

Charles Sid Bergh

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Interviewed by Thomas Webb

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Webb: Welcome to the Pritzker Military Museum & Library's Oral History program. I'm Thomas Webb and I'm here with Sid Bergh. Today is September 3rd, 2014. And we like to begin by getting to know a little about your history. So, I would ask: When and where you were born?

Bergh: I was born in Oak Park, the West Suburban hospital. And I was born at a very early age! No, actually it was June 24th, 1926, and that makes me eighty-eight. And I try to stay active, I try to stay active so that I don't grown old. I was brought up and raised in Lombard and Villa Park. And I've been in Villa Park... well, I started out in 1930, but I think I moved back to Villa Park in 1949, and I've been there ever since.

Webb: What did your parents do for a living?

Bergh: My parents were... I was a late baby, and... my mother was a widow, and my dad had never been married- I take it back, my dad was married, but it was away before my time. And my dad was more or less a bookkeeper and being—I think he was in his fifties when the depression hit, and he was overlooked for younger peoples work in those days. So, he was scavenging for work. In fact, he was a very responsible person. One of the local realtors who had foreclosed on houses, would put us in a house, and we would pay very nominal rent, and my dad would take care of it almost like he owned it. And then when he sold the house, we moved to another one. So, when I was growing up, I lived in, I think it was five different houses. And I hasten to add that I was always in District 45, which was the Villa Park school district.

Webb: And how was that district? Good schools?

Bergh: I thought they were. When you're a kid, you really don't know. Later on, we found out I became interested in education. In fact, my first wife was a teacher. And a little aside on that, she got her degree while we were married going to Elmhurst College. In the time that she was going to school to get her degree, it

took her ten years, we had four kids. And one time, the joke was the left the door to the classroom open, because they didn't know the time that she was going to go to the hospital. I went to—I went to York High School, which was District 88 at that time. And I left, I worked a year when I was sixteen, I went into the Navy at seventeen, I like to say...I can't say if it was really true, but I like to say if I hadn't gone into the Navy I would have been a juvenile delinquent.

Webb: Where were you working at sixteen?

Bergh: If I remember, it was with Chicago Metal Hose, in Maywood, [Illinois].

Webb: And what kind of work was it?

Bergh: A machine operator. Basic.

Webb: Did you do any kind of activities in school? Play football, anything like that?

Bergh: Played very little football my sophomore year. I was in the boy scouts. And became—went as far as being a life scout, when I discovered girls.

Webb: What kind of things did you do in the boy scouts?

Bergh: The things I liked the most was the camping. In fact, I think there was a couple of years when we went up to northern Wisconsin. And one of the things back in those days, you're a second-year camper, you could go out to what they called pioneer point, but there was no canvas. You had to build your own shelter. And that year, I think it rained, five or six nights out of the two weeks. I woke up one time, lightning woke me up, and there was a deer right there, right in front of my little shelter. That wasn't too shelter-y.

Webb: Well, I have to ask, what was it like growing up in this area during the Depression?

Bergh: It was, I can't say I knew anything different. I kind of envied some of the kids whose dads and folks were working because they had more toys. But most of the time we shared; playing baseball, we did a lot of pickup games, sometimes we'd take a ball, and somebody would steal some black tape from their dad's work bench or something, tape it up, so that we could use it some more. But that was the big thing. And... fishing, making boats. We made a boat one time and took it out... on a lagoon

Webb: What did you make it out of?

Bergh: We made it out of... it would be tin, sign tin that was discarded. A lot of times, things like this were thrown away. There was a lot of empty lots. And things would be discarded, and you could pick up a lot of stuff there. One of the guys decided he was gonna, in our little... I don't want to call them gangs, but they were... good guys. Picked up a cement tub, where contractors would mix cement by hand, and we used that as a boat too. Oh, gosh.

Webb: Well that all sounds like a fun way to grow up.

Bergh: And—oh, one time, this I got to tell you, we were in a Western Tire and Auto Store, and there was a pair of brand-new Hockey skates, and they were my size. And they said, "Well, they're seven and a half bucks," and I had seven and half dollars, but let's say I was tight. I didn't want to spend that! My dad said, "That's a good price, that's a good price!" And I said, "No, I'll use the old ones" and the salesman said, "Well, let's make it five dollars" and my dad say, "Take it take it!" So I did. And it's funny, when we look at skates and stuff like that nowadays, that five dollars, it seems like you couldn't get one blade for it. Or maybe a pair of shoelaces

Webb: Yeah, things have changed.

Bergh: We lived in one spot where, just to the south of us there was a farm and the guy had raised cattle, and the [Works Project Administration] came- oh and there was a Creek running through it—and the WPA came along and build a coffer damn as one of the culverts, and we raised the water level several feet. And we had a skating pond that was fabulous in those days. I think one or two of our—the guys on the block there that we lived on, probably got their butts tanned, because when it snowed, somebody would always bring snow shovels down there to clear off the hockey rink, and the racing spots. And promptly would forget to bring the shovels home.

Webb: That would be cause for getting in trouble. Okay, so you left high school and you went to work and that was probably about the time when Pearl Harbor happened?

Bergh: I was fifteen when Pearl Harbor happened.

Webb: What do you remember from that?

Bergh: I remember going to a roller-skating rink, and meeting one of the guys that was there, and he said, "You know, we're at war?" And I said, "What?" He says,

“Yeah, Pearl Harbor was bombed,” and I said, “Man, oh man.” And the very next day, there was an assembly, where we were listening to President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt addressing congress and asking apparently asking them to declare a state of war with the Japanese—and it was scary.

Webb: Did you listen to that through a radio?

Bergh: Yes. It was a radio broadcast through the auditorium.

Webb: What do you remember what the mood was of all your classmates gathered there? You said it was scary.

Bergh: Well, sometimes... I thought, well, war wasn't nice, I didn't know that at the time, I thought war was all, “Bang, bang. You're dead” type thing. But, we thought, well, those little yellow-bellied little Japanese, they're nothing. And we would have them over in a couple of weeks. Then the next day they declared war on Germany, a state of war existed, and I thought, “Well, those guys are smart!” Well, I got my education on that. The Japanese were not little yellow-bellies, they were very intelligent people and very well disciplined, and the Germans were every bit the same way

Webb: At that young of an age—and I know fifteen then was a little different than fifteen now, more responsibilities—were you aware of what was going on in Germany?

Bergh: We knew there was a war over there, and that was just about it. We knew people got shot, but we didn't see this. You didn't experience this at all. And newspapers were looked at but not studied or things like that. And on the radio broadcast, “Little Orphan Annie” and “Captain Midnight” were more important than the news.

Webb: Yeah, absolutely. So did anybody in your family serve?

Bergh: Yes. I had one brother, and he joined the National Guard in... oh I think it was 1940. They were federalized in 1941 and went into service, into active duty. And he served—ultimately, he served in Europe—he was in a service company and got a Bronze Star.

Webb: What was his name?

Bergh: John Foster, he was a half-brother... and... I had a cousin that was a ground pounder, a fellow by the name of Roose Peterson, Morris Roose Peterson and he

got pretty well, he was in the real ground pounder, and got shot up pretty bad. Lost a kidney. And he was one of the smart side of the family, and after the war he took advantage of the GI Bill. CPA lawyer, and he became an instructor and a dean of the Law school at Tulsa University, became a judge, and I used to say, "I hate you, you got so good!" In later years, we got back together, and some of the stories he would tell he would relate because of the fact that I was in the service and [WW2], he would tell me things...that would come out...I certainly became very happy that I was not in the infantry.

Webb: Well, let's talk a little bit about how you came into the service. You enlisted.

Bergh: After Pearl Harbor, the big guys, you know, quote "the big guys," maybe three or four years older, went in. And it became the thing to do, was to go into the service—enlisted and drafted. In fact, one neighbor, he was home on leave, he said, "I hear you're thinking of going into the Navy?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "What do you want to go in as?" And I said, "Well, I was thinking of regular Navy, taking a four-year minority hitch." He says, "Listen, let me give you a little advice. I know you're going to love being in the Navy, but just in case you aren't, join the reserve. In the reserve you'll be out in two years or at the end of the war. And you can always re-enlist. Just in case you don't like it, if you don't think the discipline or what have you is good," and I took his advice, and by the way he went down with the ship in the Pacific too...do you want his name?

Webb: Yeah.

Bergh: I can't remember his first name, but his nickname was Whistle, Whistle Kusta, K-U-S-T-A. It's funny how I can remember things like that, but I can't remember what I had for breakfast this morning. [Laughter]

Webb: It's nice that you remember his nickname too, it's funny how those things really stick with somebody.

Bergh: They stick with you, yeah.

Webb: So, you say you knew that you wanted to go into the Navy. I would say that that would be kind of unusual for the Midwest, but with the lake here and you talking about making all these different boats, maybe it wasn't unusual. What caused you to?

Bergh: Well, I like to say, it's more or less humorous, but I like to say that all my life I wanted to join the Navy. And after I was in for a week, all I wanted to do was get out. [Laughter]

Webb: What was it about the navy that was so enticing?

