

# Joe Geraghty

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## Joe Geraghty

INTERVIEWER CHARLES NELSON:

Today is March the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer at Midway Village and Museum Center in Rockford, Illinois, which is cooperating in a statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in the momentous events of World War II. We are in the office of Midway Village and Museum Center interviewing Mr. Joe Geraghty who served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war.

NELSON: Joe, would you please start by introducing yourself to us? Please give us your full name, the date and place of birth. We would also like to have the names of each one of your parents.

GERAGHTY: My name is Joseph Geraghty. I was born February 27, 1920. My father was Joseph Geraghty, Sr. and my mother was Evelyn [Heath] Geraghty. They both lived in Rockford. My father's family goes back to the 1800s in Rockford, Illinois.

NELSON: Would you like to give us their names?

GERAGHTY: My grandfather's name was James Geraghty and my grandmother's was "Grandmother". [Laughter] I forget her first name.

NELSON: How about any brothers or sisters.

GERAGHTY: I have two brothers, Robert and Gerald Geraghty and they both flew in the Navy as I did in World War II. They were Navy pilots.

NELSON: Are there any details about your parents and/or your family that you would like to give?

GERAGHTY: My parents were in business in Rockford. My grandparents were in business in Rockford since the 1800s in the military and costume business. That lasted up to approximately 1975 or '80 something.

NELSON: What was life like for you before the War specifically during 1941?

GERAGHTY: Prior to the War I attended St. Thomas High School and graduated in '38 and I had taken engineering schooling at the time. And the position opened up at Camp Grant with the engineers, which I accepted. I stayed with this company in Rockford at Camp Grant for the construction of the camp for about nine months. Then I left Rockford and went to Des Moines, Iowa, for about a year at the same type of work. This was the construction of a powder plant north of Des Moines. Then I went from there up to the Badger Ordnance Works up in Baraboo, Wisconsin. That was in 1941. So I was involved with determining the progress of construction of these camps.

NELSON: What thoughts did you have about the War before the United States became directly involved in the conflict?

GERAGHTY: Well, I was aware that things were building up because of my work. They were pushing for powder plants to be constructed in a hurry and Camp Grant. I knew there was a military build up in the United States and I was also aware that the Germans were pushing the Europeans around at that time and I was frankly not impressed with their actions.

NELSON: How did you hear of the December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese?

GERAGHTY: I happened to be driving my car on South Main Street in Rockford, Illinois, and heard it on the radio.

NELSON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what was taking place in Europe or Asia?

GERAGHTY: Yes, I felt that we were helping the English who were our allies and I felt thought that we would have to do a lot more to help them because they were having a hard time with the Germans at the time.

NELSON: Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

GERAGHTY: Yes, I do. Right.

NELSON: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches, ideas or actions?

GERAGHTY: Yes. At this point I read some of it in the paper and I knew they were making roads in parts of Europe. They were going into Poland and places like that. Taking over areas with their war machines.

NELSON: What events led to your entry into military service? Were you already in service, drafted or did you volunteer?

GERAGHTY: I volunteered. Since I was with the war effort in engineering, I wasn't accepted immediately. I volunteered the first part of 1942 and I was accepted in October of '42, in the Navy Air Force.

NELSON: Was your response to entering military service influenced by family and friends attitudes towards the War, the threat

to national security or any other consideration?

GERAGHTY: I'd say all of those considerations influenced me. I have two brothers and as I said, one of them—all three of us were in the Navy Air Corps program. My middle-aged brother, Robert, had joined the Navy almost six months prior to myself and my youngest brother.

NELSON: When and where were you inducted?

GERAGHTY: I was inducted in Chicago in the fall of '42.

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of this event?

GERAGHTY: Yes. It was in the Board of Trade Building in Chicago. Raising my right hand and being sworn in was very impressive.

NELSON: How old were you then?

GERAGHTY: Let's see. I was 22.

NELSON: What happened after you were inducted?

GERAGHTY: I was sent to—first base, I went to Monmouth College for about six months and after that I went to the University of Chicago for probably about four months. Then I went to Iowa preflight for my physical training and also navigation and academic training.

NELSON: What did you think of the training?

GERAGHTY: I was impressed with the training. We had a lot of, not only academic

work, but a lot of physical work to accomplish. It was very thoroughly put together.

NELSON: Did anything special happen there?

GERAGHTY: In my training?

NELSON: Yes.

GERAGHTY: I had preflight training at Notre Dame in 1942. In my training and flying was located at five different bases.

NELSON: What other training camps did you attend?

GERAGHTY: Iowa pre-flight school. I trained at Minneapolis, [inaudible] and also graduated at Pensacola and different bases at Pensacola and then I graduated from there.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

GERAGHTY: Yes, I did.

NELSON: How did you use them?

