

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Edward Higgins

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Edward Higgins

Interviewer: Seamus Gunn & Ryan Berger

Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime

Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Edward Higgins conducted by Seamus Gunn and Ryan Berger on October 10, 2009. This interview is part of the Cal Maritime Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Edward Higgins is a graduate of the class of 1964, Deck

Abbreviation

EH: Edward Higgins

SG: Seamus Gunn

RB: Ryan Berger

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Interview Outline

- 00:40 What was your role in the 1962 Colombia train accident and how did you assist?
- 09:27 What were the living arrangements at CMA in 1964, including barracks, meals and leisure?
- 15:46 Compared to when you attended, how do you feel about the different standards and regulations since CMA joined the California State University system?
- 17:28 Do you feel your training in the Air Force gave you an advantage when you were here?
- 20:23 How do you feel about the addition of non-licence track programs at CMA?
- 24:10 How did graduating from CMA contribute to your experience serving in the Navy?
- 33:20 What advice do you have for current Cal Maritime students who are seeking a commission in the Navy?
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- 42:11 Do you remember your thoughts and feelings when President Kennedy was assassination in 1963?
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- 46:51 Do you have any closing thoughts or remarks you'd like to make?

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Interview

[00:40]

SG: Well, I'm a Seamus Gunn student in California Maritime Academy Global Maritime Affairs. I'm here with my partner, Ryan Bergen. Also, Global Studies Maritime Affairs. We're here, we're here interviewing, uh, Mr. Edward Higgins, U.S. Navy commander, retired. Born January 24th, 1940 class of 1964. Mr. Higgins, please tell us what your role was in the 1962 Kelly Columbia at night, a train accident and how you assisted with that.

EH: Well, let's start off with, uh, the school was divided into two parts. The ship was in Buenaventura, Colombia, uh, which was just basically at that time of banana port. Very little to do or what there was to do was probably not approved by the Academy. And, uh, so they had organized a trip up to Cali and uh, they just, those that wanted to participate could participate. Not everybody had to go. And so, they divided the, the school into two parts. Basically, we were on a four-section watch, I guess. Uh, the first group went up one day, returned the next, uh, then there were the day following, uh, the group that I was with went up, so it was like a four-day period that, that set aside to do this. Um, so we boarded a train at Buenaventura. Uh, it was, as I recall, uh, it had an engine, uh, like a baggage car, I think about three passenger cars. Uh, some sort of club car, diner type thing. And then there was a car and he had, uh, I'm not sure how many cars total.

And so, we headed off, uh, go up to, uh, Cali. Uh, some of my classmates, uh, the engineers basically had gone up to the front of the train, uh, take pictures. It causes it was kind of a Gorge phone up from the college in the mountains. And this was down in the person in the water. And uh, they were looking up the track. Yeah, we were right near a little village. There's kind of a string going about village, village flip on one side, tracks slipped down into the village and they looked out and saw a train coming.

So, we're obviously on a single track. So, uh, they were bailing out right and left. Uh, one of our classmates, uh, a guy named Murphy was trapped between the two engines. And then we had this head on collision. The force of the, uh, of the collision drove the, uh, mail car, uh, right through the inside of the car behind it, uh, crushing all those people first into the, to the rear of the compartment, buckled the, the next two, uh, cars and they rolled over on their side towards the village. And, uh, here again, I can't, I don't know how many passenger cars there were. I was in the dinner or club car or whatever it was. And so, the effect for us, for most of the children other than those who were riding up in the front of the train was none at all the other cars that absorb the shock from the collision.

But it was just all of a sudden, you know, were stopped and uh, to get out and on one side you would have to, uh, you know, almost be going down to the bank into the, where the village was. So, most of us got out on the opposite side just to see what the damage was. There were a couple of soldiers on the train. Um, what we call now, the FARC, uh, was another group that, uh, is open rebellion has been for a number of years. At that time, I

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think Columbia had been fighting this, the surgency for 20 some odd years and pretty well. They, the government had given up control of the countrysides to these rebels and uh, tried to maintain control in the cities well. So, we had a couple of soldiers on board, I guess, uh, for protection. Um, they were pretty ineffective in terms of what happened after that. But shortly after that, uh, a bunch of guys showed up in horseback and the soldiers, uh, very openly pulled the clip out of their weapon, turn their weapon upside down, to indicate hostility there.