Bergh: Probably the uniform that the girls loved. And... I think it was probably, as a kid, it was probably one of those more, I use the word romantic, it was probably less, it was one of those things you do... I did have an uncle I remember that talked about being in the Navy—I think he joined the navy in 1903. I was... the discipline was not for me.

Webb: You were used to running around and doing what you wanted.

Bergh: Just about.

Webb: Well, let me ask: When you enlisted, what was the reaction from your family? I know it was sort of the thing to do in the community that you'd had these role models that had done it, but what was the immediate reaction of your family?

Bergh: My... both of them, both my mother and my father were very supportive. But I think my mother didn't want me to go, and my dad was proud. Later on, when we were in the service—at that time, my folks had a little food store, it was the fore-runner of a deli, and they had advertisements for... I think it was Camel Cigarettes of maybe two and a half or three-foot cardboards likeness of a sailor, and a soldier, advertising camels, and my mom put my picture on the sailor and my brothers on the soldier. [Laughter]

Webb: That's neat. So, you enlist: Where do you go first and how do you get there?

Bergh: Well, I pulled a little string. There was a fellow that was actually the nephew of Admiral Leahy who was some really big 5-star admiral. And he was a yeoman, 2nd Class as a recruiter, and when I enlisted in Chicago, and he was here, and I was supposed to go the very next day I would have gone to Idaho and the day after I would have gone to the Great Lakes, but he said, "We'll switch you, we'll keep you the day after," and then I went to the great lakes. And then from there, somebody had told me, "Boy, you want to get into the Naval Air Corps," so I said—well, I wanted to be either a small boat operator because I loved sailing, somebody said get in the Air Corps, so I said my second choice would be to get into the Air Corps. Well, when I left boot camp, I went to Memphis Naval Air

Technical Training Center... to train as a radioman in the Naval Air Corps. We went to...

Webb: Did you know what that was? I mean, wasn't that fairly new? Or had it been around for a little while?

Bergh: Well, one of the fellows that—the big guys, I think he was two years older than I was, was stationed up at Glenview Naval Air station—and he had been as a training person as a radioman, radioman on the whatever they were flying out of there... or a technician... so I said, "Well, I'd like that," but what I didn't realize was that we'd have four hours of listening to the da-da-diddy! And it was eighteen weeks, and two weeks of radar operator school, and a little aside: They started training us as a gunner, and to be gunner you point it exactly the same as you shoot skeet, so they had a skeet range there. And I got to go, and I thought I was really good! I was shooting, I think, I got ninety-four or ninety-six out of one-hundred pigeons that I got towards the end. And a little side note, when I got back out of the service, and I was sitting out on my fiancé's back porch—and that time there was nobody behind us, and there was a crow sitting down, looking at us—and I said, "Boy I could shoot that," and we were bragging back and forth, and I had a propensity for opening my mouth too many times, too much. Somebody, I think my father-in-law, got the 410 out and said, "Let's see if you can hit it." And he threw a piece of bread down in front—it was probably no more than thirty feet away, and I shot, and I missed the crow completely! He didn't leave the bread alone. And I thought, well, that's enough of that stuff. [Laughter]

Webb: Let's go back just a little bit to your initial boot camp at Great Lakes. You've already said that disciplined was not something that you were prepared for, but what kind of things did they have you do? What was boot camp like?

Bergh: You learned to march everywhere, you learned to march information, and if you didn't do something... oh, I think one time, the whole company we were in, we did something that we were out after the evening mess running out on what was the drill field—they called it the grinder because you were really ground down into it. And we were running on that because, supposedly it was a formation... you know, in those days everybody smoked. The nonsmoker was hardly there, and you could smoke when the smoking lamp was lit, and you couldn't... well, we also had a thing where some of us were assigned to... furnace duty, and you're shoveling things down in there, and down in there, well that was okay, we could smoke because there was a fire. But just the people that were on duty then

could do that. But we'd sneak in and have a smoke down there, and I got caught one time, and that meant extra duty. [Laughter]

Webb: What's the weather like?

Bergh: It was warm.

Webb: Okay.

Bergh: It was warm, but I don't remember worrying about it too much, because I went in July 22nd, and it was an 8-week period, and I went down to—like I mentioned—from boot camp to Memphis, [Tennessee].

Webb: So, you didn't have to march in the snow?

Bergh: And in Memphis, in that gear—at least when it snows—you have to shovel fast before it melted. [Laughter]

Webb: How were the instructors at boot camp? Were they hard on you?

Bergh: They tried to be, and looking back in retrospect, they were people that had a job. And they tried to be hard, but most of them were soft sided. It was in one—we'd have one week of mess duty in boot camp, and I remember one time the cook and I were out eating, we had fresh corn come in, after the noon chow and we got cleaned up we stayed, instead of going back to the barracks, we stayed back out and ate corn on the cobb... and again that's funny how those things come out. Those memories.

Webb: You talked a little bit about some people, kind of directing you, kind of suggesting that you do this or that, did you have anybody that you knew at boot camp at the initial Great Lakes? Was there anybody that signed up with you?

Bergh: No... We would develop friendships, you know, my buddy and my friends, but... no, there was nobody I went in with. I like to say this, when we were taking the oath of office at our office, to be in the Navy, sworn in. The guy, his own private joke would be, "Would you gentlemen come over here and step into this room? Would you gentlemen line up here? Will you gentlemen raise your right hand? Will you repeat after—gentlemen, repeat after me?" And then he'd say, "Okay, lower them down you swabs, you're in the Navy now! Get over there!" It wasn't quite that way but that... memories! [Laughter]

Webb: Once you'd signed up, they were all over you.

Bergh: Oh, and in boot camp too, there was rifle training, and I'd never fired a rifle, and so I followed the directions completely the way they did, and I shot pretty good. And we some people were from Tennessee or Kentucky, that were good mountain boys, and they were proud of how good they were—I shot better than they did because they weren't used to that particular, I guess it was a Springfield-03 or something.

Webb: So... you marched, you had rifle practice, did you go out on the lake at all?

Bergh: I'm trying to think, I know we did, I think we had small boat practice one day... That memory is not good... I know we did but I can't bring it to mind.

Webb: Okay, how did you get down to Memphis? Did you have to take a train?

Bergh: A train... yeah, we reported—we reported into the Naval Armory, which at that time was classed as a receiving ship, all things like that, a receiving ship could be a piece of brick! [Cough] Excuse me. Brick and mortar, when they had the draft big enough to fill up a car or two, then you would go down, sometimes you'd hitch on the back of a passenger train or something like that.

Webb: You said you wanted to be—let's see, where did I write that down—you wanted to be an air radio operator- did you get to choose that, or did your, or was it more luck of the draw?

Bergh: It was more a luck of the draw, they—they needed somebody, they needed to fill the things, and they thought that I might... [Cough] Excuse me. So we went down and that was, you learned the procedure on how to talk on the radio, which was, you wouldn't believe you had to learn how to talk on it, but you do because at that time, you didn't, you wouldn't talk to cover up somebody because if you pressed down your microphone you wouldn't hear what they were saying, and it could be something very important. So you had things, words to say, you know, "Over" or... the television always says, "Over and out," but you never say that, "Over" meant "Talk back," "Out" meant you were through. And various things like that and code—I learned code. We had code two to four hours a day, Morse code, and a funny thing about that- when I got out in the fleet, the only time I used it was to send code to officers. And we always used direct language.

Webb: So how long were you at Memphis then?

Bergh: Twenty weeks... From Memphis... there was a draft, we went down to Hollywood, Florida, for aerial gunnery training—and that was six weeks

Webb: You were doing the skeet-shooting type of stuff?

Bergh: It was skeet shooting and machine guns, generally ground-to-ground. And in fact, it was all ground-to-ground, getting used to it. The targets would be moving, and things like that. Actually, at that time in the everglades, at the skeet range... Let me get a drink here.

[30:34] CUT [31:13]

Bergh: A little aside, the first week in Hollywood was mess duty or some type of guard duty, and we were given a .45 with live ammunition to be on guard duty with. They said, "If you fired it, you'd better bring back the snake." [Laughter]

Webb: So, during all of these classes, this training, there's still a war going on, and it's probably escalating for the Navy. I mean, it's not troops on the ground in Europe, there suddenly is the Asian conflict—what's was the mood as you were going through all of this training?

Bergh: We had to get out there and kill those people, we had to get through with that. I will add, by that time, in my mind, there was movies, both the news reels and the classified information that they would take of battles going on and what have you—bombing a freight train, say in Europe or chasing people out of foxholes in the Pacific. And that would be very interesting, that was what we wanted, not that we wanted to see it, but we knew where the war was, and we were actually going to it. When we went from Hollywood, Florida, to Fort Lauderdale, [Florida], the naval station at Fort Lauderdale, and in training, and when our training, we were through with our training June 6th of 1944, in fact, somebody hollered out of the window one time when we were out doing our muster in the morning, saying, "Hey, we landed in Europe!" And I thought, "Boy, I wonder where my brother is?" I knew he was in England, but I didn't know what he was doing. And I knew a cousin was over there, and I knew that he was employed as a ground-pounder, as an infantryman. My brother was in the service company as a truck driver.