GERAGHTY: I was able to come home once or twice during my transfer of bases and I seemed to accomplish that. I think I was home maybe twice.

NELSON: What do you recall of this period about the places you were stationed, the friends you made and your association with civilians?

GERAGHTY: Well, the program and training was pretty strict. They kept us in base. We would get leave probably on Saturday evening, afternoon and evening, and maybe Sunday afternoon. That was about it through that total training period but I made a lot of

friends and everything, I thought, was well done.

NELSON: What was your military unit?

GERAGHTY: I was in the B5 program.

NELSON: And that was the Navy Air Corps?

GERAGHTY: Navy Air Corps the B5 program.

NELSON: What were your assigned duties?

GERAGHTY: You mean prior to...

NELSON: At this time.

GERAGHTY: During training?

NELSON: Yes.

GERAGHTY: Prior to joining the Navy I had CMTTC military training. That's Civilian Military Training Corp in the Chicago area. Consequently I had two years training that most of the fellows didn't have, so they assigned me as Battalion Commander for the Cadets and I have that type ...

NELSON: This is participation in the conflict. Where did you go after completing your basic military training?

GERAGHTY: After Pensacola, I was transferred to a field outside of Miami for torpedo bomber training. I graduated with my youngest brother. The two of us went through all the training together and when we were commissioned, he went into "Hell Divers" and I was sent to Torpedo Bombing Training School.

NELSON: When you were sent overseas how did you get there?

GERAGHTY: The first part of the War, after initial training in torpedo bombing, I was trained into night flying and was assigned to a night flying torpedo bomber squadron stationed in Maine, and we had a section of the North Atlantic that we flew at night. We did searches for German subs off the coast at night.

NELSON: What did you think of the nation's War effort up to this point?

GERAGHTY: The nation's effort — everybody was going all out. Everybody did everything they could do to help the War efforts along. I thought it was 100% go for everybody.

NELSON: Tell us about your experience of entering your first combat zone.

GERAGHTY: My first combat zone was basically flying off the North Atlantic at night with radar searching for German subs that would be... that would surface at night to recharge their batteries. That would be my first experience.

NELSON: Can you list for us in order of occurrence all subsequent combat actions in which you were involved?

GERAGHTY: Other than searching for German subs... —this happened about... I was doing this for approximately 12 months. This was night flying. The North Atlantic was very clean of German subs [inaudible] and we carried depth charges rather than torpedoes with a sonobuoy and we would drop our sonobuoys — We had five of those. We tried to ascertain the direction of the sub and we dropped the depth charges. After that—this probably lasted about 12 months. Things were quiet and they changed our whole squadron to night fire squadron because in the Pacific there were Japanese ze-

ros and Kamikazes were coming in at night, so they switched us as fast as they could and they sent us out to the Pacific. Then I joined the Night Fighter Squadron out there. By the time I arrived in the Pacific that particular problem ceased to exist so I was stationed in Honolulu.

NELSON: Were you ever on a carrier?

GERAGHTY: I was on five different carriers, yes. I belong to the Tail Hook Association. You have to have a hundred [inaudible] or more.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

GERAGHTY: Not really. I don't think so. You just knew you were in a war and the time that's involved. I don't think my attitude changed, to my knowledge.

NELSON: Did you write many letters home?

GERAGHTY: Yes. I corresponded with my folks quite often—probably once a month at least.

NELSON: Did you receive many letters or packages, if so, how often?

GERAGHTY: I received letters and a few packages, very few, but it was always very welcome to receive letters.

NELSON: What type of things did you receive in packages?

GERAGHTY: I got cookies a couple times and a few things like that, all crumbled up.

NELSON: Did most of the other men write and receive letters?

GERAGHTY: Oh, yes. There was a mail every so often would come through and would be distributed amongst all the troops.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendship with many or some of your combat companions?

GERAGHTY: Yes. To this day I still have some good friends of the service.

NELSON: Did you ever have to help retrieve a wounded buddy from the field of combat?

GERAGHTY: Some of my buddies would go down in the ocean, and [we would] search for them, one time for 14 hours straight, but we couldn't find anything. That type of situation.

NELSON: You didn't get involved with any foreign prisoners of war camps or anything of that nature?

GERAGHTY: No.

NELSON: What was the highlight occurrence of your combat experience or any other experience you can remember?

GERAGHTY: One night we located a German sub in the North Atlantic [inaudible] torpedo bombers [but] they had decided to surrender, and they were surfaced, and we were told not to drop any charges or anything like, that so that would be one of the ...

NELSON: They were later captured?

GERAGHTY: Yes, they ...

NELSON: The Navy come in and captured them?

GERAGHTY: Yeah.

NELSON: Tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional family holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

GERAGHTY: On board ship or on the bases we normally would have turkey on Thanksgiving. I don't know where they got it all. The food was excellent in the Navy. I can say that. At Christmas time we would have very special meals also.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the United States after the end of the War?

