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AN INTERVIEW WITH RAY H. HIGGINS

FOR THE
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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Ray H. Higgins on April 11, 2000 at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

ELLEN EBERTS: Ellen Eberts.

PIEHLER: And, I guess, I'd first like to ask you a very basic question: where were you born and when were you born?

RAY HIGGINS: I was born at Woodbury, Tennessee, June 18, nineteen and twenty-one.

PIEHLER: And your ... parents were married in Woodbury, Tennessee?

HIGGINS: Yes, yes they were married in Woodbury. She was from McMinnville, and he's from Woodbury.

PIEHLER: Do you know how your parents met?

HIGGINS: Uh, they were neighbors. Uh, this is where I ad lib a little bit and tell you a little more than answering the question.

PIEHLER: Please do.

HIGGINS: Okay. My mother lost her husband to appendicitis. His name was Jesse Moore. And she had three children. And she lived near ... my father, uh, who was married and lost his wife with four children. Well all, putting them together automatically they had seven children, you see. (Laughter) Well, the grandparents on both sides ... felt sorry for them, I think, having that many children. So the maternal grandfather took ... our mother's oldest daughter and, for all practical purposes, reared her as their own. And my, uh, father's father took my oldest brother, his oldest son, and reared him as his own. And then too, ... his mother and father-in-law ... that, um, had lost their daughter took ... his youngest daughter, my dad's youngest daughter, who was only six-weeks old, when their mother died. And then, that was the beginning of the family between my mother and my father. They were married about twelve months later, I think it was, after the death of their ...

PIEHLER: Their spouses.

HIGGINS: ... their spouses, yes. And, um, I was the oldest of their children. Now, we have never referred to each other as "my half-brother" or "my half-sister." Though that would have been in order, it would be correct, but my mother treated her stepchildren as the same as she treated her own, and same way with my father. He treated his stepchildren as if they were his own, and so we had this large family. Um, I had ... four brothers and a sister ... that was ... born to Richard Higgins and Esther Lance Higgins. And ... five of those brothers served the Stars and Stripes. And ... my grandfather Higgins was a ... veteran of ... the Civil War, and he was a Federal soldier. And he was captured by the Confederates and imprisoned on an island off of Savannah, Georgia. And ... he was treated very, very roughly and ... the days—there were days when he didn't have anything to eat but a pone of bread that was

thrown in on the horse manure. He was confined to the barn, to keep the officers' horses groomed. And ... when the Civil War was over ... he came home—it was in the dead of winter, and he came home with his feet wrapped in, um ...

PIEHLER: Bandages?

HIGGINS: ... uh, burlap bags.

PIEHLER: Oh, burlap bags.

HIGGINS: Yes, and they said that there was a snow on the ground and everywhere he would step there would be bloody footprints. And ... he had a brother that I was never told what his name was and I never, and he was never mentioned in family discussions, as far as I recall, about the family, but he was Confederate soldier. And my great-grandfather ... was killed by what they called, “the bushwhackers.” And that’s about it.

PIEHLER: No those, that’s—and you remember your grandfather?

HIGGINS: Yeah ... I remember him.

PIEHLER: And he told you these stories?

HIGGINS: Yes. Yes. I was a baby when ... but I remember him. Yes ... then the brother that stayed with him after the death of his mother um he was a ... nine-year old youngster and, of course, he had more ... conversations with Grandfather Higgins and he remembered him.

PIEHLER: What did Grandfather Higgins do for a job?

HIGGINS: What did my grandfather do?

PIEHLER: Yeah. What did he do for a living after the war?

HIGGINS: Okay. My Higgins grandfather owned a—[he] fell heir, after the bushwhackers killed his father, he fell heir to a large section of Cannon County that was referred to as Higgins Hollow. If you will, it was a small hollow compared to Cades Cove, but there was a great similarity between the two. And ... I was born in a house in Higgins Hollow. And ... the countryside is just beautiful around that place, especially in the fall of the year. As I understand it, a doctor from Florida came up here and retired and bought the whole section, there was about a thousand acres, and, uh, built a new house on it. It was just a very picturesque place.

PIEHLER: Did your Grandfather Higgins, did he ever join the Grand Army of the Republic? The GAR? A veterans' organization?

HIGGINS: I don't really know.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You never saw him in a uniform?

HIGGINS: I don't remember anybody saying anything about it. The only thing that ... I recall that was related to the Civil War was that he drew a tremendous pension. And ... in those days it was referred to as a tremendous pension, and didn't do anything from then until his death at age eighty-eight.

PIEHLER: So the pension really made his life comfortable when he got one?

HIGGINS: ... He had other people to do the work, he'd sit on the front porch and ...
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: And tell a lot of stories it sounds like.

HIGGINS: ... And tell them what to do. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Could you tell me a little bit about your father?

HIGGINS: Well, my father's name was Richard Higgins. And he had two brothers, William Higgins and Jim Higgins. And ... he was a farmer and a trader. I mean he traded in stock and cattle, you know. And ... in 1929, no ... about 1930 I think it was, uh, we moved to Wartrace, about 30 miles away, and he had purchased a farm over there, about a 200 acre farm. And we lived there ... until I left home to go into the service. And I'd like to tell you about my maternal grandfather. His name was J.B. Lance. And, uh, he owned and operated a mill ... Claremont Mill they called it out from Bradyville, Tennessee. I beg your pardon, out from Centertown, Tennessee. Bradyville's going the opposite direction from Woodbury toward Murfreesboro. But anyway Bradyville, I mean uh, Centertown was about halfway between Woodbury and McMinnville. And he was—he operated this mill ... all my mother's life with him. And I'd like to tell you this funny story about my mother. The last time ... she visited us, before her death, we took her up to Pigeon Forge and we wanted her to see that old mill up there. It's still in operation I understand. And so ... Jean and I had been through this mill several times and ... we saw no need to go again, but we suggested (laughter) that my mother make a trip around over this mill, and take a tour of it, as it were. And during the tour ... there were two girls that were escorting her around and at the conclusion of which ... she said, one of the girls said to the other, "I wish you hadn't brought that old woman around," she said, "I told you she knew more about this mill than we did!" (Laughter) And she ... grew up there, you see.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: But my mother ... went to high school, completed high school, and, uh, ... back in those days they would ... accept certain people with a high school diploma as a schoolteacher. And she taught school a while before, I don't know how long, but a while before she was married.

PIEHLER: Your mother was born in 1899. When did she pass away?

HIGGINS: Nineteen and seventy-seven. She was in a ... rest home, a hospital, for two years and one day. And it just ... unreal that they would keep a person alive that long when she didn't know anything. The wife and I would go down to see her at least once a month. And I don't recall her recognizing me a single time. And ... that's a sad chapter in my life, because both of my parents were just precious people to me, and my dad died with a stroke. And it was ...

PIEHLER: Very quickly.

HIGGINS: Yeah. And that's the ideal way. If you can ...

PIEHLER: Yes, if you can call anything an ideal way.

HIGGINS: We know we ... can't live forever, don't we?

PIEHLER: Your mother taught high school, and um ...

HIGGINS: I don't know, I don't think ...

PIEHLER: ... I mean not high school, but she taught school, but you're not sure. And this was ... near Woodbury.

HIGGINS: No. It was in Centertown. That was before she was married ...

PIEHLER: Before she was married.

HIGGINS: ... to her first husband.

PIEHLER: So her first husband, not ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, not my father.

PIEHLER: ... not your father.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Growing up, was your—your mother worked at home, I mean, she took care of ... a lot of children. Was she—how active was she in the church?

HIGGINS: As active as she could be! (Laughter) I wanted to go to David Lipscomb College, that's a Church of Christ college, and that's—are either of you Church of Christ?

PIEHLER: No.

EBERTS: No.

HIGGINS: Well anyway, I wanted to go to Church of Christ College there in Nashville, it's a university now, when I graduated from high school. And somehow or another my father kept saying he couldn't get enough money together. And so I kept working with him, you know, until I went into the service. But, I want to tell you about ... this, my father went by an old saying, and I look ... back on it now and I think it too was a sort of a comical thing, he didn't trust anybody that wore a mustache! (Laughter)

EBERTS: That's interesting.

HIGGINS: And they had a revival in Wartrace, and the preacher was from David Lipscomb College and he had a mustache! (Laughter) But my dad went one time and I overheard him telling my mother that he didn't trust him and I think he was a wild womanizer, you know, I mean the preacher. At least two or three people in Wartrace was reported pregnant by him after he left. (Laughter) So maybe there was some merit to what he said, "Don't trust a person with a mustache!"

PIEHLER: Well, it is a good story.

EBERTS: Mr. Higgins, what was Wartrace like as you were growing up?

HIGGINS: Do what?

EBERTS: What was Wartrace like?

HIGGINS: Wartrace was a town of 619 people. But the outlying area ... of course, fed into Wartrace. And not very many people had cars back in those days. They'd walk to the grocery store, you know. And when we moved there ... there were two doctors, MD's, one dentist, a funeral parlor, a furniture store, a post office, and a drug store, and two or three grocery stores, besides the blacksmith's shop. I was going over it last night with Jean and I forgot the blacksmith's shop. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did your family own a car?

HIGGINS: No. They did not. We walked everywhere, now my grandfather did. Oh yeah, he was one of the first people that got a car, my grandfather Lance.

PIEHLER: What about ... a telephone? Did you have a telephone ...

HIGGINS: Yes ...

PIEHLER: ... growing up? You had a telephone growing up.

HIGGINS: ... yes, we had a telephone.

PIEHLER: What about electricity?

HIGGINS: Yes, we had electricity.

PIEHLER: Always when you were growing up?

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You always had it, you didn't ...

HIGGINS: No, no ... we didn't have either a telephone or electricity until about the ... early '30s.

PIEHLER: Did you get it because of REA? Rural electrification?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you remember the co-ops, when the ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah. I remember. And, I remember they put a telephone pole in a place where my father didn't want them to put one. (Laughter) And so he called their attention to it, and they'd already connected the service and all. And the foreman of the workgroup assured him in my presence, "Mr. Higgins," he says, "we'll move that pole where you want us to." And he says, "Well, when will you do it?" And he says, "Well we'll move it before Christmas." And this was in mid-summer. Well, it was about two years later they came out to move that telephone pole. (Laughter) And my father reminded him of it. And he said, "Yeah, I remember that," but says, "But I didn't say what Christmas!" (Laughter) They both got a big chuckle out of that.

PIEHLER: What kind—it sounds like you worked a lot growing up on the farm.

HIGGINS: Yes, I did.

PIEHLER: What were some of your chores?

HIGGINS: Well ... the first one was feeding the cattle and the second was milking the ... ones that were milkable, you see all of them weren't dairy cows. And then ... we helped our father cultivate the corn and the crops and the planting of the crops. And then we had a huge fireplace that the modern day civilizations just love to have, and [we] had to put logs on it, you know, for heating. And my brother Clarence and I, he was eighteen months younger than I, and on Saturdays we would saw wood with a saw ...

PIEHLER: The old-fashioned ...

HIGGINS: ... yeah, he at one end and me at the other, you see, and there was no such thing as a chainsaw back then. And, of course, we mowed the grass with a push mower.... Our

father was a big believer in, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” And he manufactured chores for us on Saturday ... while some of our playmates and classmates would be at the local pool hall playing pool. (Laughter) And a ...

EBERTS: But not you!

HIGGINS: ... he told the operator of this pool hall says, “The minute one of my boys shows up in here you call me immediately,” and he says, “they won’t come back, I assure you.” And we knew, and he told us that, you see, and we knew what he meant. ‘Cause I can’t play pool today! (Laughter) I’m too embarrassed to tell people that here I am an adult and I can’t play pool, you know. But that was his rule. And, uh, like I said he operated on the theory that, “an idle mind was the devil’s workshop.” Well, now he and the local squire were close companions. And he had a car, he’d come by and pick him up and they’d go to Shelbyville every Saturday. See, Shelbyville was the county seat of ... Bedford County, and that’s where Wartrace was. Wartrace ... was a railroad junction, really, and Shelbyville had a lot of mills that employed many, many people, like ... the Overall Mill over there and the Rubber Company Mill, ... U.S. Rubber Company. And material would be hauled by train from Wartrace to Shelbyville. And they had one section of that train for passengers to catch a train to go to Shelbyville, you know. And then, of course, in the afternoon, about four o’clock, the old conductor would holler, “All aboard!” (Laughs) And he’d go on back to Wartrace!

Yeah, it was a—I relive my childhood, I get a lot of fun out of stories like that ... that my children really don’t understand, you know. (Laugh) But many a time, many, many a time, when I was growing up ... me and my brothers would sit in the kitchen studying, doing our homework, supervised by our mother, and our father would be sitting before the fire. And we studied by coal oil lamps. And we did well in school, we weren’t at the top of the class, but back in those days being at the top of the class wasn’t as important as it is now. And ... we had an icebox, and the iceman would come by and fill it with a big hunk of ice ... and we had a spring at the bottom of the hill that never went dry, never! And, I’d like to show you a picture of that. We had that until the other day I was in my son’s room back here and came over ... (leaves to get picture)

(Tape paused)

HIGGINS: On a hill ...

PIEHLER: The house was on a hill and ...

HIGGINS: On a hill, not a real steep one ... like they have here in East Tennessee, but a hill nevertheless. It had a horseshoe driveway. It went from one section ... of the road around to the other section. And in between those sections was this ... spring. It didn’t ever go dry. And, uh, it was lined with limestone rock.... And that ... tree there is an oak tree and since then—I cried, I hate to say this folks, but I cried like a baby when that place was sold.

PIEHLER: There was a lot of memories?

HIGGINS: So many happy memories. I—as a matter of fact, when the auctioneer was auctioning it off, I just, I was so embarrassed about the tears flowing my eyes that I just went out, went for a walk ...

PIEHLER: When was it sold?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: When was the farm auctioned off?

HIGGINS: When was it auctioned off?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: I guess, it was two years after my mother's death. And—but anyway, I wouldn't, and neither would us, any of us, go back in the house when we found out that mother wasn't coming home. We just locked it and left it intact. That is—sentiment and emotionalism took over. But that's not—if you want to be realistic about it, that's the wrong thing to do, you know too—you see, she was in the hospital or and a rest home for two years and one day. And during that time the interior of the house had really deteriorate[d] ... rats and mice eat up a lot of things they'd come in, you know, nobody to take care of it. So we lost a lot of stuff that way. And too, people break in your house and steal things knowing it's unoccupied.

But ... my horse, I mean my father gave me a walking horse at age—when I was age sixteen years old. And I really, really got a lot of pleasure riding that little horse. And when I went in the service he couldn't take care of him so he sold him and then put the money in the bank and I haven't seen a penny of it. (Laughter) But that's the way he was. And you was asking me what we did ... my brother Clarence and I were closer than the other brothers because of our age, and we started a flock of sheep. Our dad ... didn't want that ... because sheep would eat the grass right down to the ground and the cows had nothing to nibble on. Well, we had a sizeable flock of sheep. We started out with just three or four from, uh, discarded lambs by their mothers they wouldn't accept them next door, not the next door, but a neighbor of ours a ways from there. And so we would pass by his home going home from school and he stopped us and asked us if we wanted those little lambs and so we did. And we fed 'em on a bottle and that's how we ... started our flock of sheep. Well, time goes on, time will go on, so we—and times goes on, and my brother and I were home on leave at the same time and ... it was—I think it was about this time of year, best I recall ...

PIEHLER: April of 19 ...

HIGGINS: ... yeah. And I remember it being real cool. And ... my father always took an afternoon nap. And we thought he was asleep, we were in his bedroom. (Laughs) And I said, I had gotten in there before Clarence did on our leave, and I told him that our father had sold our sheep, he couldn't ... take care of 'em, you know, dogs would kill them. And ... so Clarence says to me, "Well what did he do with our share of the money?" And we didn't

think our father was listening. He jumped up, he says, “Your share?” He says, “The dogs killed your share!” (Laughter) That’s another funny chapter I think, you have to really know our dad.

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like money was a problem for your dad.

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Was money a problem for your dad? Were times tough for your dad?

HIGGINS: Was money what?

PIEHLER: Was money scarce for your dad?

HIGGINS: No—well if it was, he wouldn’t part with it. (Laughter) He was a very ...

PIEHLER: Frugal?

HIGGINS: ... frugal, frugal man, yes he was. Yeah he was, he was very frugal. And it was a good thing he was, because he was quite well off when he passed away and ... for that day and otherwise ... we’d probably been out in the street or something, you know. But he was a good manager.

PIEHLER: Did your farm employ anyone, besides the kids? Did anyone else work on the farm besides the family?

HIGGINS: Oh yes. Oh yes.

PIEHLER: How many people?

HIGGINS: Well, uh, one as I remember real, real, real—well a black, we had a tenant house and a black man by the name of ... Robert Watson and his wife Betty Lee lived there for years. And my father furnished them the milk and the eggs and ... the basics of life, you know. And, uh, they were real fine we, the whole family thought a lot of them.

PIEHLER: How long did the Watsons stay? When did they finally leave the farm?

HIGGINS: I don’t remember. I don’t remember how long they stayed. But my father would ... pay Robert Watson off on Saturday, and he and Betty Lee would go to town—sometimes town meant Wartrace, sometimes it meant Shelbyville—but anyway, they didn’t show up the next morning ... for milk, and I’ll tell you the reason why. About four o’clock in the morning Betty Lee [comes] knocking on our door and says, “Oh, Mr. Higgins come quick!” She says, “Bob ... needs you!” So we went over to his house, I said we, my father and I, went over to his house and just as soon as my father saw what was happening he sent me back home to call the doctor. I called the doctor and the doctor saved his life, he was bleeding so.... What had happened, I later learned, was this, he and Betty Lee went to a dance in Dog Town. And

Dog Town was the portion of Shelbyville where blacks lived, and these blacks were jealous of Robert, or Bob, because he was a good dancer. And they ganged up on him and castrated him that was, that was—he lived, but a lot of times people bleed to death once that happens. And ... as time goes on, the war comes along and my brother and I went in the service my father just, he just couldn't manage things and he just let his—he rearranged his priorities and Bob and Betty Lee went to work for another farmer and he didn't have them anymore.

PIEHLER: So it was during the war that they left the farm?

HIGGINS: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah.

PIEHLER: This incident, in terms of what happened to Bob in town, it was really ... a fight over jealousy over dancing?

HIGGINS: Uh?

PIEHLER: It was jealousy over dancing?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah over dancing.

PIEHLER: Do you remember what year—this was before 1939?

HIGGINS: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did Bob ever go back into town after that?

HIGGINS: I don't recall him going back in there, no.

EBERTS: Were there a lot of blacks in your community?

HIGGINS: Do what?

EBERTS: Around where you lived, were there a lot of black people in Wartrace?

HIGGINS: No, no there weren't. There, there was a black cemetery on the farm, however, and there were just rocks sticking up where they had been buried. And the owners of the place at the time that that cemetery was established was a couple by the name of Phillips. And their graves—the reason why it was Phillips [was] because they had engraved tombstones—and their graves was surrounded by huge limestone rocks as you'll see here at this place, between these two maples you have here, that's what I call my pet rock, and when the farm was sold I got one of those rocks.... But other than that there weren't very many blacks that, uh, lived in Wartrace. I would like to tell you about one though. We were not a prejudiced family. One of my dad's best friends was a fellow by the name of ... Soot Streeter, a black man. And he rode and trained walking horses, and he would go by our house, our farm, practically every day, riding a horse, training. And when my father passed away he drove up ... the driveway. And my brother and I were sitting there under a shade

tree, a big maple tree. And it was the fifth of May, 1955 that he passed away. And this black man got down off of his horse and put his hat over his heart and he said, “Boys,” he said, “I sure did hate to hear about your father” big tears running out of his eyes. Now that was genuine friendship, it wasn’t anything put on or anything like that. And I later heard from a reliable source, and I don’t remember who it was, that when I was a little boy my daddy had saved Soot’s life. And the way he had saved it was this: there was a creek that ran through Wartrace called Wartrace Creek and it originated up at Bell Buckle. Do you all know where Bell Buckle is ...