Webb: I guess that brings up a question that I sometimes try to ask. How were you able to communicate back home? I assume you send letters. Were you able to receive mail from back home?

Bergh: Oh yeah, yes.

Webb: And were you able to communicate, you know, where your family that was serving in Europe, how they were doing, or.

Bergh: No, all we knew was that he was in Europe. Everything else was at that time classified. When I joined the fleet it was at sea, we couldn't say where were. I don't remember, now that was true. We put in through New York one time for rest and recreation, R and R, and I think we could've said we were there.

Webb: Okay... What kind of recreation did you get when you were in Memphis and Hollywood and... did you get evenings off? Were you able to go around and explore in those areas or were you confined to the base?

Bergh: Yeah, in Memphis I think we had... I think one weekend every month. It was maybe, liberty allowed once a week. And on the base, there was of course the ship's service you could go to. There were movies, both in Memphis and in Hollywood. When we got in Hollywood it was a little bit, it was far more liberal because now we were rated people. Our seamen first were rated, and we were no longer the lowest level. And at the liberty one time we went to... a buddy of mine and I went, somebody had told us, "Go down to the hurricane club in Miami," and of course we'd hitchhike. And when we got down there, there was a grandmother type, now I would want to date her of course, but she said, "Can I take your hats for... put them on my grandkids, they want to be in the navy," they were little kids, well, sure. So, she said, "I want you to meet my oldest granddaughter, she's in Hollywood, where you guys are," and she said, "Ah, you'll love her!" Well, she gave us the number and we called her later on, and we invited ourselves to dinner. And it wasn't a very pretty girl, and she was very... put on a good sign of being an intelligent person. And of course, her mother was saying, "Oh, she cooked the whole thing for us," and later on we were thinking, well maybe we'll hang around for a while longer, and she whispered to me, "I've got a date tonight, I can't stay! You guys have got to say you've got something to do and get out of here!" [Laughter]

Webb: So, you've gone through a lot of different training, you're down in Ft. Lauderdale, have you been—at this point—assigned your duty of the radio?

Bergh: Yeah, we were, we would do many things, we were assigned a crew, an air crew. And a gunner, the pilot... and the pilot was from Boston, my gunner was from Georgia, and I, of course, being a Chicago boy. And we were all great, in fact, the first time I remember I went up in an airplane it was in a torpedo bomber. That was the first time I'd been in a plane. In fact, the highest thing I'd ever gotten do

was the parachute jumps in Riverview, over at Riverview amusement parks. And my gunner with his southern accent said—and my hair was quite- it's gray now, but it was more white- they nicknamed me Whitey, too. He said, "Hey, Whitey, if you get sick, we won't say anything, I'll help you clean it up." He said, "Now I've been up flying, I've been in planes back up in Jacksonville, so I know how it is flying but you've never been before, so." Well, when we went up, I was exhilarated, I thought, boy, I fell in love with the Air Corps, I fell in love with flying. And one of the few things I regret in my life is that I didn't continue on going into flying clubs. It was in fact, in the, this was a torpedo bomber, a TBF, and the radio compartment—there was probably about, oh maybe five feet wide, I don't remember exactly. But I know my seat was a bench, and there was windows on each side, and I was sliding back and forth to look out. And finally, the pilot called on the intercom, "Sit still until we get higher!" [Laughter]

Webb: Rocking the plane too much, huh?

Bergh: And then a little later than that, we were told, "Don't eat anything, don't drink anything for at least an hour before you go up because you don't know how it's gonna be." Well later on, we would go with ice cream or soda pop and get on the plane with that, because it became that common. And my gunner one time, with his turret open, he was in the turret and his feet would be right about here, and I was looking, fiddling with the radio or doing something, and his feet started going back and forth, and I looked, and he was doing...and I picked up something, he said, "No". Well, I picked up the gun bag and he got sick and he filled it up. And it was—it's not that he was airsick, it's just that he had too much crap that he had eaten. And, when we got down, I remember, I could still see him, and he said, "Whitey, I would appreciate it if you didn't tell anybody about this." But things that we would do in training, there was ground to air firing, and where a—a plane would be towing a big sleeve, and you'd be shooting at it with painted bullets. And you had your tracer, and they could tell by the paint how many times you hit the target. And... there was... no prizes, just the bragging rights, the number of your paint color that was in there. [Laughter] There was this gunnery range over the Atlantic, and it was north of Boca Raton and you went over to get to the waterfront, you went over what was I presume would later be the in-land waterway, or what later on would be developed as such, but you went over a rickety wooden bridge to the beach, and you'd look one way there was no houses. You looked down and it was forever it seemed. And the other way again, and maybe a mile or so, there was one old house up there. And I thought, "Boy, sometime when this big war is over, there's gonna be—this

would be a good place to get the lease from the Navy!” And it was. I didn’t do it, but boy! Now of course, it’s all developed. And one time, it was, calm, there was no wind, and the fog was there, so we couldn’t shoot because they were afraid that someone may shoot at the airplane as opposed to the sleeve. We fleeced the area, and they said, “Well, go, take a rest for a minute. We’ve got to stay here for another hour.” So I went and tried swimming. Well it seemed like the ocean was so calm, and it seemed that we only took a few strokes- we turned around and we were a hundred yards off the shore! It was so much. And I say that was uncommon because one time back in Hollywood, we had to swim—we were supposed to swim a mile in the surf, and that was where every once in a while, your arm would be in the air because the wave would be broken. You’d have been carried up to high or something like that... and that was a chore!

Webb: I can imagine. Or maybe I can’t! So, then you get—you’ve got your air crew. I guess I want to ask: You signed up for the navy because you loved sailing, but here you are now flying all the time.

Bergh: And loving it!

Webb: And loving it, yeah. I think that’s pretty neat. What was—because aviation air warfare was so—I mean it was kind of becoming what it was in World War II—what can you tell us about the different airplanes or what you experienced? You know, that maybe we don’t know now, because we’re so used to it.

Bergh: Well, it was, our crew was initially assigned to torpedo bombers. So it was a three-man crew. And that was the biggest plane that flew off the carrier. And after the training—by the way, my pilot spent three days in Glenview landing on the aircraft carriers that were in Lake Michigan and qualified. We would fly, when we were doing, we were assigned anti-submarine duty in the Atlantic, and I have to add that I really lucked out that on the cruises that I was on that there was no activity.

Webb: This was on the [USS] Croatan [CVE-25] is that how you say it? The USS.

Bergh: Croatan. It got an Indian name and... that’s all I know about it. The highlights of that, of course, were, you know when you’re taking off this was what you called in those days a jeep carrier, or a carrier, it was small, CVE. And they were pushed off with a catapult, off the deck. Catapulted off. The plane was heavy enough that sometimes, I swear we would get out of the front of the deck, and we would mush down, and I swear I saw wake out of where the machine gun was facing! And I thought, “Well, that was fun!” And landing on a carrier that was kind of

scary. But it was scary to just about everybody. And what we had to do—how can I keep this in order? Flying on patrol—if we were actually on patrol, even though Intelligence said there was no activity, we would be practicing with the radar, and it was more [Coughing] or less training, or at least practicing looking for stuff. And coming in and landing would be, you'd have to land as fast as possible, try to get the planes in as fast as possible because the aircraft carrier would be vulnerable if there were subs in the area—especially if we didn't know about it. As we landed and caught the hook, the wire, the hook caught the wires and stopped the aircraft, we would have to get ready to jump out because they would release the hook and take the plane, and they'd have to get it up to a parking spot so another plane could come in. And so, I was sitting in the doorway, excuse me the hatch, and had my harness in my hand because when you were landing you took the harness off because if you were going off—if you were crashing or something, you were going into the drink, you didn't want that harness to bother you, to hold you, when you opened up the—you wore a Mae West, it was done with compressed air so if you pulled the compressed air you didn't want the harness there to hold it in. Procedure maybe, to come backwards, you put your harness on when you got in, but your harness was completely opened. That is it was, the legs weren't lodged, it was just over your shoulders, like suspenders and then as you got into the air, and got up where you knew you weren't going to crash from the takeoff, you'd buckle it in. The parachute that you used was actually hooked on above the bulkhead on the wall of the plane, so that you could hook it off and hook it on to you—if you had to evacuate, if you had to take a shootout. And then when landed, if you had time, you'd take the shoot off, or you'd hope you'd be able to release it, completely. Now getting back to being in the door, getting ready to jump out of the aircraft, especially if somebody was coming in a little too fast they'd run into you! [Laughter] The blast of the air prop wash, the air from the prop, pulled it out of my hand and slid it across the deck. And I got chewed out by the leading chief and laughed at by the rest of the crew, they did find it. One of the people was able to grab it before it blew off the end of the ship.

