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## Crawford Hicks Interview

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**Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**

**Crawford Hicks interview**

**Conducted by James Newberry**

**March 23, 2016**

**Transcribed by Caitlin O'Grady & Camden Anich**

Born in Kentucky in 1921, Crawford Hicks piloted a B-17 Flying Fortress on nine missions over Germany during World War II. On his tenth mission Hicks was shot down and imprisoned in Stalag Luft III. Liberated by General George Patton's Third Army in 1945, Hicks worked for the Air Force's Office of Special Investigation (OSI) after the war. He lives in Warner Robins, Georgia, and recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in March 2016.

**Full Transcript**

Interviewer: This is James Newberry, and I'm here with Crawford Hicks on Wednesday, March 23, 2016 at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw State University. And, Mr. Hicks, do you agree to this interview?

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: Thank you. So we'll just start at the beginning. If you could state your full name for me.

Hicks: Crawford Elmer Hicks.

Interviewer: And when and where were you born?

Hicks: I was born in February the tenth, 1921 in Leitchfield, Kentucky That's L-E-I-T-C-H-F-I-E-L-D, Kentucky. Which is the south of Louisville about fifty miles.

Interviewer: So tell me a little bit about your childhood.

Hicks: Raised on a farm during the depression. Didn't have any money, but we had plenty of eat—plenty of food—because we raised most of it. And we didn't, as I said, we had no money, but we didn't consider ourselves to be poor. Although, we would—we, we had no problems. We had no big ones. And we survived, and we were healthy.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Hicks: My father's name was Elmer Hayden Hicks. My mother's name was Myrtle Crawford Hicks. And—.

Interviewer: They put the names together.

Hicks: Made Crawford Hicks. And so my name, Crawford, is a family name. It's a Scottish.

Interviewer: And what did your parents do for a living?

Hicks: My father was an attorney. More of—he was sort of philosophical 'cause he was not a big money maker. My mother had been raised on a farm, and she was very much a farmer at heart. And so we lived on a—And we moved from Leitchfield about, I was about a year old, I wasn't aware of it then. Moved to outside of Louisville, about fifteen miles—twenty miles—to a ten-acre farm. And we lived there. I lived there until I was about fifteen years old, something like that. Lived on a farm primarily, and they raised food, and we had—.[cuts to new clip]

Interviewer: So, you said that you were in—you had moved to a farm near Louisville?

Hicks: Yeah, about twenty miles south—north of Louisville—northeast of Louisville.

Interviewer: Ok, and what was the town called?

Hicks: The town to which we moved was Bannon, but you don't even find that on a map. It's near Anchorage, Kentucky, near, near La Grange, Kentucky. That general area.

Interviewer: I see. And why did you move there?

Hicks: My mother wanted to live on a farm, and my father wanted to go—move close to Louisville so he could practice law.

Interviewer: I see. So, where did you attend school?

Hicks: At Anchorage High School. Anchorage for my first years in school through, through being a freshman in high school. And then we moved to Fern Creek, which was not—about twenty miles away from Anchorage. And I finished school, high school, at Fern Creek, Kentucky. And graduated in 1939. And from there I went to University of Louisville. Spent one semester there.

Interviewer: Why did you leave after one semester?

Hicks: Well one, I was not a good student. I was a very good student in high school, but I didn't have to work, so I didn't know how to work. I didn't know how to—my habits were not such to work at studying 'cause everything came so easy, and I made good grades in high school. But I played football at the University of Louisville, and that was a mistake 'cause I was tired and I really didn't care, so I just didn't do well. So, I dropped out after one semester.

Interviewer: Now, did you have a sense that war was on the horizon at this point?

Hicks: Not at that point, no. That didn't happen until maybe—see this was 1939 when I graduated—and I'd say in '40. In 1940 I became aware of it. And so I was looking for—I was, I was looking for a good job, and my aunt lived in Oklahoma, oh, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. So, I went out to live with her and work in, in, in a war factory, help building a war plant. And I was out there on December the seventh, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. So, I had a sense of the war coming on up to that point.

Interviewer: So, tell me about making the choice to go live with your aunt, and how you got that job.

Hicks: Well I went and applied for whatever job I could find, and it was a clerk in the company that was building this building. This is the work I did. I didn't know anything so I—they, they taught me how to do it.

Interviewer: What exactly were you doing in a typical day?

Hicks: My primary job was delivering mail and picking up notes from one office and taking to another. It was, it was typically it.

Interviewer: And what sort of facility was it? How large?

Hicks: It's a very difficult question. I don't know. It was a, it was a major, it was a major oil company. Yeah, where I worked. Get a little confused. It was an oil. They, they—the company which did the building was a big one, and I don't know how I got the job, but I moved over to the oil company. That's where I did my—all this work. I'm sorry, I messed you up.

Interviewer: Oh no. And so, what were you making? Do you remember the amount of money you were making?

Hicks: Dollar an hour. Fifty cents an hour. That's something like that. I don't know. I have no idea. No—I know is pretty good money in comparison because back home, I would make twenty-five cents a day. Or sometime work in the field with putting up hay. I'd get a dollar a day in lunch. So that was the kind of wages we got then. This was, remember this was in before 19—well about 1935 to 1938, something like that. Then I started working at the A&P Tea Company stocking grocery, and I made twenty-five cents an hour there, which was pretty good pay. And I worked on the weekends, and I had a Model E Ford. And I was able to keep the car running, buy gasoline and buy clothes on twenty-five cents an hour which worked for working two days. Yeah, about two days a week.

Interviewer: Ok. And that was before you went to get that job at that factory?

Hicks: That's correct. Yeah, that's before. mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Ok. And when you were working at—for that factory, you lived with your aunt?

Hicks: Yes, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, yes.

