

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Richard C. Higgins**

Date of Interview: December 6, 2008

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Interview in progress.

James Lindley: [This is James Lindley.] This is an oral history that is being collected on December the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008. This is the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission and the Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz Foundation. This is a meeting...this oral history is being collected in conjunction with a meeting of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association meeting in Fredericksburg this weekend. This oral history is from Mr. Richard C. Higgins. Mr. Higgins, would you introduce yourself for us?

Mr. Higgins: Yes, Richard C. Higgins; I live at 2917 Redwood Avenue, Costa Mesa, California, 92626; telephone number: 714-549-2373.

James Lindley: Tell us about your experiences in the military...in the Navy.

Mr. Higgins: Okay.

James Lindley: And tell us where you...where you were born and...and how you came to be at Pearl Harbor on December the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Higgins: Alright. Well, I was born 1921...July 24, 1921 on a farm in southwest Oklahoma which later became part of the Dust Bowl. It's...it's encircled in the...where they draw the lines for the...for the Dust Bowl. I attended...uh, we lived about...well, twelve and a half miles southwest of courthouse square of Mangum, Oklahoma...which was Greer County. I grew up on the farm;

attended schools in the local area of the (unintelligible); it was Central View school and I graduated from Central View High School in May of 1939 at the age of...still seventeen then. They had established a community college in Mangum which was twelve and a half miles away from where I lived, but I didn't have money to ride the little station wagon they run around the area to collect the students and couldn't live in town because there were no jobs, and two and a half...twelve and half miles was too far to walk. So I hitchhiked six hundred miles up...up to St. Joseph, Missouri to live with a half sister; I made that trip in two days. I worked at various things there; my...my sister had some drag with the company next door. She worked in the...the Smith Brothers factory...clothing factory; they make Big Smith overalls among other things. And there was woman's hat factory next door and she knew the foreman there, so through her I was able to get a job working on women's hats, felt hats, for the winter wear, and that lasted until they started making straw hats for spring and I was of a job. I worked at odd jobs picking cherries and other things and then finally....well, the Army Air Corps had been advertising on the radio for people to join our Army and go to Hamilton Field to be aircraft mechanics, but I had...my original intention was to try to go to a rad...a radio and television school in Kansas City. But the tuition for that was three hundred dollars, and I never acquired three hundred dollars, and plus I would have to live also, so I joined the Navy. I went through the sub-station at St. Joseph and then on down to Kansas City for the...to be...took final examination and be sworn in. My...my only time aboard a train was at...I'd

got into Atchison, Kansas...almost night...and there was a train running over to St. Joseph; it was probably thirty-five, twenty-five, thirty-five miles and it probably cost me less than a dollar, but I rode that train. They put me in charge of the draft from Kansas City then to...I mean from St. Joseph to Kansas City, and when we were sworn in there, they put me in charge of the draft to go to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. And we had to change trains in...in Chicago; go through the inner-urban or whatever it was and ride that out to the...Great Lakes Naval Training Center. So we...since we were...most of us were farm boys and we wanted to see the buildings so we walked from the train station to...to the...want to take us out to Great Lakes and...instead of riding a...the streetcar or whatever it was they had there for that. And I didn't know what to do with the money that we had for that, so I tried to turn it in at the...Great Lakes (laughter), and they were reluctant to take it, but I didn't have sense enough to just give it to the guys and...and go...so...anyway, I went through Great Lakes Training Center; I joined the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 1939 and, of course, it gets very cold in...at Great Lakes in the wintertime...that's where we had our training. I was...I'd received orders for the General Purpose Preparatory School when we were graduated from boot camp, and I'd gone on boot leave and came back and my orders had been changed to the Aviation Radio School at San Diego...NAS San Diego, California. I was in the second class of it; they had just started it, so I...I was very fortunate in getting into aviation right out of...of the boot camp. That was a four month school; we finished up at the end of June, and I had orders

to VP-43 at Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle on Lake Washington, and that was a very desirable place to be! We had P-2...uh, PB...P2Y3s; that was a...flying boats that set low in the water and you could walk...walk on top of the fuselage underneath the wing and they were fairly ancient. And then in October a draft came in for people to be sent to Patrol Wing 3, in the Panama...Panama Canal Zone, and one for Patrol Wing 2 at Pearl Harbor; I was placed on the Pearl Harbor draft. And was...when I reported in there, I was then assigned to Patrol Squadron 22, VP-22, and that was down on...on Ford Island on the point right across from Hospital Point. And so...and by 19...by January, 1941, I think I'd made Third Class Petty Officer by then; Third...Third Class Radioman and was assigned to a...flight crew as Second Radioman. My Patrol Plane Commander was Lieutenant Thomas H. Moorer, M-o-o-r-e-r, who later became the Sec of the...of the Chief of Naval, I mean the Chief of Naval Operations and then after that...for the Chief of Joint...The Joint Chiefs...Joint Chiefs of Staff, so he...he hit the top of the ladder on that. In 19...in October, about the 15<sup>th</sup> or the 16<sup>th</sup> of 1941, the Admiral in command of Patrol Wing 2...there were about, I think, five squadrons in the wing; twelve planes each...this...the Admiral and our Commanding Officer came down to the squadron about six o'clock in the evening; we had a squadron recall; the...it was for Advanced Base Undisclosed Location Indeterminate time, so pack your bags accordingly. Six...six o'clock next morning...twelve hours later, we were in the air. And when we got airborne, the pilot said, "We're going to Midway Island." We operated out of Midway patrolling in

that area; it was just being built up; there wasn't too much there; I think they might have had a tennis court; they also had Gooney birds and that was our primary activity...was harassing the Gooney birds. They were...when they were...well, they were rather...rather ungainly, but when they...they sometime they tried to land downwind and that didn't work too well because they were...the tail over beak, and then sometimes they'd try to take off downwind, and that didn't work out either! So there's...they were actually were like an airplane; you didn't take off downwind; you didn't land downwind unless you had too. But anyway, the Pan American Airlines had...hotels from the...from Asia to the...west coast; they had one in, I think, I don't know whether they had one in Pearl City or how they...how they housed them when they got there; they may have had a hotel over there or they may have sent them into another...one of the commercial hotels in Honolulu, but they had one on Wake Is...uh, had one on Midway; they had one on Wake; one on Guam and I know they flew out of the Philippines and they flew out of Hong Kong. They had the China Clipper; they had a Philippines Clipper, and that...so, in the...sometime in the latter part of October or the first part of November, the Japanese Special Envoy, Admiral Kurusu, was going to Washington to join Admiral Nomura which was the Ambassador to the United States for a talk with the State Department because the U.S. had put sanctions on Japan to...try to...keep them from going...their aggression into Southeast Asia. They were trying to get all the oil and minerals and stuff that they could for...power the war machine. The...the clipper landed there, and they pulled an engine off it.

The Radiomen of our squadron...we...we'd cop the press everyday from the...from the States and the word on that was that he was held up at Midway because of weather. Well, we had great weather. Some of the Mechanics from Pan American told some of our Mechanics there was nothing wrong with the engine; they just had orders to pull it. So if he...well he was there for the three days; we had nine of our twelve planes lined up where they could be seen from the Pan Am Hotel, and the other three were operating all day long – taking off; flying...out of the area; coming back in...landing; continuous operation all day long. The few Marines they had there...they were marching by in...in either squad formation or what have you...maybe platoon; they'd probably pass the hotel...maybe every fifteen minutes or so, so they were...that was all day long. And then our crew...and I think another stood by to fly...fly the Special Envoy and his attend...one (unintelligible) with him...on to Pearl Harbor in case they got the word. After three days, I put the engine back on the plane and flew him on to Honolulu...to Pearl Harbor...they...to Pearl City, and then on...from there on to the...the mainland for...I think...they went into San Francisco. At the same time, there was a Russian Special Envoy headed for Russ...uh, for Washington; we did a lot of speculating in the squadron; we figured well, they were probably wanting to talk to the Russians more than they did the Japanese (unintelligible). But anyway, that's...that was our activity; that part of it. Then later part...latter...latter part of November, Admiral Halsey aboard the Enterprise with his accompanying ships came by Midway on their way to Wake Island to take a Marine Fighter Squadron out

there, and we patrolled in front of them...our twelve planes, and our orders were that all friendly vessels had been warned away and they were not to be sighted by any surface vessel. So we had five...two, five-hundred bombs thrown under each wing and (unintelligible) our planes to be sure that that didn't happen. When they got within range of Wake to (unintelligible) planes off, they did...the Marine Fighter Squadron; they had to have 4-Fs, and they were Grumman fighters, and then they headed back to Pearl Harbor, and I think they were doing some maneuvers just before they got there, so they...they weren't back at Pearl Harbor by...by the...the 7<sup>th</sup>...December the 7<sup>th</sup>, and I think they were planning on coming in...probably that...late that evening or something, but anyway they were not in there. We patrolled in the area there for a couple of days...until they were clear of it and then we flew back to Midway on Thursday the...which would have been the 4<sup>th</sup> of December; spent the night; we went into Pearl Harbor on the night of the 5<sup>th</sup>, Friday night, and we got in about...well, at night because I had an hour and a half of night flying in my flight log. So, I don't know what happened Saturday, I...I'm sure I took...went on liberty...and I went to...back to Waikiki, but...we'd...because we'd been gone for about five weeks or so, and... no, more than that...mid-October to December the 5<sup>th</sup>. Well, anyway...it was some...about that time, about six weeks. And I was sleeping on my bunk on the third deck of the barracks; third floor on the lanai...screened-in lanai...like a screened-in porch, so it'd keep the mosquitoes off. And our barracks was right across the street from the sick bay which was a...a quadrangle; it had an



open courtyard in the middle, and just back of that was the...the [USS] California; here was the sick bay here on...on this chart; we're right over here; it was a small building there on this side of the street, and we...our barracks was right across from it which is here. This was the administration buildings here. When they started bombing and the torpedo runs, of course, they were very close, and so I...I jumped out of my bunk and I ran over to the edge of the lanai and just as I got there, a plane went right over the barracks...probably fifty feet to the side of me and about a hundred feet above the barracks...with the big red meatballs on it. So, there was no doubt what was happening in my mind, because of the things that had been going on. A lot of guys aboard ship were down in the engine rooms and stuff like that...that they...they weren't aware of those things. So we...I got some clothes on as quickly as I could; got down below to...leave the building and there was... went right...right by the chow hall, mess hall, and the Marines were already posted on their doors and wouldn't let us out because...the activity was pretty high and they didn't want us killed before we got to...wherever we needed to go. So when the first wave let up a little bit, got...wasn't...wasn't quite as much action there, they opened the doors and we left out. But they...the chow hall had (unintelligible) doors on it, and those things were just swinging back and forth from the concussion of the explosions. So our hangar was down on the point of the island right across from the Naval Hospital point, and...it was probably a quarter of a mile down there, so we...got down there as quickly as we could. And things happened out of sequence that there were not supposed to be; the Flight