So, we went up forward to see what had happened. Of course, Murphy was stuck between the two engines. Uh, his arm was basically stuck there by the way. The engines were built there was like a large fan, uh, not an engineer, so I don't know a lot about how these things are constructed, but there was a large fan area, sheet metal, uh, right at the front of the engine and the two engines had compressed his arm around this, oh, being half the people on board. The train were engineers, uh, engineering students. Uh, they look for tools and they basically disassembled in front of trying to get his arm out. Uh, he was of course in shock at that time, but his whole arm was severed, a broken bone. Uh, Sarah, and as I recall, you only had maybe a two-inch piece of flush that held us all together.

So, he was the immediate, uh, concern for most of us. Uh, but then of course he looked, he couldn't tell initially what had happened in terms of the baggage car going into the passenger car. But once that became evident to us and you know, things and we got to try to help the people that we could, most of them are dead just from the compacting of these two cars. So, then we went down to the, the ones that are off the track and started helping people out of the other cars. Most of us, of course we were in uniform, so we all had web belts. Uh, so your social fraternity kids torn our t-shirts off your sows to rip bandages, to try to provide whatever assistance we could for these people. Now there was some sort of a mining operation, uh, not far away.

And uh, I remember that there was some sort of a small car, like a handcart type thing came down the track and those, that Murphy and the other children that were injured for a load of that and they went off up the track. Uh, as I recall, they were going to send a helicopter down, pick him up, take him up to a hospital. We had a pediatrician on board for that cruise. Uh, I think from Vallejo who went up to Cali and actually did the surgery, I think on his arm, saved his arm that he first, uh, uh, you know, that was the end of the school year for him. The rest of us did what we could to, uh, administer first aid and whatever rescue we could do for these people. And by this time, of course, a lot authorities has shown up.

They, one of the things that stood out almost all of our minds was the fact that they were looters, uh, going to the dead bodies stealing and this rebels or whatever they were, uh, killed several for doing that. Uh, one that took up the track and stoned to death. The other guys would fall, people being shocked. So, it was pretty sobering event, uh, in order to, uh, to get back to school. Now the, the ship, uh, I know we had to wait across the stream. There was a road, the other side, and we got picked up, take it back down the ship. So

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that was kind of the end of the trip for us. Uh, I remember sometime later my, uh, my shoes had grown a lot of Moss and things would be in the water. So, I wrote all this down in my diary, which I didn't bring with me, but, um, I think a lot of guys went from being 17, about 40 years old that day.

SG: Wow

EH: So that was kinda my experience in then.

[09:27]

SG: Okay, thank you. Okay. Kind of changing subjects here, what were the living arrangements of CMA in 1964 please? Brief on barracks meals, meals and rules and measures?

EH: Well, we basically had one residence hall, which is still here. Uh, it wasn't sufficient to house everybody. So, uh, we rotated, uh, living on board the ship. Uh, the problem of course living on board the ship, it was pretty primitive, uh, at that time, the train ship, uh, which it had been a probably a T2 or, or that particular design, um, or an assault vessel, some sir, maybe AKA whatever. Um, and we had bunks up forward, uh, and so you basically lived in the, you know, like you would when you're at sea. The, uh, in the residency hall, we had two to a room. Of course, we shared a, uh, a communal head and shower. Um, and I think there were, I can't remember the three floors of the residency hall. Yeah. And so basically, we were, um, we occupied by divisions. And so, you know, whatever division you were at the time, you know, all your classmates and of course, all the upperclassmen, we're all in the same general area. Um, it was pretty good setup. Uh, they had, the way the room was set up, I'm not sure how they are now, but they were, uh, two single, uh, bunks and they had a, uh, partition between them. At the end of the bunks towards the door, there was a desk, two chairs, and we had two lockers. Uh, there were drawers underneath the bunk and then they were hanging lockers against the wall. They're going out into the hallway.