EBERTS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: ... you see. Well there’d be a huge cloud that would collect over Bell Buckle and you can rest assured that that Wartrace Creek was going to be up in just a matter of a few minutes and that’s what happened. And along the banks of the creek, Wartrace Creek grew lots of rich land weeds, weeds about as large as your finger, and my father was going along this road on his horse and he heard some moaning and groaning. And so he went over to investigate and it was Soot. He was drunk. And my dad later loaded him on his horse and took him home. If it hadn’t been for that, that creek would have gotten up and drowned him, you know. Because by the time he got back to the place where he picked him up the creek was already out of bounds, out of the banks rather, and uh, so that’s one of the reasons why he thought so much of him, I guess. He saved his life.

PIEHLER: And they remained friends ever since?

HIGGINS: They were friends after that. Extremely—of course, we didn’t meet socially, but you know. And, uh, he knew my brothers and I. Every time he’d see us, you know, he’d say, “Well here’s them little Higgins.” (Laughter) And then he had a brother that we were pretty close to also and they called him Coal Streeter. I don’t know what their names really were, but that was what they went by, Soot and Coal. And they didn’t resent it either. And as long as we are on this subject I must say this too, there was a janitor there at the depot at Wartrace. And he—they just called him Gooch. I never did know what, but he stood there at the railroad station and just cried when I was leaving to go in service. He was a fine black man also ... they were—and then there was another one, let’s see they called him ...

----- END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE -----

HIGGINS: ... uh, square dances for white people ...

PIEHLER: And play the fiddle?

EBERTS: Wow.

PIEHLER: Did you remember his name?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Do you remember his name, the one that played the fiddle, the black man?

HIGGINS: Yeah, I remember it—it was on my tongue just a few minutes ago. His wife, everyone called her Aunt Hailey. And, uh, well ...

PIEHLER: If it comes back to you, you can always just let us know.

HIGGINS: Yeah well, anyway. While we're on the subject of the depot let me show you this right over here. You'll have to get up to see this. (Leaves table to look at picture on the wall) I thought I would hang it on ...

EBERTS: Oh, yeah.

HIGGINS: See now that's—see Wartrace?

EBERTS: And that's where you left, right?

HIGGINS: Yeah. That's where I'd catch the train. That's where I caught the train at four o'clock in the morning ...

EBERTS: We got to get that on tape.

HIGGINS: ... to go to Nashville.

PIEHLER: Yeah. We want to put you back on tape.

EBERTS: Lets get this story on tape.

HIGGINS: That's where I caught the train ... to go to Nashville when I was inducted into the service.

PIEHLER: You spent a lot of time in this train station it sounds like.

HIGGINS: Yeah ...

PIEHLER: Waiting for trains coming back.

HIGGINS: It was the center of the community. And it's a—and people came and went by train. And, uh, that was just the way, the only way. We traveled to Nashville, Murfreesboro, and Chattanooga, everybody would go by train, you know. They tore down that depot—when I went down there to visit my mother and they had torn it down, I couldn't help but say, "What a waste, what a waste." And now everybody sees it that way.

EBERTS: So you traveled a lot before the war?

HIGGINS: What?

EBERTS: Did you travel a lot before the war?

HIGGINS: No.

EBERTS: You didn't get to go to Nashville much, or ...

HIGGINS: No, not too much. I went out to Arkansas, you know, my mother's father and mother after his mill ... up at Claremont, Centertown, burned.... And after that happened he went out to Jonesboro, Arkansas, and went in the ginning business. So he was a, he was a ginner, see my grandfather on my mother's side. And this last year, well from the time I really knew him—I don't remember [if] he would visit us, except once and that was on my mother's birthday when I was real small. After that it was out to Arkansas or they'd come to visit us or we'd go out there. Excuse me, I need to ...

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: [You were saying] how important the train was growing up.

HIGGINS: Okay. Well then, like I said, most of the time we would go to Shelbyville that way, the county seat, by train. My father would go with his friend just far, you know. Have you heard of ... Shriver Brothers here in Knoxville?

PIEHLER: I don't think so. I'm new to the area.

HIGGINS: Oh, are you really? Have you heard of it?

EBERTS: I haven't heard of it.

HIGGINS: Well they're out of business now. But that was a haberdashery when I first came to Knoxville.

EBERTS: Really?

HIGGINS: And those were nephews, they was [the] guys that operated that, [they] were quite wealthy, and they were nephews of the squire—I'm talking about, Jim E. Shriver. Yeah, and they were mighty fine people. There was a lot of good people that came from Wartrace. Now I would like to say this about my family. As far as I know, none of us have never been arrested for anything except possibly speeding. (Laughter) And I've been stopped for speeding myself! (Laughter)

EBERTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

HIGGINS: I think that is what caused my father to be so frugal. He lost quite a bit of money in the Wartrace Bank and my mother lost quite a bit of money in the bank, too.

PIEHLER: Because there was a run?

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Was there a run on the bank?

HIGGINS: I don't recall. But I remember just, uh, losing some money. The Wartrace National Bank I believe they called it. And ... the cashier of the bank was a fella by the name of John Panel. And, uh, he rode a horse everywhere he went. He'd ride a horse to the bank every day. He remained a good close friend of my dad's. They were, until their deaths, yeah, they were real close friends. He held no ... ill will toward [him] because of the bank going belly up. But some people did. Of course, they felt they had to blame somebody.

EBERTS: Sure.

HIGGINS: It was too great for them ... and [too] widespread for them to fathom. It was nationwide, you know. I think that was what really what caused me not to go to David Lipscomb College when I graduated from high school. My dad was so frugal he just couldn't force himself to part with the money.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: Okay, go ahead.

PIEHLER: Oh no, no. You sounded like you wanted to say something else.

HIGGINS: No, no.

PIEHLER: How well did you, um did you know—it sounds like you knew you wanted to go to college very early.

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Back in those days, even in a small high school like I went to, ... the better students had their eyes set on some college somewhere, you know. And, uh, but they were like me. They ain't getting the money to go, you know. Several of them went to Middle Tennessee State College, it's now a university. And they worked, you know. I don't know of anybody who went to David Lipscomb College, uh, that went there, but that was my

goal to go to David Lipscomb College. Now there was one guy that, I'll tell you more about him later, his name was Pat Sutton. And his dad didn't go to ... church very often, but his mother and sister did. And they lived right in Wartrace. And his dad would go out to the farms, and he'd buy a goat for seventy-five cents. Now this seems unreal. He'd buy a goat for seventy-five cents and slaughter it and sell the meat around the streets of Wartrace. That's how he made a living. And Pat, his son, was the janitor at our church. He did—we had a big pot-bellied stove on each end of the sanctuary and on a cold winter day he'd have a hot fire going in those stoves. And when he graduated from high school—he was quite a bit older than I, and when Pat Sutton graduated from high school the good people of Wartrace and the Church of Christ there, would give their dimes and dollars and nickels, quarters ... so he could go to Cumberland University and study law over at Lebanon. But after he went over there and got his degree he didn't ... know the people of Wartrace. That was his way of saying—I mean he was “Mister Big,” you know.

But, uh, he dated my older sister. And I remember this very, very vividly, telling my sister after he had left one day, he says, “Now sis, I don't want to see that guy around here any more.” And, uh, she started crying wanting to know why. He says, “There, there's just nothing to him. There's nothing to him.” And she says, “Well, what do you mean there's nothing to him?” “Just take my word for it there's nothing to him.” He says, “I don't want him hanging around here anymore.” And, uh, so as the years go by, he moved over to Lawrenceburg. Got married over there and then the war came along. And he ... was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor as a result of heroic action on his part and the sacrifice of his own life if necessary. And [he] saved about six hundred Marines at Jones Bridge in Manila. And he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Well, time goes on. And, uh, I was believer, I was a firm believer in the Boy Scouts, you know, raise up a child in the way he should go and he won't part from it. Well, it stayed with my son. So, I was in the Boy Scout movement in Macedonia United Methodist Church when Edward was of scouting age, my son Edward was of scouting age, and I met this guy ... Springer, I believe was his name, and he was on the Board of Directors of the Boy Scout troop. And I picked up the paper one day and it was right on the front page, uh, that he was arrested for counterfeiting. And the head of this counterfeiting ring was Pat Sutton that I was telling you about. Now that was, that was just heartbreaking, you know. I've seen Pat Sutton one time since then and that was two years ago at a class reunion of the whole high school down at Wartrace. And he didn't serve time. The reason why he didn't serve time was because of the fact that he had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor ...

PIEHLER: You, you mean his father had been awarded ...

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: His father had been awarded. I thought ... the person awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor had died.

HIGGINS: No, that was Pat Sutton, the man that saved all those people.

PIEHLER: He did live. I thought you'd said he had died in ...

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: He ... survived.

HIGGINS: Oh no, he survived, yeah. And, uh, but anyway, this guy Springer, he had to serve some time, but he was a real gentleman after that. He'd go around and offer his services to widows and all, you know, and do things for them. And he was just busy all the time trying to help folks. And he apologized so many times about—he'd get up in Church and apologize for it, for getting involved in that counterfeiting ring. That's just a side story I thought maybe you all might be interested in.

PIEHLER: No, no, it's a very interesting ...

HIGGINS: ... I personally would not have had the heart to face my friends in the grown up years had I been involved in a counterfeiting ring, uh, something obvious that all of us know is a violation of the law. We'd be in a mess if everybody started making their own money, wouldn't we? (Laughs)

EBERTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Were you a Boy Scout growing up?

HIGGINS: No. They didn't have a Boy Scout troop.

PIEHLER: What did you do for fun? You, you couldn't play pool, so—and your father kept you very busy on chores, but what'd you do for fun?

HIGGINS: Well, for fun, uh, the neighborhood would gather at our place and we'd play all kinds of games ... we'd play, did you ever hear of the game Annie Over?

PIEHLER and EBERTS: No.

HIGGINS: Or Tin Can? Uh, Blind Man's Bluff?

PIEHLER: Blind Man's Bluff I've heard of.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Well those are the games that we played and ... seems like every weekend our place would just be full of kids. And there was a place in the pasture that we marked off as a ball field. Now we didn't play baseball, but we had a rubber ball about the size of a baseball that we played with, you know, and that sort of thing. And then, then too, there was a creek nearby that on some occasions it'd be this deep (gestures) and we'd go in swimming. And in the wintertime we'd go skating on the same creek 'cause it'd freeze over.... That's what we [did], you know. We were occupied!

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to movies growing up?

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Did you go to movies growing up?

HIGGINS: No. See, you had to go to Shelbyville to see a movie. Well, we'd see one every once in a while. It' might have cost a dime.

PIEHLER: But you had to go to Shelbyville for a movie?

HIGGINS: Yeah that's the only place that had a movie house.

PIEHLER: So you didn't go very often ...

HIGGINS: No, we didn't go very often.

PIEHLER: What about the radio? Did you have a radio growing up?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Yeah, we had a radio. And ... I remember the special broadcast on Pearl Harbor. My dad and the whole family couldn't help but, uh, shed a few tears.

EBERTS: How did you feel when you heard that broadcast?

HIGGINS: Do what?

EBERTS: How did you feel?

HIGGINS: Oh, I just felt like the world was coming to an end. Just made me feel terrible. I'll tell you what I did, I went to the barbershop, and he couldn't do it, but I asked him to—I was so encompassed with patriotism and all, you know, that I asked him to leave a place back there on the back of my head that'd show a "V," you know. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You, you wanted him to sort of cut a "V" into your hair.

HIGGINS: Yeah, into a "V"! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, we want to ask you about the war, but I have just a few more questions about before the war. And, I guess, one of them is, what did your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt?

HIGGINS: President Roosevelt?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Well, my father, up until the war, my father said was gonna—he was ruining the

country. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Why did your father think he was ruining the country?

HIGGINS: All these programs he had like the, uh, WPA. It was creating jobs for people and he'd look around and ... they weren't working, and ... things like that. They were rebuilding a road by our place, this is an example, and we had moved the fence to where, you know, how to give them part of our land for the right-of-way [so] they could have a wide road. And the fence was a woven wire fence, a top grade fence. And ... we had, uh, real hardwood posts, and they were stapled—each section of the wire was stapled to the post. And we had a steel gate that opened onto the road from the barn lot. So, uh, WPA was working on that road. And my brother and I, Clarence—[there was an] old dog that had been coming to our house visiting, courting and we didn't like him. We knew who he belonged to, but we didn't like him. And uh, there was some painting supplies at the smokehouse left over from the guy painting the house. And so we, I don't know whether he came up with the idea or I did, but one of us did, and we decided that we'd have a little fun. So we tied a string around that dog's tail and some tin cans to the string where they'd rattle a lot, you know, and then poured some turpentine on his rear end and turned him loose. (Laughter)

EBERTS: Ooh.

HIGGINS: I can see that dog now going down that hill and when he came to that steel gate he just, whoosh! And just jumped over it you know, and that's where he lost his tin cans. But one of those WPA men yelled, "Mad dog!" And when he did they all headed through that fence. And that's the last I've seen of that dog. (Laughter) And that's a funny chapter, I think, in my childhood.

PIEHLER: So you had some fun growing up?

HIGGINS: (Laughter) Some of my friends, I've told that to some of my friends, and they didn't see anything funny about it, especially Edward, who doctors dogs and cats.

PIEHLER: Well it wasn't too—yeah, the dog didn't probably enjoy it very much.

HIGGINS: I know, but he never did come back. (Laughter) Anyway, and then WPA built a football field at Wartrace High School. And, uh, they just poked around and all, you know, and that irritated my father again, you know, and he said that program was ruining the working populace of Wartrace. And there ... were other programs that he didn't like. But, uh, and then when it came on, when ... the war came on I mean, he fell in love with FDR.

PIEHLER: Really?

HIGGINS: 'Cause he was a patriot, he loved his country.... And then he loved Harry Truman, really. Harry Truman was an ideal president, he said.

PIEHLER: Really. He really backed Truman in '48 too?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: He voted for Truman in '48?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah he did. Yeah, he was great Truman fan.

PIEHLER: Now your father, he did not serve in World War I?

HIGGINS: No he didn't. He ...

PIEHLER: He was too old?

HIGGINS: ... he was too old for both of them. Had too many responsibilities also, uh, children-wise.

PIEHLER: Could you just talk a little bit about your schools, uh, your grammar school and your high school? How big—how many people were in your class, your graduating class, for example, from high school?

HIGGINS: There, there were twenty-six people in my high school graduating class, and I've got something here I want to show you. I came across that this morning and I didn't realize that you were going to go this deep with this, in my life ...

(Tape paused)

HIGGINS: ... keepsake memories. When we moved, excuse me, from the house on top of the hill [to] down here I was in the hospital and wasn't expected to live. The 23rd of January last year. And these people that moved me said, "Toss this, toss that, toss this, toss that." They didn't know they were throwing away a lot of val, valu, valuables, I'll get it right in a moment! Now this, I want you to see this [shows memento]. [Reading] "Three-star letter banquet given by the Nashville Tennessean, June 3rd of nineteen and thirty-nine."

PIEHLER: [Reading:] "At the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville".

HIGGINS: Where?

PIEHLER: It was down at—the three-star banquet was in the Hermitage Hotel.

HIGGINS: Yeah. It was, that's right, it was, uh, and that was ...

PIEHLER: And, uh, [reading]: "Hilton Higgins."

HIGGINS: Yeah, uh, yeah, that was it. See, nobody—I had a classmate over here at UT that went by Wartrace to see me, and he was asking, asked somebody how to get to our house in Wartrace and he asked about Ray Higgins. And this guy shook his head, he says, "Ray

Higgins? I know all of ‘em, but I don’t believe I know a Ray Higgins.’ And actually very few people knew that that was my first name.

PIEHLER: So you went by Hilton Higgins?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Family, you know, tagged that on me. But uh ... (laughs) so after, when I went in the service ... it was easier to remember Ray and so ...

PIEHLER: That’s why you became known as Ray.

HIGGINS: ... known as Ray, and I’ve been known as Ray ever since.

PIEHLER: What was the three-star banquet?

HIGGINS: Oh that’s—let me tell you about it. I thought maybe I had the letter. I wrote a letter to the—we rode, excuse me, we read the Nashville *Tennessean* religiously. And in the evening, many times, we would see it. And I would read the newspaper, uh, the part at least that I thought would be interesting to my dad ‘cause he ... was lazy when it came to reading. He ...

PIEHLER: Could he read or [was it] just that he was lazy?

HIGGINS: He was just lazy about reading.

PIEHLER: He wanted someone to read to him.

HIGGINS: Yes. And then ... we would discuss what went on, what I read. But anyway, I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Tennessean* in which I commended Cordell Hull for his work in the Good Neighbor Policy. And the Good Neighbor Policy meant a lot to my dad ‘cause that was a market for farmers’ crops from Tennessee, you know. And, uh, but anyway they gave me a three star, for the best letter they had received during that particular day. So they gave me three stars. And that was 1939, that’s a long time ago, you know. And oh, I was elated, you know. They wanted me, and, of course, they sent me a dollar and congratulations, [and] published it in the paper. Well Albert Gore Senior was our Congressman and he sent me—he saw it, or his secretary saw it or somebody, and he sent me a letter of congratulations. And I’ve been a Gore fan ever since! (Laughter)

HIGGINS: And you all may not agree with me, and that’s perfectly alright.

PIEHLER: No that’s fine. That’s fine. But that ...

HIGGINS: But I’ve been a Gore fan ...

PIEHLER: Both father and son?

HIGGINS: Both father and son, yeah.

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Everybody likes a little recognition, I guess. Now this right here ...

PIEHLER: I guess one question before we leave out, did you ever—did you meet Congressman Gore, later Senator Gore?

HIGGINS: Yes ... Senator Gore, uh, he was Congressman at the time ...

PIEHLER: Yes, but ...

HIGGINS: ... was at that banquet and so was, um, let's see, the speaker—nobody had ever heard of him before this, uh, J. Percy Priest. They named a dam after him down near Nashville.

EBERTS: Yeah.

HIGGINS: J. Percy Priest Dam.

EBERTS: Right, Priest Dam.

HIGGINS: But he, he was the speaker and he later became a Congressman, and a good one at that. I think he died in office, but he was, he was well respected and a good speaker. And it was held at the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville.

PIEHLER: This must have been a very big deal.

HIGGINS: Yeah it was for me! (Laughter) 'Cause I went out on my own, you know, and went to that banquet.

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: I caught a train and went to Nashville. [I] went to that, went to that banquet.

PIEHLER: I guess, ... you read the paper regularly.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you think we were going to go to war before Pearl Harbor? Did you think war was inevitable?

HIGGINS: In World War II?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Before Pearl Harbor. I'm talking, say, 1939, 1940.

HIGGINS: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

PIEHLER: What did you ... think of Lend-Lease? What did you think of the Lend-Lease, aid to Britain?

HIGGINS: If we hadn't of done it ... Britain would have been defeated.

PIEHLER: And you thought we should support Britain?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What did your family think? Did they feel the same way?

HIGGINS: Yeah, it was—it possibly wouldn't, but, ... it's always, it's been my ambition down through the years to take a trip to England, Scotland, and Wales, because they, in effect, are the mother of our country and they started our form of government, with the exception of the King and Queen. And, of course, I don't think our forefathers were interested in talking about that.

PIEHLER: Um, I guess, um, you mentioned meeting Al Gore. Did you ever get to meet Cordell Hull growing up?

HIGGINS: Cordell Hull?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Yes I did, but, of course, ... I've forgotten now where that was, but I met Cordell ...

PIEHLER: Was it in Tennessee, or was it in ...

HIGGINS: No, it was in Tennessee. Cordell Hull was a great man. Uh, he'll go down in history, and has already gone down in history as one of the greatest Secretary of States that we've ever had, with that Good Neighbor Policy.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: Uh, but anyway ... I've read a lot about Cordell Hull. And those ... people at this banquet for the most part—I think Cordell Hull was at that banquet, I'm not sure, but that was a real highlight of my ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Now you graduate—I guess, before leaving school, does any teacher stick out in your mind?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah? Well ... which teachers do you remember the ...