Leader was to fire two flares when they were coming in and...on the...from the...from the first wave, and the first flare was for the fighters and the torpedo bomber...bombers to go in so they'd have a clear view of the ships, and the second one was for the dive bombers and the horizontal bombers to go in. Well, there was a delay on the first one's peeling off to...the torpedo bombers to go in, so he fired again and the dive bomber skipper thought that was his signal. And I have a painting done by an artist who had very good cooperation from the Navy; it was a...it was put out by a gallery down in...Newport Beach, California, and it shows the, you know, the flight of...the squadron commander peeling off to make his run on hangar six which was our hangar. They dropped one bomb in the corner of the hangar and five in our aircraft parking area. One crater was seven feet deep, and twenty feet in diameter, and that was about the location of the plane I'd flown in on Friday night. So I got down there just about the time the second wave came in, and the...the guys...some of the guys were already in the planes that were still not on fire or blown apart and they were firing the guns from those. And we had a...they had a mule, we called them...like a tow tractor, but I don't know whether we just had one or two tractors, but they towed some of them with that away from the others that were burning and then...and when they'd catch on fire, well, they'd...the tanks...gas tanks would explode and throw burning gas over to the others. The trailing edges of the wings and the...and the elevator and rudder were fab...both fabric, and so they burned off...very quick. And...the...so I was pushing on...on one...we had guys

pushing...there's...there's a (unintelligible) that goes around on the internet that was showing sailors pushing on a PBY over at Kāneʻohe on the other side of the island...the naval air station over there. Well, that's what I was doing also there on Ford Island. (Unintelligible) other guys...well, I heard them firing at the...at the plane and the...and the plane I was pushing on, and so I figured well, there was one nearby, and I looked over to the side and here's trackers going right down the...about...just beyond the wing tip! And there was about fifteen hundred gallons of Av gas right above my head that's...was...we didn't have self-sealing tanks then either, so I lucked out that time. Well, after that...there's a picture that's also in all of the things that you see of the attack on Pearl Harbor – a sailor in his white pants and the undershirt watching the [USS] Shaw blow up when the...it was in...destroyer in floating dry dock across the channel from us, and he's standing about three or four feet from the wing...one of the wings of our...one of our planes that was laying on the ground; you could see the float on the end of the wing because when we'd...when we'd land we'd...let our floats down and take off to...to...(unintelligible) dock, and when we'd pull them up on the beach, well, then they...they would retract them. You can see the wing...end of the wing there with the float on it and the ribs that had burned off; they're sticking up...the fabric had burned off...they're sticking up there...there's another sailor sitting down on the ground near it. So that picture was...from one of our planes. And so after it was all over, of course, we started cleaning up and belting ammunition, so we'd be ready for anything else. That evening another

Radioman and I were...we had twelve planes in the...oh, fourteen planes to a squadron; twelve that were operating and two spares so they could rotate on overhauls and things like that, and one of them...or two of them were in the, at that time...they were called Assembly and Repair hangar because they...they would assemble planes out there as well as...repair them; later they changed them...Overhaul and Repair...and I don't...in...in later years. But we were sent up to get one of the planes in commission so they could fly it; when we got about halfway to the hangar, these six F4Fs were coming in from the Enterprise and they had...they were directed to make a straight in approach by the tower; they elected to make a go around to see what the field was like, and that was one fatal mistake because one gun opened up, and when they did, the whole harbor looked like Boston Harbor on a night of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July; every gun in the harbor opened up. One plane got on the runway at Ford Island at (unintelligible) Field, and they all were either shot down or ditched and...they...I think they lost three out of the six pilots. So anyway, that's...friendly fire...that's...its worst condition. It was the...I didn't get in the air...they...they filled our squadron up with planes from different units there. Utility squadron had the PBY1s, I think; we had PBY3s, and we...from other squadrons because we...I guess, we're the more ready squadron there. And then in...end of December, a squadron came out from San Diego with new aircraft; those were turned over to us. And the first week of January we left; we left in two divisions...two...or six planes in each division; one...two days apart, and so we...our...our flights...we...we went...both flights went out in the

first week of Dec...uh, of January, 1942 headed for the Dutch East Indies...now Indonesia. We were to join Patrolling 10 that had been in the Philippines; they had two squadrons – PP101 and 102, and a Utility squadron, plus the seaplane tenders that were there...Langley being one of them; the old...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible) Langley.

Mr. Higgins: ...first aircraft carrier; it was being used as a seaplane tender then also, as...as well a...the old four-stack destroyers that were...two of the boiler rooms and engines were taken out and used that for fuel and ammunition and bombs and stuff for the planes, and so they...we...they...we would live aboard them and operate from them in advanced bases. We...we went from...to Palomar the first; Canton Island the second night. By the way, they...that was a Pan Am base also, and I think the largest guns they had on there was a forty-five automatic, so they were very shaky. And the...the lagoon was so...so short that they...most of the time, unless they really had a good wind, the...the Clippers would have to taxi downwind; get up speed; make a...a u-turn, and then take off into the wind because it wasn't long enough to make a straight run on it that...if it was fairly calm.

James Lindley: Was a Clipper there?

Mr. Higgins: Uh, there wasn't one there, at the time, when we got there...that I remember.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: There's a...a story about that when it made a...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...(unintelligible words).

James Lindley: Went around the world...all the way around.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, I...I've got the information on that one, too. But from there...from...we went from...then from Nou...Noumea, New Caledonia and Fiji...Suva...Suva islands, and then to...to...I think that was the order, and then to Townsville, Australia and spent the night there; these were night stops along the way. And then from Townsville we flew up to Darwin; they call it Port Darwin also...or Darwin and we pulled thirty-hour checks on our planes there. Well, the six planes that had got in two days before us they had already spread out into the Dutch Indies Islands there and operating from the seaplane tenders, and I don't know, maybe some of them had already gone to Surabaya which was a...where Dutch seaplane...harbor there and a seaplane base...(unintelligible) or something like that. And...but one of the bases was at Ambon on the island of Seram which was off the west of...end New Guinea. It was right south of the Halmahera and not too far Timor which has been in the paper some.

James Lindley: Right, right.

Mr. Higgins: Oh and...also Ambon was.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: But the executive officer in 22P7; we carried the squadron number, the first two letters, uh first...designation; the P was for Patrol and the number following that was the number of the plane in the squadron, so the executive officer was flying the 22P8; we were flying in 22P...uh, I mean 22P7; we were flying in 22P8 with him, and we...as we approached the seaplane base there

we went upriver to the bay and there...the Japanese were holding an air raid on the Australian...Royal Australian Air Force Base that was using, I guess, one of the Dutch...Dutch air fields. We didn't see them, but they saw us. When we...we...I guess just before we got to the bay, two Brewster Buffalo Fighters took off from the air field to challenge them and two of the Zeros peeled off and shot them down immediately. The other seven planes, and I don't know whether the other two joined them or not, but they caught us just as we landed on the water. I think they hit seven...P...P7 boat before they got on the water, and they...they...one...wing was on fire, but they...they landed and...up to...ran up to the beach and got it under the trees there, and they were on the side where the seaplane base was; the ramp. Well, we landed behind them and turned the opposite direction, and I was...I was...my duty at the time, was to go back into the waste hatch on the west...on port side, left side and pull out a steering post; hook up a sea anchor...which was in fact, something like a canvas bucket with no bottom...bottom in it, so it'd provide drag so it could man...maneuver on the water a little better... 'cause all they had would just be the rudder and engines. And I looked over...I pulled that steering post out and I looked toward 7...number 7 boat and it...there was spray coming up all around it...and then they...they...it started coming over to us. And then when the rounds would hit the plane, it sounded like hail on a tin roof. And when they would...when they would...they had small caliber gun that was...gun or guns that was...I think a little bit smaller than a thirty caliber; I'm not certain just the size of it, but they would line up their targets with that and then also

had twenty millimeter cannons, and so when they acquired their target, well, they'd open up with that cannon. I had loaded a couple of rounds of...of ammunition in the port gun...or the...the plane captain was an enlisted man was firing it. And then they...we started getting fires inside the plane; we had four canvas bunks with a thin mattress on it, and then our flight gear hanging up there...and...a few things that were flammable, and so when those twenty millimeter rounds would explode, well, they'd start fires. So I grabbed a fire bottle; I was putting out fires all over the...the...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, but thank goodness some of the rounds would also go through the...below the water line, so we had water coming in the bilges, too, to mix with the gasoline...that was coming out of the...the fuel line to the auxiliary power unit we called a put-put. So they'd clip that and it was...gas was coming into the bilges from that, too. So it was an explosive atmosphere as a result of the sea water getting in. But that's also...that was...we had about a thousand pounds of beef laying in the bilges, so it was marinated... (chuckle)...because they were getting short of...of food up at Ambon. But then when we...we hung up on the mud banks...mud...mud banks there...mud...mud flats, and we couldn't...swung around where only the thirty caliber gun in the bow could bear on them; the enlisted pilot was firing that. And one time I saw him backing out of the...of the nose...of the bow up there; there was a lot of smoke, and the...the twenty millimeter exploded and...and he got some wounds from that. And then when we...when we came to a stop



on the mud flats, the...our Patrol Plane Commander of PBC8 ordered us to...to...ran in the plane...also he'd given instructions of...you know, grab your gun; we had a spare gun laying in the...in the bilges back in the waste hatch...back in the waste there. So we had a...we had eight men in a crew and two additional ones along for maintenance, and of course, all of our tools and spare parts and the planes, too, so one of the...other men was a...a tall man by name of...Ash...Ashtermon (sp?); well, he got out first and I handed him his fifty caliber gun and so he said, "Come on, Pinky,"...they called me...Radio and had a name "Pinky Higgins" to me because it was a baseball player that I'd never heard of...professional baseball player's name...Pinky Higgins...I finally read about him about...within...within the last year, so I could never catch him before...so I grabbed some ammo cans and...and I...I couldn't catch him; we were about...about chest deep in water, and he's got this fifty caliber out there and...and I'm...had a couple of cans of ammo, and I...I never caught him until we got to the beach. But we tried to set it up on a big boulder there and it just wasn't...we couldn't do it, and they were strafing us at the same time...on the...the plane...and on the beach there. And so finally we...I was able to get most of my body back behind that...that big boulder and I think he headed for the trees. The First Radioman was a...I was Second Radioman then, because I...we'd just got a Chief Radioman back from Belleview; had gone to Radioman Material School by Washington D.C. and...

(end of tape 1, side A)

James Lindley: ...December the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Go ahead Mr. Higgins.