Webb: Well, I've got a couple of questions from what you just said. How often would you go up on patrol? Every night?

Bergh: It would be assigned. Generally, it could be as much as every day.

Webb: Maybe, what was the typical day like as you were...?

Bergh: Usually, bored. After a while, I would say—because, all you would see would be ocean. Or looking at the radar scope. Or making sure that the radio was tuned right. Usually, you didn't have to do that. Usually, you would do that on the ground. Usually, it was—if you changed frequencies, you'd have to retune the radio. On the one radio it was the transmitter I think it was ten frequencies it could be pre-set, and the eleventh one you could set... and the higher frequency you received—we didn't, I don't remember broadcasting on that, you know, talking on that, but I think we probably did. The line of sight wasn't exactly the line of sight, it was a little more than that. It may have been too that the antennas on the ship were that high... the flying... I pulled a joke. I was kind of a, when it's boring you play tricks on people. One time I said, "Well, I went up to see the chaplain," and boy, all the old jaws come down, why are you seeing the chaplain? What for? You got a problem? You want to transfer out? I said, "Nah, he was my minister in my hometown!" [Laughter] And another time, on the ship we were on, I was on the sixth bunk up. There were six bunks, six this was, six over here, six back there, six over there. And I get on the top, and I look over and I saw the guy that was alongside me, he was a good friend, I came up and I said, "I need liberty." We're at sea, and I say, "I need liberty." And he looks, boy, this guy's going nuts! I say, "Yeah, I need liberty," then I pulled out a copy of liberty magazine, which was at that time a popular thing, and see! I got *Liberty*! [Laughter]

Webb: Well, I guess that raises some questions, you guys are in very tight knit quarters?

Bergh: Oh, sure.

Webb: You guys are out in the ocean, were there any issues with people? Or did people get along fairly well?

Bergh: We got along better, I think, because we had to... The... I don't remember having issues. But... oh, I was being a Smart Alek one time with a guy that was coming down—he was a First Class and it was his job to come and get everyone up in the morning, he was our alarm clock, and uh, I remember throwing my feet over and saying "Hey, Stuffy, see, I'm up GGrrrr", and I growled. One time—oh, the squadron, we didn't, we joined the squadron that was already in had been out to sea several times. In fact, they had been on the USS Block Island which was torpedoed. And they were, they had, I had joined them when they had just come together after survivors leave. The ship was torpedoed, and. of course, it didn't sink right away, but they knew it was going down. And there were destroyers—

the escorts, the destroyer escorts were close by so that most of the guys didn't get their feet wet when they evacuated. And those were stories.

Webb: Did that change their perception of what you guys were out there doing a little bit? Did they maybe take it a bit more seriously?

Bergh: They took it seriously. One guy, one of them, we have five-inch guns under the, after, on the carrier. And when they fired it, this guy made it, he was from our deck, which was three decks from the water line, below the water line, and he was up in the ready room, which was right underneath the flight deck. We like to say before the echo got through. It wasn't quite that fast, but he moved fast. It just scared him. It scared him that much.

Webb: Well, let's go back, you talked a little bit about when you're on patrol doing the radar—can you describe what all that entailed?

Bergh: One time we were on patrol—this was practice—we were looking for a submarine. And they told us the submarine they were using was a captured Italian sub. And looking at the thing that's in Museum of Science and Industry, I think might have been the U-505, nobody talked about at that time. We didn't even say we'd captured a submarine. That was an absolute no, no. Even among ourselves at sea we weren't supposed to talk about that. But we were doing what they called sonobuoys that is, if we catch a sub on the surface and it would dive, we would make a pattern of dropping these radio type things, buoys, that were equipped to broadcast- to accept the noise of the subs, and actually fish noises too, and we'd drop a pattern to tell which way a sub was going. Well, we found a sub. And we tracked it out, and we did buoys for that until it was out of the range of the sonobuoys in the way it was going. And that was very interesting to do.

Webb: Well, the whole, you know, possibility of German subs coming to the East Coast, it seems like almost a fantasy, but it's not. There were records of it, there were instances. What was the thought? Because you said it was a little bit mundane up there, you were just staring at the ocean.

Bergh: Well, if we were to find it, and at first I would be, if it was on radar and we didn't see it, I'd try to guide us in until we got visual contact, and then the pilot would do the actual contact, and I would sit back and man my machine gun, which was a 30-caliber stinger [M1919 Browning machine gun], and it would be my job to, if they dropped the bomb on the sub and they missed or something, it was my job to still be shooting- if they were manning their gun on the submarine. And I was

supposed to do. It and the gunner was supposed to be doing that, the guy in the turret. His job was to be more or less, stay awake. And observe, of course.

Webb: So how long were you on the Croatan?

Bergh: I think it was four months.

Webb: Four months. And I did a little bit of reading up on its history, and I saw that it went through a hurricane at some point. Were you still...?

Bergh: No.

Webb: No. Okay. Did you have a lot of rough weather?

Bergh: There was one day I can remember that, again, as a maverick, I did what I wasn't supposed to. But I went out on the forward deck, below the hanger deck, which was open, and was in the lee of a big H type beam that was holding up the corner. And I was watching our destroyer escorts were taking waves to the bridge and spray over the masts. It was rough that way. We did one day, and we had water over our bow. And this was, thirty feet up? Fifty feet... not fifty, I know it couldn't be that much, but it seems like it was. And it dipped down that low to take water over the bow, in fact coming back where I was, my feet always stayed dry because there was a triangle of water that came by, and it ran so fast.

Webb: Did you get used to being out on the water like that?

Bergh: I never got seasick. It never bothered me. I never got seasick, I never got airsick.

Webb: Did you have people that weren't so lucky? We've interviewed some people from Iowa that have talked about the transition.

Bergh: Once again, on this very day, just before we went out on the deck, I went by where my gunner was sitting, and he was a hurting! I felt so sorry for him, I didn't harass him.

Webb: That's probably just as well. Okay, so you were on the Croatan until, I think, December of '44? Is that accurate?

Bergh: It was after December; it was sometime in January. I know because we were in the Caribbean off of Cuba and had Christmas services on the flight deck in whites and t-shirts.

Webb: What was that like? What was the mood like? Christmas is a hard time to be away?

Bergh: Yeah, it was. I can't remember exactly how that was. I can remember later, when the war was over, I thought, "Man, as a kid, I'd say I want to have a few drinks on Christmas," because I wasn't home. All I remember is that we were up on the flight deck. And a little aside on that, in Cuba we were going out and doing a practice torpedo run with the squadron, and we'd broken up to take our different positions going into the target, when... the oil pump went out. And my gunner had been taking a little nap, and they had an emergency pump that he could pump with his hands. The pilot could actually do this- and he was doing it, and it was working. So we flew back, and the gunner woke up and he whispered over the intercom—and the pilot of course could hear it, he said, "Hey Whitey, where's everybody?" And I said, "We're going back to the ship, the oil pump went out," and he was three-quarters of the way out of the turret before I could tell him, "Hey! The emergency is working! Get back in there!"

Webb: Cuba, not really that far off of the coast when you think about it. How far out did you go out on a regular basis? Any further than that?

Bergh: Oh, yeah, we were, I know we were quite a bit east of Bermuda, in the—I think it was still in the Gulf Stream, it might have been even past the Gulf Stream because I know we spent a day or two... at least a day, going back west, when we were in the air and the ship got on the com, and there wasn't enough air to land the torpedo bombers, so they vectored us into Bermuda. Into the Limey Air Station.

Webb: What was that like?

Bergh: Well, in putting us into a billet, we went through were some of the guys, the English, were having a craps game. And I walked in and said, "I wonder if we could get in," and somebody grabbed me and said, "C'mon!" They told us we were ordered to be back on the flight line at seven o'clock and... we just had chow and went to bed. More or less just talked to them. At about a quarter to eight the pilots came out. And they were walking in a line. The first pilot had a brown bag under one arm. He was the lead, a leading kind of. The next guy was thirty/forty feet behind him was carrying two brown bags. The guy behind him was probably the JG [Lieutenant Junior Grade] was carrying a case of beer. Behind him, they couldn't see us, we were looking through glasses at them. We could see them, and they didn't realize we were doing this. And I thought it was

a little ensign, just happy as a lark, was laying and singing until they thought that we would be able to see them. I swear, we were kind of wondering, "What were these guys doing out here?" And we knew of course, or at least suspected, that they had been imbibing a bit of the drink. And my pilot made the smoothest landing he might have ever made. [Laughter]

Webb: Really? Maybe suggest that he do that every time. Well, you were in contact with the English then? Did you come across any other countries' military? I know the Canadians were up there.

Bergh: No. I'm trying to think, I know that we did see other ships from time to time, mostly when we were moored up by a pier. But no.

Webb: So, anything else of note when you were on the Croatan?