That was pretty nice. Um, there was a window on either side of the room, if you went outside, like there looked like two windows up there. But that was where the wall between, um, living on the ship was not particularly comfortable. Uh, I remember standing quarter deck watch here and during the winter out there fly roll and it's just pretty visible. Maintain the, uh, there was always a group on, on duty, uh, hallway. Uh, see at that time we had the library was there, the medical facilities were there. Uh, we had, uh, the duty desk, like you're probably three people on duty at any given time. Mess Hall was like; I think it's still here.

Um, they had morning formation, uh, and then they had breakfast, uh, which seemed to have the same meals, uh, in rotation. So, like I remember every Monday it was my call. We had, uh, chili, rice, and hotdogs. We called tubes and beans. I won't tell you all the

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other names. We had food, but it was, uh, it was filling. Um, all the pies. We had a lot of pies, but most of the pies corn starch, flavored cornstarch pies, you know, not too much in the way of anything. Again, we still funny stories because you could only take one dessert, but if the guy in front of you or the guy behind you didn't want his dessert, you could ask him. So, there was a fairly common expression. They had your pie. It's kind of crazy, but it was okay. Of course, you know, there was just guys in it, uh, going to school. And so, you can imagine the language probably wasn't the best comments were probably not the best, by the way. What was the other part of this?

SG: Um, rules and regulations?

EH: Uh, well, of course he had to make every formation, um, and marched to class. Um, uh, there was a, I think, kind of a standard military type of rules about, you know, lights were out at 10 p.m. Uh, revelry was at 6:00 a.m. Um, we didn't have, we had the weekends off unless you were academically restricted. Uh, the first class, uh, at that time, got Wednesday after, I guess Wednesday evening go into town. Uh, not much to do, of course in Vallejo at that time. But, um, you know, pretty much, uh, the way it was, the only problem was being an Academy, uh, every class counted, and we lost probably 30 of our initial class, you know, right away because after the first semester, either people didn't like it or flunked one course, and then of course flunked , you get, you're out, you go back next year. So, I wrote several did, but uh, instructors are, uh, in my estimation were excellent. Um, almost all of them were experienced in the maritime trade and then I didn't have any, any, any of the engineering courses, but talking to my classmates in engineering, they liked them, so okay. I may be going into another question here.

[15:46]

SG: Okay, next question is, as you may have heard, CMA is commonly referred to nowadays is the casual Maritime Academy. What rules, regulations were you upheld during your tenants? You already touched on that, but what I want to ask you is how do you feel about the loosening of the standards at CMA associated with it joining the Cal state university system?

EH: Well, I really probably can't speak to that because, uh, you know, when I left the school, of course I went into the Navy and other than visiting occasionally, uh, I have family in the area. Uh, I didn't spend a lot of time here. So, uh, as I recall when I, uh, graduated from school here it was not accredited, uh, terms of higher education. Uh, it didn't stop people from getting advanced degrees, but, oh, I don't know.

I think it was, it was probably good that they ended up going into a larger university system because I know our superintendent was up in Sacramento almost weekly, you know, trying to get funds. And I noticed the school has really expanded in size and scope and a lot better training facilities and then we had, so I don't know about being casual or not, I guess it is a, I guess you don't march the class anymore and people live in all kinds

of different places here. And I don't know if you've been a little off campus or not. Um, one of the rules we had, you couldn't be married here and you couldn't be, could be over 21 when I came here and I think some of my classmates were married. Uh, I was 21 when I started, so I don't know the changes since then cause I really not aware of it. Bizarre.

[17:28]

SG: Okay. Uh, do you feel that your training in the Air Force gave you an edge in leadership when you were here?

EH: No, I would, it probably gave me, is it a, I, when I went in the Air Force, I went into a flight program and the worst out of it and I was driving a firetruck in sheriff, Syracuse, New York. Uh, and uh, my brother was librarian. I had always wanted a career in the military. Inside, I would say. Well, when I got out of the Air Force, I was, he wanting to go back to college and I had the idea of going to some sort of Academy at some sort of a formal military tech school. Um, at that time, the Citadel, uh, South Carolina and the Virginia Military Institute were really the only two military schools other than, you know, national schools. And, um, I didn't want a career in the Army and if you weren't flying, you know, the Air Force wasn't much for you. So, uh, I asked her about Naval school and she sent me back.