GERAGHTY: I was in the Pacific at the end of the War, and then they started disbanding our squadrons and I joined a Utility Squadron out in [inaudible] at Honolulu. And I stayed an extra six months in Hawaii and then I came to the United States.

NELSON: What happened to you when you arrived in the United States?

GERAGHTY: I flew from Hawaii to San Francisco. At that time, a lot of the fellows were getting out, and it would take two or three months to get back to the United States. I was fortunate enough to get a flight to San Francisco and then I was there about two or three days and was able to catch a train back to Chicago. I was a few weeks at Great Lakes.

NELSON: Tell us about your military rank, your decorations, and especially your campaign decorations.

GERAGHTY: Basically I was a Lieutenant in the Navy. One of the incidents during the War, I was stationed south of Miami. This is when we were being trained as night flyers and a hurricane came through. They warned

us that our planes were to go to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We were just about ready to land there and they told us to come back and land at Richmond, Florida, which was just south of Miami, because the hangars could withstand a 155-mile-an-hour wind, which we did. Along came the hurricane and that **165**-mile-an-hour wind, and we lost 150 military planes, lost 3 dirigible hangars, 10 dirigibles, 150 civilian aircraft and all the fire fighting equipment and everything!

At that time I happened to have the only vehicle on the base; I was one of the first people to notice that the hangars were down. I was at the BOQ. It turns out that I told my skipper. Three of us left the BOQ and went out to see the hangars. We could; the sky was lighting up a little bit. The warning system was about two blocks away so we made our way over there. The winds were about 165-mile-an-hour wind and so we crawled on our belly over there.

I found one truck that was not inside. I brought quite a few of the injured back that were in these hangars and it lasted probably about—we were right in the calm, right in the center of the hurricane, because there was a dead calm to it for about an hour, and then it started up again. For this adventure I got a [inaudible] citation for a few things I'd done. Other than that, the regular ribbons of World War II.

NELSON: Overseas?

GERAGHTY: Yeah.

NELSON: Air medal?

GERAGHTY: Yeah.

NELSON: How many campaigns were you in?

GERAGHTY: I wasn't really in campaigns. I was on five different carriers. They kept switching me around: Midway, Mission Bay, Sitka Bay. I can't remember. There were five of them. Ford was on the Mission Bay -- President Ford.

NELSON: He was also a pilot or ...

GERAGHTY: No, but he was aboard the ship.

NELSON: This is return to civilian life. How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

GERAGHTY: How did I get along with whom I had the greatest contact? During the service, I didn't have any problems at all.

NELSON: Were there any things you would do differently if you could do them again?

GERAGHTY: I don't believe so. I volunteered for flying and I was accepted and I volunteered for night flying and was accepted and I did as much as I could. I went where they told me to go.

NELSON: What was your most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

GERAGHTY: Notifying friends when one of my friends died. Something like that.

NELSON: Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in the military service?

GERAGHTY: Most successful achievement? I think one was the time of that hurricane I was able to help over 100 and some people get back to sick bay.

NELSON: You saved a lot of lives.

GERAGHTY: Their arms [were] cut off and things like that. [Mine] was the only vehicle on the whole base that was running, 12 or 14 hours.

NELSON: How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

GERAGHTY: How did I learn of VE Day? I was ...

NELSON: That was in April of '45.

GERAGHTY: Yes. I heard that, of course, on the radio as far as I know. Everybody celebrated as I recall. There was a big party. Everybody went out in the street and it was... everybody was impressed that that part of the War was over.

NELSON: How did you learn of VJ Day and what was your reaction to it?

GERAGHTY: We were aboard a carrier at the time in the Pacific, and about the same thing. Everybody was excited and everybody was talking about they were glad it was over with, and what it meant to them to start thinking about going home.

NELSON: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

GERAGHTY: I was impressed that we had such an arsenal that we could use. It probably saved an awful lot of lives -- American lives and also probably Japanese lives.

NELSON: Has your opinion changed over the last 50 years? If so, why?

GERAGHTY: No. That was the thing to do. Harry Truman made a great decision.

NELSON: When and where were you officially discharged from the service?

GERAGHTY: I was discharged at Great Lakes [Chicago] in July of 1946.

NELSON: Did you have a disability rating or pension?

GERAGHTY: No.

NELSON: Do you have any feelings or opinions about the Nation's military status or its policies?

GERAGHTY: Present day, the military today?

NELSON: Yeah.

GERAGHTY: I feel that we should have a strong military, carry a big stick all the time, so that we're not in the position that we have to defend ourselves.

NELSON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

GERAGHTY: No I don't.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us how your family supported you during your military life?

GERAGHTY: There were three boys in our family. All three of us joined the Naval Air Corps. Of course, my mother and father were for it but they were worried also. You might say so we had 100% support from my mother and my father, and anything we wanted we could contact them, and if it was in their power they gave [it to] us and supported us 100%.