Interviewer: I see. So, tell me about your specific memories, any memories you have of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Hicks: Ok, they're pretty clear in my mind. It was on Sunday morning, and we were getting ready to go to church. And heard on the radio Jap—that Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Now, I was twenty years old at that point in time, and I knew that I was gonna go in the military because I knew I'd be drafted. Now, all of my life up to that time, I'd always liked airplanes. Used to build model airplanes, and I read about World War I, and about all the, the Air Force activities in World War I. And I wanted to go to West Point, and I couldn't make that, but I was very much enamored with the idea of flying. So, I, when I heard about, about Pearl Harbor, I knew I had to go, but my mother felt that flying was too dangerous so she would not sign my approval papers to get into the Air Corps. So, I waited until I was 21, which was the following February of 1942, and I signed up to go to Air Corps—Air Corps cadet training. And this was quite interesting, and I'm trying to, to not say that this was because I was so wonderful, 'cause I wasn't. But looking at the, at the selectivity process that they had. As I recall, one hundred applicants were there at the time I took the application to go to Aviation Cadets. Nine of those guys passed the aptitude test, and six of those fellas passed the physical exam. And I'm one of those—one of the six. Then we got into flying school, and about fifty percent of those people made it through. So I'm quite fortunate. Yeah, this is not me talking. I'm just lucky 'cause I happened to be there as what they needed.

Interviewer: Right. Well I want to go back quickly and then we'll get into the flight training.

Hicks: Ok.

Interviewer: But you said, you started working at a bank before you got into the war.

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok and tell me about your work at that bank. Where was that?

Hicks: It was in Louisville, Kentucky. This was, yeah, in, in—this was after I left, after University of Louisville, and I got a job there as a teller—as a runner. I made ten dollars a week for six—for five and a half days a week. In my job then, we didn't have all the electronics we have now, and my job was to take checks which my bank had received, and take them over to the Federal Reserve Bank, which was called a clearing house. This clearing house then sorted the checks out and counted the money and all these kinds of things. Did that electronically, I think.

And gave credit to each bank for the money in the, in the checks—the money—the bank to which they should have gone. So, they divided the check. So, we took the checks over and brought our checks back. We did that twice a day. And this is when we, we got the, the pay, which is more than I'd made before. And I was able to drive my car on it and buy some clothes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about meeting your first wife?

Hicks: Yes. Met her, I was, I was—had worked up, and I became a, a, a bookkeeper in the bank. And I was reasonably dexterous with my fingers. And we had a, a, a machine, a posting machine, which had two, three, six—two, three, seven—two, three, six— [closes eyes and thinks] about nine rows of numbers on it. Zero, one through nine, and going across. And the, the—my boss taught me how to—when I had to enter a check, or a number into the machine, instead of saying one, two, seven, three, five, O, O, I would go up the line and do it—dissect the number and put the numbers in going up this way. Are you with me? Are you following what I'm doing?

Interviewer: Somewhat.

Hicks: And after doing it a while it became easy, and almost like typing. And so I was pretty good at it. So, I was pretty fast, and so I could, I could post a stack of checks that high [demonstrates with hands] in, in a, a hour's time. You know, this kind of stuff. This was pretty normal.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: But I enjoyed that.

Interviewer: I see.

Hicks: Gave me a sense of accomplishment.

Interviewer: Ok—

Hicks: And then that's where I met my wife.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: I became a, a part-time teller at a bank, and she was going to a local high school. I was twenty years old at this point. And—yeah, I was twenty years old. No, I'm sorry, I was twenty-one 'cause I'd just become twenty-one. And she would come to the bank and pick up school checks—school bus tokens—they had a deal with the local bus service in the city that the students could get bus tokens for a reduced amount to get to the school. So, the bank would be the one who dispensed these, and so I, I did that as a part of my job, and I met her that way.

Interviewer: I see. So, did you marry fairly soon? How, how long before you married?

Hicks: Well no. I didn't marry her until after I got back out of from overseas after a prison camp.

Interviewer: Ok. So, we'll come to that. So, tell me about that, that process of enlisting. How soon after Pearl Harbor did you enlist?

Hicks: In March. Pearl Harbor was in December, and I enlisted in March. I was accepted and sworn in the latter part of March. I wasn't put on active duty as a cadet until July of that year, July the 21<sup>st</sup>. So, from there I went to a Camp Atterbury, which was south of Nashville for processing. It was a processing center—.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: —where they issued money and—I had more money than then I had for all my life—and uniforms, and, and told us what to do. This the first time I owned a watch. Now we didn't have enough money for that, so I bought a Mickey Mouse watch. I think I paid \$3.00 for it. And, and I wore that all the way through flying school. But that was the, the jewel of my life, my Mickey Mouse watch.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: But I had money for a change.

Interviewer: So bootcamp. Where was bootcamp?

Hicks: Well we had, we didn't have bootcamp as such, but this was, this was a, a indoctrination center. From there we went to, to Montgomery. No, no, Maxwell Field—Maxwell Air Force Base—in Alabama. And this was bootcamp in that sense of the word. This was the Air Force cadets. This was the first, let's see—yeah, Air Force Cadets. This was the first phase. And we learned military there. The military being a military courtesy. We lived—it was a somewhat—it was patterned after West Point in that we were cadets like they would be at West Point. We had rooms that we had to maintain. We had to have the beds made up every morning by seven o'clock. And you could put a quarter on the sheet it should bounce, these kinds of things. We had to clean their sinks, which they had in the room. If they, if the inspectors found a drop of water, we had to do it all over again. We had to be that meticulous. So, we learned to do those kinds of things. We also had a pretty good regiment of calisthenics. And of course the first three or four days of that was misery. But after we got used to it became fun. And I remember that during this calisthenic, during this period of time, they we had a, a formation to run around the base—around the airfield—which was seven miles. We ran the whole way in G.I. shoes. And I

remember doing it. I came in third. I was in pretty good shape at that point. I'd lost weight and then gained it back in the form of muscles. So, I was in excellent shape. But there at Montgomery—at Maxwell Field—we learned Morse code. And for those of you who don't know Morse code, you don't count the dots and dashes. You, you learn Morse code by listening to rhythm. So, the Morse code is made up of the rhythm of dots and dashes like SOS. The "S" is three dots—three dots. And "O" is three dashes. So, so an SOS call would be [demonstrates call]. And you learn pretty soon to recognize that as being an "O" and you forget about—you don't count. You with me?

Interviewer: Absolutely!

Hicks: That's how you learn Morse code?

Interviewer: That was my question is. To what degree are you retaining this? So—.