Mr. Higgins: This Chief Hacey...uh, Casey, Chief Radioman, one of the rounds had clipped his belt and he just about lost his pants (chuckle) in the process, but I guess apparently as soon as...we must have had a little bit of a lull between the planes strafing us, well, I...I headed for the trees also. And after the raid was all over...there was one of the planes...was tied up to a buoy that had arrived a couple of days before we had; he was...had been on patrol and come back there and off that and he was tied up to a buoy in the bay. And actually there were two that were, but they'd had a false alert for oh, probably an hour or so before, and one of the pilots that was from VP101...or VP1 or VP102 got a boat out to the plane and we had a...we'd keep a skeleton crew on the plane; maybe two or three men...to...to guard it and to be ready to go, and so they flew out to a scatter base, but the other plane was still tied up to the buoy, and so they sunk it, of course, also. We didn't...they didn't sink us because we were on...on the mud flats. Our wing burned off from the trailing edge...from...both fabric from wing tip to wing tip, and they'd also hit the oil tanks, I guess, because we had the oil all over the blister and on the waste hatches there. And so it was a...we...we...they sent a boat after us, and they sent another crew to...skeleton crew to stay on the plane because of...to protect...protect all of our...

James Lindley: Stuff?

Mr. Higgins: ...things that we had in there; tools and spare parts and our clothing. And they counted over four hundred holes in the plane. Of course, most of the rounds

counted for two holes, but it was fairly well rattled. All the Plexiglas was shot out of the blisters in there. Five men were...uh, four men were there...back there all the time during the attack, and I was there part of the time which was five; not a one of us was hit!

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And it...the enlisted pilot...the AP, Aviation Pilot, was...was firing a pee shooter in the bow there, that thirty caliber; he was the only one hit in the plane of the ten. Number seven boat had one man hit in that; he...he thought he was...just had a scratch on the inside of his elbow. Well they...they brought in more planes that were off of patrol...on patrol and we evacuated Ambon. And they had a...I think they were called J2Fs; they were in a utility squadron; there was this...a large float in this...under the hull or...under the fuselage, and then wing tip floats. And...in that...they had a hatch in the bottom of that fuselage float where they could mount the camera to do photographic work. I think they had eight men in that that they...that they evacuated and there were, I think, twenty-seven in the plane that I flew out in. And we flew to Surabaya, Java which is the main operating base there that...Dutch...Dutch naval air station; Bogocumbongan (sp?) is similar to that. Of course you couldn't smoke in the hangar 'cause it's something like Verbotin Terokin (sp?)...(chuckles)...there's no...no smoking...whatever it meant.

James Lindley: No smoking.

Mr. Higgins: What...whatever the (unintelligible) was. (Cough) But we got in there and I don't know whether it was that night, but another guy and I went into liberty

in Surabaya, and we got back to the barracks; we'd just put our bags on the bunk...on bunks which had mosquito nets on them. We got back to the barracks that night, and the barracks were practically full; both planes had come in and our bags were sitting out in the middle of the floor and the only thing available was ones without mosquito nets. Well, mosquitoes start biting and you pull up the sheet. Well, the sheet was like in Oklahoma; we had cotton sacks that were canvas and they...I think they were almost as thick as that and you'd swelter under those things! You'd have to pull them off of you a little bit to get (unintelligible) some and of course we were hit by mosquitoes again. Well, next night we were sure that we had a bunk that had mosquito nets on it. And...I don't know when...that was when we'd gone over to the...the club, the enlisted club there, and that's the first time I'd ever had any Heineken's beer. Well, the guy that was with me...I led him back...led him back to the barracks and got him in a...a bottom bunk and I crawled in the top one and I held on for dear life because that thing was spinning! (laughter) It just about threw me off of the...(laughter). Needless to say, I didn't drink that much Heineken beer anymore. But we were...we were running patrols out of there, and then we...we ran a patrol back to Darwin...down...Darwin. We stayed there for a few days and...and we patrolled up to...one of our patrols was on February the 13<sup>th</sup> up to...almost to Ambon and back, and we were no longer superstitious...you know, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> didn't mean anything to us anymore because we...we weren't shot out of the air...because they'd already occupied Ambon. But we lost six of our twelve planes all in the

general vicinity of Ambon. We lost six out of one crew and one [out] of another. And this...the one they lost one from, they were shot down up near Melville Island; they were on patrol out of the island. In fact, Lieutenant Moorer had a...his flight report in the book that was published of the...of the flight reports of different...different activities...one in (unintelligible); one in North Africa of a...of a fighter taking off with a guy still...hang...laying up on the wing to hold it down or on tail or something...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: ...but anyway it was...it was some...they were all unusual reports. His was labeled "Routine Patrol out of Port Darwin," which didn't come out to be routine...because that was on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, the first raid that the Japanese pulled on Darwin. And they were flying north out of there under a thin cloud layer and they spotted them through it. So they peeled off and they'd run on them and the first thing they knew, the rounds were coming through the plane and I think it had set...I don't know whether...the wing was on fire or not, but they had...they were on fire...and landed. And the Radioman Thomas...the Thomas that was...that I was Second Radioman to when I was originally assigned to Lieutenant Moorer's crew...I was later on...went to other crews...but he had ankle or something...something he had broken...in fact, he'd been wounded at Pearl Harbor; he was on watch when a land mine hit in their hangar; had one hit...headquarters and he was...had the duty there and he was hit by shrapnel, I guess, there and got a...and was wounded, but Thomas was there; he was banged up on that, and Lieutenant

Moorer had a shot in...well, he...they said in his...in his hip, you know, but anyway he...he had a...he was hit, too. But they were...they were picked up by a tramp trader. The military had contracted for...with four or five...uh, five or six, I think it was, tramp traders to go different routes to Corregidor to carry supplies. Well, this one happened to be...[in] Europe where they were shot down and they were picked up again, and so Lieutenant Moorer figured that on the way back, if they had any...they'd probably attack again and if they had any bombs or whatever...they'd bomb the ship. So he told them to stand on the fantail of the ship...stern of it and when I give you the word, you jump, because you could figure out about when they would make their drop and where the ship...would be far enough away...that they wouldn't be hit. But one of the guys had gone forward earlier and he didn't get the word, so he was on the ship when it...it was sunk.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And then, of course, they were...they got some discomfort in the water from the concussions when the bombs would explode. So, they were picked up by natives and taken...I...I don't know where they were taken to...Melville Island or to another island, but they were...they finally were shuttled back down to Darwin; I think they went into Darwin, and...they got to...Broome (sp?), Australia when we evacuated Surabaya, Java. But in the meantime, we had flown...we'd gone back up to...we'd left before the raid; we'd gone back to Surabaya, and in fact, we'd escorted the [USS] Langley; she was going down

to Fremantle at Perth to pick up P-40s to take them up to Java; they were going to haul them up there, but she was sunk on the way.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: And then the survivors and that were picked up and put on the [USS] Pecos, oiler tanker, and she was sunk. And one of the...one of the guys that...we picked him up when the Langley was sunk...he had a motor wheel boat or something or other...he picked up one guy and picked him...same guy up again when the Pecos was sunk! (laughter) "You again!" (laughter) So anyway, they...that was ...we moved back to Surabaya and we were running patrols out of there, and the Japanese were moving down through Sumatra; they'd torched the oilfields up there in Sumatra; a lot of smoke coming out of that area. Of course, we were down on the lower end of Java near...in Surabaya, and the...we were doing...running patrols up in the Makassar Strait of the southern Philippine waters.

James Lindley: Now was this before or after the [USS] Houston was sunk?

Mr. Higgins: Before.

James Lindley: Okay.

Mr. Higgins: And so, we were...we were running patrols up there; we took...we had a patrol...I forgot what the date was; it's in my flight log, but we...we went up the Makassar Strait, and Makassar is a harbor on the south...kind of the southwest end of the island...of the...the Celebes [s/b ?] Island, and then Balikpapan was on the east coast of Borneo. Well, we didn't see any ships...neither one at the time. So two days later another crew...Lieutenant

Roberts or Robertson...he's in...In the Hands of Fate; the article is in there on...of his...his experience. He...they...his crew had that same plane on the same patrol we had, and there were ships in Makassar; they got in there, I guess, somewhere...I don't know whether it was still dark or...but anyway, very early in the morning; they reported them to the Command Headquarters in Java, and they continued on their patrol. And, I don't know...they got half hour...or however out, and they ord...base ordered them to...to go back in and bomb them. High...high altitude bombing in PBYs is about ten thousand feet which is in...within range of anti-aircraft fire. Well, the fighters jumped in first; I was a...I was a...we were on patrol in the...the Flory (sp?) Seas, I guess, down south of...of...or south of Borneo and...and the Celebes...down in...through that sea there, and we'd picked up a...the landing force that was coming; they were about...I think about two hours out maybe on their flight, and they were around nineteen or twenty ships in that group. So we circled them and got..., you know, getting the types and the course and speed and everything and they finally got tired of it and they started firing on us. So we...when we got some hits in the plane we decided, "Well, that's enough; we've got enough information," 'cause...our...our transmitter was out; we couldn't send a report.

James Lindley: Oh!

Mr. Higgins: And so we went on down and we... by...below Celebes and...okay and Makassar, and we ran across a humongous...I think it was supposed to be a



cruiser; it was probably a treaty violation ship that they had, you know, after the World War I...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...and it was a large one! And it was either...either cruiser or one of the...battleships or something; I think it was a cruise...oversize type with their...accompanying destroyers. And so we went on to our scatter base, and...and tied up and the pilots phoned their report in, and then when it got almost dark, well, we flew back into Surabaya... 'cause they were having air raids all day long there. But in the meantime, we...I was on the radio circuit when the...the other plane was going in to bomb the ships in Makassar. And at first they were saying they were...they were attacked by the fighters and then when they got within range of the anti-aircraft guns, well, the fighters backed off and they were getting anti-aircraft fire. And they dropped their bombs and they got...said...reported that one hit and near miss, and then shortly after that...and they said they were being attacked by fighters again. And the...the base asked them how many and they said , "Many," and something...and then...no more transmission, so they never heard from them again. That was the same plane; same flight that we were on...two days before.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: Well, we flew back to Surabaya that night then, and they put another transmitter in the plane. Another crew took it out the following morning, and they weren't heard from then after they took off; same patrol we had and

then...(unintelligible) there and same thing. So, the first one two days earlier, we were one flight ahead and that...we were...or which was two days...and that one was one day ahead. And so the Good Lord was looking after us. The...I think it was the following night then that...that night that we'd put back together a plane from...parts from other planes and I think we had twenty-one men in that; we took off at night time and that was a hairy thing because...when the tide was low, well, you...you had to follow...follow a channel out there...they'd dug channels for the...for the seaplanes to...go out there in deeper water and take off. And one mag was...I don't think...I think only one mag was working on the engine, and it was...it was...magneto and it was...really, they kind of had to urge it along...to throttle to...to get it up to full power (unintelligible). And so we took off and flew the whole night to...to Broome, Australia, and we landed there and then we flew on down to Exmus (sp?) Gulf and we picked up these...these other seven members of of...well, Moorer's flight crew, and so then we had twenty-eight planes...twenty-eight men in the plane, I guess, that went down to Br...uh to...to Exmus Gulf. And we unloaded there and got aboard the...I...I rode the [USS] Holland, submarine tender, to Fremantle and Perth, and that's the first time I ever saw the gyro room in a ship. I was...I was down...I was, I guess, bunked down where the Electrician was and that's where I was. But we had, I think, it was three...the...the two squadrons in the Philippines, I think, they probably had fourteen planes each – two spares for each squadron. The Dutch turned back five, I think it was, that were on lend/lease, and those...I think those

were...Dutch...the two planes that were in that time were Dutch were Dutch aircraft. The first one may not have been, I don't know. But, of course, they did a lot of re-numbering on the planes; I can look in my flight log with me...and tell whether it was a...a Dutch plane or...or one of the Navy planes we had originally. But, we...there were three...I think there were three still flyable by the 1<sup>st</sup> of March...