Bergh: Well, I would say that, I wasn't too—too impressed with general quarters. We had to practice general quarters and I had to crawl through and get a lot of laughs and saying, "You were supposed to be here before this," because I didn't run, and I had to go through a hatch, a little hole in the hatch to get through, because they'd already buttoned it down! So, after that, when the general quarters sounded, whether it was practice or not, we ran! We had a crash, but the things were, the plane was, the torpedo on it was tipped, the radioman said, when he talked about it, they went over, and when it became green, that is the ocean, he went under water, and it was all around on the sides he could look out, and he said, "When I saw that, I thought, 'Boy, this was it.'" And then he said, "When we popped up, we popped up upside-down, I'm hanging upside down from my seatbelt and I see sunlight. Boy, I've never been so happy in my life!" And they got out, the radioman and the gunner. The gunner had been on the he was a parachute rigger too, that was his, and he had been on the destroyer earlier that was sunk, he was in the compartments and found himself on the deck, while the other guys in the compartments never got out. How he did it, he said, I don't know. How he got out of the airplane, he said, "I came to when I was in the water." The procedure then was to have a destroyer escort follow close behind to pick up anybody that did that, and they were in the water maybe five, ten minutes at the most, but they never got the pilot out.

Webb: Does something like that maybe make you more—cautious, or... what's' the word I'm' trying to think of...?

Bergh: Well, I know what you're thinking of, did that scare me?

Webb: Yeah.

Bergh: No. It was of concern, but as a youngster, and all of us thought, there was the old joke that came back- say there's a mission where 99 percent of you are not coming back, every last one would say, "Boy, I'm going to miss those guys!" As a youngster, you're indestructible. Even though you knew somebody that did go down.

Webb: Superstitious was the word I was trying to think of. Did you have any pre-flight rituals or anything like that, or know of anybody who did?

Bergh: You mean like. [Laughter]

Webb: Counting beads on the rosary? [Laughter]

Bergh: No. [Laughter]

Webb: Retying your shoes, I don't know, kissing the picture? [Laughter]

Bergh: "Good Lord, Bring us back!" [Laughter] I don't remember, people doing that. I'm sure they did, but that never stuck with me.

Webb: So, after the Croatan, where did you go?

Bergh: I was in another composite squadron and transferred up to Quonset Point, Rhode Island. Did join a squadron that was there and we—this was in oh probably March or April, it was still chilly up in Rhode Island

Webb: Of '45?

Bergh: Beg your pardon?

Webb: Of '45 or '44?

Bergh: Forty...five. '45. In fact, I was there in May because the Germans surrendered. We had the Germans surrender when I was there... But we also, before that, we had, we were on alert twice for submarine sightings. And where we would, we could be at the ship service, the barracks, or the ready room was it, don't go anywhere else! No movies! [Laughter] Just in case we had to go up. But there was supposedly a destroyer that supposedly got a kill of a submarine right off of... well, they said between the mainland and Block Island, somewhere in that area. And whether that was a rumor or whether that was true, we didn't know.

And there was another sighting off of New Jersey... off the coast. The last big push.

Webb: So, when you were in Rhode Island, you were still doing the same kind of thing, just with a different squadron?

Bergh: It was a different squadron, but I was like, in case somebody got sick I would have to fill in for them. And we did some... I know we did some flying out of there.

Webb: And you were on the Croatian... how long? A year?

Bergh: I think it was about four months, I remember four months

Webb: Was that a common amount of time for that kind of thing? Or did you get sent somewhere.

Bergh: No, I was transferred off, I think... I think mouthed off to the leading chief once too often.

Webb: So, you were transferred, okay.

Bergh: Before going on the ship, we went down to half the squadron went to Key West for, it was Bocca Chica Key, which is nine miles from Key West or something like that, and... my pal, my crew was to do rocket training. And most of the crew was to do night flying. And they were trying to develop a system where they called it a search light, and the planes were equipped with a search light and the radar operator would find the target... the sub, at night. In those days, of course, the sub had to almost always come up at night to recharge the batteries. And the radar, we'd pick it up on the radar, and then the radioman, radar man, would hone in on it, and when they got to about, I think it was about 1,500 yards is what comes to my head, the search light would, the gunner instead of being a gunner would be the search light operator, and he would turn on the search light and sweep down there, and hopefully he would get the sub in and the pilot would be able to bomb it. Drop the bomb on it. I don't know if it ever worked, but that's what they were doing.

Webb: That's what they were trying, huh?

Bergh: Yeah. On the rocket training, the pilot was doing what he thought he was doing, but he said, "I thought I saw that rocket flying wing on us." And I said, "Do you want to do another one?" And he says, "Well, I don't know," I said, "We'll do it,

we'll see if its right!" And it did, it skipped up and here's the rocket, flying alongside him! And he said, "I'm not going to do anymore of this! Getting shot down by myself." [Laughter] And we had a big, big radar target, and I picked it up before visual sighting. And it was just big, and we were honing in on it, and he couldn't find it, the pilot couldn't see it. And we got there and finally I said, "We're right over it!" He did a circle, and here was the mast of a downed sailing boat, sailing ship, that had been in the water for maybe a hundred years. And what I was picking up was all the metallic salt and stuff that had been stuck to the mast, and you couldn't—it was very, very difficult to see. That's just one of those little funny things, you can cut that out.

Webb: Well, no. I think that's extremely interesting, but I imagine its funnier now than at that moment when you're trying to lock in on something and you're not sure what it is. So in '45, you're up in Rhode Island, and the Germans are winding down: Did you feel at any point up to then that you could've been sent somewhere else? I mean, you were fairly close to the coast most of the time. Did you ever worry that you'd be sent to the Pacific?

Bergh: I wanted to be.

Webb: You did?

Bergh: I wanted to be a hero. I wanted to get in on the action. And after the war was over, I was shipped back to Norfolk, [Virginia], which was actually our home base, and I saw some of the guys that I trained with, and some of the stories they had- they had been sent to squadrons in the Pacific- some of the things they did. I became kind of happy that I lucked out, called myself lucking out, that I didn't do the things they did. And the older I got, the more I think, "Boy I really was lucky!"

Webb: That campaign is not something that I learned about growing up, but getting these kinds of experiences, talking to the people who experienced it—I just, it makes my stomach turn.

Bergh: The capturing, of course you know the story of the U-505?

Webb: Yeah, but why don't you go ahead and let's get it.

Bergh: This was almost like—even on the base, maybe in the barracks or whatever there was nobody around supposedly—in whispers, "They got sub, this German sub, and they got this intelligence things, that they can break the German code,

and we're not supposed to talk about that." [Laughter] Between that and then, I heard stories since then that the English had done something too, got the Enigma box [machine], they weren't sharing it. And I have trouble believing that, but then of course it could have been. But that was the absolute turning point of the submarine warfare. And we knew where the subs were, and we could project and predict. Instead of losing half of our liberty ships taking supplies to the New York or England... they just about all got through.

Webb: Why do you think there was this aura of 'don't talk about it'?

Bergh: Why?

Webb: Why, amongst yourselves?

Bergh: The walls have ears! There could be something behind that picture! That was something that they preached to us.

Webb: Loose lips sink ships that was something that you guys had to deal with?

Bergh: Yeah.

Webb: Did you ever feel like there was somebody listening?

Bergh: No... Back, going back to the Memphis, the two weeks in there learning the radar stuff, you weren't supposed to talk about that. Going into town, the bartender says, "Oh, hey, what, uh, where are you at? You got a radio yet?" I say, "Yeah, I'm in the 19th week." He says, "Ah, you're at 'Radar School'?" But, it seemed that, well, you don't talk about radar because we don't know what they had, what they knew about us. But we were pretty sure they knew every little thing, just as much as we knew about them. After the war, I said, "Boy, I want to get shipped to Glenview." I didn't have enough points. The point system was, I didn't have enough points to get out, so I said, "Boy, I want to go to Glenview, finish the term up there, where I could be close to home." Instead, I found my name on the list to get to Naval Air Station Miami. I said, "Well, that's a good second, I guess! Spend the winter in Miami." And I was assigned to operate a radio on a landing runway where they were still training the bombers, torpedo bombers. And our job was, we had a signal man, and a hot papa. There were three of us in three different jeeps, and we were supposed to make sure that the pilot had his flaps down, had everything down, the wheels were down, apparently locked, and just do that. And it was something for us to be able to do. At that time, the word came around to get off the air. And we found out later that get off the air,

five aircraft from Ft. Lauderdale had been lost. That was when the five TBM's [aircraft] flew into the water off somewhere off of the Gulf Stream. Do you remember that?

Webb: No.

Bergh: In '45... oh, in late '45 there were... five torpedo bombers that were lost, and they didn't know where they went. There's still no trace of them, and a PBY, which was a workhorse, amphibious also went out and was lost, and they didn't know where it went. And there's been all sorts of rumors about that. Extra-sensory perception and there was this thing that came up and gobbled them... and they got disoriented and flew into the Everglades and crashed somewhere where we couldn't see anything. They flew over the everglades and crashed and got disoriented and got into the... Caribbean—or the Gulf of Mexico—that it was the Bermuda triangle that ate them up. It was a mystery of course. All we could do was speculate. **1:24:50**

Webb: It's nice to know that the sailor stories that falling off the edge of the world still persist.