Hicks: Not a whole lot. But I retain a lot of—a few, a few numbers. Like we had to Learn "A" and "N." "A" was dit-da. "N" was da-dit. Opposites. The reason for That is when we were flying in on instruments we had—You've heard the big on the beam? And when you fly, a beam is a, was an electronic signal put out by various spots along a route. And they would put out a beam. In, in, in one way direction a beam would be an "A" with a dit-da, dit-da in this direction. And another direction—here's the center—in another direction the beam was da-dit, da-dit, da-dit. [draws lines with hands] But in-between each of these beams was a oral lull. No sound. So, if you're flying along, you may hit weather where you can't see anything except for your instrument. You hear dit-da, dit-da. That means you're off the beam a little bit. So, you know, you better get back and correct on the beam, and get back on the beam. You can keep the airplane straight because you've learned your instruments. But your direction, you can screw that up.

Interviewer: So, if you move off, the sounds start?

Hicks: Yeah, the sounds starts if you move off, and then it goes away if you move on.

Interviewer: I see.

Hicks: That was the idea. That's the code. That's, that's the beam you've heard about. But all these, these directional signals had these things. "A's" going this direction starting here and broadening out. And "N's" going this direction broadening out. [draws lines with hands] You with me? Is that making sense?

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: Ok. That's the way it worked. Worked very nicely too.

Interviewer: So, at Maxwell Field, how far did your training go there?

Hicks: Well, we, we learned a lot of things. We learned navigation. We learned the code, as I said. We learned a lot about military courtesy. We learned things about the Air Force, and that, I think that was generally it. I forget the other specific things that we learned. We learned—we did geography I'm sure, and something about the political aspect of geography, but I can't really recall those things.

Interviewer: Could you give me a percentage of like in a classroom versus outside?

Hicks: Well how do you mean percentage in that?

Interviewer: Like how much were you doing calisthenics versus how much were you studying geography?

Hicks: Maybe—maybe a one- or two-hour session. Let's say two-hour session in days—two days a week.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: Rest of the time was marching and learning military formations, and going to school—going to class.

Interviewer: I see. So, then you—.

Hicks: Like West—quite a bit like West Point in that respect.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: I mean modeled after them.

Interviewer: I see. Ok. So, then you transitioned to a, a place in Albany, Georgia?

Hicks: No, that was—Well yeah, I'm sorry. Yes. That was my next one to Albany, Georgia. And this was where we no longer—We still did our calisthenics. We still had a little bit of ground school, as we called it. Not a whole lot, but we learned to fly primarily. So, Albany, Georgia was the—was my next stop. And this was where I first got in my first flight on an airplane. And this was—And those of you who have been in a, in a museum in Atlanta—in, in Macon, Warner Robbins—have seen the yellow airplane hanging up in the rotunda. That was the kind of airplane I flew. Had, had two cockpits, two open cockpits. Had wheels—fixed wheels—they didn't come up into the fuselage. And the students sat in the back and the instructor sat in the front. It didn't have much power. But anyway, that was our, our, our, our primary trainer we called it. So, in it, I sat in the back. And, and the instructor on the first flight, the instructor took me up and was showing me how to be strapped in and everything. Was showing me all the,

the things that the airplane would do. You know, how you take off, and you, you keep your—how you move your rudder and keep it straight with your—You keep it straight with your foot. You don't use a wheel. You keep your feet—you use your feet. And so you, you, you learn to make, to operate the airplane is probably what we were doing. Though he took me, and we did some, some, some, I don't want to say stunts but say movements with the airplane that it could do. And one of these movements was the stall because—Just like in people today don't know what a stall is in an automobile, but when you have a stick shift car you're going up a hill, unless you give it more gas or give it power to get up there, it'll stall. It'll stop. And it'll stop and it won't go any farther. You had to either change gears or put more power or something. Well the same thing's true with an airplane. When you start going up, as opposed to going level, when you start going up, you have to have more power in order to go up. Or if you don't have enough power to stay—keep flying—because you're, you're flying capability is based upon the fact that your air is going across the wings at such a speed that it gives you lift. That's the basic idea of the flying. So, you had to maintain that speed, and when you pull the power back and that speed lessens, you fall like that. Well the instructor showed me this, and I had not been able to go down the steps—down elevators for all my life. So, this time you need pull, you need—He did a stall, and, and he, and he went down, and my stomach came up in my throat. Scared. I was, I was scared anyway. It's my first flight. He failed me, and he said, "Hicks, you got your seatbelt on?" I said, "mm-hmm." He could talk to me and see me, but I could not talk to him or see him. "Ok, got your seatbelt on?" "mm-hmm." "Your parachute on?" "mm-hmm." "Now Hicks, do what I tell you to do." "mm-hmm." Now remember this was a crucial thing that if I didn't do what he told me to do, and do it well, I was gonna wash out. I was gonna have to leave. But he turned to airplane upside down. We're about 4,000 feet, something like that. Open cockpit. He said, "Hicks, put your hands about your head." Now keep, keep in mind where I was. I was scared. I had my seatbelt on, but I was hearing all that wind, and, and I did. And it broke me. And there's a saying in Georgia, "That, that stopped him sucking eggs." [laughs] Because that's what happened there. It, it broke me of my fear. Right there, flying. I still don't like to go into tall building, but I'll—I've been up in a B-17 at 20,000 feet, 10,000 feet and stood on the plexi glass nose in the front and looked down and been happy. But not, not going up into tall building. Don't ask me why, but that's it. Now we learned—what we learned basic flying there. We did, we did spins, and snap rolls, and slow rolls, and emmulments, and things like that that World War I airplanes used to do. But we were learning how to fly the airplane. And, and the, the instructor was helping us to, to acquire control of the airplane. Make it do what we wanted it to do. And one of the things that you did was to get out of a, out of a stall when you didn't know what to do. When you go into a spin, get out of that and know what to do. So, he would put us in a spin, and he would show us how to get out of it. And the way you did it then with that kind of airplane, you'd, you'd put your controls in neutral—your rudder and your stick in neutral—and let it get out by itself. It'd get out. Or you could push your stick forward and that will keep your—stop your spin—then you pull up. Now the, the sensation that

you would want to do, you'd get in the spin, you'd want to pull the stick back because you're going straight down. That's the worst thing you can do. So, he taught us how to get out of spin, but then he, he would put the hood over our, our backseat so all we could see was the needle. Needle showing us what—whether we were level or turning left or this way that the needle. And then they had a ball in there. A ball in a little tube, which was about a three-quarter circle. And if that ball stayed in the middle you were alright. If it went one way or the other that means you're, you're, you're not flying straight. Not, not straight, but your wing's not level. [demonstrates with hands] So, we had that needle ball, and the airspeed showed us how fast we were going. If you were diving, your air speed was going up. If you were climbing, your airspeed would go down. So you had to read those three instruments. He would put us in a spin with a hood over us. He called it a hood so we couldn't see anything except those three instruments. "Alright Hicks, pull it out on north." So, I had to remember to do all these things that I had to do. And then what you do, you neutralize the controls, pull the throttle back, and wait till, wait till these needle ball—needles and balls—settle down, and then you pull it out. So, once you get to it, you do it. It's a piece of cake.