But unless he says no Naval schools per se, but there're Maritime Academies, well she talked about New York, uh, up to chest deep snow, cold and I didn't want to stay in New York and then it was, went to Massachusetts, that's more the same. So, I think Maine had one, probably still does. So, she said California. Jesus, that's great. Well, I had been, uh, had passed an appointment to King's Point going into the Air Force. And so, when I applied to the school, they use that as a basis for acceptance. So that's how I got, got to go to school.

Um, it was kind of funny because, you know, being 21, almost all my classmates, there were about 17 or 18, um, the upper class at that, you know, the second class we're in charge of indoctrinating means to the school. And so, they had all the little Mickey Mouse things they made us do. And I, I thought it was a joke personally because, uh, you know, flight school, they were serious. These guys were pretending I thought, um, as far as leadership goes, uh, I was enlisted. So, you know, I didn't have any more leadership than what these guys said coming out of high school. Um, I was probably more serious about what I was doing then. Some of them were, uh, academically I wasn't that good. So, it was for me. I really push hard to get through school. I think the, uh, the experience has been in the military. Of course, originally life was easier for me to adjust to this.

[20:23]

SG: Okay, perhaps the biggest change undergone by CMA since 1964 is the admittance of non-licensed track majors, Global Studies, Maritime Affairs and Business Management.

Without any concern for offending myself or Mr. Berger who are Global Studies. Do you think this was a positive or negative change? Please explain.

EH: Well, uh, when I graduated, of course Vietnam was just off off the ground. Um, there were a lot of maritime jobs. We were pulling ships out of the reserve fleet and shipping's pretty heavy. But, uh, you know, over time, uh, the maritime industry just got smaller and smaller and smaller. Uh, I think that a lot of my classmates went on and got MBA's and went into other industries besides maritime. We're often, they're probably in the Maritime Industry, but other than shipping, I think it, uh, the school had some good goals. I think it's probably good that there are other jobs, uh, trading for other things. And basically, I was being trained to be a deck officer and navigation rules of the road. Those, uh, basic things for, uh, you know, focused on that. The main object, uh, I don't share what the rules are anymore, but in order to have a license, uh, you had to have three years CD, uh, if you were an injured man, a wiper or Euler, those terms department I used anymore, um, if you were on the deck side, you could be an able body seaman or the ceiling.

So, the whole purpose of this was to bring us up to a standard where we can sit and take a license exam. And, uh, so the education part of it, although we did have, um, you know, ROTC unit here, um, English, uh, you got here, I knew that Craig had names for everybody. So, it's hard to think of the guy's real name. Um, we had a math guy, uh, taught us, but the basic object of the drill was to learn to pass all the things you need to do to pass your license. And I think they excelled at that. Uh, so it was pretty focused on what we were going to do when we walked out the door. Um, so it wasn't a liberal arts education by any stretch. Uh, we didn't learn a lot about maritime business, those types of things.

I think the education was good. Uh, I think we had it used to rate the academies on what they call, you know, setting for your license and those that passed it on the first go that had additional questions. Uh, it was a written exam. All the questions were on three by five cards and you know, they just walked up and gave his hand your card. He had no idea what was going to be other than the general subject. Uh, you know, it was funding obligations or whatever and we had to write out all your answers. You know, mobile guesses is very useful. Um, I think that we had something like 97% of people taking the test for the license passing on the first, uh, far exceeded most of the other academies, United States education. I thought it was excellent for the purpose of why we were here.

[24:10]

SG: Okay. After graduating CMA, you proceeded to commission in the Navy and earned the rank of commander, a very prestigious feat. Please speak, uh, explain how your graduation from CMA assisted or hurt you and your service to the Navy.