HIGGINS: Yeah my, well my high school ... English teacher was—I admired her very, very much. She was tough as nails and she'd make you think that she was going to give you an "F" in some aspect of the class and it turned ... up she'd really give you an "A", you know. But, uh, we had in this particular—her name was Gore by the way, but, excuse me, a distant relative to Albert Senoir and Junior. And anyway, she was a Home-Ec[onomics] teacher also. And she asked us, the senior class, to write a poem of some sort, to try and look at writing poetry. And I ... just couldn't think of anything to write. So one night, just close to the time that they were due, I said something to my sister, I said, "I need some help on composing a poem for Mrs. Gore." She knew Mrs. Gore too because she'd had her, you know. And so we came up with this little ditty. Her husband's name was Jimmy:

Mrs. Gore got awfully sore,
because Jimmy would not go to the store,
and buy her a sucker,
so she kept her mouth in a pucker! (Laughter)

I can see her—we had to get up before the class and read those poems. (Laughter) I can see her now. Boy she was mad! (Laughter) And I recall saying before I read it that this, my poem, was a little pun with no intents of offense at all. And I can remember the class just doubling over with laughter. And, uh, when we had our fiftieth reunion, uh, I recalled it like I have to you and again they doubled over with laughter. And I remember telling one of the classmates, Hillary Lane Walker, I said, "Hillary Lane, you're laughing now like you did fifty years ago!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: From your high school class, how many ended up—of the men and the women, how many ended up going into service?

HIGGINS: Uh, there were—the class was about evenly divided between girls and boys, and as far as I know, all of the men served, every one of us.

PIEHLER: No one claimed an agricultural exemption?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: Did any of the women serve?

HIGGINS: Do what?

PIEHLER: Did any of the women serve?

HIGGINS: I don't think so.

PIEHLER: You graduated in 1940. You, you really wanted to go to college but your father wouldn't part with the money.

HIGGINS: That's right.

PIEHLER: And he was also suspicious of the guy with the mustache. But, uh, from the class of 1940, did anyone go right to college?

HIGGINS: Any of them go right to college?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: I don't ... think so. Several of the boys had college ambitions, but perhaps one or two went directly on to college. Uh, one of them's dad was a ... postman, carried the mail, and he had a real good job and his grandparents were quite well off, and I think he went on to college. I didn't—and one of them went to this airplane plant down in Nashville that opened up about that time, he took a job with them. And then one of them ... the valedictorian of the class, uh, he too lived on a farm and I think he ... farmed. Of course, they weren't getting us at that time in the draft. Uh, the war didn't happen until the year after we graduated.

PIEHLER: And you, after you graduated, you worked on your father's farm?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Hoping that I'd get the money together to go to college. And I finally came to the conclusion that if I wanted to make anything out of my life I had to do it on my own. So, like I said, we read the newspaper religiously, took Readers Digest and Life magazine. And ... I saw this ad in the Tennessean where they wanted people to advance their training to be radio operators.

PIEHLER: And when did you see this ad? Was this before Pearl Harbor?

HIGGINS: No. It was ... in the spring after Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: Spring of 1942?

HIGGINS: '42, yeah. And I knew—I figured after I analyzed everything that if I went to this training school that it could serve as a springboard for better education and at the same time I would be serving my country.

PIEHLER: And where was, where was the radio school? Was it in Nashville?

HIGGINS: No. The radio school was at Gallup's Island, Boston, Massachusetts. And I went to—I was sworn in at the Custom House. I think I said in my note to you [it was] at the depot, but it's a Custom, it was a Custom House.

PIEHLER: The Custom House in Nashville?

HIGGINS: It was in Nashville.

PIEHLER: And you were sworn in on June 29, 1942. And you signed it explicitly to go, you were ... to be trained in radio school.

HIGGINS: That's right. And they, they, um, had previously given me a physical and a written examination and you had to make a good grade on both of 'em. You couldn't have anything wrong with your ears or your eyes. You had to have twenty-twenty vision and perfect hearing. And at that time, uh, I did, so I qualified scholastically and physically.

EBERTS: And that's what attracted you to radio school?

HIGGINS: What?

EBERTS: What, what attracted you to radio school?

HIGGINS: The desire to find a vocation.

EBERTS: So it was communications you were interested in?

HIGGINS: Communications, yes. Uh, I just thought that would be, like I said, that would be a good springboard for something else when the war was over, after serving my country like that, then when the war was over I could do something else. On my own.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: This is before the G.I. Bill.

EBERTS: Right.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So you were sworn in at the Custom House and then where did you go next?

HIGGINS: We, uh, there was one other guy from Tennessee that was accepted in my class but he didn't stay. Uh, he left when we got to Boston. He went back home. But that was the first time I had seen the ocean. [It] was June 30th, nineteen and forty-two. And, I must say, ... we encountered one of the foulest smelling places in the whole world. I couldn't stand it hardly. It just made me sick and to this day, if I smell fish eating, uh, cooking, don't serve me any! And I love fish. But, um, see there was a dock, Commercial Wharf they called it, in Boston ... at the station took us almost, I mean the train took us almost to within walking distance, and then we went over to this Commercial Wharf, and we had to catch a ferry out to the training station, which was known as Gallup's Island ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And, uh, I was standing there on the wharf waiting for the ferry, and I was homesick, and then the smell of those fish and everything just made me sick. And ... this guy walked up behind me and patted me on the shoulder and says, "Don't take it so hard, fella,"

he says, “We’re going to a good place.” I said, I turned around and said, “We are? Are you in the same boat I am?” And he said, “Yep, I’m in the same boat you are.” He says “I’m Ken Pryor.” And he said, “I’m going out to Gallup’s Island to learn to be a Communications Officer,” says, “Are you headed for the same direction?” And I said, “Yes, I am.” And from then on we became super duper friends. And last summer, even with my heart condition, I told the wife, I says, “[if] the doctor approves it and all, we’re going to fly up to Boston or Providence and visit Ken Pryor.” And we did, and we enjoyed it immensely.

PIEHLER: Had you seen each other between the war?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: You, you stayed in touch well past ...

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. I’ve stayed in touch with him ever since. And his dad, his dad was on the Board of Directors of the National Broadcasting Company. And, uh, when I took a refresher course at Sheepshead Bay ...

PIEHLER: Brooklyn?

HIGGINS: ... yeah, in Brooklyn, ... his father was down in New York on business and, uh, he called me up and asked me if it’d be okay to come out ... to the base. And I told him, “Sure!” I said, “Come out and have lunch with me,” you know. So he did. And I had a black roommate—and I had nothing whatsoever against him, he was a nice guy. And we discussed, many times, we discussed in my visits with the Pryor family, we discussed the black situation in our country. And, uh, I got the impression that he thought that Southerners were all wrong, you know, that we ought to just open our doors to the black people at all times and accept ...

----- END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO -----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Ray H. Higgins on April 11, 2000, at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

EBERTS: Ellen Eberts.

PIEHLER: And you were saying, who was saying that this is your black roommate?

HIGGINS: Ah. Me.

PIEHLER: You. You ...

HIGGINS: ... I introduced him to ...

PIEHLER: ... to your friends.

HIGGINS: ... to my friend. My classmate in school ... there's dad, who was on the Board of Directors of the National Broadcasting Company. And I had no choice as to who was going to be my roommate up there. And I didn't—that was where I was assigned, and I didn't mind. But, uh, we went on to the officers' mess for lunch and found a table, and he and I were sitting there talking about old times and family and everything. And my roommate came through and he—being by himself and all, he looked over and saw me and Mr. Pryor. So he came over and I introduced him and he sat down, you're like me, I don't like to eat by myself. And he was no exception. So we had lunch together at the conclusion of which, when we got up to leave, my guest said to my roommate, "Good to see you. If you are ever up at Providence please feel free to come out and visit us. We're in the process of going into the television business ... but we'd like to have you as a guest any time you're up that way. We'll show you around, and I think that you'll like what you see." He thanked him and was very, very courteous. Well, we walked out of the officers' mess and he, just as soon as the door closed, he says, [he] turned to me and he said, "Now listen here, Higgy," [he] says "I want it ... known right now, I never," [he] says, "It's not every day that I have lunch with a black man, let alone shake hands with him." Now that told me, I've thought about that so many times, 'cause that told me that those people that peddled ... the elimination of segregation really wasn't sincere about it. But I think they are now. And black people served the Stars and Stripes and ... they didn't deserve to be treated like they were. Now my father, my father going back to farming days, he was good to all the black people that would work for him. Now he didn't invite them in for dinner, uh, but he was good to 'em. He paid them well and uh, and they all thought a lot of him.

PIEHLER: Your ... roommate, your black roommate at Sheepshead Bay, where was he from?

HIGGINS: The black roommate there?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Roommate At Sheepshead Bay?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: I think he was from someplace in upper, uh, Massachusetts.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And um, ... was he the one that said that things had to change in the South? That he thought Southerners—what did he think of the South and segregation, your black roommate? What did your black roommate think about the South?

HIGGINS: I don't recall him discussing it. But, uh, before I graduated from the Communication School up in Boston, ... my class had a party at the Lenox Hotel Ballroom ...

PIEHLER: Which is still there.

HIGGINS: It is. And uh, during the evening a young lady came around to me and said, our

conversation I remember like this, she says, uh, “They tell me you’re from Tennessee.” I said, “That’s right.” And she says, “Well, tell me something,” [she] says, “I’ve got a brother that’s in the Army and since he’s stationed down at Camp ... Forrest, Tennessee, do you know where that is?” I said, “I sure do. That’s just eighteen miles from where I was reared.” And [she] says, “Well now, he tells me that down there, ... they have the sidewalks marked off and one side is for the black people and the other side is for the white people. Is that right?” I said “Ma’am, we don’t even have sidewalks down there.” (Laughter) And [I] went on. And, of course, it’s obviously, somebody had twisted the truth around, you know. It wasn’t that bad, but it was bad enough.

PIEHLER: ... What did you think about segregation growing up?

HIGGINS: Growing up?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: I didn’t give it serious consideration because ... we mixed together, just like I told you. We had this ... dance and this black man would ... come and play the fiddle. And, uh, I see well something, I still can’t think of it [his name], but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: And he was well thought of too. See, in a small town like Wartrace you didn’t think as much of it. I don’t remember any white girls marrying any black men. But ... we didn’t have any trouble. We had a black man that had ran a poultry business there. He’d buy chickens and turkeys and all kinds of fowl, and also in the springtime he would buy wool from the shepherders, sheep keepers, and everybody thought a lot of him.

PIEHLER: What about in the North? Because the North is different, and you had a black roommate. What did you think of the South, having been to the North, and where you grew up? What was your impression of the North?

HIGGINS: Of what now?

PIEHLER: What was your impression of Boston and Brooklyn? They’re very different from ... Shelbyville and ... Wartrace.

HIGGINS: Well, I just accepted the fact that we were all different, you know. And I went out to dinner one evening on the weekend, uh, with a fellow by the name of McMinn, I didn’t know anything about him, I’ve got it here somewhere, a list of my classmates, but I didn’t know that he was Jewish. But, uh, we went on leave together and we went to this restaurant and had T-bone steaks. And I trimmed all the fat off, you know. And there’s several items that I just ate half of, or something like that. And at the conclusion of the meal he says to me, he says, “You’re not going to eat the rest of your food there?” And I said, “No. No.” He says, “well, my mother and dad would just love to have you as a customer.” And I said, “Well, what do you mean?” And he went on to tell me that they were in the restaurant

business down in New York and they would take the remnants of my plate and make, uh, stew. Yeah. So I didn't order any stew anywhere! (Laughter) But ... now these people, the Pryors, that I visited in Providence, uh, they were aristocrats of the English variety. And Mrs. Pryor had tea at four o'clock in the afternoon. And uh, there were several children in that family and they lived in a three-story house and ... I enjoyed many, many weekends with them. Many, many weekends. I just fell in love with them.

PIEHLER: After the war, ... your friend, what did he do?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: Your friend Pryor, what did he do?

HIGGINS: He, he went into business with his dad there in Providence.

PIEHLER: ... at Providence?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Was it in broadcasting? Or, uh ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, in Broadcasting. He had WBIR radio and TV. And I think he was a troubleshooter on the mechanical side of it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And, um, how long were you in Boston for training? How long did you stay in Boston?

HIGGINS: About eighteen months.

PIEHLER: Eighteen months, so from June of 1942 until—that's a long time, ... from June of 1942, that's '43, that's almost 1944.

HIGGINS: Yeah, it's—I think, no, I believe, it was twelve months.

PIEHLER: Twelve months. A year.

HIGGINS: Yeah. A year.

PIEHLER: And what was a typical day like?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: What was a typical day like? What did you do on ...

HIGGINS: Well, see I went to school.

PIEHLER: So you would go what time in the morning?

HIGGINS: Well, we had reveille at seven o'clock in the morning. And taps at ... ten o'clock at night. And ... they had a recreation hall where you could play ping-pong and badminton and basketball. Just had one goal. And then, uh, lift weights and that sort of thing, exercise.

EBERTS: What were your duties at Gallup's Island?

HIGGINS: What?

EBERTS: What were your duties at Gallup's Island?

HIGGINS: What was my duty?

EBERTS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: It was going to school, learning to be a radio officer.

PIEHLER: You, you had no KP, or ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, I—indoctrination period I did, yes.

PIEHLER: How long was the indoctrination period?

HIGGINS: Uh, about four weeks, I think.

PIEHLER: And that's when you did a lot of KP and ...

HIGGINS: ... KP.

PIEHLER: Did you ever do firefighting training? Firefighting training?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: You never did firefighting training?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: What about knots?

HIGGINS: About what?

PIEHLER: Knots? Ropes, knots?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah! Oh yeah ...

PIEHLER: You, you did do Navy knots.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah. We had to learn all of that.

PIEHLER: What about your chiefs? Do you remember your chiefs at all?

HIGGINS: The chiefs?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Training, did you have a chief, a chief petty officer?

HIGGINS: Chief petty officer? I don't remember their names.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But you did have chiefs?

HIGGINS: I don't—oh, I had two chiefs, and one of them was in charge, well several chiefs for that matter. One of them was in charge of the kitchen when I was on KP. And he put me on washing and cleaning the walls. And I thought I did a real good job! (Laughter) And ... so he came in to inspect it and everything and, uh, I said something about how I thought it looked real good. He reached up above the door and rubbed his fingers across it, of course dust had collected up there. [I] didn't think about washing up there. But he made me do the whole thing over. Boy that burnt me up! (Laughter) But you—see you don't say anything. Just grin and bear it. Yeah, yeah we have—while I was in KP, I remember we'd have a break about 11 o'clock and go into the barracks and my mail was on my bunk, you know. And I got a letter from Mother, my mother, and I just rolled over, you know, and I was about to cry. The commander came through the ... barracks and he patted me on the back and he said, "That's all right, sonny. I had to go through the same thing." He knew I was homesick. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So you got homesick in Boston?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. And the ... we'd go to training, you know, training school. We had to learn codes, the international code, and we had to take it by earphones and they'd have a machine and tell you to play this over and you had to record it.

PIEHLER: How fast could you record when you got ...

HIGGINS: I was recorded ...

PIEHLER: How good did you get?

HIGGINS: ... well I recorded about forty-five minutes an hour, I mean forty-five words an hour.

EBERTS: What were you the best at?

PIEHLER: ... forty-five words a minute?

HIGGINS: How did they call it? Forty PM, per minute.

PIEHLER and EBERTS: Per minute.

HIGGINS: Yeah. What did you say?

EBERTS: ... What were you the best at doing?

PIEHLER: Giving code, sending code, or receiving it?

HIGGINS: Both of them.

PIEHLER: Both. You, you were equally ...

HIGGINS: I say equal. We had to learn to send it ...

EBERTS: Yeah.

HIGGINS: ... and I did have my key, but I gave it to my grandson just before we moved from up there, as a keepsake. I bought my own key after I got out on my own. And I also had the Japanese key, ... but a lot of my relics disappeared. I don't know what happened to 'em. And, uh, I wanted to tell you about this tale. We were about ready to graduate and, uh, I think it was—we were going to be given one more final exam in code. And, uh, they had a little platform that the petty officer would go to ... when he wanted to talk to us. And he went up on the platform and stopped the machines that was playing the code. And I got this man's name and everything replied to, but anyway, he stopped the machine and he went like this, he said, "Gentlemen," [he] says, "there's a man in this platoon that is cheating." And he says, "You ... know we can't tolerate that. And I want to know if he's man enough to come forward." Said, "I want to give him one minute," he looked at his watch like this, you know [gestures at his wrist watch]. And just before the one minute was up here's this guy gets up and goes up, his name was Allendorf from Oakland, California. And, uh, he admitted it, that he was cheating, and he says, "Well I guess you know what the penalty is," says, "Pack up your bags." And he says, uh, "You'll catch the launch at four p.m. and go back to Boston. And from there you'll go to the Naval training station at Great Lakes, Illinois." And, uh, so that's what happened to him. So, um, that was next to the final exam we had.... It's a pity, you know, to spend that much money in training somebody and them goof off like that.

PIEHLER: ... How many people dropped out of the training? How many couldn't keep up with the training?

HIGGINS: Well, there were eighteen, I don't mean eighteen—there were two platoons that was formed out of the group that collected ... together beginning with Ken Pryor and myself at the dock. And they said it was too large and they divided it. And, uh, Ken Pryor ended up in R-17 and I ended up in R-18. And ... if they were taking code he and his group would go in to ... the training room and then, at the conclusion of which, then my group would go in.

See we just went 'round in training, in code and both signaling and ... receiving. And then at night we had a regular study hall and we'd go to the study hall and stay until ten o'clock. And, uh, we had a fellow by the name of Rosenblatt that nobody liked, and he would come in after the lights were out and most of the men were dozing off to sleep, and he'd make a lot of noise and so on and so forth getting in his bunk.... So there was a group of men [who] decided they'd something about that. So one day they went down to the beach and collected some crabs, (laughter) and about ten o'clock, just before the lights went out, they put those crabs in his bunk ...

EBERTS: Yeah?

HIGGINS: And then, and then we're all getting back to our regular bunks, he came in about eleven o'clock, got in there and all those crabs. I don't believe I've ever heard anybody cuss like he did! (Laughter) So that was a funny moment. But another moment involving him, Rosenblatt, it was a cold winter day and we had—every Saturday morning we'd have inspection, every Saturday morning, and so we were on the, uh, parade field for the inspection. And, uh, the order was dress blues. And ... so the commander of the whole base [would] stand up there and he says "R-18! I notice one of your men is out of uniform. What's your explanation?" And the platoon leader stepped forward and he said, "I don't know, sir, but I'll find out, sir." So he goes back and asks ole Rosenblatt why he didn't have his uniform on, his dress uniform. And he says, uh, that it was wet. That, uh—bear in mind, now, it's a cold winter day. And the wind coming out of that North Sea, just, you know. You know how it is.

PIEHLER: Boston's a very cold place in the winter.

HIGGINS: Yeah. It'll just chill you to the bone! Well he, the platoon leader then went back and reported to the commander, and he says, "That's not an acceptable excuse." [He] says "Consider your men confined to the base over the weekend." Well most of those guys were single, all of us were single, but [for] one that I knew of, and they had plans for the weekend, you know.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: And boy, were they mad! So when we were dismissed a delegation collected around Rosenblatt and another delegation was sent to the barracks to check his locker to see if his dress uniform was really wet. And they came back and reported [that] it was as dry as a chip! And so they proceeded then to pull that man's clothes off and strip him to his birthday clothes, and threw him up on the ... barracks! And can you imagine that? In that cold hard, cold wind out there. I look back on it, you know, and so, uh—I mean he just cried like a baby and, uh, so by four o'clock that afternoon he had a discharge in his pocket. Rosenblatt did. He had a discharge in his pocket, "Unfit for Service." Now that, uh, that's almost unbelievable, but that's the way it is.

I want to backtrack a little bit and tell you about my growing up years on the farm. I had a couple of young men from a nursery up here above Strawberry Plains to come down and ...

put out some shrubs for me. And put mulch around the ones that I had here, two or three years ago, when we lived on top of the hill, up there and, uh.... I was checking the work and everything and I asked one of 'em, I says, "Did your mothers tell you what your pay is?" And they said, uh, "Yes, sir ... she told us it was five dollars an hour." I says, "That's right." And they said "Well that's alright, Mr. Higgins." And I say, "Do you know how much I got when I was your age?" They were fourteen years old, both of 'em and their mothers—they couldn't drive because of their age, and their mother brought 'em down here. And I said, "Do you know how much I was paid when I was fourteen years of age?" I said, "I started to work in the morning at sunup and quit at sundown and took an hour off for lunch." "No, sir." And I said, "I made seventy-five cents for that whole day's work." (Laughs) They straightened up and said, "Are you puttin' us on, Mr. Higgins?" And that's true, back in those days, people, they just didn't have the money. It needed to be done, but they didn't have to money to pay anybody. Well, now what were you all going to ask me, y'all get back to the Naval base.