Bergh: Yeah! Well, this brought back to mind when this Malaysian plane disappeared. And one of the stories is that there is some type of magnetic vortex that goes through the earth, and a radio personality, a radio-television personality at the time that was also an amateur pilot, was Arthur Godfrey, and he was flying in the Pacific, and he got to a spot where all of the instruments went haywire, and he was able to turn around. Now this was whether he imagined it or whether it actually happened... but they never found it. Now the Gulf Stream at that area was probably going at the rate of a mile per hour, and in the ocean, you know that's big. So, say they did crash, if they were practicing torpedo runs, the lead pilot would be flying and each of the other guys would be taking their lead off of him. They wouldn't be watching the other ground; they'd be watching him. So if he went into the water, went down a couple feet too low and crashed into the water, they would go down with him there wouldn't be time to change. I kind of thought that probably, and the planes were such that they went down they could be three quarters of the way to England. Well, somebody said, "The Bermuda Triangle," well, even in the days of the war, we trained over there! We flew all over, and there was probably then there could be five hundred to a thousand instances of ships and planes that were in that area that was called the Bermuda Triangle at any given day.

Webb: Well, speaking of that, sea stories or whatever, you know, the Navy has... traditions. Did you experience any kind of naval tradition—anything that you think signifies the sailor life?

Bergh: Well, I remember them, a fellow, a 1st class made chief, they were going to—part of the initiation was to throw him overboard, in an area where there was... I think it was in Guantanamo Bay, there were a lot of jellyfish, and all they did was soak him wet with a firehose! No, I did not go too much of that. I was always a polliwog, never crossed the equator.

Webb: Gotcha, okay. So, you're down in Miami, and that's where you earn the last of your points?

Bergh: Yeah

Webb: So you did just the two years that your friend way back when recommended that you sign up for the Reserves so that you would do the two years and then get out if you wanted to?

Bergh: Thirty-three months and three days.

Webb: Thirty-three months and three days. Are you glad that you went that route, or did you have any regrets?

Bergh: No, I wanted out. I wanted to be home. And I considered talking with a lad that had transferred into the [US] Coast Guard, he was doing, flying radio man on observation planes that would go out for Coast Guard rescue service, amphibians. And I thought that might not be a bad way to go, but, no. Chicago was calling, well, Villa Park was calling. [Laughter]

Webb: You missed those winters. You missed the snow while you were down in Miami. [Laughter]

Bergh: For years after that, I vacationed at least two weeks in south Florida.

Webb: So what did—you get out of the military—how did you get back to Chicago? Did you take a train, or did you fly?

Bergh: In those days, we took the trains to [Naval Station] Great Lakes, two weeks in Great Lakes—well, two days in Great Lakes—and when they finally said, “Okay you’re a civilian,” they put the ruptured duck in the Navy, so I had that on and a jumper and... I remember taking the North Shore [train] downtown, transferring to the old Chicago rural engine, and I said, “I’m gonna take the first train out.” I

actually lived on Westmore Avenue, and the train would stop there. It was called a flag stop, so strictly, a local. In Villa Park itself there were two stops they were called Express. The next train out was an express, you would get out at Villa Avenue. That doesn't mean much to you, but that the two stations. And if it was a limited, it would go to Main Street, Lombard, so I would take that. Lombard was a Limited, and I got off and there was a restaurant there with a cab stand in front, and I was going to take a cab home, but there was a cop in there, and he said something, "Are you out now?" And I said, "Yeah, Scotty, I'm out," and he said, "Ah, another guy I've got to watch, huh?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah you're probably gonna have to watch pretty close" and I said, "Is there a cab stand out there?" And he said, "Yeah, is there no cab?" and, "No, not there," and he says, "Where do you live?" I told him, Westmore Avenue. "On the Lombard side?" "Yeah," "I'll take you home." So I rode home in a squad car, and the guy pulled in the driveway, blew the siren, and my dad and the guy that was helping him ran out and they went, "Uh oh, he's in trouble before he got home!" [Laughter]

Webb: [Laughter] What was the reaction from your dad when you were finally home?

Bergh: Glad to be—glad to be in one piece. They had the delicatessen, and they had to get rid of it, and from the proceeds they got from it they got this little house, so I lived there. I lived there until I moved out and got married.

Webb: And when was that?

Bergh: 1949, October 1st.

Webb: And how did you meet her?

Bergh: The roller rink. She knew me at another spot when we would go roller skating when I was home on leave, and she was a waitress, and I didn't remember her. And at that time, when we started going out, she was seventeen and I was twenty. I was discharged from the Navy, like I said, thirty-three months and three days, I was still nineteen.

Webb: That's quite a bit to go through before you're even twenty-one. That's pretty neat.

Bergh: I used to imbibe... in the, well, in alcoholic beverages. [Laughter] And I was in one place, I think it was the second or third time I was in, and the owner was the bartender, came up, put his nose up to mine and said, "You expletive, expletive, expletive! I looked in my records," I had worked for him as a skate boy when he

had owned a roller rink before he went into the service, he said, “I looked in the records, you’re not twenty-one! If you get within five feet of a shot glass, I’m gonna kick your expletive, expletive all the way from here to your house! And then, when I close this joint, I’ll take you out on Anheuser Road and I’ll get you drunk!”

Webb: You mentioned that she saw you when you were back on leave—back home on leave. You got to come all the way back home to Chicago? Or was that when you were at Great Lakes?

Bergh: I got a boot camp leave; I think it was ten days out of Great Lakes. But we had I think two or three leaves from the coast. My sister in law was so mad because she didn’t see her husband for all that time, but she saw me two or three times! [Laughter]

Webb: You just hitch the train?

Bergh: It was always the train.

Webb: And other than our sister in law, what was the reception like from the community, from old friends, you know?

Bergh: The girls always loved the uniform. The guys that were left were envious. It was—it was just vacation time for me I guess and being in the service. I’d gotten a couple of ribbons that I would wear. And I had, if I can show you this, this was, I was really proud of, the aircrew wings [Aircrew Badge]. The publicity was that these were combat aircrew wings, and that was, I called them my “hero medal.”

Webb: That’s really neat. So, you are very active still with the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]?

Bergh: Yes. Yeah, I joined the VFW about six years after I got out of the service. In fact, my father in law, who I was living with at that time, he was crippled up but was a past commander, and the present commander was over, and they were each on one side and said, “You will join.” And, oh, about five years later I got active. I went through the chairs at the post and held various things there, I went through—I became, at that time we had a country council in DuPage County, and I was county council Commander. I went to districts and I held several chairs in the department. And I met so many good people that way. And I had gotten—by that time, I had gotten into the mood that maybe we can make, instead of

making a big hero or a big power structure, I said, "Maybe we can make the world a little bit better." And that's...

Webb: That's a great way to look at it.

Bergh: Yeah, later on, I raised my hand at the wrong time, and I ran for... what do you call it? Trustee in the village and had the bad luck to get elected. And some of the people there were like, "Oh, I'm a big deal," and by that time, I thought, "You know, I just want to make things better. Power? There ain't no power. I might get out of this ticket," but... which I didn't do. [Laughter]

Webb: What kinds of things did you do...? I have it here... what kind of work did you do after you were out of the service other than working for trustees?

Bergh: Well, one of the things, when we got out of the service the difference between now and then was that all of my peer group was discharged and had served. And so, we all had this in common. And most of us, to readjust, would engage in quite often we would work something during the day - construction jobs, which were fairly easy to get and then drag home in time to take a bath and eat, and then go down to the tavern and have a few beers. And look for girls. Jobs like that. I know my first job was in labor. In fact, I left that to go to school, I had to go to take an American history course to get to take the GED test, which, well now that's one of the few things that I regret that I didn't stay in school. Then I did various things like working in a nursery. I think I had about ten or twelve jobs. I finally got a job with Western Electric, installing central telephone office equipment. And then I got serious about that. And then I wanted to be in entertainment, but I didn't know if I was smart enough or had enough guts to go. And then when I got married, the kids started coming, that Thursday paycheck every week was absolutely necessary. So... my entertainment business was on a part time basis.

Webb: We'll talk about that a little bit; you had a TV show?