EH: Well, graduated I think in July and, uh, had to wait, uh, for my commission to come through it. Uh, even you had asked me before we started this, you know, if I had gone to

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flight school, uh, and I didn't, uh, although my ambition at that time was to fly, uh, for the Navy, uh, they had some quirky rules in military if you're ever in a flight program and in worst out and just about killed your chances of getting into another flight program. So that wasn't an option. Um, I had gone to a Maritime Academy and so my first ship was a, was a Liberty hall logical way. Um, when I went on board, um, I became the first Lieutenant, um, in the Navy. The first Lieutenant is, um, officers in charge of the deck department. So of course, I had excellent training, you know, right there. Uh, I could, uh, I knew how to newer ships and you know, how to navigate, I knew how to maintain deck equipment, you know, preservation of the ship at a small division. But, uh, when that department, uh, I had another officer had worked for me as a gunnery officer.

So, and you know, the initial thing was excellent, just go right in. Um, that was the radar picket ship. Uh, back in those days, uh, we were, we had radar sites, you know, through Canada, um, crossing off the top of the United States coast. And so, we, you know, that was for the rid, our barrier for manned aircraft coming in the attack in United States. Well, uh, even in 1965, we realized that if we were going to be attacked, it was going to be through ICBM other methods. So, the rationale for having all the radar sites at sea kind of went away and they decommissioned all the ships. And then I ended up going to refrigerated cargo ship over shot in the victory fall. But here again, you know, I was, I learned a lot. There was nothing that the Academy would have taught me, uh, uh, underway replenishment and those types of things. So yeah, the initial start in the Navy of course was on the merchant type falls.

That second ship I was on was out of Alameda. First ship was out of Treasure Island. And, uh, we went to the Western Pacific, uh, the war hadn't really started up yet. Um, we had pretty well hit all the ships in the seventh fleet over deployed then, um, providing under way, uh, your punishment. And, uh, we had pulled into Da Nang and uh, into Da Nang there was, uh, a group operating what they call nasty class, uh, patrol boats. And if something you remember from like a PT boat and they were doing raids on the, uh, uh, North Vietnamese border. So, I thought that would be pretty interesting. Well, when they asked for volunteers for a small craft, and here again, having gone to the Academy and had a lot of experience in small craft, sailing, powerboats, and those types of things. So, I volunteered. I ended up falling in Vietnam river patrol on a little boat called PVR's, 31 foot, uh, water jet propelled boats.

Um, do you want me to crank through my whole career here?

SG: Um

RB: Sure. How much time do we have?

SG: We have about 10 more minutes. Yeah, sure.

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EH: Uh, when I left, uh, Olympia, now my, uh, I ended up going to Greece, uh, in a communication spelling. Uh, of course the Navy sent me for school for that, but, uh, and I got involved mostly in, uh, the crypto part of the business, the key material, and those types of things you needed for secure communications. And then it kind of came to crossroads in my career. I said, you know, I got to stay in the Navy very at night. I'd read the several of the shipping companies, but you know, by this time, you know, shipping really started to drop off a lot, so there weren't a lot of jobs, uh, and your chances of, you know, going into the maritime industry to shore without having spent time with the company.

SI very small. So, I ended up going into a specialized thing in the Navy called the Naval security. We were later, I became a designated as a cryptologist, um, basically, um, that entailed, uh, judications intercept and exploitation on one side and protection of, of our communications on the other side. Well, the last 15 years in the Navy, that's what I did. I was a specialist in that. And so, um, after leaving Greece, uh, I ended up in Norfolk, Virginia on the staff of the commander in chief of the, uh, his lighting plate. And then I went to the staff, uh, commander second plate out of Norfolk, which was pretty good. I spent about three years on that one, uh, mostly operating in the Atlantic, uh, places with NATO and the European area. Um, I left that, uh, I am going to, uh, the Philippines and the war was just waiting.