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: ...out of about forty-five aircraft....at the start of the war. And they...we were...we were in Perth for about three days, I think, when the USS Mount Vernon came in; she'd had a near miss in Singapore; kind of messed up on the shafts of the propellers...'cause it had a little *hump* to it would turn over.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And the...they had six thousand ANZACs on it...were bringing them back from Africa...North Africa that had been over in Syria and North Africa for a couple of years and they were bringing them back to Australia and New Zealand. And they came in and off-loaded some of their personnel there at...in Perth and Fremantle at the harbor, and they sent about half of the aviation personnel back to...were out there to...were sending us back to the States to form two new squadrons, plus the survivors from the Langley and the Pecos and other personnel. We went on around to...to the bay in the south part of Australia, uh, Perth, and I forgot now...what they did, but...especially me, I think...of...

James Lindley: I know exactly where that is.

Mr. Higgins: (Laughter)...Yeah, I know...you fill that in later! But anyway, it was...

James Lindley: I'll think of it in just a second.

Mr. Higgins: But anyway, the rest of the Australians were...disembarked there, and they wouldn't let us have liberty there. (laughter) So anyway, I guess they didn't want confrontation...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...with the guys coming home.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: But then from there, we went on through the Tasman Straits and over to Wellington, New Zealand, and we were in there for two days...and two nights, at least, and...but they off-loaded the New Zealanders. And we were able to have Cinderella liberty there one night...port and starboard, so we had one night of liberty...had to be back at midnight.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: So that was called Cinderella liberty.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: And the three of us went out and we picked up...we met three young ladies, and the other two guys picked the best-looking ones...first and...that left me with the third one, and she wasn't exactly what I had in mind, so I...I made motions...let's...let's don't...team up with them, so we found three other girls, and we were with them...with...most...most of the day and they were going...they were going to a...dances were going to be held that night, so okay, we'll...we'll meet you there. But in the meantime, after they were gone, well,

we picked up three others (laughter), and so...but we didn't actually dance and so...and then we had to get back to the ship by midnight...so that took care of that. (Chuckle) But the...we were headed out of Wellington and...east; we thought we were probably going through the Canal and going up the east coast; when we got past Pitcairn Islands, we did a ninety degree turn to the north and headed for San Francisco, and we pulled in there on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March of 1942...about twenty-two knots all by ourself, but out of...hopefully out of range of where the submarines would be...the Japanese submarines would be, and so...and we had that *hump* every time that that shaft would turn. But when we got in, the [USS] Hornet was leaving out of the harbor with all these B-25 (unintelligible)...so, "Okay, they're taking those out to WestPac, you know, they're going to...ferry them out there." Really...took them out to WestPac alright! (laughter)

James Lindley: All the way out!

Mr. Higgins: That...that was Doolittle's Raid!

James Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Higgins: So...so we...we went to...they offloaded us there at Treasure Island, and we were waiting for orders...all we came back with was a roster of a...of the men that were aboard and that was it; no...medical records or service records weren't with us...just...just a...sheet of the names of the...of the people, and so we...we assembled there at...at...in Treasure Island at the naval station that they had there, and of course, the Master at Arms could not..., "Get...get in line, " you know, "get...,"

James Lindley: Never!

Mr. Higgins: ... and our leading Chief says, “(Unintelligible) out, we’ll take care of things.”  
And we...we waited for two weeks or so for orders there, and we had open gangway; we slept in when we wanted to; got up when we wanted to and so...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: ...we...we weren’t about to take any guff from anyone! These guys...well, we’d been to Pearl Harbor and then out to the Dutch East Indies; lost another squadron; we...we were...lucked out. We took out a hundred and twenty-men; we had to leave most of the people...a lot of the people in the squadron there because we...we could only take so many, and just skeleton crews of...of (unintelligible) for maintenance people. And we lost seven out of a hundred and twenty. And the other squadron...two squadrons, of course, they’d been involved in the fighting all along from December the 8<sup>th</sup> for them until we finally had to leave out of the Dutch East Indies. You know right after we left Broome and went on down to Exmus Gulf there was some Dornier flying boats and stuff came in to...

James Lindley: Right!

Mr. Higgins: ...the harbor; it had a lot of civilian stuff, and a lot of them were still on the...on the planes, and they lost a lot of people there that came in and strafed them...

James Lindley: Strafed them.

Mr. Higgins: ...and everything, so we got out just in time...going on down to Exmus Gulf, and...but...I don’t know how many people they lost out of there, but...they...I

think we probably lost another few lives, too, there, too. But...anyway, it was...

James Lindley: There was like three or four of the Dorniers...

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, yeah...they...we...we... you know speaking about the Dorniers...one of the guys that we met...a Dutchman, he was in a flight crew...he was a Stoker First Class, but he was a twenty-millimeter gunner on one of those Dornier flying boats.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And...were they...I don't know whether they were tri-motored or not, but and they had some other flying boat; I forgot what that was. But anyway...

James Lindley: That's what I thought...I think it was; it...wasn't it...yeah, maybe I've got it confused, but I...I thought it was...had three nessesels (sp?)...

Mr. Higgins: I think so.

James Lindley: ...with two...an engine on each end of the nessel, so there was a pusher and a puller.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, right. Uh, it may have been...well, there was one of them like that, and I...now I don't know whether that was...or...or that was the Australian Singapore flying boat.

James Lindley: That may be.

Mr. Higgins: It takes off at eighty; it closes at eighty and it lands at eighty (Aussie accent).  
(laughter)

James Lindley: Exactly!

Mr. Higgins: So they were...they were in... at Suva...Fiji when we came through there. And that was a real interesting thing there. We were walking down the street with...two of us...there were three of us there then and one of them was the Austral...uh, was New...New Zealander, I think it was...or...either Aussie or New Zealander, and we met these two native women; beehive-type hair and maybe orange colored of some sort...I think they used lime to kill the lice or something like that, and I guess they were ladies of the evening (chuckle) because they just...they just went...right, you know, right between their table...one on either...either side of the guy in the middle...they were just...went right...between us there. And they...he said, "Don't have anything to do any of them because, boy, you'll be in bad shape!"

James Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Higgins: So naturally we didn't. But, so we...when we were going down...a skeleton crew would stay on the plane when we'd hit each of...of these stops and the others would go into quarters of some sort...I think, so in...in...New Zealand...we were in Suva...I was one of the part of the crew that just stayed in...I guess we were in the barracks there with the officers...New Zealanders...whatever they were. At...at...Noumea, we...we stayed on the plane. Of course, we went into hotels where they were staying and...and ate dinner. But they were...oh, some girls were going down this causeway near the... where we were tied up at the buoy, and, okay, so we were going to go over and talk with them...going to, you know, we'd put on our life...life jackets and was going to go out across there barefooted. Well sea urchins or



something...I...I tell you, took about one or two steps and that was it! Boy, we were back aboard that plane because you...you know, those things...they'd cripple...when they'd leave their barbs in there, so we didn't get over to fraternizer with them.

James Lindley: By the way, the name of that town was Adelaide.

Mr. Higgins: That's right! Now that's kind of wine country now.

James Lindley: Yes, it is.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, so...

James Lindley: It's very similar...many of the names of the towns are similar to this part of Texas...

Mr. Higgins: Uh hum.

James Lindley: ...because it was also settled by German immigrants...

Mr. Higgins: Well...

James Lindley: ... at about the same time this part of Texas was settled.

Mr. Higgins: As I...about the same time the convicts were sent over there?

James Lindley: Yeah. These were people...these were people...they knew these were people from Germany that were tired of the war.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, yeah.

James Lindley: They weren't...it was not Germany at that time; it was all of these little republics...or these little kingdoms or whatever they were.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, right.

James Lindley: But, that's the...that the name...why the names are similar to this part of Texas.

Mr. Higgins: Uh hum.

James Lindley: So after you got to San Francisco...

Mr. Higgins: Well, we...we got some leave and...and then reported back to Alameda...Naval Air Station Alameda, and so we formed two squadrons – VP-61 and VP-62, and most of the VP-21 personnel went into VP...I mean...VP-22s personnel...went into VP-21...uh, VP-61. From 10...uh, VP-101...102 had been in Philippines with the VP-62, so we formed a nucleus of the squadrons...the two squadrons, and we got all the...all...all these draft dodgers that were joining the Navy (laughter)...as new...new members of the...of the squadron. So they...we were...we were training them then at Alameda there and then we...and in the middle of Aug...uh, July...VP-62 headed for the Aleutians. But back up a little bit...the Dutch had bomb...bombed Dutch Harbor and occupied Attu and Kiska. And one of our crews were...was...took a torpedo up; I don't know whether they...it was destined for Dutch Harbor or...or for Kodiak...it must have been Dutch Harbor because I think they were on take-off at Kodiak when they...they didn't ground-loop...they water-looped...I guess, another float or something or another, and it ripped the wing off the plane. The Plane Captain who was in that tower between the hull and the ring...he came out of the top of the...the tower!

James Lindley: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Higgins: (Chuckle) You know, it had that wing right above it there.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: And the Co-pilot was killed and the torpedo ran up on the beach and, of course, it didn't explode because it wasn't armed, but...so we lost that crew as a result of the...the Japanese bombing there and occupying Kiska and Attu. Then in...they left...the 6...VP-62 left in mid-July and we left in mid-August. Our first stop...well, we...we...oh, by the way, our plane carried Mortimer Steward (sp?) and Char...Charlie McCarthy and some guy carrying a suitcase, you know. And so we...we...he was in our plane going up to Kodiak. So we...when we...we left out of...Sitka; we'd spent the night there, and I tell you we...we had bad weather. We got into the overcast; all the clouds and stuff and we had new rad...you know, they'd just come out with the radar shortly before that in the aircraft; very primitive. It...they...they didn't...it even...the circuits...you...the wiring and everything wasn't laid out on any breadboard or anything like that...or circuit board...well, you didn't have a circuit board then.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: It just...wired from one thing to another; it was made by the...the Canadians; it was basically a flying breadboard, and so that's what we took up first. And we...when we were flying to this...in...into the fog of the clouds, we'd get a brick (sp?), about a quarter of a mile...we had an A-scope...just a lubber (sp?) line in the middle and it'd have a grip on brick on there...and it...this perfect grip with a (unintelligible) with about a quarter of a mile ahead. Well, when I reported that to the Pilot, you know, it was, "Up!"

James Lindley: Mountains ahead!

Mr. Higgins: But it stayed stationary, so you know, so it would disappear when we...we'd be out of the clouds then. But we...we still had to turn back and spent two nights in Sitka, and then flew on into Dutch Harbor....uh, on Kodiak I mean. And then from on down to Dutch Harbor...oh, we had Charley McCarthy put on...I mean a...Edger Bergen put on a show for us when we got to Kodiak. And then we flew on out to...Sand Point Island which is out from Dutch Harbor...