PIEHLER: Well, you learned signal. You, you learned how to send and receive ... code.

HIGGINS: Do what?

PIEHLER: You, you learned how to send and receive code. Did you learn anything else?

HIGGINS: Oh yes ... we learned to, uh, tie ropes, as you said, ropesmanship, they called it. And oaring, you know in case we had to abandon ship and [get] in lifeboats ... well we could go somewhere, you know.

PIEHLER: You, you didn't learn any repair.

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You, you didn't learn repair, radio repair.

HIGGINS: No. That was another station ...

PIEHLER: That was, that was ...

HIGGINS: That was another station. We were, uh, well, we did, have a course in repair of radio equipment.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You, you did have a course in radio ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. Radio equipment. Yeah. I was thinking, uh, repair of the ship.

PIEHLER: No, no, no, oh no. What about the physics of radio? Did you have any theoretical ...

HIGGINS: Yes, we had theoretical ...

PIEHLER: You, you had classroom on how a radio works and frequencies?

HIGGINS: ... principle behind the way it worked, yeah.

PIEHLER: Who were your instructors? Were they regular Navy?

HIGGINS: Yes, they were, uh, they were regular Navy, or Coast Guard, or Maritime Service. I can never figure out who's who.

PIEHLER: Did you have any civilians who were instructors?

HIGGINS: Oh no.

PIEHLER: They were all in service?

HIGGINS: They were all service, mind you. I had, uh, I went to get—I had a toothache, and I needed a filling real bad, and, uh—I'll never forget this, this is a bad chapter, and I went in this dental office and these two dentists is sitting there playing pinochle. And I told 'em what my trouble was. So this guy examined me and he said, "That tooth needs to come out!" Next thing I knew, it was out! He didn't, didn't bother to fill it or anything, you know. (Laughter) And, uh, they didn't care, you know. And then ... every other Monday morning, every Monday morning, if we had a long weekend from Friday until Monday morning, we'd have inspection. They'd examine our bodies, you know.

PIEHLER: Short arm.

HIGGINS: Short arm inspection. Yes, I was fixing to say that but ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No. They've heard about short arm inspections.

HIGGINS: And, uh, I've seen guys drop out. And if ... you caught, if you caught, uh, a venereal disease (makes a whisking sound) ...

PIEHLER: You were out.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Now I'd like to tell you this, you know in going through a—we were bunked alphabetically, and there was a guy in my, there was a guy in my platoon by the name of Halpen. And going to the shower after our training day was over, I'd have to pass by his bunk. And one day as I went by his bunk, why he had his locker open and on the door he had a picture of a beautiful lady. And, uh, this cut me to the bone. And, uh, of course, like I said, I didn't know too much about the Jewish faith or their habits, so—but anyway, I said, "That sure is a beautiful girl there, Halpen." I say, "She is your girlfriend?" He says "Yeah. Do you think I'd go ..." no, he didn't say that, he said, "Of course, stupid, you think I'd go with any other kind of girl?" Now that cut me, calling me stupid, you know. Well, if I was stupid I wouldn't have been there (laughs) because they didn't accept anybody like that. But, uh,

time goes on and the next weekend we had a long weekend. He lived down in New York. And, uh, he came up to, back to the base after his long weekend was over and ... had to go to the sickbay. And ... when he came back from sickbay he didn't even bother to get a—to receive the order from the commandant. So he knew what was going to happen. We came in from class and he was packing. And that's the last I've seen him. Uh, he was shipped up to Great Lakes, I think because ... they wouldn't tolerate anything like that. And, uh, well for the ... type of position they were training us for aboard ship you had to be above that sort of thing. And, uh, you had to be above that sort of thing mentally speaking too. Because they wouldn't accept people except mentally and physically able.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. To carry out the job.

HIGGINS: Yeah to carry out the job. And then to deviate from it made them ... unacceptable. But that's doesn't mean that they didn't serve their country. They were trained for other things in the Navy.

PIEHLER: But in this group, radio, they really—venereal disease was out.

HIGGINS: Do what?

PIEHLER: If you caught a venereal disease, that was your ticket ... to Great Lakes. You, you were going to Great Lakes if you didn't ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. I had to go to Great Lakes. I sure did.... In order to get in, I had to have letters of recommendation and I've got copies of those here if you'd like to have some of 'em.

PIEHLER: To ... get into the school in Boston?

HIGGINS: ... to get into the service. And, um, one of them was from the grain, granary dealer there in Wartrace. Another one was from the funeral director there in Wartrace. I've got another one it was from the postmaster. But somehow I lost it.

PIEHLER: Your um—you would get leave to go into Boston ...

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You, you would get weekend leaves and weekend passes. Um, what did you do when you had a leave or a pass?

HIGGINS: In Boston?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Or where did you go? Did you go to anyplace besides Boston?

HIGGINS: Most of the, most of the time we caught the train and went down to Providence.

PIEHLER: Providence?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And you would go to the Pryor family.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you got to know that family pretty well.

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. See, they were, Ken had, uh, three sisters, one of 'em I really liked.
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: You dated one of his sisters?

HIGGINS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Did you date one of his ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughter)

EBERTS: Oh.

HIGGINS: And they would go to church on Sunday, and that I liked.

PIEHLER: Which church did they go to?

HIGGINS: It was, um, Episcopalian.

PIEHLER: And you grew up in Church of Christ, right?

HIGGINS: Right, uh huh.

PIEHLER: That's a very different ...

HIGGINS: ... very different than mine!

PIEHLER: Yeah that's a very different. What did you think of the differences?

HIGGINS: I just didn't give it a serious thought. Really I didn't. Because I always equated the Christian faith and all the different churches with a situation like this, uh, we've got to go to Chattanooga [and] there are several different roads that we can take [and] still get to Chattanooga. That's the way I look at it. There, there are several different roads, you know, that you can take. I don't argue with anyone over their religion.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Did you ever go to chapel, uh, were there very—how many

encounters did you have with the Navy chaplain?

HIGGINS: Huh?

PIEHLER: Was there a Navy chaplain at the base in Boston?

HIGGINS: Uh, you're talking about a religious gathering, or ...

PIEHLER: Well, did you have any chaplains? Did you have Navy chaplains?

HIGGINS: Chaplain? Yeah, we had chaplains. We sure did.

PIEHLER: At Boston.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Sure, at Boston, yes sir.

PIEHLER: What denomination was he?

HIGGINS: I never did get that close to him, to find out, but we had ...

PIEHLER: You, you had services.

HIGGINS: Yeah, we had services ... at the recreation center. And, uh, I often looked forward to 'em really. We had a man in my platoon by the name of Pillsbury that would play the piano and boy could he play it! You play the piano?

PIEHLER: No, I don't. No. I wish I could. I don't.

HIGGINS: Yeah, I wish I could too. The wife can, but, uh, not me. And the daughter can and the son, grandson and granddaughter, but not me. But anyway, I try to forget all the bad things that happened. One time we had to take boat training, oarsmanship. And it was so cold I thought surely they'd call it off. But they didn't. And ... I was miserable all the time because there's big hunks of ice out there, you know, in the ocean, and you'd have to sort of push them to one side. It's just unbelievable. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: After Boston, where did you go next?

HIGGINS: After?

PIEHLER: After Massachusetts where did you go next?

HIGGINS: Uh, I went down to ... Boston, I mean New York, but it wasn't Sheepshead Bay. I don't remember where it was ...

PIEHLER: Was it Brooklyn Navy Yard?

HIGGINS: It must have been because they were, uh, installing some secret equipment aboard the ship and I had to sort of be guard over it.

PIEHLER: So you had guard duty there?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And that's where they assigned you a black roommate.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And how long were you in Brooklyn approximately?

HIGGINS: Uh, about six weeks.

PIEHLER: Six weeks.

HIGGINS: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And you got, what kind of training, you said you were in advanced training, what kind of advanced training did you get?

HIGGINS: Advanced?

PIEHLER: Yeah, what training did you get at Brooklyn?

HIGGINS: Oh, at Brooklyn? I didn't—oh this was later on after the war was over.

PIEHLER: That's when you went to Brooklyn for the advanced training?

HIGGINS: At Sheepshead Bay.

PIEHLER: And that's when you had the black roommate? It was after ... the war?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you were just—before, during the war you were at Brooklyn, but at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

HIGGINS: Right.

PIEHLER: And the training comes later.

HIGGINS: The advanced training comes later.

PIEHLER: After the war. So you were there, they were waiting to assign you somewhere, in

Brooklyn?

HIGGINS: Yeah, uh, but they assigned me to ... be a guard to the radio shack while they were installing the secret equipment and I later found out that it was RADAR.

PIEHLER: What ... ship were they installing it on?

HIGGINS: I don't remember the name of it.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But you would do guard—what would you do [for] guard duty? Did they give you a weapon?

HIGGINS: Well, I didn't need any, but, uh, a .45 would have been available if I'd wanted.

PIEHLER: But you didn't carry a weapon at this guard duty?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: It sounds like pretty boring detail.

HIGGINS: Yeah, it was. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did you, did you get into New York at all? The city, Manhattan or ...

HIGGINS: No, I didn't. I didn't, uh, mix and mingle with those two guys who were installing the equipment and I knew nobody there. And, uh, seemed like I, on Sunday morning when I was relieved I went to a Methodist Church. I don't recall exactly, but I know I went to a Methodist Church, and I believe it was in Manhattan.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And then after Brooklyn where did you go next?

HIGGINS: New Orleans.

PIEHLER: And, uh, how long were you in New Orleans?

HIGGINS: Uh, not very long, I was billeted down on St. Charles Boulevard, you know. And that's the elite section of New Orleans, in which to live. And, uh, I was awaiting assignment then right there. And, um, three years, four years, five years ago, my brother Clarence and his wife and me and my wife went to New Orleans, and I was going to show them where I was billeted, you know, when I was staying there waiting for assignment. And, uh, so [we] went out without a bit of trouble, took a streetcar right out to where it was, Canal Street. And I couldn't believe how beautiful that place, of course, I was looking at it, the place, from a different perspective, you know. And I just couldn't hardly believe how beautiful those, uh, barracks and the surroundings were. 'Course the barracks had been purchased by a private citizen and converted into apartments. But that was the only difference.

PIEHLER: It was very much the way you remembered ... it during the war?

HIGGINS: Yeah. The tropical growth and flowers and you know. It was just really nice. You ever been to New Orleans?

PIEHLER: I have visited New Orleans. It's a fun place to visit.

EBERTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Well it's also a pretty—I mean, it must have been—there were probably a lot of sailors, and New Orleans is known as a pretty racy place.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What was it like with all those sailors in town?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah, we went down on ... Bourbon Street, and ... my wife, she couldn't wait to get out of there! (Laughter) You, you say we—Clarence's wife, they (laughs)—well I thought it was—it's nice to visit places like that, you know. Just don't travel alone.

PIEHLER: And in New Orleans, what were you waiting for? You were just waiting for your assignment?

HIGGINS: I was waiting for assignment. And I was assigned to a detail that went up to Chicago and traveled down the Illinois River and then the Mississippi River to New Orleans, uh, towing—and I really learned something about this country, I didn't know that existed, towing submarines.

PIEHLER: That was your first assignment. Were you the radio operator?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

EBERTS: For the Navy?

PIEHLER: For the Navy?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And this was in 1940, late 1943?

HIGGINS: '43 and '44.

PIEHLER: Early in 19 ...

HIGGINS: First part of '44.

PIEHLER: Yeah, first part of '44. So you were towing submarines ... down the river from Chicago down to the Mississi ...

HIGGINS: To Knoxville, no not to Knoxville! (Laughter)

PIEHLER and EBERTS: To New Orleans.

HIGGINS: Yes, yeah.

PIEHLER: You, you saw a lot of the country. I mean, you ...

HIGGINS: Now you can't see the country from ... a boat. Just like, I had this friend that ... got some literature on taking a boat down the Mississippi River, one of these [paddle]wheelers ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And, uh, he and his wife went down to Memphis and caught it and he said, "Why didn't you tell me," when he returned, "you can't see anything from a boat!" (Laughter) They rode one of them all the way to New Orleans. And of course, you couldn't, sort of boresome really, the countryside is. I noticed on the news last night that the Mississippi River is one of [the] endangered rivers because of man, you know. We've just destroyed our earth, haven't we? Yeah. Well go ahead.

PIEHLER: And um, so you were a radio operator and what was a typical day like?

HIGGINS: Well ...

PIEHLER: What kind of duty shifts did you have, for example, on the ...

HIGGINS: Well, I had to inform Navy Headquarters in ... Saint Louis and then later on, as we got further down the river, New Orleans, as to our location. They wanted to keep tabs on our location, [to] make sure we hadn't been sabotaged or something of that nature.

PIEHLER: And you were on a barge? Was that what ...

HIGGINS: No, no. It was a towboat.

PIEHLER: Towboat.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So how big was it? How big was the crew?

HIGGINS: How big was the crew?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

----- END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE -----

HIGGINS: ... and, uh, the Mississippi, of course, flows south. And I went up there [to] be a security guard on one trip and ... that Illinois River was just a sewer! (Laughter) Oh, man.

PIEHLER: It smelled, you could ...

EBERTS: Brown, smelly water.

HIGGINS: Yeah. It was terrible.

PIEHLER: You, you had mentioned just before—you had paused just before I flipped, we'd paused just after we flipped the tape, you mentioned your ship's crew on ... this ...

HIGGINS: On the boat.

PIEHLER: On the boat.

HIGGINS: Twenty-six men.

PIEHLER: Thirty-six or thirty-six? You, you mentioned ...

HIGGINS: Twenty-six.

PIEHLER: Twenty-six. How many officers? Do you remember?

HIGGINS: Well, let's see, they had the captain and then, uh, three pilots ... and, um, what they called the first mate in charge of the crew that worked on the barges and on the dry dock, the dry dock.

PIEHLER: Were you all Navy? The whole ...

HIGGINS: Oh no. No, no. Most of 'em were civilians.

PIEHLER: With a Navy, a Navy—basically supervisors.

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah. And, uh, they were mostly civilians.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. But the Navy had control?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have to monitor the communication the whole trip?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: You, you didn't have to monitor the communications twenty-four hours.

HIGGINS: Monitor?

PIEHLER: ... communications.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You, you did.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you have another radio operator with you?

HIGGINS: Nope. I was the only one and, uh ...

PIEHLER: So, so how would ...

HIGGINS: ... I would keep the loudspeaker of the speaker on and it was near my bunk, you see, and if something would happen ... that I needed to be informed on, it'd wake me up, you see.

PIEHLER: So you were on duty basically all the time.

HIGGINS: I was on there twenty-four hours a day. We stopped, I'd like to tell you, the assignment was on the towboat Vicksburg I believe it was, and we stopped at Vicksburg, Mississippi, to refuel. Well now, we pulled up alongside a fuel barge and it—the mouth of it was way down in the water because it was full of Bunker C fuel, see. And if you'd take that Bunker C fuel out and put it on a boat, the barge comes up and the boat, and the boat goes down in the water. Well, the skipper gave the crew so many hours of shore leave. And he knew what they were going to do. And, uh, they were on the shore, I can see 'em now, coming back from ... their shore leave. And the skipper blew his lanyard whistle, you know, "Leave is up, come on back, boys!" And he, uh, took his megaphone and yelled down to Mr. so-and-so, the executive officer and says, "Is everybody aboard?" He says, "No sir. Two men are still missing." And he says, "But I see 'em coming down the levy up there." Well, they came on down to this fuel barge to get on board the boat ... like I said, the boat had gone down in the water and the barge had gone up. So there's about an eight-foot drop ...

EBERTS: Whoa.

HIGGINS: ... you see. And one of those guys didn't want any help getting down on to the boat. But he had a little help anyway. When he got out on the stern of the boat, these two guys were helping him and he just [makes a shoving movement and noise] ...

PIEHLER: He was pushing them away.

HIGGINS: Yeah pushing them away and [he] started cursing and said he could manage by himself and he went over to the starboard side of that boat and dove into the Mississippi River.

And the Mississippi River [is] swift and it's dirty all the time. And the first officer—see they'd have three odd ships which'd mean they had to have three officers that were in charge of those men, well the first officer took his ... I can't think anymore, megaphone, I guess, you might say, and he yelled at him. Well somebody threw a life ...

PIEHLER: Life ring out.

HIGGINS: ... yeah, over to him, you know. He managed to get hold of that. But here he was going down that river just like a little dog. (Laughter) Life ring, you know. Uh, he was holding on to that with one hand and the other he was paddling the water. Well, this officer got his megaphone and yelled at those guys going down to pick him up in that little motor boat and he yelled to 'em, "Don't let that son of a bitch drown!" he says, "He owes me eighty dollars!" (Laughter) Well they didn't let him drown. They brought him they got him in the boat, brought him back and put him in the brig. Of course, he was wet from toe, head to toe. And, uh, the next day when he dried out and all he couldn't believe he did that. I don't remember his name ...

PIEHLER: Um, how long would it take you to go down the Mississippi? How long did it take you to go from Chicago to ...

HIGGINS: Mississippi? 'Course you had the river currents in your favor. And, I really don't know. I just couldn't say at this juncture.

PIEHLER: How many journeys did you take? 'Cause it sounds like you were doing this for a while.

HIGGINS: Yeah, I did it for about a year.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Did you take—was it more than one a month or ...

HIGGINS: Something like that, 'bout one a month.

PIEHLER: And you would also go back up the river, and that took longer.

HIGGINS: Yeah, it took longer. And ... they were taking strategic war supplies of some sort and dropping them off along the way.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And then uh ...

HIGGINS: Had to be, had to be ... pretty closely guarded.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So, you did a lot of guard duty too?

HIGGINS: Yeah, uh, well I tell you we just didn't have—I don't believe our citizens were as mean as they are now, but back then we still had a few people that opposed the war. And they would sabotage if they had an opportunity.

PIEHLER: Did you ever witness, did you ever have any sabotage occur to your ...

HIGGINS: Did I have what?

PIEHLER: Did you see—did any sabotage happen to you, to your ship, to your barge or to the submarine?

HIGGINS: No. No, nothing ever happened.

PIEHLER: Not to you. Yeah.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What happened to you after this duty on the Mississippi?

HIGGINS: Well, of course they sent me to Port Hueneme, California.

PIEHLER: And this was in the middle of 1944?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And then where, what—how long were you there?

HIGGINS: Well, just a few days and [then] we headed for the South Pacific.

PIEHLER: How did you—were you assigned to a ship?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah we were assigned to a ship and we ... I've forgotten whether it was the USS Christopher S. Flanagan or the William H. Taggett, it was one of the two.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And you were assigned to this ship.... Where did you—you sailed to the South Pacific?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: You sailed to the South Pacific?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And what was your duties aboard the ship?

HIGGINS: Aboard the ship?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Communications. Period.

PIEHLER: So you worked in the radio room?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. And, uh, one hundred percent. I had two men to help me.

PIEHLER: What was your rank?

HIGGINS: My rank was ensign.

PIEHLER: Ensign. So you were an ensign?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And you were an ensign aboard, when you were on the Mississippi?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And so you had two radio operators?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So that left a lot of, you had a lot of cover ...

HIGGINS: See we maintained duty twenty-four hours a day to protect the ship.

PIEHLER: And did you receive and take code as an ensign?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you split with your two enlisted ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. We had split watch.

EBERTS: What kind of ship did you have? What kind of ship did you sail on?

HIGGINS: It was, uh, called a Liberty ship.

EBERTS: Liberty Ship.

HIGGINS: Both of 'em were Liberty ships.

PIEHLER: Those aren't very big.

HIGGINS: Yeah, but they were just—well I look back on it now and I say to myself, “I was assigned to a suicide mission.” Because if any, any of those, uh, Japanese torpedoes had hit my ship ... (makes a slicing action and sound)

EBERTS: Did you have guns? Was your ship armed?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Yeah, we were an armed ship. Sure. You better believe it. And, uh, we ... first went to Pearl Harbor for assignment ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: ... uh, to a convoy. And then we traveled from Hawaii to the Marianas Islands. Are you familiar with the Marianas Islands?

EBERTS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: Are you? Are you, you know where they, now see that was Tinian, Saipan, Eniwetok, Taipei, Quadulane, and Guam. But I didn't know until the war was over that Guam was part of the Mariana Islands. But it was. And I had—I saw active duty in all of those places. I mean, we were attacked by Japanese suicide planes. And ... our ship was equipped with anti-aircraft, uh, guns. And if one of those suicide planes had hit us, (makes a slicing noise) I wouldn't be here talking to you. They weren't accurate as far as we were concerned. But ... ships blew up in your face, just like these car wrecks.