Um, so, um, I had, I think I was probably a Lieutenant commander at that time and you know, I had, Oh, I guess 10, 12 officers and about 300, unless you guys working for me. And we were providing what we call direct support to the, to the fleet where we would actually send teams up to do what we did for Larry. Um, when I took over as officer in charge of the detachment, had about 75 people in that detachment, ended up being the executive officer of another command in the Philippines. Then they sent me back to see on the staff, the seventh fleet other year coast skirts pin. Uh, when that tour was, uh, back in Norfolk, uh, as a department head for the commander landing command that it all changed their names, protect the innocent and so different names now, but whatever it was called today.

But I did that until about three years before he retired. Um, I went over to join the packer to the armed forces staff college, and I taught for a couple of years and then I did of course development for the last year I was here. I retired. Um, being a cryptologist, uh, for field at that time was not very great. Uh, today, you know, anybody was in information systems security, you know, get a job right away. But that time I didn't have that opportunity. So, I went to work for the national security, uh, with just kind of the big brother to them. Same type of thing I did in the Navy. Um, that was, uh, I did that for until I retired 10 years ago. Uh, but I got a lot of great assignments. I worked with, uh, virtually every major intelligence organization in the United States. So, I was able to work in a white house office for a while. Uh, worked with the central command and special operations in Tampa. Uh, spent a tour Panama with Southern command. Um, the

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basically almost almost all my career there was in the field after I retired. I retired to where he lived down in Florida. Okay,

[33:20]

SG: Good. Uh, my last question is, uh, speaking to somebody that's attending Cal Maritime and trying to get, I'm trying to get my commission in the Navy. I just want to know if you got any advice coming from a CMA grad who was in the Navy.

EH: I think coming out of out of Cal Maritime, at least for me, I was probably better prepared to be a Naval officer then almost everybody I met in the Navy. Um, the president of the college was speaking to us last night. He went to community. You, it was, we called it an Annapolis. Uh, even the guys that had gone to Annapolis for the most part, you know, not so much about how to go to sea, you know, they didn't understand that, uh, the mechanics of it particularly well, most of the, my, uh, officers that I ran into in the Navy were OCS type people. Uh, I thought that, uh, the preparation that I had received from going to school here really set me, you know, head and shoulders above a lot of these guys in terms of practical knowledge, ship handling, uh, all those other types of things that you really need to do in the Navy.

And also, the, probably the, you can just go to college, which I did before the Air Force. Uh, you're just a student, you had no other responsibilities for anybody else but yourself. Get to class, do you do your work? Those types of things, here you do. Uh, you start up on the bottom, you know, in a fellowship role, I guess you'd call it, but as you work your way through the school, you know, you have more responsibilities. You have people that have to, you had to mentor. Uh, you had to teach them a lot of things. They need to know. Uh, you have leadership responsibilities. Uh, by the time you become first class, you know, typically most people, you know, you have some officer type bull. Um, the ship was run basically with the supervision of license. The people, it was run by the chairman or the engine room.

It was run by Shivan and every case, I mean, uh, I was on a Hill going to the Panama Canal. Uh, yeah. You know, and then, you know, did the shifts navigation, uh, always being checked by somebody who was already qualified. But basically, he did all that well, he had tremendous responsibilities. Uh, the safety of the ship, uh, all, you know, everybody, if you're on the bridge or in the engine room, you know, you're the guy and all your shipmates, uh, classmates, you had to rely on you to make the right decisions. So I think he'd get it. It's hard to really articulate, but I think you get a sense of, of leadership coming out of the school you'd never get coming up college. And I think that that if you go into the military where you know a lot of decisions or life-threatening decisions, you make decisions once you get in the military. Uh, we say that the military is just like any other business except for, you know, we'll ask you to die. And so, I think you will find that your experience here would put you in where you would be probably about four or five years after you went into the military. I think you start off about that level of

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understanding leadership and responsibilities. I think this is a good basis for if you want to go on a daily basis.

SG: Okay

[37:19]

RB: Okay, alright. I'll go ahead and stop the camera for a time period. Okay. Alright. Is it on,

SG: Yes

RB: Okay, I'm cadet Ryan Berger, class of 2011 Global Studies major. Mr. Higgins we're just going to continue the interview now. So, in October 1962, the United States experience with 13 days of the Cuban missile crisis. What do you recall about this event and what were your feelings and thoughts of some of those on campus?