(end of tape 1, side B)

James Lindley: Where were you at the end of the war?

Mr. Higgins: At Lake City, Florida; Naval Air Station, Lake City, Florida. When I got my orders to shore duty when we came back in October of '43, the ones that had been out twice...generally...most of them got shore duty; the others stayed there from nucleus...6<sup>th</sup> Squadron...most of them from nucleus of other squadrons to go back up to the...to the Aleutian area or somewhere else. I got shore duty to...direct...we went to a training...Advanced Training Command in Jacksonville, Florida Naval Air Station. And from there I was assigned to Lake City, Florida which is sixty miles west. And they had PV Operational Training there, and I was in the Ground School and we had...we taught pilots code and semaphore and blinker and what have you...not...not semaphore, blinker.

James Lindley: Blinker.

Mr. Higgins: And...and communication procedures and stuff for the...so they could draft messages up for the Radiomen to send out . And also...how to operate their...I

think GF...RU...GF transmitters and RU receivers for the comm....watch communication. And then we had the training of the crewmen, you know, in the different equipment. We had a...a radar simulator there also, you know, and they also had neat trainers there for the...for the pilots.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: And they had some good looking WAVES over there that were (unintelligible words) or so. When we took some time off, we'd go over to fly (unintelligible) trainers. (laughter) I...I always crashed (unintelligible); I could never land one of those things.

James Lindley: You were lucky, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: I figured (unintelligible), you know, when we were at...when we up in...I guess we were (unintelligible words)...yeah, we caught...somewhere out...I'm not sure where we were stationed, but our pilot...uh, or Patrol Plane Commander said...now if anything happened to him and his body was still warm, he wanted it to get back, so the whole crew had to prac...do some practice landings on...on the runway; we did it at Adak, so I got to land the PBY-580 a...a couple of times with a lot of...(laughter)...help from...from the pilot. So he was sitting in the right seat and I was sitting in the left seat which is the plane commander (unintelligible).

James Lindley: Uh hum, right, right.

Mr. Higgins: But, you know, that was...I really wobbled around in that thing before it finally...get a halfway feel of it, and so yeah, we had to do it downwind and crosswind and final and...and down (unintelligible), but so he wanted...he

wanted his warm body to get back! (Chuckle) So that was our...and it was good...all...all...and he...mostly (unintelligible words) crew.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: Anyone who can get the controls should be checked out on how to land one of those things...

James Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Higgins: ...airplane. So...but I...I got shore duty down there and one of the guys was in the squadron with me...or the training group...was a First Class Radioman, and I...I'd made Chief when I was up in the Aleutians; I made Chief when I had a little less than three years and six months, but I was (unintelligible) Chief (unintelligible words). Originally...had to...you had to have...thirty-six months in as a...First Class before you could go up for Chief, then they dropped it to eighteen months, you know, after the war started because they needed more people...hired...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: ...ranks, and grades...and they dropped it to eighteen months, and then with special recommendations, they dropped it to nine months...except for Radiomen. Now if the Radioman had gone through a Radio Materials School, at Elmview (sp?) in Washington, D.C....well, they could...they could wave the nine months. So, and so I could go up for Chief at nine months after First Class. Well, I was a Tojo (sp?) First Class; I was in the Asiatic Sea out there; I made Second Class in November of 1941; they came out with an all Asia...they have them all now for all Navy; they...they have one of the Asiatic

Fleet. Everyone that had made a rate prior to February...every...every three months that were...come...rate...come up for different...advancements and anyone had made a rate prior to November, uh, February of...when that rate would take affect...would advance one rate, except for Chiefs. And...but most of them were... been...later on...very shortly...or made either Warrant or...or Ensign...some even made a higher rank afterward...who had qualified. All of the officers were advanced one rank. Then later on they came out with a (unintelligible) that advanced all the officers one rank. So some of those that were...basically that were in...that had got out to the Asiatic Fleet, they...either in the Philippines or in our squadron went out that were basically boot Ensigns; they were Lieutenant...by the some time in...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: ...summertime, you know.

James Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Higgins: And so I...I'd made...I'd...I'd taken the test...they'd (unintelligible) squadron; I...I'd taken the test and passed it when I think I had about, I think, around fourteen months in...thirteen, fourteen months. They sent it in to the Bureau; the Bureau approved it with conditions. I could keep my hat, my Chief's hat, and...but time for a permanent appointment...you had to be a perm...a...active appointment for a year after you made Chief before it became permanent. The pay for an active appointment was ninety-nine dollars a month; a permanent appointment was a hundred and twenty-six, so you got a big pay jump. I could keep my...but my...my time for permanent appointment wouldn't start

until eighteen months after I'd made First Class which was in March, so...and...don't do it again. (laughter) He basically chastised a man because he'd (unintelligible) and done that. Later on I...when I was down on shore duty at Lake City, another Chief came in and his...same...same situation, but they wouldn't let him keep his hat; he had to do the full eighteen months before he got his hat. So anyway, he...so...I...I, and so this First Class had a date with a nurse over at the local hospital, Lakeshore Hospital, and so they...they wanted someone to go out with a friend of hers who was a nurse anesthetist, her name was...last name was (unintelligible)...all...all nurses went by their last name; she was MacDonald (sp?) or Mac, and I, of course, went by last name...was Higgins, so it was Mac and Higgins. But anyway, that's the only time we went out...what they call...the...Jax Place. It was a...had been a gas station, I guess, with a...kind of grocery store in the back. Well, they'd turned that into...put a jukebox in and some booths and there...there was a big Jax Beer sign up on top of it. There was...actually Sawdust Trail was the name of the...of the place, but they called it Jax Place. And here, you know, we're sitting in this booth and this...with this First Class and his date...back...was sitting across from us, and you know, we danced and all, and we'd talk a lot, and...and her eyebrows would keep...raising up, you know? And so...so we were dancing one time and I'd made a date with her, and that's the only time I ever went (unintelligible). (laughter) Three months later we were married!

James Lindley: Oh my goodness!



Mr. Higgins: And, so I pulled rank on this...this First Class. But anyway, we married and we were still at Lake City when the...war was over. And they were closing up Lake City and they moved us up to Lake...uh, Hutchison, Kansas. That's a...they had a...a PB4Y1, I guess, they were using...training base which was the B-24s that the Navy had adapted, and so we joined them up there at...at Hutchison Naval Air Station. Six months later, they closed that! And they moved us back to Whiting Field down near Pensacola...Mill...near Millington (sp?), Florida. And about three months after that, I got...I think, the first of 1947 I got orders to sea duty to...VA-4A which had been VT-3...Torpedo 3 and I guess it was originally...I don't know what it was originally attached to there...VT-1 or...VT...I mean, the...the 1 squadrons were...I think the Lexington and Saratoga...one and two...and three, I don't know what it was. But I was on VT-3, and they changed the designation to VA-4A and VA-4B or something like that, I've forgot now...for the...for the...dive bombers; I'm not sure...VA-3 or...V...I don't know, but anyway I was a VA-4A aboard...we were attached to the [USS] Kearsarge...

James Lindley: Oh, the Kearsarge?!

Mr. Higgins: Yeah.

James Lindley: Oh yeah.

Mr. Higgins: CV-33, I believe.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: And then...so we made the...we were at Oceania...at...near Virginia Beach...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...and so we were going to later change our home port to...home base to Charlestown, Rhode Island, but in the meantime, we were going to go to Guantanamo Bay area on...on training. So...we weren't supposed to, but I...I took my wife up to Rhode Island to Charles...uh, to...to Westerly, Rhode Island, and we tried to rent a place for her...an apartment or something...we finally found a "For Rent" sign of someone's home out in the country there and it was on Sunday. So we went up..., "Want to rent it." They wouldn't even talk to us; they...they observed the Blue Law up there, you know, no...business on Sunday.

James Lindley: Oh, no business on Sunday! (cough)

Mr. Higgins: So I had to leave; so I went back and put her in the...Roger Williams, you know, I think it was called there in Westerly, Rhode Island. And so she...she got a job at the Westerly hospital as a nurse over there. And they...of course, she was from Mississippi recently, so she had a different accent from...mostly Italians and what have you up there in their northeasterly dialect. So anyway, she worked there and I...I went back...to...down to Oceana, and then they...they had a delay in us deploying. So, she and another Chief's wife and their baby were coming back down to...Oceana and to be with us until we left, and they were on (unintelligible)...she had this little baby with her and they were at George Washington Bridge and they got rooms there; they...it...it was snow and ice, you know. So they spent the night in a...a gas station or something...(unintelligible) George Washington Bridge and...in D.C...they got on down, and they stayed there and then we left out, well, we went back up...,

'cause you weren't...you weren't supposed to move before you had the actual orders...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...there, so anyway, we did. And we went back into Charlestown which was on the...I don't know...what...is that on (unintelligible) Bay or something or other...but out near the...near the beach there...but it was out...out near that. And so they were...when...then we left on the Midshipmen cruise...in June...taking them to Scotland...the carriers were going into Scotland, well, I don't know...maybe the whole group went into the...Firth of Forth in Scotland, and we had about a week there. So I got to go into Edinburgh and got a one day trip...Thomas Cook and (unintelligible) tour of the Lake Country; went to Loch Ness and Loch Lomond...and didn't see Tessy though, (laughter) and...or Nessy, I guess it is.

James Lindley: Nessy, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: And then we went through (unintelligible) and had dinner and expressway back to Edinburgh; got to visit the castle up there in Edinburgh...castle and then up to...Holy...Holyrood, I believe is the...the royal...

James Lindley: Uhm, I think that's about right.

Mr. Higgins: ...palace up there and I went up...out by that. And then we went...from there we went to...the carriers went to Gothenburg, Sweden and the...destroyers went in with us and then they went on down to Copenhagen, so some of the guys took leave off the carriers and went down to Copenhagen. The battleships...two...had two battleships...they went up there to Oslo, Norway; I

don't know whether any...had any support ships along with them or not. We had a landing ship dock along, too, and I...I don't know where it went...there. But you don't want to...trip over we were flying the midshipmen...I'm sorry, I don't think I had any flights coming across because they were...they were using it...two midshipmen...in the back end of that TBM, torpedo plane. And there was one of the S...OS...OSO...S...SB2C...SB2C I think it was that was there; they replaced SBDs...whatever it was.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: One of them ditched on takeoff off the carrier.

James Lindley: Oops!