EBERTS: Yeah. Did your ship ever sustain a hit?

HIGGINS: (Shakes head)

EBERTS: Never? No kind?

HIGGINS: No. There wouldn't be any survivors a lot of times. And, uh, we'd have general quarters at midnight being attacked by Japanese submarines and ... we were lucky they didn't hit us. And, uh, we fought the submarines with depth charges, and [we] fought the airplanes with anti-aircraft fire.

PIEHLER: You were on two ships during the war.

HIGGINS: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: Why were you transferred from one ship to the other?

HIGGINS: Well, simple. After I got back from the first trip over there, I wanted leave. And

so they gave me leave and I came home and visited my folks. And then I went back and they assigned me to another ship.

EBERTS: What kinds of things did your ship carry?

PIEHLER: The first ship you were on.

EBERTS: The first ship, yeah.

HIGGINS: It carried, uh, technicians. I didn't know what they were technicians in, but they carried technicians.... And a gunnery officer and his crew, ... the Coast Guard and technicians. And I later found out that when we took Saipan and Tinian and Quadulane and Eniwetok that some sort of airbase was being built on two of 'em. And that was, uh, Tinian and Saipan. And that's the islands that we built this airbase on from which the B-29s took the atomic bomb to Japan.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: And that's where we went and then, uh, we came back to the States and, uh, I was, I forget which ship it was, one of 'em was the Flanagan and the other was the, the Taggett, but they were famous men that those ships were, Americans, that those ships were named after. And, uh ...

PIEHLER: Your first ship, how long were you at sea? How long—you left from the United States, you stopped at Pearl Harbor, how long did this, this the first time you were at sea ...

HIGGINS: Probably just a few days.

PIEHLER: ... Yeah. How long were you out at sea on the first ship's voyage?

HIGGINS: Well, uh, we went, when we went to Eniwetok and ... Quadulane, Tinian, and Saipan, uh, I don't know how long we were at sea before we got there. It seemed like to me about three or four weeks.

PIEHLER: Before you came back to the United States?

HIGGINS: No. No. Three or four weeks before the battle to take those islands started.

EBERTS: So you were still sailing with the Navy?

HIGGINS: What?

EBERTS: You were still sailing with the Navy?

PIEHLER: You were sailing with the Navy in the Pacific.

HIGGINS: Yeah, I ...

PIEHLER: They were regular Navy ships?

EBERTS: Regular Navy ships.

HIGGINS: Yeah, now here's the thing about it. I was in the Maritime Service. I was an ensign in the Maritime Service. I was sworn in [to] the Navy in the Custom House at Nashville, Tennessee. I was shipped to Boston by the Navy, under Navy orders, and then I ... went out to this island that was operated by the Navy and about six weeks after I completed my basic training, the Coast Guard took over. Then I was assigned to the Maritime Service. And all this confused me. And I was under the orders from the Navy. But at the same time, the orders came through the Maritime Service. See? And, uh, so that's the way it operated. But anyway, if I had deserted my station, at any time, (makes a slicing sound) they'd have shot me and thrown me overboard. That's how critical my position was because the lives of everybody aboard my ship depended upon good communication.

EBERTS: Mm hmm. Definitely.

PIEHLER: Your first ship, who was the captain? On your first voyage out?

HIGGINS: Uh ...

PIEHLER: Do you remember?

HIGGINS: I can't recall his name ... I think it's Percy Arms.

PIEHLER: Percy Arms.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Percy Arms.

PIEHLER: Um, and, uh, what was he like?

HIGGINS: Oh, he was a very nice person. He was very, very nice. But, uh, he didn't mix and mingle with the crew or with me either, though our quarters were on the same deck. Uh, he was somewhat of a distant person,... hard to get acquainted with. I remember—do you remember the song *On the Road to Mandalay*?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: "... where the flying fishes play." Well, we were floating in the Pacific one morning and that was happening, you know, could just look on either side at these little flying fish.... And the ocean was just as blue as it could be. And I was whistling and I heard somebody say "Higgins!" I'd go for a walk on the boat deck every morning, and I looked around and he was up on the bridge looking down over the boat deck, and he said, "I want to see you." So I went up and he said, "Now, I know you didn't know any better," but he says,

“nobody whistles aboard my ship.” He says, “That’s a bad sign.” (Laughs) You know he was superstitious. (Laughter) So I didn’t whistle any more after that.

PIEHLER: So it was a superstition, it wasn’t [about] ... indiscipline?

HIGGINS: Yeah and I think, he and I got along very, very fine, very, very fine. And, uh, when we, see, like I said, we had all kinds of equipment aboard the ship as well as these personnel. Seemed like to me they were—most of them were Marines that were—they didn’t know it themselves, that they were going to build an airbase on Saipan and Tinian. But that’s what they did.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. I ...

HIGGINS: And okay, go ahead.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, no, I ...

HIGGINS: And, uh, then we came back to the States and then I said I took leave and went home. And I went back to San Francisco and was assigned to the USS William H—no, I got that reversed, Taggett was the first one that I was on and ... Christopher S. Flanagan was the second.

PIEHLER: So Christopher Flanagan was the second ship.

HIGGINS: Uh huh. And the captain on it was Tillman.

PIEHLER: Captain Bill Tillman.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Captain Bill Tillman. And he was a peach of a guy. Really, he was. He and I... We didn’t share the same quarters, but we shared, uh, the same toilet. And he had a huge bedroom and a desk and all, you know. And, uh, I kept in contact with him until, oh, three or four years ago when he passed away. But like I said, he was a peach of a guy.

PIEHLER: What was his background?

HIGGINS: Well, he’d been Navy all of his life.

PIEHLER: And your first captain, had he been Navy all his life?

HIGGINS: As far as I knew he had been. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Your second captain, he wasn’t ... in Annapolis?

HIGGINS: No, no. None of ‘em were in Annapolis ...

PIEHLER: None of them were Annapolis.

HIGGINS: No, no.

PIEHLER: And this was also a Liberty ship, the second ship?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Any regular Navy crew on either ship? Were any of the chiefs or officers, besides the captain, regular Navy?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Were any of chiefs or any of the crew regular Navy?

HIGGINS: Yes ... Oh yes. Yes ... most of the gunnery crew were ...

PIEHLER: Regular Navy.

HIGGINS: ... regular Navy. Yeah. And, uh, the gunnery officer in charge of 'em was regular Navy. Yeah.

EBERTS: How well did they get along with the other men, the gunnery crew?

HIGGINS: The gunnery crew? Just fine. If they hadn't have been, they'd of put 'em ashore somewhere.

PIEHLER: In putting people ashore, you did you never put people ashore on a hostile beach?

HIGGINS: No! No!

PIEHLER: You would bring them to a site where they would stay ...

HIGGINS: To put people ashore on a hostile beach if that's their job is to take over that beach! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah. So you were never in invasion convoys, the actual invasion convoy?

HIGGINS: Yeah! I was there, surely was!

PIEHLER: Where they're actually assaulting a beach.

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Where they're actually assaulting a beach. In an operation where they're

actually assaulting the beach.

HIGGINS: Not from my ship, but ...

PIEHLER: No.

HIGGINS: ... but after the space was made by those that did, then those aboard my ship disembarked.

EBERTS: Oh okay.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And ... the loss of men on those islands was terrific.

EBERTS: Did you bring some of those men back to the United States?

HIGGINS: Do what?

EBERTS: Did you bring those men back to the United States?

HIGGINS: No.

EBERTS: No.

PIEHLER: So you came home with an empty cargo ...

HIGGINS: Yep.

PIEHLER: You'd, you'd ...

HIGGINS: We had balast ... seawater.

PIEHLER: Your second ship, how many voyages did you take with that ship? (Higgins holds up one finger.) Just one again. You went out from ... the West Coast and ...

HIGGINS: We went from San Francisco to the ... same place in the Marianas and then up to Guam. And they had just declared Guam, for all intents and purposes, as free. They had taken it back from the Japanese. And that they has—but they still had a few snipers that was hiding out in the caves, ... on Guam. Well, when we got there we had mail call and I got a letter from my mother. And ... I meant to tell you about this chapter. And, uh, she didn't make any difference in so far as the children were concerned she corresponded with my brother, who was really a half-brother, just like she did with me. And his name was Charles Mason Higgins. And, uh, she said, in that letter, that he was somewhere in the South Pacific in the Second Marine Division. So, I believe she even gave the service number, serial number. And so I went to the captain of the port with that letter and I asked him if by any

chance my brother was ... on that island. And he said, "I'll tell ya in just a moment." So, it didn't take but a moment, and he said, "He sure is." And he said, "Do you want to go out and see him?" And I said, "Yes, sir, I sure would."

So he ordered his orderly to take me out there. And we got in this jeep and we had a guard that was black. And mind you, I told you that there were snipers that were still hidden in the caves and what have you on the island of Guam, even though it was declared for all, uh, intents and purposes taken back from the Japanese. And so, this uh—I want you, I want you to envision this now. The island was known as the Pearl of the Pacific before the war. But it was just devastated, wreckage everywhere. And just multiply some of these scenes on Gay Street [Knoxville] where they, uh, used the wrecking balls on those buildings and the whole place of the capital city of Guam was like that. And they had it cleared so you could go down the street, main street. And the—so here we're going along in this jeep, the driver, and the guard sitting in the front seat, the guy that was in charge of the whole thing, and me sitting in the back seat. And all of a sudden, this guard started firing with his carbine up in this palm tree. And, of course, when that happened, the driver stopped. And the guy that was in charge said, "What's going on, soldier?" And he said, "Captain!" he says, "I saw something moving up in that palm tree." He says, "I'm not taking any chances." And about the time he said "chances," down dropped a Japanese body and he had a hand grenade in his hand, ready to pull the trigger. And if we'd have gotten a little closer, he'd have dropped it on us.

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: And had that happened, I wouldn't be here talking to you again.

PIEHLER: And your guard was he a Marine?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: The guard that was assigned to your jeep ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah. He was a Marine.

PIEHLER: He was a black Marine?

HIGGINS: No. Uh, yeah, the guard was a black Marine, yeah.

EBERTS: Wow, it was a close call.

HIGGINS: Pardon?

EBERTS: It was a close call. A very close call.

PIEHLER: A close call.

HIGGINS: Oh yeah, that was a close call.

PIEHLER: Was that the closest call you had in the war? Did you have any more closer?

HIGGINS: I just don't know closer, see during the taking of Saipan and Tinian ... during the general quarters I was confined [phone rings] to a radio shack.

PIEHLER: So you didn't know what was going on above deck?

HIGGINS: See, I was confined to a radio shack and my ship didn't have any direct hits.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: I don't think, as I recall, but one man lost their life ... operating an anti-aircraft.

PIEHLER: But your ship was being ... strafed. Was your ship ever strafed in battles?

HIGGINS: Yeah, it was being strafed, yeah. And, uh, we buried a man at sea. I've forgotten his name. But, anyway, getting back to meeting my brother on the island of Guam.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no I, I ...

HIGGINS: Now that was one ... reunion.

PIEHLER: And he had gone through the battle of Guam?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: The battle to retake Guam.

HIGGINS: Yeah he was in it.

PIEHLER: Did he tell you anything about it?

HIGGINS: No, I don't remember him telling me anything about it.

PIEHLER: Yeah. How did he look to you?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: How did he look to you? Was he the same brother you remembered?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Oh yeah. He was, he was so glad to see me.... I never will forget there in his tent he had some beer. He didn't drink. [I'm] sure he didn't. He said, "Do you want a

beer?" I said, "No" I said, "I don't drink the stuff." He says, "You know" says, "they allot us so many cans of beer a day," he says, "I'm gonna give it to somebody."(Laughter) And then from there ... we went to Leyte Gulf and around different places in the Philippines. That's the supply ship.

PIEHLER: So you were ferrying supplies from point to point.

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: You were ferrying supplies from point to point?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What kind of supplies did you ferry?

HIGGINS: I don't know what was in the cargo.

PIEHLER: Yeah, to you it was just cargo?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: And so much of your time is below deck in the radio room.

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: Much of your time is in the radio room.

HIGGINS: Yeah, that was it, you know. I couldn't desert my station.

PIEHLER: What about the two—in both ships, what do you remember about the radio men that were under you? The radio operators that were under you? You were the ensign.

HIGGINS: Well, uh, one of 'em was from New Orleans I remember, and another was by the name of Turner and I don't remember where he was from. But the one, the reason I remember the one from New Orleans [was] that he name was Narcissus. And, uh, I thought that was most unusual for a name. And he'd tell people, "Just call me N." You know.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: He was a nice guy too. We got along wonderful.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Yeah. But the skipper was the closest one that I—'cause I wasn't supposed to mix and mingle with the others, you know.... One time he really surprised me. I got off duty at eleven o'clock. We'd rotate a watch, you know. And I got off duty at eleven o'clock. I

went down to the officer's mess to get me a sandwich. And I heard a moanin' and groanin' in this room, you know. It was just horrible. So I opened the door and peeked in and it was the, uh—I forgot was his position was aboard the ship, but anyway, he was an officer aboard the ship. And, uh, there was a bottle of, an empty bottle I should say, of aspirins down on the table. It was obvious that he had taken all those aspirins trying to commit suicide. And, uh, so I went dashing upstairs to the skipper's quarters and told him what I had found. He said, "Wait just a minute, Higgins," and I never will forget this, he came back and says, "Here, take this and give it to him." I said, "Skipper, you're not serious, are you?" And he had a bottle of iodine and he wanted me to take down there and kill the guy. (Laughs) He says, "Any son of a bitch that wants to commit suicide in my ship ... I say get rid of him!"

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: And now we, we were layin' an anchor at Manila when that happened. And the next day the MPs came aboard ship, took him to shore, and I haven't seen the guy since. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So you don't know what happened to him?

HIGGINS: No, I don't know what happened.

PIEHLER: But he lived through that.

HIGGINS: Oh yeah, he lived through it, yeah.

PIEHLER: He was an officer?

HIGGINS: Yeah, he was an officer.

PIEHLER: Did you think that this was ...

HIGGINS: We called him first steward.

PIEHLER: He was the steward?

HIGGINS: Yeah, a steward, yeah.

PIEHLER: Uh, was he, and he was ...

HIGGINS: ... and he was in charge of ...

PIEHLER: The mess?

HIGGINS: The mess, yeah.

PIEHLER: How many stewards did you have?

HIGGINS: I think there were two.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And these were the only blacks you had aboard ship?

HIGGINS: How many blacks?

PIEHLER: Yeah, [they] were the two stewards.

HIGGINS: I don't remember, I don't remember how many. But I remember being on the deck when I, on the boat deck where the radio shack was located, sunning, that was on the trip from Hawaii to Tinian and Saipan., and uh, this black man who was a member of the crew in some capacity, but he came by where we were sunning. The guy that was sunning with me was a guy by the name of Fred Smith from Macon, Georgia. And, uh, he's still living. I wish I was able to go down to Macon, Georgia, to visit with him, cause he was a nice guy too. Now he was a full-blown Navy man. We were sunning, like I said, and I remember what this black boy said when he saw us. He said, "White boys, here you is layin' out here in this hot sun trying to get black. Here I is, black, and I sure would like to be white."

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: Now ... I didn't see, you know—that's about as close as I got to any of the blacks aboard ship. Well, I take that back, there was one, they called Fritz. He was an old Navy man of long standing. And I got seasick and he brought me a baked potato and told me not to eat or drink anything else and said, "You'll get over sea sickness," and I did. Well, uh, I'm sort of jumping around a little.

PIEHLER: Oh no that's okay. No you have great stories, you have great.... Um, did you ever ride—did you ever have a trip—were you ever in a tropical storm?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Ohhh yeah! I was on the way back from over there the last trip up in the, I guess you'd call it "Alanada," right off the coast of Alaska and Canada, we were in a storm. We were headed to Seattle. This was the last trip.

PIEHLER: Was this during the war or after the war or after?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Right after.

PIEHLER: Right after the war.

HIGGINS: Yeah. This was the last trip right after the war. And that ship was, man, I tell you, it was just going this, that, and the other, you know. I was on duty in the radio shack and when it'd go to one side, or this side, why I'd meet the wastepaper basket and go (makes vomiting sounds). (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were throwing up a lot!

HIGGINS: Yeah, but I had to stay with it.

EBERTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: And I did. So you know ... (Laughs). But, uh ...

PIEHLER: Did you ever get claustrophobic being in the radio room?

HIGGINS: Yeah, claustrophobia was ...

PIEHLER: Particularly in battle or in the storm, I mean you're really locked in there.

HIGGINS: Yeah, and in battle too. You don't see anything. And, uh, it sometimes scares you to almost, out of you, you know. One time I did it in my pants.

PIEHLER: Because you were so scared?

HIGGINS: Yeah, well it woke me up and I had to go on extra duty. When I got to the radio shack, the thing was over, UT was over. I finally realized I'd done a bad job in my britches.

EBERTS: ... What made you so scared?

HIGGINS: Pardon?

EBERTS: What made you so scared?

HIGGINS: I really don't know, just the overall situation I guess. Uh, here's another interesting anecdote story I wanted to tell you about. They were slow in disembarking from my ship, and uh these technicians that were building Tinian and Saipan, air bases on them, and all. And we had a supply officer on board ship that was just so nosy, ... you know. That radio shack was a restricted area, you know. And, uh, but he'd come and just stand as close as he could, and it was so hot you couldn't close the door. And he's have his ear ...

PIEHLER: He'd have his ear open, listening?

HIGGINS: Yeah, and so his name was Block. And the skipper said to me one day, he said, "Ray," no "Higgins" he called me Higgins, he says, "I don't like the way Block is coming up and listening in to the conversations that you have with the commander of Philippines sea frontier or the Hawaiian sea frontier." And says, "He's not supposed to be there." Says, "Can you think of anything that you can do that would keep him from doing that without me reprimanding him?" I says, "Well, I don't know, Captain." I says, "How about me coming up with a fake message (laughter) and then coming up here and reading to you real loud so

that he can hear it?" He says, "Higgins, that's a good idea." MacArthur had just landed at Leyte Gulf. That was all news on the armed forces radio. And so, uh, I went into the radio shack and I turned up the communications on the loud speaker. And I started writing down ... code, of course, there's always code, you know. And, uh, of course, he didn't know what I was writing. Then I reached down and got my codebook after the broadcast was over. Then I wrote these words, "proceed to Leyte, proceed to latitude so and so and longitude so and so and join a convoy. Destination: Leyte Gulf." Those Japanese planes were sinking those ships over there just like shooting clay pigeons. So, I wrote it up and went up to skipper. He said, "Read it to me Higgins. Read it to me." (Laughter) I read it and I turned around and ole Block was under the bridge there listening to it, you know. I knew he would be. (Laughter) His face was as white as cotton. And it wasn't but just a little while until he came to the skipper and asked for permission to go ashore. We hadn't seen him since. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So he got ...

HIGGINS: He got himself transferred back to Hawaii. He went ashore and, uh, got himself transferred. Allegedly the man that, the oarsman that took him to shore, said he broke his glasses. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So not everyone ... was all gung-ho or patriotic. There were slackers.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I was just reading the other day about all the people who gave their lives in taking Okinawa. And then we gave it back to the Japanese. I don't and, uh—let's see two years ago this past Christmas, the wife and I were down in Crossville went to the Oldsmobile dealership with the idea of trading cars.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

PIELHER: The guy we talked with down there had some literature on the islands of the South Pacific there on his desk. I couldn't help but ...

----- END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO -----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Ray H. Higgins on April 11, 2000 at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, with Kurt Piehler and ...

EBERTS: Ellen Eberts.

PIEHLER: And you were saying you were at this dealership and there was this literature on the South Pacific ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: ... at this dealership.

HIGGINS: He'd been over there, just returned from a missionary trip to these same islands

that I'm talking about. Since then they have united together and formed a confederation, or federation, I guess you might say. And, uh, it was interesting the changes, uh, that the USA doesn't own those islands anymore. Neither does the Japanese. They're an independent federation. Guam, of course, is still one of our bases in the South Pacific. But I thought that would be interesting ...

PIEHLER: 'Cause you—what did you remember of the islands? What were your impressions of the islands? You mentioned the devastation of Guam.