Interviewer: So, you did have your hands on the controls while you were still posted in—.

Hicks: Oh yeah. Oh yes, yes, yes. The whole time, yes. 'Cause he wanted me to so I could feel what's going on. But you don't move the controls like this. [demonstrates] You move them, you just sort of move them like this just a little bit. About, about just a little bit. You, you move your controls to make the airplane do a certain thing. You don't move the controls a certain amount to make the airplane do a certain thing. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: Ok.

Interviewer: So, were there accidents?

Hicks: Oh yeah, yeah. I think we lost one man. One fella who had had a little prior flying training. And he was playing around too much, and apparently, he went into a spin and didn't pull out in time, and then he crashed. But that's about the only accident I recall that we had in my class. We were there for two months.

Interviewer: Were there other specific guys—personalities—that stand out in your memory?

Hicks: Well yeah, was one fella was my—who was a friend of mine with whom I was a teller in the bank—and we went, we joined, and we were in the same class together, and we went to the same school there together, and we learned to fly together. We both soloed about the same time together, which was about—eight hours was the standard—and we made it in about seven and a half hours. This is

dual instruction. We made it in about seven and a half hours, that's not quite eight. We, we, we landed—or learned to by ourselves, and he was with me. We went through primary. That's called primary. Then we went to basic together. That was the next level. And there we had a single engine low wing airplane, but it had twice the horsepower of the Stearman—which we flew first—and a closed canopy. We had a pilot and copilot in there—two-seater. And we learned, we learned more—the more sophisticated things about flying. We did cross country navigation looking at a map. An aerial map is quite different from a roadmap that you see. It's the same stuff on it, but it's just different because it has different, different things mean different things. You see a railroad track. You can see a railroad track and two ribbons of steel, but on the map it's two lines with little cross marks on it. That's an example of the symbols that are used. So, you had to learn the symbols on your maps to learn to do cross country. And we, we had to do solo cross country, meaning we had to drive the airplane, and look at the map, and look at the ground to do the whole thing all in one swivel—one time.

Interviewer: Where were you doing that training?

Hicks: At Greenville, Mississippi. Right on the Mississippi River.

Interviewer: Ok. So that was before—.

Hicks: That was in, that was at basic now.

Interviewer: Ok. Before we proceed to basic, I, I do want to just ask you, how did you feel when you put on the flying helmet and goggles?

Hicks: I felt absolutely ecstatic. I was [laughs]—I'll try not to be self-appreciating, but I have one of the sexiest pictures of me you ever saw in your life of me in a helmet and goggles. [laughs] It was absolutely fabulous. I love it. [laughs] It is a beauty, it really is. I mean, that was the, sort of the epitomy 'cause I had been raised with airplanes, and seen guys—pilots—with helmets and goggles. And believe it all of a sudden, and here I am, and I am one. That made me—that was a, that was the symbol.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Hicks: Really was. Made a big difference.

Interviewer: So, tell me about going on to Mississippi then.

Hicks: Well, finished there. As I said, Mississippi—primary was at Albany, Georgia and that low powered airplane. Basic was in another airplane, say about twice the horsepower. We had long, longer cross country—solo cross countries. We did, still did our acrobatics. I remember, and we had a closed cockpit, and I got a sunburn in the middle of, of December—or sometime with real cold weather—

with the sun coming through the, the canopy, and gave me a sunburn. And that kind of thing. We learned, learned formation flying. With formation flying, you're the wingman. You, you, you can fly beside the leader. And on the leader's airplane you pick out two points, which are usually seen. And then you, with using your, using your, your, your rudders, your stick, and your throttle, you keep those two points in perspective. So regardless of what this leader does, you keep those two points in perspective. Case in point, he's flying. He wants to make a turn. These two points change. You make your airplane changes so as to keep those two points in the same perspective that they were before. This way, you, you, you do the same thing. You make your airplane go up here [demonstrates] so you still keep those two points in the same perspective. Is that making sense?

Interviewer: mm-hmm. Yes.

Hicks: That's formation flying. And we flew with our wings, not inside of each other, but this pretty close. So we—so he would turn, turn, go down. This kind of thing. [demonstrates with hands]

Interviewer: Did you alternate positions in the formation?

Hicks: We did. Well I don't recall leading the formation very much because this was a training thing for. Now the lead of the formation in the formation didn't have a lot of intricate things to do, as like the wingman did. The leader flew the course. Just like you're flying solo. He didn't have to worry about anything else. But the lead man had to worry about the other airplane and keep themselves in perspective with that lead.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: So, we flew—I don't recall. We flew wing. I don't ever recall flying lead in, in basic because we were learning, not, not being leaders. We were learning.

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Hicks: But my problem there, as it always has been—always was—was learning to, to land. And I had a British instructor in basic, and it's the instructors—.

[break in film]

Interviewer: I'm still here with Crawford Hicks. And you want to proceed where we were?