Mr. Higgins: So I don't know whether that...that midshipman decided to go into the Navy air or if he decided to stay surface (laughter), but anyway, they...we went into Gothenburg and we were in there over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July; we went for about a week. And I had...hangar deck control watch which was right above the quarter deck; you had the full view of all the hangar; I was in charge of the sentries on the hangar deck, and the quarter deck was right below us. They had the red carpet out there; they had the Navy side boys; they had the Marine Honor Guard; they had the Admiral's band because we were the flag ship on the Ran...oh, they'd put six of our PB...TBMs over on the [USS] Randolph to help kind of balance them up or something or other, and the other twelve were left on the...on the Kearsarge. So I was in the group that went aboard the Kear...uh, Randolph. And so at...you...I got to see all the pageantry there, you know, all the dignitaries coming aboard. And one night when I was in the

alternate duty section, you know, you had a...four sections and you'd have a one...one section would be...have the duty...like your section one or section three would be the alternate just in case they needed the other people. Well, had to go in to...I don't know whether it was consulate or what, but had to go into a big party and...at...at the diplomatic thing there, and they were assigned to go to that. They...rough (laughter)...rough duty, right?

James Lindley: Tough duty! (cough)

Mr. Higgins: (Laughter) So that...that was really nice. And they had the...Vista Park...park there which they said was their number two beautiful park in (unintelligible) Tivoli (unintelligible) supposed to be nicest one, and this Vista Park was the one in...number two...which we really liked. All the roller coasters had...they were...the sides were enclosed with murals and they had flowers all over the place...this is...beautiful spot. And they had three (unintelligible), I think. And so...one of them was playing...you know, the polkas and just the Schottische (sp?) and all...all those things and they were hooping it up there; the midshipmen especially. And then the...another one was a regular...regular type music, and all of the...(unintelligible) I don't know whether the third one was a western theme or what it was, but anyway, they had three dance pavilions out at the park there. And so...had...right across...there...there was two women out at the beach there, and one of them had...about a forty-year old; I don't know whether she was married or ever married or still married or what, but anyway, she had this...this kid on her bike, you know, with her. And...but she said...you know, "meet me," she didn't...she talked very limited

English, very little, and so...said, "Meet me at the...at the...uh, one of the dance pavilions there," and so I did, so we...we had some dancing there. And so...one time, I guess, I'd ordered an alcoholic drink and she ordered a soft drink, and the (unintelligible) came around checking to see if ...if hers was alcohol or not, so I guess they had prohibition about that.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: But, you know, that was 1947 and I think they had more...post-war automobiles, American automobiles, there than we had in the States per population.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: You know they...they had a lot of them over there, and they were...

James Lindley: I wonder how they got there?

Mr. Higgins: I don't know, but they...they had. But they were still on rations.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: And...they were...so we...we...there...we'd get a ration...a coupon book, you know, for...to eats and stuff, and so what we had left, well, we'd just give them to the natives, you know?

James Lindley: Yes.

Mr. Higgins: And...same thing down in England. When we left Scandinavian countries, two of the...one...our...the carrier I was on, the Randolph, and one battleship and a landing ship dock went to Portsmouth; the add...the other...carrier and battleship went to Weymouth. And I don't know whether the (unintelligible) I guess were scattered out between...I don't know whether they were...just in

those two harbors or where, but we had...we were in there for eleven days and the officers and chiefs were on a different duty section arrangement from the white hats. And it wound up...the white hats got seventy-two hours off at one time and the chiefs and officers got sixty. (laughter) But we still took a...Thomas Cook and (unintelligible) tour of London area. So we...we were...listened to a little of their debating out in Hyde Park there; we were...hotel close by; there was still a lot of damage, you know, from the war over there. And we went out to Windsor Castle; we went to St. George Chapel...of which..., you know, it was before the fire they had; saw the...the meeting room of the Order of the Guard with all of their banners and stuff there, and they...they said that they had...the Tojo's colors and stuff; they kicked it all the way down to the Thames River. (laughter)

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And then...then we went to Stoke Poges...no, yeah, Stoke Poges; that's where "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"...by...

James Lindley: Oh yes.

Mr. Higgins: ...who wrote that? Thomas, or Gray, or...I've forgotten who wrote it. "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"...but we'd visited that and eaten. And the other castle we went...Hampton Court! There was a book written...I think the...principal woman was...was it Kittie or...I'm not...but she was kind of a free-wheeling young lady in royal circles, but they had some beautiful paintings in that place...just beautiful art. And they had a fire there later on, too, and I don't know how much of that art work was damaged but it was a

beautiful place. And then...back to...oh, and we visited...the cathedral that's on...Trafalgar Square; I'll think of it...I don't think it was...anyway, it was one...one where Nelson was built...uh, buried.

James Lindley: Buried...yeah...Lord Nelson, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: And so the...the guide, our docent was telling us, said, "Did you ever hear of Drinking Admiral Flood or Drinking Admiral Fly?" "No." Well some had, but they had no idea of what it was all about. And so he said, "Well, during the Battle of Trafalgar, well, Admiral Nelson was killed."

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: "So they put him in a rum barrel to preserve his remains till he got back to England, and when they got back they opened it up and the barrel was dry. So they...said...said the sailors had been (unintelligible because of laughter) stuff," so that's...that's where the...the grog...so that's where the thing came from. So I asked...our tour guide at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove there and we get visitors from all over and I...I asked a couple of women from...London area, oh I...I think they actually were down at...Portsmouth area and so I asked them about that. And they said, "Yeah, that's true; that...they...they'd bored holes in the side there and..."

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: ...and consumed the...all...the grog. (Cough) But I was down in Portsmouth...I...I met this lady on the beach and she...I...she had invited me up to the place for...dinner one time. I went up there and they took me over to this...I don't know whose house it was, I've forgotten, but they lived there



during the war. And he had...he had some paintings in that...in that royal art gallery. I can't...I have his name somewhere....that...I...I asked him one...that I saw later on...it...it kind of refreshed my memory and I wrote it down then, but I don't know where it is now, but he...he had some...some beautiful paintings. One that I remember was...they were towing a canal barge...people were actually towing that along the banks, you know, towing it along, and that was a very good one. And then the other one was a...a bay...or was it underwater scene that was of an old hulk of a ship there...

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: ...and you could see...the longer you looked at that, the more things you could see...

James Lindley: The more things...

Mr. Higgins: ...in the depth of it there, and that was a fantastic painting! And they said he used a...he fashioned a...like a metal thing for...like sea divers would do...

James Lindley: A helmet?

Mr. Higgins: ...a helmet....out of a tin can or something or other and he would go down there...get enough view of it to see what it was like and then come back up and paint it.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: And so, it was really a beautiful thing. I...I did...like I say, I don't think he was trained then, but I didn't...so I didn't think about that. It was...they lived by...(unintelligible), but yeah that was...

James Lindley: So how many years did you serve?

Mr. Higgins: Nineteen years, six months, and ten days. You got credit...credit for over six months...if...when you got to the point of retirement there. So I just put in an extra ten days just in case, because I went out twice and re-enlisted because I didn't like flying on and off that (unintelligible) deck carrier in the rear-end of that TBM. And so when my enlist...enlistment was up...we'd gone back into Quonset Point when we got back from the cruise, and... 'cause they were working on the runways or taxi-ways or something there at Charlestown, and so I took a discharge in October of '47. And my wife was pregnant then, but we...we still...okay, I'm...I'm going out; I'm g going to get away from here and we're going off to San Diego and I'm going to enlist in a...a land-based squadron...something without a tail hook on it! So I was able to...re-enlist in a...in VP-2 at Miramar Naval Air Station. They had P2Vs; they had the P2V1s and that...that was the version that they flew from Perth, Australia to some place, I think, in Indiana...non-stop!

James Lindley: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Higgins: And I guess they had...I don't know whether they had...I suppose they had extra fuel tanks in there sometime, I'm not sure. But the Navigator on that was...he was my Patrol Plane Commander; he was Lieutenant Junior Grade when I...when I went into flight crew with him, and so he could fly that P2V, and he could navigate also. Because (chuckle) when we'd be out on a submarine exercise and we do a trapping square; we...we'd figure out where...might be...about where he was; we (unintelligible) decreasing square, you know...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...and about the third or fourth leg around that thing, well, the Navigator would lose track of where...

James Lindley: Where he was.

Mr. Higgins: ...where he was, you know, in the scheme of things, so our pilot would be putting the information on this...log on his...on his leg there and so he'd take him back through it...all the way back through...he knows....and know we are right here right now. And so, yeah, it was a...just after I got in that squadron, they were having a submarine exercise and one of the planes...they had brought...they'd...using sonic torpedo, so they...any...any noise you'd hear, well, they would follow that. And when it's...it...but they finally brought it to the surface because it...kept biting them in the (unintelligible), you know?  
(laughter)

James Lindley: Yeah, right.

Mr. Higgins: And so they came to the surface and it was night, and so they had their...they had their landing light on and they...the Patrol Land...Patrol Plane Commander was in the left seat and he was on visual; the...the Co-Pilot flew on instruments. But they...they were in a...in a turn, a bank, and they were very low and I guess...something...something happened and they got too low and they dug a wing tip.

James Lindley: Oops!

Mr. Higgins: And the Co-Pilot and an observer from the wing...air wing...(unintelligible) and 14, I think it was there at San Diego was an observer in it; they were the

only two that got out. And the [USS] Pomodon was a submarine and they...they picked them up...and...those two. But later on, several years later, there was like a funny paper-type thing; it would have...kind of a...back shelf fictionalized things and that was...one of the things that they had in there...was the Pomodon...whether it had...picked these survivors up from this P2V. But anyway, that...that was a P2V1 which had a blister in the nose and a...and a...it was...I guess we had a thirty caliber up there and then twenty...twenty millimeter in the cannon and tail. And I think those were twins. But we traded those in then for the P2V3s which had a...solid nose and then they had three guns in a forward fire...guns, fixed guns in the bow in the nose of it. But we...we lost our happy home at Miramar when they were realigning things and they moved us up to Whidbey Island and I...we sold our house that I'd bought in LaMesa; my son was born in the Naval Hospital, Balboa Naval Hospital...

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: ...and...in '48...February, '48 and we deployed in March of '49 to Kodiak...uh, not depart...transferred to Kodiak...uh, to Whidbey Island, and then we were up there for about...in the middle of May then, we deployed to Kodiak for three months; we rotated the squadrons up there for three months at a time. And she was left there...we were...we were staying in a what they called a motel right off the mains street and had a (unintelligible), and we...at least had a crushed rock gravel...some gravel...in to...rock...into the driveway...from these...back of the main street there, and the...the walls probably were at least

eight feet thick between the units, but we did have a gas stove and a...I don't know if it was bottled gas or not...because and...and a refrigerator, as well as a Wonderbox (sp? to our food cold...food. The ones that lived in the...in federal housing behind us, they had wood...wood cook stove and...and just a Wonder box; no refrigerators in them. So we...we did...were a little bit better that way. But anyway, it was...she was...it was...lot of fog up there, and when my son would get out of the house with a...with a push toy, which...whichever way that went that's where you were at, and she...get around the corner...and she's trying to find him. I built a play pen out in the grass across this drive and out of about four feet high with chicken wire; dug up post holes; put them in and we put a gate in there, and as was headed back to the...to our cabin there, I looked around and here he is almost up to the top of (laughter)...his toes just fit those openings in...in that chicken wire (laughter). So that was all that work for naught! And...and of course didn't have much money either so, you know, that was down the drain...buying the posts and the chicken wire.