EH: Okay. And when I got out of the Air Force, you know, it was right during another crisis. Uh, I think it was Berlin at that time. Uh, again, I say she's just going through a kind of a series of, of, uh, challenges I would guess by the Soviet Union at that time. Probably didn't come to any great collusions at that time. Uh, there was always some thoughts, well, you're going to get yanked out of school and sent back into active military. The Cuban missile crisis, uh, probably didn't become the extent of it probably didn't become widely known until some years later. You know, the, the fact that we were basically the things I didn't know at that time, of course, uh, you know, we were flying full alert for SAC. Uh, we were just about ready to go to nuclear war with the Soviet Union. It was probably a lot more serious than most people knew until later. So, if you talk about, you know, when the President was killed, that was a very significant event here.

[39:19]

RB: Right? That's, yeah, that's the question. Um, my next question is, uh, speaking of President Kennedy, in 1961, he addressed Congress and said, quote, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal before this decade is out of landing a man on the moon and returning him back safely to the earth". This would eventually lead to the United States and the Soviet Union and what would be known as a space race. Um, which would in July of 1969 culminate in the first man mission to the moon. Could you talk a little bit about, you know, this space race that John Kennedy sent us on and --

EH: Um, when I was a senior in high school in 1957, was when Sputnik went up and I think false on everybody said, geez, we have, we all gotta be engineers now. I actually started my education at Oregon State, but not Oregon State University or Oregon State College then. And I would say 70% of all the entering freshmen men in place, you know, over all gonna be engineers because of that. Um, is an interesting era. I think that, you know, so many of the technologies that came out of that, uh, that we have today, you know, just,

you know, GPS for instance, most people think about it, but a lot of people walk around the GPS and the pockets in the cars and stuff. Uh, I don't think any of that would have been possible if we hadn't have gone into this era of trying to explore the, the outer reaches of space and those types of things.

We've done the whole telescope from those types of things. Um, I think at the time it was just like, you know, I dunno, it just seemed so impossible that, uh, in the timeframe that any of this could be done because, uh, even though we had missiles and just the idea of making something big enough to put a person on it and did it actually go to the moon and everybody saying, geez, how are we going to, how are we going to go to the moon? You know, how do you land a spacecraft on the moon? It was just, it was just, I think, mind boggling to most people and the fact that we actually did it, uh, was maybe even more significant.

But, uh, I think sometimes you need to set really high goals to meet. Uh, you get a lot follow up. Uh, the lesser goals that are very beneficial for the long-term. Uh, very ambitious. I, I was stationed in Greece at the time where they actually landed on the moon. You got to watch that on TV. Just amazing that we could do that. Just yesterday, I guess we were looking for water on the moon. I'm not too sure how that's going to turn out. You're talking about going to Mars. So, I mean, none of this would've ever occurred if we hadn't taken that step. Pretty important.

[42:11]

RB: Yeah. Excellent. Okay. And November of 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Could you just reflect on your thoughts and feelings and emotions during this time?

EH: Actually, I sat down, and I wrote my feelings. I'd here again, isn't bringing this stuff with me, but I still have a letter that I wrote to myself, uh, about that event. Um, President Kennedy of course, you know, times have changed, and people now have a different view of his personal life, shouldn't reflect on his public life. It was pretty staggering. Uh, I remember the Superintendent at the time, uh, we had a special formation called everybody out because we didn't really know what was going on and he basically came out and says, we don't know what's going on, we don't know if this is the beginning of some larger event.

Um, but yeah, he cancelled classes, uh, that they actually for the rest of the week may have happened on Friday. I can't, um, pretty sobering event, you know, the President of the United States is, you know, killed and I think it kind of shocked a lot of us. Yeah, you kind of get into the store, cocoon security. We don't think about big events when you know your students. I think it was very significant for most of us that had happened. And of course, for the nation too. He was such a popular President, and we seem to be moving along, you know, in a great direction that most of us thought this was priceless. Was over

really fronted the Soviet Union. They backed down and talk to them and go, I'm sending a man to the moon and we just, the United States just seemed to be on a roll. We were going to do great things and you know, the leader of all that, you know, is suddenly is not with us. And we ended up with Linden Johnson. That was okay.