HIGGINS: Yeah, that island. Well, of course, Eniwetok is the one that had the radio station, and I communicated with those people, uh, more than the others. And I went ashore there a couple of times because it was so small there wasn't any place for anybody to hide out. And ... it was three miles long, I believe, and about a mile wide. And most places you could stand and throw a rock to the other side, [on] Eniwetok. Now Eniwetok, I believe, was completely destroyed by bombs, atomic bombs, in an experimental stage after the war.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Yes, it was. Did you ever encounter any of the people that lived on the islands? The original inhabitants of the islands? Any islanders, did you ever encounter ...

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: So you ...

HIGGINS: No, no I didn't.

PIEHLER: What about the Philippines did you ...

HIGGINS: Oh, the Philippines, yes. And I'm surprised that they turned against us over the outcome because we did so much for them.

PIELHER: How, how ...

HIGGINS: And they were so friendly toward American forces. 'Course, we were advised not to eat any of their food because their ways are not American ways, in so far as preserving their food and ... bleeding the animals of disease that they eat and ... growing the crops ...

PIEHLER: How long were you—how many times would you get, [when] you were in the Philippines, would you dock?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Where, where in the Philippines would you dock?

HIGGINS: Well, uh, Mindanao.

PIEHLER: Mindanao.

HIGGINS: Uh huh. And Manila.

PIEHLER: Manila.

HIGGINS: And, uh, Manila and, uh, this Navy base on the other side of Luzon.

PIEHLER: Subic Bay.

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: Is it Subic Bay?

HIGGINS: No. Yes! Yes. Subic Bay. Yes it was in Subic Bay.

PIEHLER: My impression is that Manila, in particular, was pretty devastated by the war, by the retaking of the city from the Japanese. What were your impressions of Manila?

HIGGINS: It was just ... pitiful, really, how that city had been destroyed. Uh, I don't think there was a building intact anywhere with the exception of Santa Tomas University where the Japanese had imprisoned Americans and other nationalities that they accused of spying. And uh, I went out to the Santa Tomas University, and it was pretty, the buildings were pretty well intact, but the occupants were just worse than pitiful. They were just skin and bones. And, uh, Penny Wood, did you read about him? Recently he passed away, he was a former vice president of Home Federal ...

PIEHLER: No, I didn't, uh.

HIGGINS: Well, he was a prisoner of the Japanese during the war and some, uh, of his stories equated with those that were told to me by the occupants of Santa Tomas University. Uh, he was on, uh, the battles that happened [when] they took over the Philippines from us at the beginning of the war. And he was a prisoner from then on. And that's when MacArthur skidaddled and went down to Australia. But it's surprisingly some of 'em even survived at all, because of the diet more than anything else. These people were nothing but skin and bones. I hate to even think about them.

Now going over to ... Subic Bay from Manila, I was one of three officers that went over there, and I forgot the purpose of our mission, but we were told to watch out for Japanese snipers. And it was a hot, real hot day, and, uh, we stopped at this mission that was operated by the Catholic Church in one of these little towns. The Catholic Church was a beautiful building, around it was nothing but straw huts. And we stopped there and these people gave us something to drink and a cookie, I believe it was. And then they charged us for it. And they made ... some of the people so mad they said they'd never give anything to the Catholic Church again. (Laughter) But it didn't phase me. I guess, they did the best they could. But we, we attended a movie while we were at Subic Bay and they had a big area that was marked off with something like cowbells, you know, to let us know if a Japanese sniper was

coming in. And, uh, our movie was interrupted. (Laughs) I forgot now what the movie was but, uh ...

PIEHLER: But you knew it was interrupted.

HIGGINS: Yeah. There was somebody ...

PIEHLER: There was a sniper there?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious about daily life aboard ship, um, there were—how many officers were there and how often would you do watch? In addition to your regular ...

HIGGINS: The days were twenty-four hours.

PIEHLER: Twenty-four hours. But how often, would you, were you ...

HIGGINS: Four hours each.

PIEHLER: Four hours each.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How did that throw off your sleep cycle? 'Cause you ...

HIGGINS: Well, you'd get accustomed to it.

PIEHLER: You'd get accustomed. What about the darkness? I've been told by Navy people that doing watch, it gets very dark at night, and you're not, you know, you don't have lights. Did you develop a night, sort of, vision?

HIGGINS: Well, you'd just have to, well you'd have little lights aboard ship sort of like night lights on [during] the day in some areas. But in ...

PIEHLER: But when you're doing deck duty it's very, I've been told ...

HIGGINS: In most ... most times you had to have, let's see, what'd they call it? Dead ... reckoning. Because you didn't have any lights at all. It'd be a dead giveaway of the convoy, ... and then it'd make you a sitting duck for the Japanese submarines.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. But navigation in a convoy, you can run into things if you're not careful.

HIGGINS: Yeah. You sure can.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have any close calls there, in convoy?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Well, it, uh, was a hair-raising experience to say the least. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about your food? How good was the food aboard the ship?

HIGGINS: The food, for my part, was excellent. But, of course, we got low on food several times. We would eat, um, dried potatoes, dried eggs, and we had to take atabrine tablets, at least an atabrine tablet once a day, to ward off mosquitoes, especially at, uh, in Manila and Guam.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Did your, all of your men take the atabrine tablets? Did you have to force your men to take their atabrine tablets?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: They took them willingly.

HIGGINS: Willingly. They, we had the atabrine tablets dispensers throughout ...

PIEHLER: Throughout the ship.

HIGGINS: ... throughout the ship. Yeah. No problem. You could tell they were taking them because ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, you'd ...

HIGGINS: Well you'd turn yellow ...

PIEHLER: ... you'd turn yellow.

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And you had a yellow tinge, probably, when you got home.

HIGGINS: Yeah. I did.

EBERTS: And people noticed?

HIGGINS: And it took me some time to get over it, get it out of my system.

PIEHLER: So the food was pretty good until you ran low?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: The food was pretty good until you ran low?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Were you one of the lucky ships to have ice cream? An ice cream maker?

HIGGINS: I don't remember us having anything like that.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. You didn't have ice cream?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: What about showers? Did you have fresh water or salt water?

HIGGINS: Oh no. We had fresh water for a while and then after that ran out, we had saltwater showers. I'd rather not have a shower than one [of them]. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When you were out at sea, I mean when you're not on duty or in the radio room, I mean what did you do to ...

HIGGINS: Read.

PIEHLER: Read. 'Cause you mentioned your morning walk ...

HIGGINS: And I walked.

PIEHLER: But you did a lot of reading?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What did you read?

HIGGINS: Well I'd read, when it was available, I'd read books, Newsweek, and, uh, Reader's Digest, books like that, that I got at the Navy PX.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What about—was there any gambling on your ship?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You didn't, did you gamble at all?

HIGGINS: No. I didn't gamble at all.

PIEHLER: But your crew, how about the crew?

HIGGINS: Yeah. They participated in that quite a bit. I didn't.

PIEHLER: You didn't. You didn't ...

HIGGINS: [I] didn't say anything. They had to have a little recreation.

PIEHLER: What about, a lot of Navy people remember very, particularly more so the enlisted men, beer parties. Did you ever have any beer parties where you would ...

HIGGINS: Only one. And that was after the war was over.

PIEHLER: That was after the war?

HIGGINS: Yeah. We were celebrating.

PIEHLER: But no, you never took your men out for a beer party at one of the islands.

HIGGINS: No. That would strictly be a violation of set rules at that time, because we had to be in a state of readiness at all times.

PIEHLER: So you were never in a port where you could give your men a beer party?

HIGGINS: After the war was over.

PIEHLER: After the war. You had to wait until the ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, we had one in Seattle, Washington, after the war was over. And, uh, but it was only for the officers. The crew didn't ...

PIEHLER: So you never arranged a beer party for your crew?

HIGGINS: No. They'd already, uh, gone down to Treasure Island.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: The ship, uh, was going to be dismantled. It had been sold, the war's over, it'd been sold to the Gillette Razor Blade Company. And we officers had to stay with it until a certain date and that's when we had the beer party. (Laughter) And, uh, it was the New Washington Hotel, I'll never forget it.

PIEHLER: In Seattle.

HIGGINS: In Seattle.

PIEHLER: It sounds like it was a great party.

HIGGINS: Yeah. And the executive officer got drunk, and he embarrassed me, and he embarrassed my old buddy that was with me ... that was a new supply officer that took the

one's place that flew back, a fellow by the name of Dick Fiedler, [he] embarrassed both of us, he walked through this plate glass window to the coffee shop.

PIEHLER: Because he was so drunk.

HIGGINS: He was so drunk, you know.

PIEHLER: He could have really gotten hurt.

HIGGINS: Oh yeah! He got cut all over. We sent him to the hospital. I've never heard from him since! (Laughter) New experience.

PIEHLER: After you decommissioned the ship, what happened? After it was decommissioned and sent to Gillette to make razor blades?

HIGGINS: After we decommissioned the ship?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Well, after it was decommissioned and everything, we went down to Treasure Island. I'd like to tell you about that.

PIEHLER: No, please do!

HIGGINS: Yeah. There was a navigation officer, who was a married man, and he had a family and they were going to meet him down at New Orleans, I mean ...

PIEHLER: Treasure Island.

HIGGINS: ... Treasure Island. And, uh, he had rented a hotel room in the New Washington Hotel. And he wanted me and Dick Fiedler to, uh, stop by and have a few beers with him, and what have you. Before we went up to the skipper's headquarters, he had the Bridal Suite up there, he and his wife and his daughter, and so ... we told him we would. We knocked on the door. "Come in." And, uh, he said, "Ok! Which one of you's next?" Now he was laying in bed, just as naked as a jaybird, and this woman is in there with him also, same thing. So, I don't know whether it was Dick Fiedler or me, but one of us said, "We'll see you later!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you just got out of there.

HIGGINS: We didn't even go in. We went on up to the ...

PIEHLER: So the woman had said, "Which one is next"?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Who had said, “which one ...”

HIGGINS: Oh, the navigation officer said, “Which one of you’s next?” You know. (Laughter) So we went on up to where they were having the party. And, uh, we got the Pullman Headquarters, you know, orders to go from Seattle down to San Francisco. (Tape Paused) We got our things together and left the ship in the care of legal guardians from the Gillette Razor Blade Company and took off to San Francisco. And, uh, the next morning we were going from Pullman to a day ... coach in order to get to the diner. And we were going to this day coach and, all of a sudden, something grabbed me by the legs: “Higgins! Ohh Higgins! Please help me! Please help me!” I said, “Man, what’s wrong with you?” And it was this guy, up there in that bed, you know ...

PIEHLER: Oh, the executive ...

HIGGINS: He says, “I’m going down to San Francisco to meet my wife,” says, “I’ve got the worse case of gonorrhea a sailor ever had!” (Laughter) “Sorry! Can’t help you!” (Laughter) And that’s the last time I saw him ...

PIEHLER: ... saw him. Was ... aboard the train.

HIGGINS: Yeah. I’ve forgotten his name. But I talk to this Dick Fiedler every once and a while. He lives at Los Angeles. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I have a feeling this is one of your favorites, one of the stories you exchange this ...

HIGGINS: You know, ... we were glad—see we landed and anchored in Manila a long time waiting for the assignment for the Japanese invasion. And the atomic bomb was dropped and the whole situation was changed. We ended up going up there ...

PIEHLER: To?

HIGGINS: ... to Japan.

PIEHLER: So you did go to Japan?

HIGGINS: Yoka ... yeah, Yokohama, Japan.

PIEHLER: So that was your third voyage, that was your, your post after the ...

HIGGINS: That’s what we did, after we left Manila, we went on up there.

PIEHLER: And what was your mission? Why did you go up to Yokohama, Japan?

HIGGINS: To take some men, as well as supplies.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Did ... you ever set foot in Japan, in Yokohama?

HIGGINS: Oh yeah. Yeah. Sure did. And they were just as nice and friendly as the Filipinos were!

PIEHLER: Really?

EBERTS: Really!

PIEHLER: Yeah, you didn't ...

EBERTS: I'm surprised ...

PIEHLER: Did that surprise you, how friendly the Japanese were?

HIGGINS: Yeah. It was really surprising. And, uh, we had a Japanese pilot to steer us into harbor. And we'd already had mail call before he took over. And Dick Fiedler, the supply officer, had gotten a letter from his girlfriend, a "Dear John" letter. And he said to me, he said, "I'll tell you what," he said, "we were supposed to get married when I got back." Says, "I want to fix her up." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm entitled to one more date," and he says, "I'm going to fix her up." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "I'm going to put some Spanish Fly in her drink." And I said, "Surely you wouldn't do that." And he said, "I sure will. Somebody that two-faced and double-crosses me," says, "She deserves it." Well, I, not knowing the situation, I didn't argue with him. So this Japanese pilot was about ready to disembark on the ship after we tied up at the dock at Yokohama, Japan, and so he could speak perfect English. And Dick accosted him and he says, "Sir, could you do something for me?" And he said, "Be glad to help you any way I can." He said, "Would you write out the Japanese symbols for ..." that medication I can't think of it right off. I said it just a few minutes ago ...

PIEHLER: Spanish Fly?

HIGGINS: ... yeah, Spanish Fly. And he said, "I'd be glad to!" (Laughs) So he wrote the Japanese symbols down there, you know. And so we went ashore after that and, uh, he went into this Japanese drugstore. And I'll never forget this scene either, and he asked this Japanese, uh, he'd like to have an order of this particular drug, you know, and he looked at it and he backed off, "No got! No got! No got!" And that was the end of that! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: That was the end of that.

HIGGINS: That was the end of that.

PIEHLER: So he never actually went through, to your knowledge, your friend never went through with it with his girlfriend?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: He never went through with it with his ex-girlfriend?

HIGGINS: Oh no. No, no. (Laughs) Well, anyway that's a good funny story. But we went to this warehouse where all these guns were stored, from the Japanese Marines.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And, uh, ... an American soldier was on guard duty protecting those guns, you know. And I asked him for one. And he says, "Sir, I can't give it to you." But he says, "I'll tell you what, I'll turn my back, and [there's] nothing to keep me from doing that. And you can go in there and get one." (Laughter) So Dick and I both did. And I had mine up until we had our house broken into, about how many years ago, hon?

JEAN HIGGINS: Oh. Sixteen ...

HIGGINS: About sixteen or seventeen years ago they broke into our house up on the hill and stole that Japanese rifle. And I had the saber with it. Bayonet, they call it, I guess.

PIEHLER: Did you—you were in Manila Bay when the word of the Japanese surrender occurred?

HIGGINS: Yeah. I was, no. Yeah, I was too. Yeah. I was in Manila Bay. I want to tell you about this too.

PIEHLER: No please do.

HIGGINS: We were in Manila Bay and I was on duty. And I heard ... the most distressing message, I mean, I received the most distressing message of my career with the Navy. It said, "Attention all ships at sea." Uh, I'm trying to recall ... the exact words of it. But anyway, it was on the Armed Forces Radio. It says, "Our Commander-in-Chief, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, has passed away at Warm Springs, Georgia, and Harry S. Truman is now the President of our country," or words to that effect. So I took that message to the skipper, and I never, he was a strong man, and he just stood there, big tears rolled out of his eyes. And finally he gained his composure and he went to the public address system and he said, "Now hear this. Now hear this." And he read that. And, you know, you'd look around on the ship at the crew and everything, and there wasn't a dry eye anywhere. And then, later on, when people gained their composure or got a hold of themselves, it was finally—someone just said, "Who in the hell is Harry S. Truman?" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Because you had never heard of this guy before, Harry S. ...

HIGGINS: Harry Truman?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Yeah.... I knew he was Vice President.

PIEHLER: But that's about all.

HIGGINS: But that's about it, you know. Yeah.

PIEHLER: What did Roosevelt mean to people? Why, why, you know, you mentioned the Captain was a tough guy ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah, Tillman he was a tough guy.

PIEHLER: Why, what did Roosevelt mean to people? Your father was not a big Roosevelt person until the war, so why were people so upset? I mean, because I think that people like Ellen don't understand, I think, what Roosevelt meant to people.

HIGGINS: Well, I think that the war had gone on so long, that people began to realize that there was a valid reason for it, and that ... FDR had really gotten us out of the Depression, at least it had happened under his Administration.

PIEHLER: Had you remembered any other President besides Roosevelt? Did you remember anything about Hoover?

HIGGINS: Roosevelt was the first one.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And, uh, but anyway, uh, let's see. There was something else I was going to tell you about that. I've got a letter here from Harry S. Truman. It reads: "To Ray Hilton Higgins, to you who have answered your call to duty ..."

PIEHLER: And this was the letter you got when you left, uh [reading]: "... Ray Hilton Higgins ... to you who answered the call of your country and served in its Merchant Marine to bring about the total defeat of the enemy, I extend the heartfelt thanks of the nation. You undertook a most severe task, one which calls for courage and fortitude because you demonstrated the resourcefulness and calm judgment necessary to carry out that task. We now look to you for leadership and example in further serving our country in peace. Harry Truman. The White House."

EBERTS: Wow.

PIEHLER: Now, but you were on a Navy ship the whole ...

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... but you were considered technically part of Merchant Marine.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you were able to get G.I. Bill.

HIGGINS: Yeah. No!

PIEHLER: No.

HIGGINS: That's what bothered me.

PIEHLER: But you drew, did you draw Navy pay, or ...

HIGGINS: Navy.

PIEHLER: You drew Navy pay.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

EBERTS: How can that be?

PIEHLER: That sounds like one real fiasco. Or one snafu, uh ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. See there were all kinds of snafus during the war. And I was a victim of one of 'em. Uh, I wondered what would've happened to me if I hadn't followed orders, you know. Sometimes ...

PIEHLER: Well, it might have straightened out your paperwork. (Laughter) But no, you felt like you had to follow—it doesn't sound like you had much of a choice. But ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah. What was it we that were talking about before I got off on Harry Truman?

PIEHLER: Well, you were there, you were telling us about Roosevelt's message, the word. Did you have any sort of service aboard ship, memorial service for Roosevelt?

HIGGINS: For Roosevelt? Uh, no, we didn't.

PIEHLER: Did you, um ...

HIGGINS: We had one for this guy that they buried at sea.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you did have that. Did you—you didn't have a chaplain aboard? You were ...

HIGGINS: No. No,

PIEHLER: Did you ever ...

HIGGINS: ... No, I take that back. We did too. Yeah we did too, on the trip from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor. We had a chaplain.

PIEHLER: Did you, uh, when you didn't have a chaplain, did you have services aboard ship?

HIGGINS: Uh, yes we did.

PIEHLER: Who led the services?

HIGGINS: The chaplain.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but when he wasn't aboard ship did ...

HIGGINS: We didn't have any.

PIEHLER: ... you didn't have any services.

HIGGINS: I would turn the, uh, the off sources, I mean, I would turn the radio on, the high powered radio, where I could receive stateside broadcasts and, uh, I would pick up ... this "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" they called it from San Diego, California. And then ... put it on the loudspeakers all over the ship. And [for] news broadcasts, I would do the same thing and also ... the Hit Parade. Now that went over big with the crew, the Hit Parade.

PIEHLER: The Hit Parade. That was their favorite?

HIGGINS: Yeah, that was their favorite.

PIEHLER: What about Tokyo Rose?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: Tokyo Rose. Did you ever ...

HIGGINS: Oh yeah, we picked her up but we wouldn't ...

PIEHLER: You wouldn't put her over the loudspeaker.

HIGGINS: Naw. No we wouldn't. (Laughs) She had very, very little effect on ...

PIEHLER: On your crew.

HIGGINS: ... on my crew.

PIEHLER: What about, um, you didn't have a physician on board?

HIGGINS: No, but we had a ...

PIEHLER: Surgeon's mate.

HIGGINS: ... we had a, what'd they call 'em ...

PIEHLER: Medic? Surgeon's mate?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Or, I guess, a Navy corpsman is actually ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, Navy corpsman is what they called him.

PIEHLER: And, uh, any serious medical problems?

HIGGINS: Uh.

PIEHLER: Serious medical problems on ship.

HIGGINS: No, we didn't have any.

PIEHLER: You didn't have any ...

HIGGINS: One of the most serious ones was ... as a result of Ensign Fred Smith and I laying out in the sun.

PIEHLER: Oh, you got sun poisoning.

HIGGINS: And our legs were all swollen up.