James Lindley: Right, right.

Mr. Higgins: But, yeah, that...we were...we went to Kodiak and we...we went out...we...we practiced the (unintelligible) exercise...

(end of tape 2, side A; nothing on tape 2, side B)

Mr. Higgins: (Unintelligible)...they were going to test out to see whether or not they could put out a barrier patrol between Midway and Adak...and we (unintelligible) Adak. And what we did...they had the PB4Y2s I guess, the four-engine modified...had a single tail on it instead of a double tail like the B-24 had.

They were flying...I think that's what they had...it maybe...I don't know...one version of the PBV, four-engine flying...they were slower than the P2Vs, and we...they would fly two fifths of the way up from Midway and we'd fly three fifths of the way to...out of Adak...in the P2Vs. And this operation continued for about two or three days, I forgot how many hours it was, around the clock; we had two planes would take off every four hours flying about sixty miles I think it was apart. And then there...the...I think it was four or twelve...four or eight hours, I don't remember, leg out, and then across and then back. And so we had them coming and going both directions...two...two planes...about four hours apart. And they...they were trying to get a submarine through on surface...they never did get one through. One time I picked it up at ninety miles on...we had a little bit better radar then; it was Aps-33(sp?) radar...at three hundred and fifty...uh, three hundred and sixty degree search and it had two hundred mile range, but I picked up the...I guess it was the conning tower out...at...at ninety miles...which was pretty (unintelligible). Of course, we had much more...much greater distance later on, so it was...it was...that part of it was successful as far as checking on surface or any surface ship (unintelligible).

James Lindley: Right. This would have been in...the?

Mr. Higgins: 1949.

James Lindley: '49?

Mr. Higgins: Yep, summer of '49. And so...and then another time we...our crew and another one, I think it was...I think it was another one with us flew out from

Kodiak to...Adak and then we flew out around...up the Siberian coast...being little...listening on the...with the ECM gear to see what frequencies and what their signatures were...everything. Later on, you know, the...that P3 was forced down in China which was doing the same thing...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ... except they had much more modern equipment...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...than what we had. Ours was not...you know, we'd pick up some information; got a signature on it...let's see what it might be...our control radar or whatever. And...and we went into Nome and spent the night there and then back down to...well, actually we spent two nights there, I guess, and then back down to Kodiak.

James Lindley: Kodiak.

Mr. Higgins: And that's one time when I had to relay through Pearl Harbor to get to Kodiak; I...I couldn't...I couldn't raise Kodiak...because of skip distance.

James Lindley: Skip...uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: And so I had to use a...I mean a skip (unintelligible).

James Lindley: Right, right.

Mr. Higgins: (Unintelligible) skip (unintelligible words) for all those frequencies that they were using.

James Lindley: Right, right.

Mr. Higgins: So I think I was up on twelve thousand something and...and communicating NPM or not and then Pearl Harbor...or not and on Oahu, and so...and then

we... one time we flew up to Fairbanks, and it was beautiful weather; just very thin, very thin clouds there...just, you know, just kind of a haze there that went about half way up on Mount McKinney.

James Lindley: Oh yeah.

Mr. Higgins: We were flying up around eleven thousand feet, and you could see the whole thing there! And what I...when I picked it up on the scope, it was coming up over the edge, you know, two hundred...and the (unintelligible) marker didn't start until two hundred miles after, you know,...toward the edge of the scope, so that thing was sticking up out there and all by itself. But we made the trip up to Kodiak and flew back same day...I don't think it...yeah, we flew back same day.

James Lindley: So how many hours flying time do you have in your log?

Mr. Higgins: I think a little over three thousand...between three and four thousand; I've forgotten what it was. But I was able to qualify for hearing aids because that...you're sitting right between the props on the PBV and the P2Vs, and those things beating in your...and you know, when we'd be...have a low...weak signal, and along with it would...came a lot of sharp spikes.

James Lindley: Noise, right.

Mr. Higgins: And you'd have that thing pressed into your head and in those days, we had a (unintelligible) light ear piece there and we had a little powder puff type thing we'd put over it, so it wouldn't hurt our ears so much.

James Lindley: Right.



Mr. Higgins: So you had no protection from the noise or anything, so you'd get those spikes in there...and then the engine noise and everything...and...

James Lindley: How in the world did you copy code with all that noise?!

Mr. Higgins: With great difficulty; you...sent IMI a lot of times, too. (laughter)

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: That means "repeat."

James Lindley: Repeat, right, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, and then...when you get through with a message...(unintelligible words).

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: Slant (unintelligible).

James Lindley: Well, I've had a Ham license for more than fifty years and I've got a bug, but...and I can...

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, I heard you always had...you know, they...they store...restation with all these (unintelligible) call signs. M9U was our patrolling to...in (unintelligible words); M9U is dah, dah, dah, dah (laughter). I know I was in...I was in...number twelve plane so much, 122J; that was pretty good.

We'd...we'd...it was...you know, we'd use our...our squadron would be the...that 22; we'd start it with 1...122 and then J would be the twelfth number; we didn't use E for...a number, you know, for a call sign...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...so there's...number twelve was...when we got to that was J.

James Lindley: Okay. Did you ever use the AR-13 transmitters?

Mr. Higgins: I used that in the...well, I was in the PBY...uh, I mean the P2V.

James Lindley: Oh, the P2Vs, yeah?

Mr. Higgins: Yeah. And then we had the ARC-1s (sp?)...no, we had the ARC-1s in the P2Vs...on...PV...yeah, P2Vs, yeah. Yeah, because they called me Archie. Now I don't know...we had ARC-1 and then the ARC...ARC-27; okay, ARC-1, I think, we had in the...the P2Vs. And I...somehow or another, I didn't read the instruction book very well, and you're supposed to approach...you turn it...and either clockwise or counterclockwise when you're coming up on the frequency, you know, you get your LM...

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: ...frequency meter, and you get on...on frequency and you approached it either clockwise or counterclockwise before you locked it; if you approached it the other way, it wouldn't come back...

James Lindley: To the...

Mr. Higgins: ...to its own frequency. And I...I don't know how many times we flew and they'd change frequency and *whoops*...couldn't...! (laughter)

James Lindley: Couldn't get there.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, so (cough) and...and I'd take that thing out of...out of the plane, and put it over my shoulder and (unintelligible) on the...on the rack and tune it up again. And someone finally told me, "Hey, you...you're turning it the wrong direction!" So my problem was solved! (Chuckle)

James Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Higgins: And then later...later on we had the tran...the...the ARC-27, and later on...I wasn't flying in the plane then until...well, I think I flew one time when we were on...deployment aboard the [USS] Lexington with the All-Weather Attack 35, AAW35. We...we had the...pilot radioman, I mean the Pilot, Radio Operator and Navigator in those and they were the flight leaders for the single-seat ADs which later designated as A...A-1s.

James Lindley: Okay.

Mr. Higgins: Because they...what'd they call that (unintelligible)? (Unintelligible) I guess it was, and they were a workhorse. They...we...they were going to phase...phase those out and this...this...when I made the department in '58 onboard the Lexington, they were starting to get...Jet Engine Mechanics into the squadron...their squadron-leader supported and were going to switch over to jets, and *whoops*...they switched back! They...they sent them back; they kept the ADs...for...in Vietnam there...

James Lindley: Uh hum, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: ...later on...because they...the jets couldn't do the job that that AD could do.

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: I...I've been told that...that could carried the load of the B-17.

James Lindley: Probably could; I mean...it was unbelievable what it could carry.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, and I was in...I was the leading Chief of the detachment and we had thirty-eight men and four aircraft with four pilots, uh five pilots...sort of have a spare, and one to put in administration...what have you. And they...they'd do loft bombing with them on their practice, you know, loft bombing. And I

was in special weapons loading crew and I would...I would like to have been in one of those when they...lofted one of those out, but I'm not sure that they would be able to...(unintelligible words)...blast, you know?

James Lindley: (Unintelligible sentence). Yeah, yeah right.

Mr. Higgins: Because they...they'd head for the (unintelligible),

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ... and...but...thank goodness we didn't have to (unintelligible).

James Lindley: Didn't do that, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: But you had a...we had a quite a bit of a little rumble out there and...you know, the independent China had (unintelligible) and Temor; they were still on there...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...those two islands there. And they...so they were taking their supplies in and some of our ships were taking the...well, going in with them and they threatened to fire on...on our ships and I guess our State Department said, "You don't do that." And we went to flag quarters and general quarters we loaded everything, but pilots were briefed...briefed on their targets and they were ready to go and we were at flight quarters all night long when they finally...they...our ships got back out of range; we offloaded and started regular operations just like nothing ever happened!

James Lindley: Never happened, yeah.

Mr. Higgins: And the next...you know, they...they'd launched the jets and they had this AD squadron back there that was...still turning up...prop chops and I was up on

the...the island structure there, and of course, we...we kind of watching the, you know, (unintelligible) planes...our four planes...whatever we were flying then...I don't know if we were flying all four of them or just one or two or something, but anyway I was up on the...the island and all of a sudden...sudden that ship shook and there was two big blasts, and I thought one of the...my first thought was one of the...one of those had blown up. And I looked back and here's two jets going into the overcast...and they weren't ours! We didn't have any like that; they were F11Fs off the [USS] Midway that we'd operated out of...my first thought...they got through on us, you know?

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: But they went right past our fantail and I don't...they had...well, it was afterburners on them doing all their...

James Lindley: They were...they were moving!

Mr. Higgins: That shook that ship up I'll tell you! That was...

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: That's a first...closest I ever was to a sonic boom.

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: But that put out quite a blast there, but I tell you...my...my heart was about up to there!

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: So that's...my first thought, "They got through on us!" So...yeah that...we...we went out two weeks early; we'd been out on flight, uh, on strike

exercise and operational readiness out...by that San Francisco area and with...operating with the fleet, and come back down to San Diego.

They...they flew the (unintelligible), they flew them off up there and then they came on down with most of the detachment. I guess they flew the...F3H...F3Ds! The twin-engine, uh, A3Ds, I'm sorry. The twin-engine...Douglas...it...the Air Force version of B-66, I think.

James Lindley: Uh huh.

Mr. Higgins: Twin-engine, large twin-engine...heavy...

James Lindley: Large, right, right.

Mr. Higgins: ...heavy...heavy attack. And every time they'd hook that wire, that fuselage would wrinkle like that, you know? And...but anyway, they...they were stationed at Whidbey Island; they had three aboard. And you had to a...photographic detachment; you had the early warning detachment, the guppies, and another detachment...I forgot what...but most all of us went back in ours, I know, and we went back to San Diego. They offloaded us; took a...a reserve air group aboard, and when...leaving...going to operate with them until we got ready to go out which was...about the first part of August, and the Marines went into Lebanon; the change...the scene changed!

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: So we...we got every...we...we scrambled around to get all four of our planes that had the same type of version of the radar because they had different versions of it, you know, so we had to be sure our...

James Lindley: Everything's the...

Mr. Higgins: ...our pods were the same version so we didn't

James Lindley: ...same.