[44:58]

RB: Um, how are we doing on time? 17 minutes. Okay. I'm just changing gears. Um, isn't the last of my questions. Um, talking about the automobile industry in April of 1964 you're graduating here, um, the brand-new Ford Mustang hit dealerships, um, with an MSRP of 2000, 358 offers, um, all fruit for your graduating year of your graduating class. Was there any talk, was there any hype? Was there any, you know, you just talked about the muscle car era and the attitudes on campus, and did this have any effect? Well, all the cars people could drive a parked over by the gymnasium. So, to give you an idea of how few cars really were on campus, um, I was at that time, I, in fact, it still has a scar. I was driving the 1953 mg TD. Uh, her Bart Bart or the athletic field is named after, had a 52. Uh, and I don't know, that's a thing you guys want to know about. But Herbert had a date with a girl in town and borrowed my cipher, uh, to go on that date and typically foggy here. Uh, and of course he was in a collision that night was killed. So, I never got my sacredness back from that and not that I wanted them, but, um, I think the muscle car thing didn't really hit because nobody had any money until probably, uh, when I was first in the Navy. And I remember one of the guys went out and got a GTO slick, but so many of the year before I graduated had a Corvette, stingray, the Fastback and I mean that had a lot of talk on campus. I mean that's just a gorgeous car, but most people if you see pitches from our, our class, it was just driving, you know, whatever they could drive, but not, like I said, Cars those days, that was a lot of my, in those days.

[46:51]

RB: I imagine so. Okay. Well, are there any closing thoughts or remarks you'd like to make?

EH: Well, it's an interesting, this school is an interesting place. Um, well wife, you know, we were here five years ago and got together with guys and then afterwards she says, you know, it's like you guys never, never left. They're just like walked up there. These people didn't really know everything they had done their life. But the camaraderie here was just phenomenal. And, uh, it's, it's more like a fraternity. I can't say that anymore, right. This lady's here now, but, uh, for our guys, you know, it just really has been very tight. Uh, and I assume other plastics are the same. I've, I've talked to the guy graduated in 44 is here, you know, and it just, it just seems to be something about being at this school that you don't get any other school. I don't know. I'm pretty tight still with some of my classmates from high school, but it just seems to be this phenomenal, uh, relationship, uh, with the students here.

Interviewee: Edward Higgins
Interviewer: Seamus Gunn & Ryan Berger
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And it's hard to explain, but I think you guys were probably don't experience now 10 years from now, you're gonna see shipping out or something, run, crush your buddies. It just never seemed to lose it. This is, uh, I used to tell people going to Cal maritime wasn't an education. It's an experience plus that. I think he had great leadership here. Now, uh, I'm still shocked. I looked down St. James and all the young ladies that are retired now, masters driving shifts just part of the year. But, uh, I think this is an excellent institution. Uh, it continues to grow a lot better. I couldn't probably, I probably flunked out here now. Um, it just, it's just a great place and I think you'll find out later on after you leave here, you know, people to good work or history. It, I almost got my master's in history almost.

It didn't make my thesis. Uh, I believe in the oral history is probably the tremendous thing to do. I've gone to, uh, then they want to, which you should try to join. Uh, and they have done a tremendous oral history program or while the senior officers and their experience [inaudible] with us. And so, they get a different perspective of real life when you do that. Um, I've, I've taught where I live. Of course, a lot of older people, but then I'm a young person anymore. But I mean we're talking about people in your eighties and nineties that fought world war two. Uh, I've had great opportunity. One of the guys, uh, uh, associated with was part of the Japanese outfit, the flood and angio. Another guy made the landing and, and Normandy, and, uh, you know, you talk to these people, find out about what life's like a foxhole as opposed to a big map. Looking down at arrows, uh, is, is really different. And I think you get a far greater appreciation for people in their activity when you do world history. So, I applied. You guys were building this.

RB: Thank you, Mr. Higgins

EH: Thank you.

[End of interview]