Bergh: Well, long before that I worked as a floor guide in a roller rink. And being kind of outgoing I guess, and the guy who owned it also owned a hayride business. A business where he would take a group of people, give them a hayride for an hour, take them to a barn dance for an hour, and then send them to a bonfire they could roast hot dogs and all that, and I thought, "Man this is nothing!" And also, I joined a guy that was an organist, they had a business, went in a business making organ records for roller rinks. And I told him, I'd quit being a floor guide, a floor manager, I had to quit because I wanted to spend time with that. And he

said, well, he was lacking a caller. He said, "I'll make you a caller over at the farm, and you can make some good dough at that time." Now, we're talking in the early fifties, middle fifties. And I said, well... and he said, "Come on over and take a look this Saturday," and I was surprised. He ran as much as a thousand people through there in different groups. And they taught me some dances and I took to it as an outgoing guy, and I got an audience to see it. And I got, I liked it. It helped me do my entertaining bit. I made some good money. Now, the pay at that time, I would get three dollars an hour for a group. In the barn I had smaller groups, like twenty to thirty people, I could take two or even three groups. So I could make as much as nine dollars an hour! Now in the 1950's, '55, '56, that was big dough! I got more than I was making from western electric being a big-time technician! Not big time, I was a salary jockey, but yeah... When the Forest Preserve bickered with him to buy his farm, and they finally did it, and he was out of business. And that was 1960. January 1st of 1960, he went out of business. I happened to be reading the sports section in the [*Chicago*] *Tribune* about Four Lakes, and their ski school, and they were teaching big deal ski school, and the other things that four lakes did out there. They had picnics, big industrial picnics during the summer, and hayrides! And hayrides rang a bell. So I went over there, and I said, maybe they could use a program like we used to do. Well, in talking to their number one man, he said, "Well, I'll give you a call." And a couple days later he calls and says, "Aubrey wants to meet you." Well, Aubrey was Mr. Greenburg, he was the partner in Greenberg and Finfer, who actually started, were making this—had bought this property and they had made it a ski school, a ski slope because they were skiers, and they were going to develop it into big apartments, which it later became. And they said, "Well, how would you like to run this business for us?" And that was kind of out of the clear blue sky! And I said, "That would be fine on a part-time basis," of course, and I was quite successful with it. I will tell you, about the calling bit, when I was still at Stelford Stables, that's where we had first come in, we had a group from Taylor Street, and there was this kid, maybe thirteen years old, that came to me before I started calling the barn dance. He said, "We don't want this barn dance stuff. Give us rock n' roll, that's what it's gonna be!" and I talked to him, I said, "Give me a chance, let me give a dance or two for you. And if you don't like it, I've got Elvis, we'll play Elvis for the rest of the time." Well, I danced them, and I danced them a little harder than I normally would have, but at the end, when I was sending them off to the bonfire, he said, something like, "Hey, there's something to this expletive." And I thought, "Man, that was the best compliment I think I got." I still treasure it. That Greenberg adventure had many businesses, and they

had a building in Chicago, high rises that they had built, some rentals, let's say that they operated. And some that they sold off, but each business ran on its own. That was their thing. If the business didn't run, well, I've got others, but that was it. People working there, that's tough for them. So, we had a bad winter. When I say a bad winter, there's no snow. You could have big headlines in the *Tribune*, in the sports section: "Ski school in Four Lakes [Alpine Snowsports]" but it wasn't near as good as snowflakes coming down. Snowflakes coming down said skiing, newspapers, eh, maybe. So they were sold. And I said, "Well, Western Electric was my job. That was my main thing." In fact, one year I said—that was it—I came back and they said, "How would you like to run a stable for us? You know, we're gonna have four-thousand units there, and you're gonna have people—build in people that are gonna ride horses." And I said, "What I know about horses is that you put oats and hay in the front end, and expletive comes out the back end. That's what I know." And so, I didn't do it. I said, "Well, Western was my living."

Webb: Yeah, wife and kids, I know for a fact change things. [Laughter] But you were saying before the interview started that you did some TV work too, later on, in the recent past?

Bergh: Yeah.

Webb: Why don't you talk about that, too?

Bergh: In the village we have cable television, and we have the government, what we call the government channel. In doing that—what they were doing for a while was just televising the board meetings. And somebody wanted to do a little more and see if we could expand it a little bit. So, I also, through the VFW, the VFW wholly sponsored our 4th of July parade, and, oh, way back in the sixties I had one job, I think I was senior vice commander in those days, that meant my job was to chair the parade. Well, I got into that and I thought that's great, and I would do not only be the chairman and work on the committee in one form or another, and then be the announcer at the reviewing stand, and, again, it was something that I ate up, you know. When we got there—we would do this also—when cable came in, we would also do this. And so, I had fun doing this. Well, before we had cable, I interviewed [James R.] Thompson, when he was governor. I thought, "Ahh, I can associate myself with the governor!" Then when [Jim] Edgar was governor, we did have this, and we were on the television. I thought that was pretty good. That was something. And then a few years later—one of those guys on there, he was a good friend—he said, "Come on join us, get it

right,” so I came in and started talking with, interviewing people. So just like what you’re doing, except, in fact, I’m trying to learn from you too! I would interview various people on the board and people in town. For instance, the barber that I still go to, was the second owner of this “Bill’s Barbers Shop” that started sometime around 1923, ’24. And old Bill started as a young immigrant, his barber’s shop. And Dick, the gentleman that runs it now—we don’t talk about how old we are. Dick worked for him right after World War I—or World War II. And bought the place when Bill retired, and he’s still running it. So he is the second oldest—we did a show on him. Say, “Oh, this was the old one. It’s now a beauty shop, but this is where it started, this is a good one. This is the way he had it.”

Webb: It’s a great way to make sure that the history lives on.

Bergh: And most of the stuff we do, we do couch shows, we’ve done that. Interviewing people on the couch. I did—we did a regular thing with the fellow that was the village president at the time, his name was Tom Cullerton, from Villa Park, and he—we would do this show together and talk about things going on in Villa Park and what he thought about it. And it would be, if I would introduce the show, it would be the “Sid and Tom Show.” If he introduced it, it would be the “Tom and Sid Show.” [Laughter] And he ran for and got elected as a democratic state senator, and the Democrats being able to gerrymander the thing that made a good Republican stronghold into a Democratic thing. In fact, [U.S. Senator and Army Reserve veteran] Tammy Duckworth is also—and I was fortunate enough to get to talk with Tammy a couple of times, and in other enterprises, and I think that lady is one of the most fantastic people...

Webb: Yeah, she’s been here a couple of times, and it’s always a pleasure to get to talk to her.

Bergh: I would give a plug for Tom because as a state senator, he took to it like a duck takes to water. And in talking about things that he’s done, his grasp of it down there, is very, very good. He has done a good job for Villa Park and a good job for the state.

Webb: Well, I want to maybe come back to the VFW. You’ve been there for quite a few years, seen quite a few types of veterans come through, and I guess my question would be, at your particular one, whether you have any of the younger guys, the Iraq and Afghanistan vets coming in?

Bergh: Yes, we do. In fact, our junior vice commander is a... he was in Saudi Arabia. And he's a cop in Oak Park. And what a nice guy, real nice guy. I would not like to go be arrested by him, he's a no-nonsense person... but he's one that's taken to the office and is doing very well, a really good job, a superior job. In fact, right now our bingo on Tuesday night, I sell our raffle tickets, we have a raffle license, and the lady that's sitting alongside me for those two hours is going to be his future mother in law. I haven't dated her—yet. I have enjoyed, I've really enjoyed being in the VFW. I've enjoyed being able to try and make a life a little better. When I was district commander, there would be people who were like...sucking up, I would call it. But I tried to tell them, "No, no, no. My job is to help not to be a..." Well, the title is commander, but it means to help. That's what were supposed to do for most of the club.

Webb: Well, taking that idea of making the world a little better and also going back to what you said about when you came out of the service, everybody around you had served. You had a really great tight knit community that you could talk to. What is it that you think that we could do to ensure that the new guys coming back, as a community, what do you think we can do to support them?

Bergh: We..., one thing we have done is recognize the post-traumatic stress level, and in World War I, it was a called shell shock. And there was a ward in Hines where they just locked guys up because we didn't know what to do with them. In World War II, well, we tried to treat it, those that had this. In Vietnam, coming back—Korea and Vietnam—it was a little better, but Korea was like a forgotten war. When I came back, I was a hero. When they came home, they were ho hum. When the guys from Vietnam came home, they were as much as baby killers. And that was something that was—boy, that was a sad thing. A little aside, in the VFW, we closed the bar one Tuesday, this was before bingo, and we were doing a work party, we were painting. And a lad comes in and says, "Can I get a drink?" and we say, "Well, no we're closed." And he said, "Well, you know, I'm a Vietnam veteran, would I be eligible?" I jumped off the ladder I was on and whipped out a gin, well here we'll do this! Well we had this lad work with us. He was very, very active with us. He enrolled in COD [College of DuPage] and he was supposed to be part time, but then he ended up taking on a full-time court. He wanted to work for Kroger because his interest was food service, so he went to work for Kroger part-time, but ended up almost full time, and he was still spending an awful lot of time with us. He met a girl, and they got married, and they moved out away from—I think he lived out in Villa Park somewhere or out in Lombard, and he moved out west somewhere and we lost him. After a few