Mr. Higgins: ...have to have so many different types of spare parts because we didn't have all the spare parts anyway. Well, they...on-time delivery type...that...like they have in manufacturing...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...well, that's what we were doing there I guess...all the spares weren't in, so we were short-handed when we deployed about two weeks early, so we...we were scrambling to get everything squared away...and the plane's ready to go. And so it was forty-four day after we left Pearl we took on this...probably special weapons out there I think; I'm not sure what we...what went down, but we...we left Pearl and went...I think we offloaded the F3F squadron...of the F...F3Us...F3...F3...they were...I think they were made...made by...who was the one...who...Mc...McDonnell...McDonnell...

James Lindley: Mc...McDonnell, McDonnell.

Mr. Higgins: ...F3...uh, F...D...those were D...uh, F3...what was McDonnell's designation? F3D, uh, let's see, (pause) anyway...

James Lindley: I can't...

Mr. Higgins: ...they were...they were the...we called them the Screaming Mimis; they had a high, real high pitched scream when they turned those...things up. And...but they offloaded them at Guam so we'd have enough leg room to operate. And that was forty-four days later...but when we pulled into port again...and we...every time we'd head up to...to, well, we lost...we were operating with

the Midway off of Formosa, and they were night operation, and they were about a hundred miles out from us, and F4Ds squadron...that's where this... didn't reverse in time...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...one of them developed trouble and the pilot ejected, and they...they picked him up in a helicopter, I guess, and his playmate came back to the ship and he was just a tad low; his gears hit the ramp...

James Lindley: Uhm!

Mr. Higgins: ...he plowed up the decking with his...his struts there, and he didn't...he didn't catch the wire or the barrier and so he was in the air again, and he got up about five thousand feet when it exploded. I don't know or maybe he couldn't eject, I don't know...but why...anyway one of our planes (unintelligible) up to five thousand feet and he was...they...he was about lev...about level with him when it blew up, so we lost him.

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: But we were trying to get in to the yard up at Yokosuka, and I think it was about...about the third time we were able to get in. We'd...it...we'd get part way up there and they'd call us back...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Higgins: ...about the time we got our heat rash cleared up, well, we'd go back down there again. And so we finally got in the yard; they got most of the water out of the dry...dry dock...they'd flown the air group off that Subie (sp?), and so we were...I...I stayed aboard; I wasn't in that flight crew because I was the



leading Chief of the detachment there, and we...they almost got the water out and then they started filling it back up again...and out we went; went back down...and they...then we finally came back and got it...got it high and dry so they could do some work on the bottom of the ship and...and replace planking on the deck where he'd plowed that up.

James Lindley: Uhm!

Mr. Higgins: But that was a...well, we had a...most of it...the rest of it was kind of uneventful then the rest of the way back to...and I can still have ill feeling for their skipper of that BA...BAAW35 because I'd been in Fleet Air...Fleet Airborne Electronic training (unintelligible words) at North Island. I'd got that assignment because my wife had to have major surgery and I had two small children and I was aboard the Pine Island seaplane tender...the only time they ever tied me on ship's company to one of those (unintelligible) things; was on there about a year. (cough) And so she had major surgery and so the...my...my son...that was in '55...end of '55, so he'd been...he was born in '48 and my daughter in '52, so they were small and they needed...you know, she couldn't take care of them very well (unintelligible). And we were out in the yard at...in the yard at Long Beach getting work done on our ship at Pine Island, so the Exec went down to the Air Pac and he got me transferred to...(unintelligible) there...shore duty. And I was in that until...19...uh, 1957 and I was in for about a year and half and then I got transferred to the BAAW35, all-weather attack squadron. And we had about fifty aircraft and about five hundred men and...plus we had some...TFs or something or

other...T...anyway, they were Grumman twin-engine that they were using for experimental or testing of all different kind of electronic gear; they had antennas all over that place; so that was a detachment. And for awhile we had the AD5Qs which were counter-measure aircraft, and we turned those back in and finally...and then got...I flew in one of those, I think, a couple of times that they had...four-man crew in that - the navigator; the pilot and then two guys back in there...down below in the...

James Lindley: Playing with the black boxes.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah, so...and they...they came out with the (unintelligible) for...they were going to start the Senior Master Chief, E9, and of course, the same thing in the other services...E9...whatever they were. Still the Senior Chief that was a...the Air Force called them (pause)...they were...uh, I don't know, anyway they had different...

James Lindley: (Unintelligible words) yeah.

Mr. Higgins: But they...the...it said, you know, the (unintelligible) said, "Oh, just recommend your top people." Well, I'd been the Department Chief for the Maintenance Training Department in (unintelligible) PAC there. Had to have (unintelligible) Chief and Radar section before...the Chief was, uh, Department Chief and the Maintenance...training retired and I...I replaced him. And I went into AAW35 and was...had charge of the Radar and ECM section there and it was...they had...since they had so much equipment they had to...divide...one navigation and bombing (unintelligible) and...and they...and communications and...and I don't know...they had it divided up in

three sections...three different sub-sections...uh, sub-divisions. And anyway, he said he wasn't going to recommend anyone that hadn't been in the squadron for two years because he didn't know them well enough because they had about fifty Chiefs, you know. He made two exceptions – one was a Personnel Chief; he didn't have two years in the squadron, and guess who the other one was? The one who packed his parachute.

James Lindley: Of course! (laughter)

Mr. Higgins: They had the examination when we were in West Pac; there were three Chiefs out of ship's company...and the all...the squadrons and the detachments that were on there...they didn't take the exam. The Maintenance Chief who was with me and myself and a...a ship's company Chief that had screwed up somewhere along the line, so...and he wasn't recommended. And every Chief on that ship was taking the examination with exception...you know, with exception of us.

James Lindley: Hmm.

Mr. Higgins: So he recommended...the Officer in Charge recommended me for the next board and I took it, but I...I was out before the results came back...so I don't know...whatever. I came back; the rates had already been established, you know, and I took over as...they appointed me as Leading Chief for the squadron (laughter). I relieved an E8 who went to Air Pac (laughter) (unintelligible) then when I retired then about seven months later in July an E9 Master Chief who had been a Lieutenant Commander temporarily...Lieutenant Commander and reverted back to a Master Chief

relieve...relieved me, so (chuckle) anyway...that was the only compensation I had out of that, but...

James Lindley: Seems like you had a wonderful career.

Mr. Higgins: It was. And you know, all the different things...I...I'd taken the flight exams for...to go to Flight School as an enlisted pilot in 1941. In fact, I even listed Advanced Base to Funafuti (chuckle); that was...that was quite an experience for them, I guess, that...to get my tonsils removed because they...they wouldn't pass me until I got my tonsils removed because they were...not too good of shape. And they came out with a quota...that they...patrolling too, when we were out at Midway. And they didn't send any out to our squadron...

James Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Higgins: ... so they were...filled it up with ones that were there at Pearl Harbor and Ford Island. And...when...after we got back from the Dutch East Indies, we were at Alameda...they came around, "You want to re-apply again?" "No, I don't think so." (laughter) (Unintelligible words)...if I hadn't...you know, my future from there would have been changed; I wouldn't have met this beautiful nurse...

James Lindley: There you go!

Mr. Higgins: ...there (unintelligible words); wouldn't have had these two wonderful kids and two wonderful grandkids that I have now. So my...my daughter was...is a registered nurse and then my son is a...is a pathologist...

James Lindley: Oh really?!

Mr. Higgins: ...that works for Kaiser Hospital at...in...Panorama City...San Fernando Valley; he's been there since 1981.

James Lindley: Where did he go to school?

Mr. Higgins: At...he went to UCLA. He...he graduated from UCI in biology...biological science. He'd gone through Orange Coast College, community college, and then to UCI for the last two years. He was in a DNA/RNA research program there, an honors program. He graduated Summa Cum Laude...number one of a hundred and eight in the class. But it was a wrong time; he didn't have the right surname; he didn't have the right color; he didn't have the right sex...gender...

James Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Higgins: ...and so, he...just as a back-up, because he seen these things going on already, you know, as a back-up he put in for med...uh, dental school. He'd applied several places, Texas, I think, University of Texas; he went to about three campuses there, I think, Galveston in the Houston area and then some other place. I think there was one...is there one around Austin?

James Lindley: No, it's in San Antonio. There's one in San Antonio...

Mr. Higgins: San Antonio, okay (unintelligible).

James Lindley: ...and...and Dallas is...is the other one.

Mr. Higgins: So, and then...I don't know whether he put into SC or not, but he applied at UCLA, and he would get on the alternate list; he got...several places...he'd get on the alternate list, and finally...you know he put in for dental school, too, at UCLA and USC; he was accepted at both of those. But you know, it...it was

heartbreaking...when he got those rejection letters and just like “Dear Johns”  
you know?

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: So, he went ahead to dental school, but he got two years in at UCLA...went to dental...LA, and they came...they had a pathology fellowship after two years of dental or two years of medical...they could apply for this fellowship. There...sent two dental students and six med students, I think. Well, he...he got it, but he told them he...he wasn't coming back; he would just go on to...if he couldn't get into med school, well, he'd just go on into...get a PhD or something or other, I guess. So he went to...that fellowship, and I guess they...they knew he was...he was...been applying; he'd been...still...had made the alternate list at UCLA and they'd fill out the course and...then so I guess they went down and rattled a cage at admissions...said, “Take another look at him.” So when they took their final...or guess...I guess he had an examination or something or another...when they finished the program...he made it...made out better than he did than the med students then. And there was a vacancy in the second class, second year class...so he got that...med school. So he spent three years in med school and then four years as a resident and (unintelligible) as chief resident! (laughter) So I thought he was never going to get out of school!

James Lindley: Yeah, I...I understand that.

Mr. Higgins: Eleven...eleven years at UCLA...post graduate! (chuckle)

James Lindley: That's fantastic.

Mr. Higgins: So...but they...they...you...Cedars Sinai, I think it was, tried to...tried to get him to bypass the... their computer-matching system, you know?

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: They'd put in their...their druthers and their...their school...

James Lindley: Right.

Mr. Higgins: ...or whatever...have to do with that, so he...he wouldn't go to...they wanted him to go straight over there, but he didn't want that; he wanted to go to UCLA because he'd come...been...he'd already spent six years there...and so he did. And the senior year...I mean the when he went as a chief...

James Lindley: Chief resident?

Mr. Higgins: ...uh hum, there were two of them that were going for two boards, so one of them had...half the time on one board; the other one had the other, and then they switched.

James Lindley: Swapped.

Mr. Higgins: And so...so...he...he was...then...got...surgical and clinical.

James Lindley: Clinical, right, right.

Mr. Higgins: Had to go to Chicago to take the exams, and so...are you a medical or, you know...what...what is your...?

James Lindley: I'm a Nephrologist....kidney doctor.

Mr. Higgins: Okay.

James Lindley: Kidney transplants and dialysis.

Mr. Higgins: Yeah.

James Lindley: So...

Mr. Higgins: So yeah, that...

(end of interview)

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