Hicks: Well, talking about basic training. We learned a lot of things. We learned how to use the Morse code—by the way that I was telling you about earlier—to, in our flying when our, when we did a cross country. When we did a navigation flight. We'd remember that sometimes we would be in weather, and we couldn't see

anything, so we had to use the, the sound that come over our, our earphones and our instruments to tell us where we were. So, this was navigation. So, we had to use the Morse code to keep ourselves straightened out. That's why we had to learn the Morse code. That was the example there. We did a lot more flying of all sorts, but I had a, and I had a British instructor who was very good. But I had trouble in landing the airplane. Now these airplanes were, were, they were three-point airplanes. Airplanes today are almost all tricycle, meaning one wheel in front and two wheels in the middle. With the airplanes that I flew, all of them airplanes were had two wheels in the middle and one in the back in the tail. We called them—affectionately—tail draggers. But this is, this is what we flew. So in coming in, in making a landing—this was true in primary—out of all the airplanes, with their, which were three-pointers, you had to come in at a, at a speed your approach to the, to the—Let me start back. To make a landing, you had to come into the landing pattern around the air—the field—enter at a 45-degree angle and turn right onto what we called a downwind leg. Downwind the, the, the landing strip was always determined by the direction of the wind. So, if you had wind coming from the north—from the north you would always land into the north. You wouldn't land into the wind because your lift depended upon the amount of lift that your wings got from the wind. But if you had a headwind, that meant that your ground speed could be lower because you had a headwind to keep you flying. So, we always landed into the wind. So we landed. We would enter the pattern on the downwind leg, meaning the leg which was going with the wind. Then we would turn—this was standard—we would turn, make a left turn, onto the, what they called a base leg, which was con—which was across the direction of the wind is blowing. And we would turn left again onto the approach leg, which was in the dir—which was against the wind, but it was lined up with the runway. Are you with me there?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: This was how you landed. Now, when you, now—You never ever, or very seldom did you ever get a headwind straight ahead. You always had the daggone stupid wind—'cause it was wrong, I wasn't—but the wind would be coming this way or be coming in this way, and you're going to go this way. [demonstrates with hands] So, what is that happened, that wind, you're coming in, that wind blows you off like this. So, you have to correct that when you're coming in. And you correct it either thereby tipping your wings a little bit so as to make it go straight or some of the, some of the—I didn't learn this too well, but you could turn the airplane slightly to the left and come in sideways. That's how you learned. That's how you landed in a tailwind. That's how you flew because you never had a headwind on directly. You always had a sidewind, so you had to make corrections so that the path across the ground was what you wanted it to be. Make any sense?

Interviewer: mm-hmm. Yes.

Hicks: Ok so this was landing. Our navigation was the same thing. Always had to correct for wind drift. Always. If you were the navigator, you had to check you, your, your points on the ground to see that you were still on the right track even though you may be heading this direction, you were still on the right track. The airplane was going on the right track. Are you with me there? Ok. We'd make the landing, and I would come in like this. Oh 'scuse me. Start over. With the three wheeled landings—the tail wheel landing—you would come into the end of the runway, coming down, and you'd come at an airspeed just above stalling speed. 'Cause you wanted to land at the slowest speed possible for, for—so it wouldn't be in any danger of crashing or wrecking. So you'd come in just above flying speed—just below, just above stalling speed—and just before you hit the ground, about six feet above the ground, you were supposed to—your, your, your coming in like this, and you had to kick the airplane straight with your rudder and drop it in. That's how you landed in a crosswind. In other words, so you could get all three wheels coming down, and you're going straight, and as slow as possible. That's the goal. Well, I had trouble with this. And I would come in, I'd come in and I'd go in and my one wheel may be high, and I'd hit—bounce—and Come on around. And, and he was the back. He was very British. And "Hicks, get on the ball. Get on the ball. Hicks, get on." [imitates British accent] He was screaming in my ear all the time to try to throw me out. We pretty soon tuned him out, but "Get on the ball, Hicks." But I, and I would bounce around on the basic trainer. And he told me after he saw on me, "You know, I would've washed you out if you hadn't made such good recoveries from your bad landings." [laughs] Because I could, I knew I could make the airplane do what I wanted it to, but I couldn't quite land it. So anyway, but our, our game we played with ourselves was to come in and try to hit the tail wheel first. But the runway was here—ended here—and grasses here. Hit the tail wheel on the grass before we hit the runway. That's the fun we had trying to do that. But anyway, that was how we landed.

Interviewer: I see. So, let's proceed on to advanced training.

Hicks: Ok.

Interviewer: And where was that?

Hicks: Ok, advanced training was—Now, my friend who was in the bank with me wanted to go to fighters. And at that point in time, we had, we went where we were—where we wanted to go. In other words, because the need was both places. Both fighters and multi-engine. So, my friend wanted to go to fighters and I wanted to go multi-engine. My friend went to fighters—went to fighter school. Where? I don't know. He wound up flying P-47s. Are you familiar with that airplane at all?

Interviewer: I'm familiar with the name.

Hicks: Ok. P-47 we called the thunderbolt. Thunderbolt. It was a seven-ton airplane. It had an oval engine—this cell. And it had a four-bladed prop. Now the reason for the four-bladed prop as opposed to the three-bladed prop—the B-17 had the three-blade, three-blade to it. And it had, if you ever look at them, it had rounded tips on them. Three blades. And the, the P-47 had, had a broader prop blades, and square at the ends. Four of them. There's a very distinct reason for that. The P-47 fighter had a lot more, had a lot of power. It had more power in one of its engine, its engines, than the B-17 had in one—maybe two. I don't know this. But quite a bit more powerful in its engine in that respect. It was so powerful that they discovered—they the researchers—they discovered that its prop tips were exceeding a speed of sound. They were going so fast because of the powerful engine that they lose their viability. They were no longer pulling as they should. Are you with me on what I'm saying?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: They lost 'em. So, they went ahead and, and broadened the blade of the prop. Now, the propeller is like a screw. It screws into the wood, or into the air. And it pulls—and if, if, if, if, if you're stationary and you're pulling the wind, it'll pull you into the wind. That's a propeller. That's how it's done. It's a screw. So, the broader blade prop was used so it could get more air in. We have a course screw, and a fine screw, and a threaded screw. You know the course screws go in faster, but they don't do as well as the fine graded. So, these were the four—the course graded screws, if you will. So, they would be—have broader blades, and they squared the tips of them off so they would not exceed the speed of sound so they would be effective for the entire length of the blade. I'm getting technical, but is that making sense?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: Ok. So, the P-47 had that—four blades because of the powerful engine. We had the rounded blade tips, and we had four engines. And each of the engines had lesser amount of power than any one in the other thing. But we had four of them because of bigger airplane. And I had a different job to do, but we didn't, did not do aerobatics like the P-47 could do.