NELSON: Over subsequent years what has this support meant to you?



GERAGHTY: The support that I felt? I had a family that would accept me and I could always rely on them to fully support [me].

NELSON: Now this is not an official question, but are there any other events that you would like to relate at this time that stand out in your mind as to what happened to you in the service?

GERAGHTY: In service? Basically my total service lasted approximately close to four years. In that four year time I had a year and a half of training and they kept me moving probably about every ninety days to a different base.

Whatever they needed—I was in a particular Night Torpedo Squadron and there was probably about 30 of us there in this particular squadron, and then they kept us together in a Night Fighting Squadron, and then they switched to Night Fighters.

They had us ... when we were in the States, they had us put one quite a few air shows during the time we were there because we would— Once, I remember our Squadron was sent to Atlanta, Georgia, and we put on an air show for the City. Three days! And we flew tight formations.

In those days you could fly about as low as you wanted to. The Georgia Tech game was going and we flew inside the stadium and out again to give them a little thrill!

But we put on the shows for Cuba, put on shows for Miami, New York City, Chicago, Milwaukee, Hawaii. We did put on quite a few shows because our Squadron was together a lot.

Incidentally, I started flying the F4 and then we got the F6. That was the plane I probably flew the most. After the F6, that was right at

the tail end of the War they got the F8 out and that still I guess is still the fastest prop plane in the world today. After the War I joined the Naval Reserve. I was with aircraft for 10 years and in the Reserve I flew the Phantoms, the Banshie and Jets and that was my ...

NELSON: Were there any close calls that you would like to relate?

GERAGHTY: A lot of close calls. One coming in Hawaii for a carrier landing my fuel gage read 1/3 and I was going to make about one pass (we were shooting landings at the time). We were going to make the last pass, then I was going to change tanks.

Just as I was coming in, just about 1000 feet away from landing, my gas run out in that one tank. I was about 200 feet high with everything down, the flaps and wheels. As soon as I stopped the [inaudible] we went right down towards the water and I pulled back and landed in the water. In the meantime I switched tanks. It had emergency fuel pumps on and it caught but my tail was dragging in the water. We finally got out and I got up about 4 or 500 feet and it quit again! I went back down and it was the same thing. After it quit again, I went up to about 5,000 feet, stayed up there a little while until I settled down, came back. Then they had to scrap the plane because salt water had gotten into the tail section and also the controls. That was one little incident.

NELSON: Any others?

GERAGHTY: There were quite a few incidents just in flying. At night you had the lights but they were very dim lights. You had bright lights and also very dim military flying. When you are making passes at night and you come back up again, your leader, of course, goes first and I guess I was second

or third. And when you're separated two or three blocks then you can't see these little lights. One time I went sailing by and I never saw them. I thought it was a star but I saw it move just a little bit and we were on a collision course and I just saw a little movement and I pushed down real fast we went by them just by a few feet! There are a lot of things like that when you are flying, story after story after story.

NELSON: Well, Joe that is very interesting. I think this was a very good interview and if that is all there is to talk about right now, I think we should quit.

GERAGHTY: Okay.

NELSON: Here is another little incident that Joe would like to relate to us.

GERAGHTY: When I was flying with the Night Fighters off of the Bermuda Triangle I was flying at night and it was just a pitch black night, but the stars were out and you catch the horizon off the ocean somewhat. Probably I was flying for about an hour and then I checked my instruments and I looked out and looked up and I saw the stars. Then I looked down and I saw stars. I thought I got vertigo or something and I am probably upside down but I didn't change anything but when I looked out every direction I looked I saw stars. To this day I can't figure what caused that one. It was a pitch-black night but there were stars out. I have never seen stars reflect over the ocean. I can't believe the ocean could be that calm.

NELSON: Do you think there is something strange at the Bermuda Triangle?

GERAGHTY: That's what I ran into. I guess you'd call it strange. I also spent two days looking for the nine torpedo bombers that went down in that Bermuda Triangle. I think

it was four days that we searched trying to locate nine torpedo bombers and I think there were 27 fellows that just disappeared.

We never found them. We never saw anything, any traces of oil slicks or anything like that. We have no idea what happened to that group. That's another one. There's a bunch of them that I can think of that happened.

NELSON: End of interview.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Geraghty retired from Naval Air Reserves in 1958 with the rank of Lieutenant.

His obituary says, "One of his accomplishments during his 10 years in the Reserves at Glenview, IL, was to be the first person to fly a jet out of the station. Joe had a passion for aviation. In addition to flying in the Navy, he owned his own planes, and dealt with the military bringing in aircraft to the Midwest Airfest."

**Source:** Legacy.com archived obituary from the Rockford Register Star, published November 26-27, 2014.