EBERTS: Oh.

HIGGINS: And, uh, we managed to go to a Naval base where there was a doctor in Manila. And, uh, the guy aboard ship had told us we had to drop-see. (Laughs) And then the medical corpsman aboard ship told us that we had to dropsy and the doctor there said, "No, it was just too much sun." Said it would clear up in a few days, and it did. (Laughter) But he operated, this uh ...

PIEHLER: Corpsman?

HIGGINS: ... his corpsman operated on one of the crewmen ...

PIEHLER: For what?

HIGGINS: ... for a cyst that was under his arm, and took it out. And then he smothered it with iodine. (Laughter) And the guy just, oh, I mean it wasn't funny to him I'm sure, but ...

PIEHLER: But he was pretty upset.

HIGGINS: ... he was pretty upset. He went around with his arm like. (Gestures)

PIEHLER: Holding it up in the air. (Laughter)

HIGGINS: For a long time. But it cleared up.

PIEHLER: When did you learn, I guess, ... were you in the radio room when the word came of the Japanese surrendering and of the atomic bomb attacks? Did you pick up those messages? How did you learn about the atomic bombs, and then later the Japanese surrender?

HIGGINS: Uh, by Armed Forces Radio.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What did you know about the atomic bomb? What was your initial thoughts about it?

HIGGINS: I didn't know a thing about it! It was completely a surprise for me, even ... that the planes came from the bases that were built at Saipan and Tinian. Just came—I think it came as a surprise to everybody because, see all of the information that they had come through me.

PIEHLER: And you were really expecting to be part of the invasion of Japan?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: When you ... left Manila and you went to Japan, you were taking men and supplies, did you take anyone back from Japan? Where did you take, did you take any supplies or men from Japan?

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: No. So your ship was never part of MAGIC CARPET.

HIGGINS: We went from Yokohama then to Seattle.

PIEHLER: Seattle. By way of Alaska?

HIGGINS: No, yeah, well it was pretty—that's where ...

PIEHLER: You mentioned that storm. The storm that ...

HIGGINS: ... yeah. Yeah, we got that storm.

PIEHLER: And then, you mentioned going, you had a great party in Seattle, at the Hotel, the New Washington Hotel, then you took the train down to Treasure Island. And then what happened?

HIGGINS: Uh, I came on home. And, uh, contacted these people that were the owners of these towboats that brought the submarines down from Chicago. And they said that they'd give me a job as a radioman aboard one of their towboats. And I went to St. Louis and worked for a little while.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you went to Sheepshead Bay at one point. When did you go there? When was that?

HIGGINS: After about six or eight months. And I went down to New Orleans on one of those boats. And, uh, I had heard that they were in urgent need of people of my previous training to come to Sheepshead Bay for update training on RADAR, LORAN, SONAR and all of those things. And I did. That's where I contacted them and I went there almost direct up there from New Orleans. And, uh, again I was in the service again, see. And that's where I roomed with this black man.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the black roommate.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And, um, how did you like being back on, I guess, before talking about Brooklyn and afterwards, how did you like being back on the Mississippi?

HIGGINS: I didn't like it and I'd made up my mind that ...

PIEHLER: That's a part of why you took this offer to go ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. I said I'm going to pursue another form of a vocation. And so I had always wanted to go to David Lipscomb College, but the University of Tennessee was more the ... school that would [have the] best curriculum. It was a lot broader than David Lipscomb College. And so I decided on coming to the University of Tennessee.

PIEHLER: So after you did your training in Sheepshead Bay, that's when you decided this really wasn't for you.

HIGGINS: Yeah. That's when I decided that this—I just can't follow a life of this type. I'm a family man and I'm gonna follow a career in something else where I can do things that I enjoy. And so I did. I came to the University of Tennessee, and that's where I met Blue Eyes over there. (Gestures to wife). (Laughter) And, uh, I was humiliated, I was embarrassed, and none of my friends over at University of Tennessee know, to this day, that I

served as I did, because I didn't tell them.

PIEHLER: You didn't tell them what?

EBERTS: Really?

HIGGINS: I applied for schooling under the G.I. Bill of Rights and was told that I was not eligible. And it took me until ... '88 I think it was, and by that time all of my records had been stored up at that warehouse in St. Louis had burned, and, uh, not intentionally I don't think, the whole warehouse burned, and I couldn't replace them, but I just kept pressing, I kept pressing, I kept pressing, and, uh, I finally contacted Captain Tillman. And Captain Tillman was living out near San Pedro, California. And he was in charge of operations on the Victory ship. And they were converting it, the Victory ship, to where it'd be living quarters for distinguished guests that were going to go to, uh, Normandy for the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy. And so I contacted him. And that man was—he just acted so thrilled to hear from me.

PIEHLER: Because you hadn't talked to him since the war?

HIGGINS: I hadn't talked to him since the war. And I told him I needed his help, and why I needed help. 'Course, in the meantime I had already graduated from UT and [was] really retired and, uh, from my career, and so he said he'd help me in any way he could. And he helped me get some papers together that said that the VA—and, uh, I was finally recognized as a veteran of World War II. And I ... had to employ an attorney and I had to make a trip to Washington, D.C. And that's what this right here is. (Thumps a file full of papers) The records of my efforts and anyway, it was finally ...

PIEHLER: You were finally given ...

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... your veteran status.

HIGGINS: Yeah. I have veteran status now. But ... I tell you what, I had a classmate that I started to school with in the first grade, and went all the way up to the twelfth grade, in a small class like that you get to know everyone pretty well. And he paid the supreme sacrifice in Italy. And he was just a fine young man. And his mother was a fine woman. And he got killed. He was in a Jeep that ran over a landmine that blew him to smithereens.

PIEHLER: What was his name?

HIGGINS: Joe Lee Jones. And they brought him back to Wartrace, his remains, to have him—and buried him in Wartrace. And Mrs. Jones was so embarrassed, I mean grieved and everything, and she called my mother and asked her about where I was. She wanted me to come back to Wartrace and be a pallbearer at his funeral. And I was so embarrassed that I found a reason to not go.

PIEHLER: Why were you so embarrassed?

HIGGINS: Well, I wasn't recognized as a veteran at that time.

PIEHLER: So you missed your good friend's funeral?

HIGGINS: Yeah. I just couldn't—and my friends couldn't understand, I didn't think, at least, so I wouldn't go back.

PIEHLER: Did you try to straighten out the situation after, initially when you got back?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Did you try to straighten this out with the Navy Department when you got back in '45?

HIGGINS: No. I waited until ... I started at the University of Tennessee. I had a lot of work to do, catch up, you know. And when I applied for help under the G.I. Bill and was turned down, I was so embarrassed I didn't know what to do really that when I said to myself, "Well I'll just make it on my own."

PIEHLER: So how ...

HIGGINS: You know. And I did.

PIEHLER: So how did you pay for college then?

HIGGINS: With the money that I'd saved ...

PIEHLER: During the service?

HIGGINS: ... while I was in the service, yeah.

PIEHLER: Was that enough?

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You had saved enough to pay for tuition ...

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... and room and board.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... and did you live on campus?

HIGGINS: What?

PIEHLER: Did you live on campus?

HIGGINS: Did I live on ...

----- END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE -----

PIEHLER: You had mentioned you lived in which hall again?

HIGGINS: South Stadium Hall. And then ... there was a men's dormitory they built off campus there, I can't think of the name of it right off, but it was—I moved from there over to that place. I could have more privacy because ...

JEAN HIGGINS: It was Melrose, wasn't it?

HIGGINS: What was the name of it? Melrose Hall. I moved to Melrose Hall and lived there until just before I graduated. I started making preparations because I cornered you know who over here. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you met your wife at the University?

HIGGINS: Yes I did.

PIEHLER: Where did you meet?

HIGGINS: Well, I was in Byerly's Cafeteria up from E&E drugstore, and, uh, having a cup of coffee with one of my classmates. And, uh, he waved at this girl that was over in the line. And he said something about, "Do you know her?" I said, "No, but I'd like to know her, though." He said, "When she comes around here by the cashier I'll stop her and introduce you." Well, I come to find out that she had known him for some time and his wife was a good friend of hers. And, uh, the next, she was working for Dean Dunford, Dean of Students. And ... the next day I found an excuse to go over to the Dean of Students office, and I looked over the counter, and I never will forget this scene, and [I] saw those two beautiful blue eyes and I said, "That's the woman for me!" We started dating and that's it. (Laughter)

EBERTS: And what was your wife doing during the war?

HIGGINS: What?

EBERTS: What did your wife do during the war?

HIGGINS: She was a student at the University.

EBERTS: The whole time?

HIGGINS: Yeah. She majored in English, Spanish, and Latin. (Laughter)

JEAN HIGGINS: No, not English. Latin. I majored in Latin. Minored in Spanish.

HIGGINS: And, uh, how did English come in, hon? You taught that too.

JEAN HIGGINS: Yeah. Oh, I know because they said that I had enough of a foreign language that I should be able to teach English.

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughter) Well anyway, that's the way it is.

PIEHLER: Going to school what was your major?

HIGGINS: Well, I took a curriculum of, uh, getting a B.S. degree and then going on to Law College.

PIEHLER: Did you go to law, did you end of up going to Law School? Did you go to Law School?

HIGGINS: No. I got admitted to Law School, but shortly after I got admitted I found out that my son was on the way and that meant [it was time] for Ray Higgins to get out and go to work. And so I had several job offers from all over the country, ... people wanting me to work in their firms. After discussing any and all with Jean, I said to myself, "She's gonna be unhappy if I leave Knoxville." And so I decided I'd find me a job here in Knoxville. And I found a job with the Southern Fire and Casualty Company. And I enjoyed it very, very much. They merged with another company, Pilot Fire and Casualty Company, in '66. And again, I found that not only would my wife be unhappy if I moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, but also my in-laws and my children. So I was out-voted there again. And I said to myself, "Well, I'll just go into business for myself." And I did. Had a successful agency and I retired in '87. I retired because of stress and I had open-heart surgery.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How did you—it's very different for you when you were part of a company and then you worked for yourself. What were the rewards and what did you like about being part of a company now that you were on your own?

HIGGINS: Well, I liked the associates that I was with. After I left the company I liked them all the more. I just really, you know, I realized how much they meant to me. For a company to succeed, of any size, the employees have got to cooperate and work together, and pull together just like a football team, you know. And, uh, so I did, and I hated—I stayed up all night writing my letter of resignation. And, uh, then after I turned it in, I said to myself, "Did I do the right thing?" You know. And the guys that I worked with at Southern Fire and Casualty Company have kept in contact with me, and I with them. One by one the old reaper has taken them. And those that are remaining are either in as bad shape as I am, or worse.

One's got terminal cancer and another's got congestive heart failure like I've got. Another had Alzheimer's disease and was confined to a rest home for about four years down in Jacksonville, Florida.... But I've kept in contact with 'em all these years. Just like the ... officers that I worked with aboard ship, Dick Fiedler and Captain Tillman. Captain Tillman didn't exactly share my views on a religious basis. But, um, Dick Fiedler and I went on liberty in Manila. You heard of the Walled City of Manila?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure.

HIGGINS: It encompassed several Catholic Churches and they were just beautiful. And they were preserved in the Battle of Manila. Those churches, I guess, served as sanctuary because they were still in such good condition. I was out taking a picture of them and I missed him, Dick Fiedler, and guess where I found him? Up until this point I didn't know he was Catholic. But he was at the altar and the priest was standing there with his hand over his head. He was a top-notch guy. I had to go back to that because I never wanted to forget that part of it.

PIEHLER: No, no. That is a good story. 'Cause what did you think of, I mean, I get the sense Catholics growing up—what did you think of Catholics? Had you ...

HIGGINS: My boss at the insurance company was Catholic and he was a gentleman in every way. And I just thought as much of him as I could.

PIEHLER: But in the 1930s, what did you think of Catholics before you'd met Catholics?

HIGGINS: Well, really I hadn't given much ...

PIEHLER: Much thought.

HIGGINS: ... thought to it. I hadn't given much thought to it. I had given a lot of thought to Jewish people, though. Because you know the Jewish people were subject to persecution and also prejudice of all kinds. And sometimes you can't blame folks for looking at it that way. There was, uh, when I was growing up I told you [that] dollars were hard to come by. And there was a shoe store that came into Shelbyville by the name of Joe Katz. Somehow or other my father got roped into it and he bought me and my brother some shoes there. And like I said, we walked to school. Shortly after school started on the way to school, why there came a big rain and our feet got wet, we didn't have anything on them to cover 'em, you see, [we] didn't have galoshes, as they called them, at that time. It wasn't expected to rain. Well, the next day those shoes just came apart. And later the baseboard, you know. And, uh, by the time we, my father had realized that we'd been taken, Joe Katz had moved out of town! We didn't know where he was he'd closed up. (Laughs) 'Course, that's just one example because there's a lot of nice folks in every ... faith and every race. A lot of good people left in this whole world. Otherwise the Good Lord would let it collapse, I guess.

EBERTS: I was going to—uh, your son served in the Army. What did you think about that?

HIGGINS: My son serving in the Army?

EBERTS: Yeah, as opposed to the Navy.

HIGGINS: Well, I thought it was all right. He made his choice. Yeah, he made his choice so that, I'm real proud of him. He was a captain in the Army right when Vietnam was at its highest.

JEAN HIGGINS: He went in as a captain, though, if they had medical degrees, you know.

(Phone rings)

HIGGINS: And uh ...

PIEHLER: And your son is a veterinarian?

HIGGINS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Your son is a veterinarian? You mentioned earlier ...

HIGGINS: Yes. He's a veterinarian down in Crossville. And, um, I'm not saying this braggingly or anything folks, so please forgive me if you think I am, but, uh, he's a fine young man. And he has a good clientele there, and people seem to think a lot of him. When we go down there to visit we'll go out to eat somewhere, and invariably people see him, you know. And they'll come over and say something to him, you know. And a lot of people down at that church where we go to when we're down there will come up to us and say, "You're Ed Higgins' father." Say, "I can really see it." (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you're now a member of some veterans' organizations ...

(Tape paused)

HIGGINS: What did you say?

PIEHLER: You are now a member—you listed on your pre-interview sheet that you are a member of the American Legion and Disabled Veterans.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: When did you join these organizations?

HIGGINS: About the time that I was accepted ...

PIEHLER: Once you got veteran's ...

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you become active in any posts? Any ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. I'm real active in, or was until I got disabled where I can't drive. I've taken so much medicine that I think it would be a disadvantage to you, as well as to me, to drive. So I quit. And this right here I received the other day from the Disabled Veterans' organization. (Shows certificate).

PIEHLER: You said you were active in your local Legion post?

HIGGINS: Well no, I wasn't active in it. I just went a few times.

PIEHLER: You went a few times to ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. And I don't want to say anything against the American Legion, but, ... the post that I belonged to is down here on Asheville Highway. And, uh, I went in there one day when we were about to have our 50th Anniversary from graduation from high school. And I asked the guys in there about it, because I wanted to remember my friend and classmate from grammar school and high school by the name of Joe Lee Jones.... So they didn't know how to handle that situation because—says, “So and so will be here tomorrow at such and such a time. You can stop by then,” and says, “He'll tell you what to do.” So I stopped by there, and all of them were drunk or on the verge of getting drunk. So I said, “Adios,” and left. That's not my cup of tea.

PIEHLER: So you didn't drink very much when you were in the military?

HIGGINS: No. In the Navy.

PIEHLER: ... in the Navy, well yeah in the Navy.

HIGGINS: Yeah. It was military, really.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Well, no, you were in the military, but the Navy, yeah.

HIGGINS: Well, I tell you when we stopped off ... at Pearl Harbor to form this convoy, the gunnery officer was a fellow by the name of Busch. B-U-S-C-H. And, um, he and I went to, on liberty together, and we went in this bar and he talked me into drinking a Singapore Sling. Do you know what a Singapore Sling is?

PIEHLER: It sounds like it would probably—if you're not used to drinking, it'd really ...

HIGGINS: Oh man. After that it threw me for a loop and I was sick for two or three days. (Laughter)

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: So that's my limit. Now this guy, Ken Pryor that I was telling you about that I met in Boston, he'd go drinking. And his dad was sort of like mine he'd give him lectures on what to do and what to do as a man, even though he was out, technically speaking, on his own. I remember him telling us onetime, "Now boys, ... don't get in any of those beer drinking parties," he says, beer is for peasants."

EBERTS: Peasants?

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughs) Those words were ...

PIEHLER: Were his, yeah. I just—you'd talked a little bit, your son had served in the Army and he was a captain. Uh, your daughter, Alice Higgins Hodges, ... could you tell us a little about her?

HIGGINS: Well I'd be glad to. She went to UT and she graduated from UT. And her major was English, wasn't it Jean?

JEAN HIGGINS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And she decided she would go down to Auburn University and get her master's where her brother was. So she went down there and she got her master's degree, and at the same time she met her husband, who is Chris Hodges. And he, too, is a veterinarian, was until Good Friday two years ago at which time he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and he hasn't been able to follow that profession since. But, uh, he's a—again, now he's reached an embarrassing stage of his life, he has to stay home, what age, what age is he Jean, forty-six?

JEAN HIGGINS: Forty-eight.

HIGGINS: And he has to stay home and look at four walls, his mind's good, but he can't walk hardly. And, uh, he would have died, had they not gotten him to the hospital as quick as they did. He collapsed at the door when they, when he came in, when he came in from work on Good Friday. Two years ago, '98.

JEAN HIGGINS: He and our son were surgical mates at Auburn together.

HIGGINS: And our daughter, our daughter, um, she took a job with the school system up in Covington, Kentucky teaching English. And then, uh, last year, last fall she was offered a job with the Department of Education, State of Kentucky. And that meant about a doubling of her salary and so she resigned from her teaching job and took that, with the State of Kentucky. And that's what she's doing now.

PIEHLER: And does she work in Frankfort? The capital. Does she work in the ...

JEAN HIGGINS: About two days a week.

PIEHLER: Two days a week. You also have another relative who served, ... it sounds like he

was a ... career Marine. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Richard Higgins. Could you tell me a little bit about him?

HIGGINS: Well, um, yeah, I didn't know him.

PIEHLER: You didn't know him.

HIGGINS: I didn't know him, but I'd like to tell you about him. As I told you, my dad had two brothers, Robert and Jim. None of 'em had a middle name. And, uh, back in, after World War I was over, Bob Higgins decided to go up to someplace in Kentucky and make his living. What he was doing in all I don't know. But he and my father were never very close. I remember seeing him one time. And, uh, but anyway he settled up there in Kentucky. And he had a large family and we didn't know his family either. But ... Colonel William R. Higgins that was hung in the country of Lebanon, uh, we had a cousin that had retired from the military academy up in Annapolis, and he did some research in family history and all. And he told us at one of my family reunions, right after Lieutenant Colonel Higgins was hung, that he was our cousin by Uncle Bob Higgins.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. But you never knew him personally?

HIGGINS: No, I never knew him personally.

PIEHLER: Because I remember that he was with the UN Peacekeeping Operation ...

HIGGINS: In, in ...

PIEHLER: ... in Lebanon.

HIGGINS: ... in Lebanon, yeah. His wife came over to the Masonic Temple and spoke about, uh, was it two or three years ago, wasn't it, hon?

JEAN HIGGINS: At least three.

HIGGINS: Three years ago, on Armed Forces Day. And I'd never met her before then either. So that's the way that is, you know. A lot of times when brothers get married and move off, they and their brother go their separate ways, and the families really don't get to know each other.

PIEHLER: Are there any motion pictures or novels that capture your World War II experience?

HIGGINS: Uh, what?

PIEHLER: Any movies or novels, films or novels that capture, ... that accurately depict what your life was like in the Navy?

HIGGINS: Well, this one right here has to do with our wedding.

PIEHLER: This is your wedding announcement.

HIGGINS: Yeah. After it was all over. And this right here is where my mother had a family gathering afterwards. I didn't know whether you'd like that or not.

JEAN HIGGINS: Ray, he asked you if there were any movies or novels that would depict things that you might think about the war.

HIGGINS: No.

PIEHLER: Something like Mr. Roberts? Did you ever see Mr. Roberts?

HIGGINS: Mister what?

PIEHLER: Mr. Roberts, the film Mr. Roberts.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: No, there's no film that you say, "This is what I went through!"