Interviewer: So, you're now talking about the B-17?

Hicks: Correct, yeah. But I was trying to explain the different props because it makes a big difference.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: So, you know I went to multi-engine school in Vincennes, Indiana, right across the river from Vincennes at—I'll tell you the name of it in a minute—Lawrenceville, Illinois. Which is right across the river from Vincennes, Indiana.

[coughs] Excuse me. And that's where we had twenty engine—we went into twenty engine airplane—two we flew twenty engine. And we flew them solo—we soloed. But we flew that. And it's where I did a lot of my navigation. This is where they were, they were fine, fine tuning my navigation skills. And this is where I really used this, the, the night, night flying skill of, of the beam and all these kinds of things. And I did a lot of instrument flying too, where I'd have a co-pilot, and he'd put a hood over me, and I would fly and make approaches to the field on, on instruments. And this meant you had to approach on, on a certain angle—certain altitude. There's a certain direction. You're rate of letdown had to be a certain amount. And then you turned onto a certain direction. [coughs] Excuse me. And then you come on in, and then they'd take the hood off so you could land.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: So, this was a blind landing that we did. And we had—and we practiced that over, and over, and over again. We practiced—We also had a thing called—Oh heck, we had an artificial trainer—I'll remember the name in a minute—where we spent hours and hours—a Link Trainer. Link was the name of it. We spent a lot of time in the Link Trainer learning, learning, practicing blind flying.

Interviewer: And describe the Link.

Hicks: Sir?

Interviewer: Describe the Link training.

Hicks: No, it was Link. Link was a, was the name of the trainer. But we, we flew in that—we, we used that a lot as a trainer. We trained us. And we'd be in there, and the instructor, the instructor would 'cause an emergency to happen, and you had to get out of the emergency. See I'd lose an engine or something of that sort. You had to get out of it using just the instruments you had.

Interviewer: But the Link is a simulation?

Hicks: Oh yeah, I'm sorry. Yes, that's right. It's a, it's a simulator.

Interviewer: Ok. So, let's move on to Texas.

Hicks: Ok.

Interviewer: And tell me what happened in Texas. You arr—and the city was Pyote.

Hicks: No. Now you're exaggerating. Pyote, Pyote ain't no city. [Laughs]

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Hicks: Pyrote—Pyote—almost, not even a wide placement road.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: It's a railroad station. It was. It was called the rattlesnake bomber base because they used—they reused—bulldozers to clear out the rattlesnakes before they built the airfield there. But it was right there; 200 miles due east of El Paso, Texas. Right smack in the middle of oilfields in the desert. You saw tumbleweed. And, and it really was literally only a wide place in the road. Monahans and Pecos were right close to there. But it was 200 miles due east of El Paso. Ok. What we—this was our—Now, excuse me, after leaving Lawrenceville advanced and getting my wings, and my commission, I was quote “full-fledged” pilot then and made a second lieutenant. Went to Columbus, Georgia and learned to fly the B-17. Which was a learning machine itself. Learning what it could do, how to handle it, and learning its capabilities is what it was all about. I was there for a month, I believe. And—.

Interviewer: Were you at Fort Benning?

Hicks: No. No, this was Columbus, Ohio.

Interviewer: Columbus, Ohio! Ok.

Hicks: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Columbus, Ohio. And now here before—I'm right handed—and here before I had been flying with a stick in my right hand. Or I had a wheel I had both hands on. But the control stick would be in my right hand. In the B-17 I was gonna be the first pilot, and I had been trained for that. So, I sat on the left side. So, I had to fly with my left hand all the time. I had to learn to fly left-handed. And I felt I'll never get this. And I had—you had the horse, the— We had the capability of adjusting the, the controls by mechanically so they would change them. To do what—how you—to make sure they were level. But the instructor would not let us change those controls from, from straighten and normal. Made us sit in the—we sat in the left side and had to hold the wheel, and when we came in for landing we had to pull that horse thing back and bring it in. Or we wanted to turn, we had to horse the thing over like that. [leans to the side] So we had to learn to fly left-handed. That's how it was. But the transition was learning the airplane, learning what it could do, I had to do to make it do that, and, and radio, and all these other things. And spent a month there doing that. And then to Pyote. Pyote was a transition—was a phase training. It was a training where we started. We got out crews together—it's where I accumulated my crew, leaded my crew. And where we did a lot of practice bombing, and a lot of, lot of formation flying. Now the practice—wait a minute. Wait, I got the, well the co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, two waist gunners, engineer, ball-turret gunner, and tail gunner. Ten of us all together. And so we practiced for about two months

there, but doing bombing a whole lot, and doing low level, low level strafing sometimes, but doing bombing most of the time.

Interviewer: What is low level strafing?

Hicks: Meaning flying not too high. Like you can see what's on the ground and shooting something there with a fifty-caliber machine gun.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: 'cause—Ok, in the B-17 had two engines. Two, two fifty caliber machine guns in the nose, two fifties in a, in a turret right above the pilot and co-pilot—right up here [motions to the back behind head]—two down in the belly, one in each of the open windows on the side of the fuselage, and two in the tail. We had ten guns on there. So, we would just practice using them. Part of our practice too included shooting skeet. And they sent, put me on a truck one day—an open truck—it had a, had a twelve-gauge shotgun. And they would drive around in a circle and I had to shoot a skeet as the—as we passed it. I have yet to hit a skeet—to hit a skeet. You can't, you can't hit those stupid things. You're going this direction. They're going this direction. And you had to figure out where the 'tween, where the 'tween will meet. You can't do it.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Hicks: But that was their job.

Interviewer: Tell me about your crew. What—who were these guys? Where did they come from?