years, there was another lad that came in, and he was scraggly hair, scraggly beard, he looked, coming home, he looked like he was the rebellious type. Only he wasn't. He was twenty years old, and I started talking to him. He came into the club, joined the club. I started talking to him and I found out that he was actually raising his little brother, taking care of his little brother, which was sixteen, and he was twenty. I talked to him every time he would come in, I would talk with him, sit with him. And I wouldn't tell the guys that were in charge of the bar at that time that he was twenty years old. [Laughter] I didn't do that until we had a little celebration that he was twenty-one. But he moved away eventually. Good workers. That was just a couple of the guys from Vietnam that were in. My son in law, before he was my son in law, was a Vietnam vet. Two-termer. Ran through the chairs. In fact, he had two years as a post commander. A buddy of his did two years as post commander, another guy, I think we had three other guys that were Vietnam vets that came through. And one of the things about the Vietnam coming home, I knew, and I knew what they were going through, I could feel it second hand, of course, I found it was so bad that they were treated that way. Well, I was also the rental manager for the VFW. By this time, I had retired, and I was the rental manager. And I rented the hall to a girl that was an FBI agent, and for her wedding reception. And she was marrying a detective in the New York City police department. When she told me this, I was worried because I know how some of our local cops go when they party because we also have some of the local police associations having meetings there, and after the meetings they'll socialize. And by the way, I learned enough about people to be able to jolly them out of, usually, jolly them out of their badness. But these people, at her wedding reception, these cops came in, and the best man was another dick from New York, and many of the people in there were New York cops. And I'm thinking, well, I wasn't shaking but inside I was. Well, they were the most perfect gentlemen. It was one of the easiest wedding receptions I ever had, one of the most fun things. The best man had said, "I'm chairman, and we're going to have a welcome home parade for Vietnam veterans, and we're gonna have a million people out for it." And I said, "Well, that's fine," but inside, I said, "This is all B.S., he can't do it, it ain't gonna happen!" Well, it worked. And it happened in New York. They had a million people out, plus. And that was a turning point, in what people generally thought of Vietnam vets. These were people, these were men, and sons, and brothers, and people who were serving their country. These were not baby killers. These were people that were so honorable. I think it was six months later, we had the same thing in Chicago, and it was a humongous turn out. And I thought, "Man, it was so great to turn these

things around like that.” I haven’t seen this lady since then. And of course, this was in the eighties. I haven’t seen her since then. And I wish I would, I would have liked to see how this turned out because she was such a lady. You couldn’t believe that here was a, well it wasn’t a [former FBI Director John] Edgar Hoover type of radio program, or Jack Webb. It was a mundane thing that the FBI does... What did I want to say? After—in the VFW, I made so many good friends, and being as I’m grown so old, many of the people that I had admired, are gone. It’s just, old age is taking them. I would add to the—oh, back in the late eighties, I think it was ‘86, I laid off all alcoholic beverages. So, the socialization of sitting at the bar, with no more of the additives, in fact, one of the jokes, would be like, I would say, “Boy, around ten o’clock, we’re sitting around the corner of the bar, we’ve got all the problems of the world solved, why won’t people listen to us?” And I said, “When I sobered up and I sat in the corner and listened to us, I found out why people wouldn’t listen to us.” Working in the VFW, and now, they still—oh, I think it was fifteen years ago, something like that, I became on our Du Page County Veterans’ Assistance Commission. And on the board. And this is another thing where we help people. And it’s something that’s called “Veterans Helping Veterans.” And like, Steve—I don’t think you’ll meet him in this particular thing, but I’m sure you’ll meet him somewhere on these television broadcasts—he’s a retired major, even as an officer he’s a nice guy! Sorry Steve, it just blurted out. But we helped guys when they’re in the veterans’ system. And they might talk to another veteran when they won’t talk to someone like Human Services, or something like that. And that’s important, it’s important because we help people that would be too proud to ask for help that need it.

Webb: You also have an understanding. I mean, you may not have had the exact same experiences that they did, but you’re a veteran and you understand.

Bergh: We have set this up where—I think it was, probably close to ten years now. At this age, you get up there, you know, something happened two months ago was actually ten years. [Laughter] But we went from a mediocre thing to with a guy that was a great organizer as our superintendent, and he served a couple, I think her served two terms, eight years I think it was. And we went from, like I said, a mediocre thing to a spot where we could advise people. We could help them. We could help them with the money, we don’t give out money, but we pay bills. And more important, where they could get help themselves, where they could go, where they would listen to people because they know they were all veterans. Right now, our office has Steve, we’ve got Bernadette, who was a—I think she’s a retired army person, and Billy, who is a Vietnam vet. The only person who’s

not a vet is Bernadette's daughter, who is our—what do you call it...? A non-paid person... I'm having a senior moment.

Webb: Intern?

Bergh: Intern, yeah, intern. And they know where to send people. So, it came from, we were raising, I would be at the office several times a month, to now, going once a month for a meeting because everything is running so smooth. And it is, it's a good spot. And we know where to send people I don't know personally, but... our people, like Steve and those people, where to go.

Webb: Well, I think that's great.

Bergh: It's something that—it helps, it helps. If we could get to people, if we could get to people that are possibly considering suicide because there's been suicide hotlines set up, and it's one of the things that none of us would try to counsel somebody, but we would know the people who can. We just wish we could get more, get more of the people to do that. It kind of hit fairly close to home, insomuch as one of our guys at the VFW that was, a retired reservist, retired guardsman, whose son committed suicide, had the PTSD. It... gets you right in the—my joke would be it gets me right in the pacemaker, but that doesn't do it. That gets you right in the heart... Even though I'm an old man, I'm still the adjutant for our district. I take the minutes.

Webb: Well, it sounds like you are really busy. You said that you retired, but it doesn't sound like you really retired.

Bergh: There's the old joke, the old cartoon, "I'm too busy to grow old!" My body doesn't think so, but. [Laughter] And my joke is still, I've been a widower twice, and so I can't get married again because I'm too hard on wives. But I still like to enjoy life as much as I possibly can.

Webb: You've got some kids that take care of you, and you mentioned a son in law?

Bergh: Living in my house—I have a nice house, I was fortunate. In fact, I said when my first wife died, I think the following July. She left us in May, I think it was in the following July a year later, I got a bill from the mortgage company that said, "You owe zero, zero, zero, zero." So I looked up, and I said, "See, you shouldn't have died, now we have a two-hundred dollars a month raise!" [Laughter] For my second wife, I bought another house. And it's nice. I feel blessed to be able to do that. Oh, live a little higher on the hog. Again, my first wife was very—very

intelligent woman, I think the one thing that she did wrong was fall in love and marry me. Actually, she went into education, and she was a principle when she got sick—a principle of an elementary school in north Elmhurst—so when she started to get out of school, when she got her degree and got hired, we started living a little better than paycheck to paycheck, or counting the money on Sunday, going, “Do I have enough money to make a good cup of coffee on Thursday morning?”

Webb: Well, I think I’ve asked you all of the questions that I had outlined, was there anything that we didn’t talk about, as far as your military experience that you thought we’d talk about today?

Bergh: I would hope, I would hope that this attitude that the general public has now, about how veterans are all heroes, stays. Even though I’m not a hero, and I say, “I don’t deserve that accolade.” I’ll take them, but I really don’t deserve it. But on the other hand, I do for some of our, I do have a lot of eulogies for our deceased members. And I’ve always thought that we were, when we raised our hand, we gave a blank check to our government. And if our government wanted to make us a meat cutter and put us in Chicago, or Panama—a buddy of mine was a meat cutter in Panama, and eligible for the VFW, and a good worker! To those guys like my cousin, who lost a kidney over in Europe—we were all—it’s something that we really didn’t have a choice. Actually, in my case, I wanted to be—because that’s where all the big boys were and I wanted to be a big boy, was that it? Because I wanted to go kill Japs? Because that’s what I said. But, it didn’t work that way. A veteran, having served—again getting back to the PTSD problems, and that we’re recognizing it, and trying to find ways to rectify that.

Webb: Yeah, wow. I think you summarized that well, and you know that’s one reason why we do this, and one reason why this museum and library exists, is so that people continue to recognize what it means to be a veteran, and all the sacrifices that were made.

Bergh: Again, I would say my sacrifice was an adventure, as a kid, people who were married even in WWII when they were taking, I think in the boot camp we had guys that were in their forties... thirties, and forties that were disrupted, the old men. I had a cousin, I was a baby of my generation, and I had a cousin that had the same rank that I did, I suppose it would be the MOS [military operations specialty], he was the radioman gunner, in the Marine Corps, in the first Marine air wing, he was on Guadalcanal and that... I envied them, as they came back. And I now—as age—as an old guy, I’m glad it was them and not me. Well, yes,

thank you very much for being able to be here. Things that we could do, because Uncle Sugar is not always right, but it's always Uncle Sugar, it's always Uncle Sam, and none of us are perfect. None of us have nail holes in our hands. And even though we really investigate when somebody made a mistake, we really investigate like crazy, and try to put blame on somebody, but in the background is always: Let's not do this again. Let's try to find a way not to do this again. So, the old saying, "Our country, right or wrong, we're always right."

Webb: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time today to talk to us and thank you for your service.