HIGGINS: No. (Shows pictures) Now this right here is a, see when the convoys forming in San Francisco, or San Pedro, or Fort Hueneme, California, we would have a meeting of all the skippers and captains of the ships and their communications officers. It was restricted. And this is, I happened to find this, this is one of the things that was given to me, uh, when we had a meeting in regards to the convoy. And uh, ... oh now this is a picture of me when I was in training.

PIEHLER: This is in Boston?

HIGGINS: Yes, sir. That's Gallups Island. And there I am, right there.

PIEHLER: (Reading) "USMS Radio School, December '42, 1942 Boston, Massachusetts." Can I look in the back because it looks like ...

HIGGINS: I tried to write their names down there.

PIEHLER: So you, you've people from Chicago, from Albany, California, Portland, Elkins, West Virginia, Howell, Maine, Cambridge, Pennsylvania, you had people from all over the country with you.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah. See there were only two, like I told you, there were only two accepted from the state of Tennessee at that time. And one of them got heartsick and left before we ever got ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But you were a little heartsick too.

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughs) I got homesick and heartsick. And let's see, let's see here now, here's a booklet right here on Radio Officer's School. 'Course, the radio officers are no more, ... technology has put them out of business.

PIEHLER: Well yeah. There's no need for code the way there was. The old code is ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, Morse Code is no longer needed.

EBERTS: What did you think of General MacArthur?

HIGGINS: What did I think of what?

EBERTS: General MacArthur.

HIGGINS: General MacArthur? I thought he was a great man. I thought he was a great man, a great soldier. Now this right here is, uh, you know, I'm having trouble seeing things, but anyway, this is a designation of grade and, I don't know, [I] don't remember the occasion why they had to send this to me, but they did on ...

PIEHLER: This is your certificate of completion for the Sheepshead Bay course on June 6, 1947.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And you went for 240 hours.

HIGGINS: Yeah. And this right here is designation of grade when I started working.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You were an ensign and retired, and this was January 9, 1946.

HIGGINS: And this right here is a ...

PIEHLER: Certificate.

HIGGINS: ... statute for continued service ...

PIEHLER: In the Merchant Marine.

HIGGINS: ... certified that Ray Hilton Higgins and so forth. And this is ...

PIEHLER: June 29, 1942 to January 23, 1947.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

JEAN HIGGINS: That's a long time.

EBERTS: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And then ... you showed us earlier the letter from Harry S. Truman, the letter from Harry S. Truman. You had showed it to us earlier.

HIGGINS: Yeah, that was this right here. (Indicates the letter).

PIEHLER: Yeah.

EBERTS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And let's see what this is. This right here is a letter confirming this, so. Now, um, this is a picture of Captain Tillman.

PIEHLER: Oh, and it looks, (reading) "Captain Bill Tillman is in charge of our cruises, with eons of experience. He spent a four-year hitch in the Navy in the late '30s, became a Merchant Seaman in 1941 and a licensed ship's captain in 1945. He taught two years at Crawford Nautical School, seven years as a loading master for the Tanker Loader Corporation. Back to sea he finished out his career as captain of a 7000-ton tanker Santa Sea II on the Alaska run. Under his leadership we were assured of a trip complete with smooth waters, lots of squealing sea gulls, playful seals, and porpoises."

HIGGINS: Well now ...

PIEHLER: ... this was a trip aboard, uh ...

HIGGINS: ... Victory ...

PIEHLER: This was the Victory, this was the, oh yeah this was the cruise ...

HIGGINS: ... ship, Victory. Now here's a picture of it. Uh, it says "Celebrate the 50th anniversary of World War II with a cruise on the SS Lane Victory, a WWII cargo ship." Well now, this ship was being, as I said, uh ...

PIEHLER: You said ...

HIGGINS: ... renovated, uh, for occupancy by distinguished guests to the trip to, for the trip to Norway, Normandy rather ... in celebration. Unfortunately, neither Captain Tillman nor I were able to make it. I wasn't able to make it because of my heart condition, and Captain Tillman was in charge of this ship being reconditioned and overhauled for the trip. And, uh, they made it down so, I had told him that Jean and I couldn't make it. And they were on their way down the coast, the West Coast. They got down around, uh, Lower California and they had trouble and they had to come back to San Diego for repairs again.

He ended up being drummed out of the Navy. And Dick Fiedler that lived there in Pasadena witnessed this. He said that Captain Tillman was so embarrassed that he came down the gangplank with a paper bag over his head. And he was a good man. Take my word for it. You know, if you serve aboard a small space like what was available aboard ship with a man for eighteen months, you get to know him. And Captain Tillman was just a first class gentleman. And I hated to hear that part of the story, but it's true. Now I have a, you might want to take this with you, you can have it if you want ...

PIEHLER: We would love to have it if you would like to donate it to us.

HIGGINS: Yeah, I will because it's ... sort of a brief resume of what happened.

EBERTS: It's your memories.

HIGGINS: Pardon?

EBERTS: Your memories from the war.

HIGGINS: Pardon.

EBERTS: It's your memories?

HIGGINS: Memories, yes.

EBERTS: It's titled "World War II Memories."

HIGGINS: Yes. It's how I remember them, yes.

PIEHLER: We can add these to the internet [website].

EBERTS: Yeah.

HIGGINS: Now here's a better copy of that boat, I don't mean boat, a ship! They didn't like—see this is the USS Lane Victory. You can have that also. And this is, this is the handwriting of my mother. We found this in my mother's personal possessions, (reading) "income tax return for 1943". This was after her death. There's nothing in there that would show anything. And, uh, did you want to, did you want this? (Offering the letter from Truman)

PIEHLER: I think you should hold on to that.

HIGGINS: Well, I value it very highly.

PIEHLER: I think you should hold that and I think ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah. Did I show you this?

PIEHLER: This is your letter from April 26, 1942, proving your enrollment in the Maritime Service Resident Radio School.

HIGGINS: Yeah. This letter sort of speaks for itself. If you'd like to have that, you're welcome to it. This right here is the same thing. See, you can readily see why I was so interested in learning the trade. After the war was over, I bypassed, uh, college because of the limit on finances and this is the way that I could get ahead. So I thought that I would be a radio operator after the war. Well, it didn't, just didn't fit my fancy, you know. And because of my hearing aid, I mean my hearing back here why it was—let's see, what is this? Oh, this ... is part of what I had to do to go to Washington, D.C.

PIEHLER: Oh this was your ...

HIGGINS: Yeah. See I had to ... threaten to file suit with somebody to get some designation of a veteran.

PIEHLER: You have problems, your hearing problems, they stem from the war.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Yeah. If you could go back and view some of that equipment that was on board ship, you could understand.

PIEHLER: Why? What was it about the equipment that, that ...

HIGGINS: Well, it was just ... there was nothing soft about the code. And you couldn't afford to miss anything.

PIEHLER: So the sound was very ...

HIGGINS: The sound, and then not only that, but when we were taking the Marianas Islands, the sound of those guns and everything, uh, there was no way you could block it off or anything in the airwaves. It comes through your ears, you know. And, uh, things like that. Uh, this is a letter from Dr. Seals here in Knoxville that confirms my hearing problem. I had to get a letter from him. Do you know Dr. Seals?

PIEHLER: No. No, I don't.

JEAN HIGGINS: Are either of you from Knoxville?

EBERTS: I am.

JEAN HIGGINS: That's nice. Where did you go to high school?

EBERTS: Knoxville Catholic.

JEAN HIGGINS: Oh!

EBERTS: Downtown.

JEAN HIGGINS: Yeah, on Magnolia.

EBERTS: Yeah, on Magnolia. Right.

JEAN HIGGINS: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: Now this is an ID that I wore somewhere.

PIEHLER: And this is your ID card from United States Maritime Service. (Reading)
“Higgins, Ray H., Ensign.” And your number was 426-0687.

HIGGINS: Mm hmm.

JEAN HIGGINS: And that’s the veterinarian right there. (Pointing at a photograph).

EBERTS: The picture.

HIGGINS: You asked me several, uh ...

PIEHLER: And this was issued to you on ... March 24, 1943.

HIGGINS: You asked me several questions about Italy. Well I happen to have a picture of it. (Laughter)

JEAN HIGGINS: That’s the four-month old veterinarian. (Pointing to another photograph)

PIEHLER: This is your, oh ...

HIGGINS: That’s indispensable. (Laughter)

JEAN HIGGINS: [He] looks just like Ray. (Laughter)

HIGGINS: Now here, here is ... something they gave me along the way.

PIEHLER: This is your ...

HIGGINS: But it calls it “electrician” but I don’t know anything about electricity.

PIEHLER: This was issued to you ... July 3, 1944.

HIGGINS: And this right here is ...

PIEHLER: Your commission as an ensign?

HIGGINS: Yeah. That's the commission of ensign.

EBERTS: And so when you left the service, you were in the Coast Guard? You were discharged under the Coast Guard?

HIGGINS: Yes, I'm now a veteran of the Coast Guard ...

EBERTS: Coast Guard.

HIGGINS: ... they declared it all as part of the Coast Guard.

EBERTS: Okay.

HIGGINS: And this right here ...

PIEHLER: Oh, the crossing of the Neptune.

HIGGINS: Yeah. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So you remember this?

HIGGINS: Yeah! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You must have given your fellow crewmembers a lot of flack ...

HIGGINS: Yeah, now here's an epistle that was written accompanying it. I don't know who it was that signed it, but someone tore the name off the bottom. And, uh, oh excuse me ...

PIEHLER: Oh that's okay.

HIGGINS: And, uh, I want to show you a few pictures. Uh, that's me and the navigation officer right here in the South Pacific. This right here is me and one of the fellows that assisted me, Crawley, when we were at his home in Los Angeles. And this is a picture of an Indian there over in the Philippines. And this is an armed guard officer, I believe. And this right here is Santa Tomas University in the Philippines in Manila that was left intact. That's where both of these are. And that's where ... all those prisoners of war were held by the Japanese that they starved to death.

PIEHLER: And who are these, this boat ...

HIGGINS: That's in the Philippines. They call those "bun boats." And this is at a schoolyard near that Catholic Church I was telling you about.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And this is the engineering officer and the captain.

EBERTS: Which captain is this?

JEAN HIGGINS: Was that Tillman, Ray?

PIEHLER: It must, it's June 5, 1945, so it looks, it should be Captain Tillman, but ...

EBERTS: Right.

HIGGINS: And this was a picture that was taken in the Philippines. That's a group of guerrillas. And this was a, um, let's see what it says on the back, (reading) "Group of Japanese," oh, "The grave of Japanese Admiral on Luzon Island in the Philippines."

PIEHLER: And that was in March of '45.

HIGGINS: Mm hmm. And this is a picture of an ox-pulled cart in the Philippines.

EBERTS: Did you have a camera with you?

HIGGINS: No, but the gunnery officer did and he took lots of pictures for me. And this right here is one of my classmates up at Gallups Island by the name of Ray Nordberg from Funk, Nebraska. (Laughter) And I remember him very, very vividly. Here we are sitting around in this huge room, being in that, part of our indoctrination, you know. And this was the first day that we had together. We all stood up one by one and introduced ourselves and told the group where we were from. We got around, now it's made up primarily of eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one year olds, all single with the exception of one. We got around to Ray Nordberg and he got up and he said, "Ray Nordberg. Funk, Nebraska." When he said that everybody just doubled over with laughter. Let's see what this is now. This is part of the Pryor family that I was telling you about that ...

EBERTS: Oh yeah.

HIGGINS: ... I visited down in Providence, Rhode Island. And this is the one that I was trying to ...

PIEHLER: The one you, the one on the left?

HIGGINS: Yeah. Uh huh. Believe it or not that's me sitting on a water buffalo in the Philippines. And this is another "bum boat."

EBERTS: You look very tan.

HIGGINS: Now, let, uh, me tell you about those "bum boats" that I—we came at the, this is March 1943 before we graduated from Gallups Island down at the Pryor family's place. And this right here is part of the initiation.... And I'm the one that's being paddled! (Laughter)

And this right here is a picture of me down at my folks' home. This is on the west side of their home, west side of their home. And this is, uh, remember Marilyn Monroe ...

----- END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO -----

PIEHLER: You were saying that a someone had actually painted Marilyn Monroe on your ...

HIGGINS: Oh, I was saying ...

PIEHLER: ... on the side of your, the side of the pilot's house. And this was during the war?

HIGGINS: Yeah, yeah. And this right here is a group of officers aboard my ship, but I don't remember their names. And this to was the same, same thing. And this was a group of officers aboard the ship. Now, this is a picture ... the Pryor family called me "Higgy" and it says on here that—they gave me this picture last summer, it says, "Ken's friend Hilton 'Higgy' Higgins," uh, Center, that where they mailed it, Center Street, ... Rhode Island, March 1943.

EBERTS: Wow.

HIGGINS: I'll tell you, the war was no picnic. Don't misunderstand me and, I guess, the way ... I've told my story that you might think that it was. But it was a long way from being a picnic. Thousands of G.I.s gave their lives [so] that we might be sitting here talking right now, and two of them where in my high school graduating class. And, uh, it really made me, um, feel bad the last time I was up at, uh, Soldier's Home in Johnson City. Where—they called it Mountain Home, I'm sorry, and that's the veteran's hospital up there.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And they had an arch across the gate that reads like this, "Where the cost of freedom is evident." And so Jean and I went on, went up there for the ... cardiology test and, uh, I was having other troubles and I told her that, after the cardiology test was over, I said then I believe I'll go in the other side of this hospital to see if I can't see a doctor. And, uh, we did, but we had to sit down and wait. And we—here's this large room where veterans were coming in to see a doctor. And it'd just, almost bring tears to your eyes to see these men come in to see, to seek medical treatment through no fault of their own. And, uh, one that came in and sat down in front of us ... was one of my customers in the insurance business years ago. And, uh, he was, uh, maimed, uh, and walked to one side, and he had no use hardly at all of his right arm. And I whispered to Jean, when he sat down, I said, "I know that boy but I can't place him." And while we sat there long enough that I finally realized who he was, he was a former customer of mine in the insurance business. And he was a veteran of Vietnam War. And now, when he came in, as I recall, to take out insurance with me I wrote insurance for a motorcycle for him.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

HIGGINS: And he was a husky, fine, handsome, young man and that just underscores what I've said about where the cost of freedom is evident. And, uh, I don't think any of my brothers regret serving the Stars and Stripes. I had never know them express that any kind of regret. And I most certainly don't regret it. If I had the same half of my life to live over I'd do the same thing, because I realize that if thousands of guys like me hadn't done what we did during the Second War years, Second World War years, that we wouldn't be here right now. Did you know the Japanese and the Germans had us all figured out? This wise, when the war was over as far as they were concerned the Japanese would take that part of the United States to the Mississippi River. Germany would take that part of the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean. Now a lot of people forget that, but not me. So I think that the legacy that, uh, World War II veterans have left is remarkable, it's—it will live forever in the hearts of true Americans.

PIEHLER: That might be a very good place to end unless there is something ... we forgot to ask you.

HIGGINS: What's that?

PIEHLER: Is there anything else we forgot to ask you?

HIGGINS: Well, I don't know what it would be. Uh ...

PIEHLER: Well, I want to thank you very much for this interview. And we, even though you have signed the release form allowing us to put it on the Internet we will send you a copy of the transcript before we put it on the Internet. And you may want to make some corrections to it. Uh, you don't have to and, uh, and we'll give you at least thirty days before we put in on the Internet. Um, and we'll also give you a copy for your children.

HIGGINS: Well would you like to have? ... Now this is what, um, I took to Washington and presented in court up there ... before I was initiated as a veteran.

PIEHLER: Now you are sure you don't want to pass that on to your children? To your son ...

HIGGINS: No, I want to pass it on. But I thought maybe you might want to take it back your office and review it and possibly—I knew I had this somewhere, and, uh, review it ...

PIEHLER: What we will probably do is maybe have Johnny—we would like to probably scan it into the computer, but I'm reluctant to borrow anything except for literally a few hours. So I'll ... call you at another point to borrow it ...

HIGGINS: Now see this right here? That's, that's the only one I've got, but that's a picture of me on duty.

PIEHLER: This is actually you in the radio room?

HIGGINS: Yeah. That's the actual radio room.

EBERTS: Wow.

JEAN HIGGINS: Well, the grandkids up in Kentucky can see it on Internet.

PIEHLER: Yes ...

EBERTS: Yes.

PIEHLER: Yes.

HIGGINS: Now, I gave a lot of stuff ... that I saved up from my war years, uh, to my grandson, uh, including the lock box that I had to put all valuable papers in to throw overboard in the event that our ship was going down. Um, and he treasures all of that very, very highly. Uh, let me see, as I turn through here. Now this, the last convoy to Normandy in '94 was when the 50th Anniversary of the invasion of Normandy was held and that's when the Lane Victory was scheduled to ...

PIEHLER: To participate.

HIGGINS: ... to participate and Jean and I were invited guests. Now this a copy of—see the discharge ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, honorable discharge from the Coast Guard.

HIGGINS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And this was, uh, this is the one they eventually gave you.

HIGGINS: Yeah. I will—I want to preserve this of course, uh, but I thought that maybe you might want to ...

PIEHLER: Well let's—as I said at some point later we will scan it in. We can scan it on, put it directly on the computer.

HIGGINS: Well you can't scan them in ...

PIEHLER: Not—I'll have—Johnny Goins will stop by and make arrangements.

HIGGINS: Okay, well.

PIEHLER: First we, we first want to get the transcript done. Then that's ...

HIGGINS: Well, let's see, oh right here, uh, here's a picture that you want to see, I guess. No it's a ...

PIEHLER: I wouldn't take, it sounds like it is pretty secure, I would leave it ...

EBERTS: We can see it through there.

HIGGINS: You can see, does that look like me? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, I would say ...

HIGGINS: That was issued by captain of the port, I think. And this right here is a passport we had to have ...

PIEHLER: Seamen's passport.

HIGGINS: Yeah. Uh huh.

JEAN HIGGINS: Ray if you go over much longer you going to have to feed them supper.

EBERTS: He's having a good time.

HIGGINS: This is a designation of grade, see this is a copy of some of those things ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, yes.

HIGGINS: ... we had gone through.

PIEHLER: And that's ...

HIGGINS: And this is ...

PIEHLER: ... your liberty ship, that's the liberty ship William H. Taggett.

HIGGINS: Yeah. See we were ... we were sitting ducks. And they tried to catch us, uh—I wanted to tell you one other thing about it. A few years ago, I've forgotten now what year it was, but we had an anniversary celebration up in Boston, of my class from um Gallups Island. And, uh, the commander of the base at that time was a fellow. And everybody loved him. I mean he was just a fine gentleman. And so we were all assembled in this huge dining hall at this place in Boston, I believe it was a motel, wasn't it Jean?

JEAN HIGGINS: I don't know, I didn't go.

HIGGINS: But anyway the last act by the master of ceremonies introduced, he made an announcement that, uh, Citillo had had a stroke and, uh, his wife was with him and that they were coming shortly. And they came in this dining hall, and here he was in a wheelchair and wasn't able to speak. And he got a standing ovation and, of course, all of us, grown men now, would look around over at him, you could see their eyes swelling up and tears forming

and, uh, it was really something. Uh, we admired him, everyone admired him. And I want to show you one other thing.... (Tape paused) ... Providence and, uh, Boston to visit these friends. Uh, Ken Pryor came into the room, uh, holding something behind him, you know. And he says, "Higgy," says, "We have a special gift for you." And ... he says some other things, which I don't remember. But anyway he had this and this handed to me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: A "Damn Seagulls!" hat.

HIGGINS: But now, I was telling you about our commander at the base by the name Citillo and I can remember very, very vividly that he was getting off of the motor launch, uh, from ...

PIEHLER: From Boston.

HIGGINS: ... from Boston. And the seagulls really ruined his hat. (Laughter) And the ...

PIEHLER: He made ...

HIGGINS: The scrambled eggs that were here on his, the commander's hat. That was terrible! (Laughter) So, but anyway, Jean says I shouldn't throw this away. She won't let me wear it anywhere. (Laughter) But anyway ...

JEAN HIGGINS: This thing's not working now is it?

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's still on.

EBERTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) Well let me, uh, well let me thank you again and say that this concludes an interview with Ray H. Higgins on April 11, 2000 at Strawberry Plains, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

EBERTS: And Ellen Eberts.

PIEHLER: Well ... thank you again, we really appreciate it.

----- END OF INTERVIEW -----

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