Hicks: Well, I can tell you—We—I had a—let's see—I changed navigators—Navigators were changed, and a bombardier was changed. But, you know, a final crew was. Ok, the co-pilot was Jean Bianco, and he had graduated from school—from flying school—a month or two months before he came onboard. He flew right seat. Ok. Then we have Hardy Mitchner who was a navigator, and he'd been enlisted before. And he had done his stint there, and he had, he had gone to Cook and Baker School incidentally, which was—I'll tell you about it later. But he was an excellent cook, and he was sort of a psychologist. He was a little bit older than the rest of us. Wonderful guy. And he was really—we all looked up to him. I was the boss, but they still—we looked up to him. Then we had the nav—the bombardier—is Lester Coons, and he was a very good bombardier. Just to illustrate, we would do practice bombings at night. We'd fly 20,000 feet, and we had had a triangle with the points being lighted with a, with a shack. Having a light down there was just a point in place. That's all it was. We called them shacks. And our job was to fly this triangle—we had ten bombs, I think it was—and fly the triangle. Remember the winds would be differing because the wind be coming this direction. So, at one time you'd be going into the wind, and another

time you'd be going crosswind, another time you'd be in crosswind another time. [motions with hands] You with me? The wind is constant. We were flying these ways. So, we would drop our bombs on these three places until we dropped them all. And getting a shack meant that you dropped your bomb within 20,000 feet. Now 20,000 feet, mind you, it's almost 4 miles away. And we used a Sperry bomb sight. You heard of that one? It was top secret at the time. But it was a bomb sight that they had in the nose of the airplane. The pilot would put the airplane on automatic pilot. [Coughs] Excuse me. The bombardier would then hook into the automatic pilot, and he could change direction and altitude slightly with his bomb sight to make it work with the other conditions. See he had to crank in wind drift 'cause you're going here, and the wind's coming from here, and the bombs are dropping here, and they're dropping here—way back here [motions to the back] is where we're dropping 20,000 feet. It's 4 miles away, so they do move. So, the wind would come to the side and blow the bomb off. So, he had to crank the wind drift into the bomb, plus temperature, which affected the, the, the speed, and the speed was dependent upon the distance. So, he had all these other factors had to be cranked in. So, he cranked all those things in to his bomb sight. This is why he had those controls on the airplane. He could—remember altitude—a little bit of altitude and a little bit of direction. So, he could make the airplane change to fit what his bomb sight called for so that he could drop the bomb back here. I don't know how many miles, but back here. [motions with hands] And that drill would come down and hit, hit your toe down here.

Interviewer: I see.

Hicks: That was the Norden bomb sight.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: And if he—Excuse me, one other thing. And if you hit it you called, you got a shack. And he did get a shack at night one time.

Interviewer: Oh I see.

Hicks: He was that good.

Interviewer: So, tell me about getting your new B-17.

Hicks: Well—Ok, we did a lot of—we did a whole lot of formation flying. A lot. I guess almost all of mine—not all, but a good—7/8 of my B-17 time was flying formation.

Interviewer: Ok.

Hicks: All the time. So, and that meant you had to use those two points and fly. Now go ahead with your question.

Interviewer: Your, your new B-17. You got a new plane.

Hicks: Ok. We finished these three phases. We went from Pyote to Dalhart, Texas and finished up. Just a little aside—and I'll get to your point in just a minute—little aside. We—This was New Year's Day, 1944, and I had to fly to, from Dalhart, which is in the Panhandle, down to—What's the, what's the Houston. What's the, the seacoast—sea port—in Texas.

Interviewer: Galveston?

Hicks: Galveston. We flew from—We took off and the, and the drifts were six feet tall walking out to the, the airplane. We got to Galveston. On the same state we flew formation—we flew practice landings, night landings and stuff like that. We got there and took my jacket off and got on the airplane 'cause it's so warm. All in the same state flying all day long. So that gives you some idea of Texas. Ok. We finished there and went to Kearny, Nebraska. And went there by train, and they gave me a brand new B-17. This was in—like March—something like that—and not too critical. In 1944, brand new B-17, had only six hours on it. And worth about 325 million dollars. And here I was a second Lieutenant. And they said, "Hicks, here's your airplane. And you're gonna fly it across the ocean. Sign for it." And I did. I was a millionaire in, in, in one second. But then they gave me a brand new one. And we took it up and flew it a little bit and played around with it to see how it felt. And I got it up to about 35,000 feet. And see it's normal range with normal flights was around 29 to 30 to 31,000. So, I got it up to 35 and it sort of was getting mushy, so I went on back down. But anyhow, it's another side. Then we flew from there to Presque Isle, Maine. And I had some medical problems.

Interviewer: What kind of medical problems?

Hicks: Sinus. I was smoking at the time. And smoking's awfully hard on your sinuses. And I had sinus problems. And I was hospitalized there for about a week to get rid of that. And they didn't, they didn't connect smoking and sinuses together then. So, then we flew from there to, to—Goose Bay, Labrador at 30,000 feet. Socked in all the way down to the ground. Had to come back to New Hampshire—Grenier Field in New Hampshire. I had the sinuses again, but they took care of that. Then took off and went back to—flew back up to Goose Bay. Made the best landing I've ever made in my life. I breezed it in. But anyway, we landed and the drifts—snow drifts—on either side of the runway were higher than a ship's tail. That's seventeen feet. It was at Goose Bay. Hadn't had my sinus problem again. Stayed there for awhile. Then, then took off one morning about three o'clock. We had taken the, the bomb—the air—the B-17 had two bomb bays, two bomb compartments. The right compartment had taken the bay—they took the bomb—bomb—bomb—The things you hang the bombs on—or whatever that was. And put extra gasoline tank in there so we had enough gas to get where

we wanted to go. So, we took off about three o'clock in the morning and flew south of Greenland, which is—Greenland is ice all over—but we flew past the tip of Greenland, and then flew onto Iceland. And landed there. Spent the night. Refueled. Took off the next morning. Boy, it was again. Sunshiney. This was in, in March. Nice and warm. Greenland is warmed by, by heated, heated springs, 'cause it's mild up there. We flew from there over to Ireland. If we're flying in—the navigator was a very good one—he had set the course and we were following it, and I turned the radio on to some music that I was listening to, that we were listening to and so I told him to go ahead and hang it up and I'd fly by compass by radio-compass. And, he did, so I was flying and watching the compass and it was going—I noticed it was going off a little bit and keep on going off. And then I picked up and asked him where we were, and he said “you're way the hell off.” You know? And I was because apparently, this is my conjecture and that's all it is, the Germans had bent the radio signal in some way, and it was enticing me to go this way [motions right with hands], which was open water, instead of going this way [motions with hands forward] going to Ireland. We got me back on track and then I got there, and I looked ahead of me and saw this white thing sticking up out of the water, and I watched it and watched it and all of a sudden it was a lighthouse on Ireland and Ireland is one of the most beautiful green places you've ever seen. So, I landed there, and they took my airplane away from me, and we went from boat by there, from there to Scotland to Stoen [1:00] We were there for orientation, in short time, then went to the base at Oundle Polebrook. They took my airplane away from me by the way.

Interviewer: So, that trip across the Atlantic was you flying alone in your plane.

Hicks: Uh, with the crew.

Interviewer: Well, I mean with the crew, but your plane was flying alone.

Hicks: Yes, that's right. We were not—we took—several of us took off, but we were not flying any kind of formation.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright, tell me about Polebrook.

Hicks: Okay, Edna knows better where it is than I do. It was—it was north of England—yeah north of London. Oundle is the name of the little town and Polebrook was the name of the base. This was the—the Airforce had, the Aircorps then, had three divisions—United States Army Aircorps, had three divisions—first, second, and third, and the Eighth Airforce. We were in the first division, and the division airplanes were identified by their tail insignias. The first division was identified by a triangle, second by a c-c-circle, and the third by a square. I think the second and third are correct but I'm not sure. I know the first one is. The triangle and these other symbols were the division identifications. Then the base identifications was a letter of the alphabet, and ours was “J,” so we were triangle “J” people. So, that's how we knew when we were flying, and we would start

forming together [motions with hands] for—in formation, and we'd look for the insignia on the tail. We'd know it was our group, and we knew we were to fly with that group. Okay? I'll jump ahead a little bit, when we were briefed for our combat flight each of the pilots—we had a list of where each of the pilots was suppose to be in that formation. So, for example, now I will tell you about the formation. I don't know if I am getting ahead of myself or not.

Interviewer: No, go ahead.

Hicks: The formation that we—our bombing formation consisted of eighteen airplanes. That was usual. Once in a while it would change, but mostly it was eighteen made up of three squadrons of six airplanes each. Now that means eighteen airplanes—Had a lead squadron, a high squadron, and a low squadron. The lead would fly here [motions with hands], the low would fly here [motions continue], the high would fly here [continues to gesture] staggered like this. Now each squadron was made up of six airplanes, and each squadron has a lead [points to fingers] and two wingmen, and either high squadron had another element lead [motions with hands]—two airplanes, that was a squadron. The middle—the low squadron—the middle—the left squadron would fly below, lead—two airplanes [motions with hands], and an element down here [motions lower with hand]. You with me? So, that's how our eighteen, and why we went with this form, it gave the best bomb pattern that we could get on the ground. In other words, all of the bombs dropping down out of those eighteen airplanes [motions with hands] were pretty uniform over a pretty good space—area of ground. That's what that was done for. Plus the fact that our guns were setup [motions with hands] so that a great number of guns could be used to fire in this direction, and this direction, and this direction and this one, back here, and down this way. So, we had a lot of firepower going all around us.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about your first mission.

Hicks: [laughs]

Interviewer: The, sort of, preparation for it and your feelings going into it.

Hicks: [laughs] Well, preparation, hell I don't remember the preparation for it. No, really. Okay, we'd go on a mission and we would be awakened that morning, "Hicks you're flying." Okay. You'd go down to breakfast, and poor Edna, they had cabbage and water to eat. I think it was something like that. And we had a good breakfast. We had an egg, and fruit, and things like that. They really gave us number one. We had breakfast then we went to the briefing, and then went back and got our clothes set up to go, and then when the briefing was telling us what target we were going to hit, what position we were going to fly in, what kind of ordinance we were going to carry, and what kind of problems we could expect. What kind of fighter opposition could we expect, what kind of ground fire could we expect. And see the navigators would take notes of all of the ground fire so as

make sure we didn't go over that ground fire to the best of our ability.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: So, this was the briefing. So, this is where we knew where we were, so all my—in my interest was—okay, at high altitudes—I'm jumping around, but I'm trying to put these things in as they come up. At the higher altitude, our normal bombing altitude was twenty-eight to twenty-nine thousand feet. Sometimes it was thirty. Once in a while it was twenty-seven, but not very often, usually twenty-eight to twenty-nine, but at that altitude the air—the temperature outside was something between thirty and forty below zero. That's cold. Now, when it was warmer, like twenty below zero, and the reason I was so concerned about this—this was the only concern I had about weather, was that I could wear my G.I. shoes rather than my heated flying boots. See, we had heated suits on to wear em', but they also the shoes were heated, and you just had the heated shoes on, nothing under em.' And if you jumped—had to bail out those shoes are 'gonna come off, but the day we got shot down, thank the good Lord, it was warmer, and I had my G.I. shoes on. See, He'd been taking care of me. He took care of me all along. Now, I jumped ahead, but that was our preparation for flying. My first mission, I flew as a wing man in one of the squadrons, and I flew as copilot. Now, I was first pilot, and I was designated as such, but they had me fly as copilot to see if I could handle it emotionally. Well, and it took off and I was happy. Our take off amounted to—we were—it was structured. We were in a line and we would follow the airplane in front of us. I think we waited thirty seconds, or some kind of a specific figured amount of time. We take off, climb at a certain rate of climb. One needle with our same direction [motions with finger], do a half needle—wheel turn. Remember I told you about the needle and near 'em. The needle had a width to it [motions with hand] and our turns were determined, or our turns were identified to us by the width of the needle movement. So, a half needle turn meant that the needle moved that much [motions with finger]. So, we'd do a half needle turn to the left— a three—to the left and keep climbing till we broke out of the weather. Then we'd circle around a beacon, which we—and we had a flasher in our airplane. We'd circle around that beacon until we saw Triangle J, and then we'd join up to that Triangle J airplane until we found our spot, which we had been briefed to be in. Now, where was I? Oh yeah, first mission, flew copilot. Okay, I was happy as I could be, or dumb and dumb and happy shall we say until I saw the first flak coming up. Our mission was to hit the launching pads for the—what was the second bomber you all had? No, the bomb.

Edna: The V-1.

Hicks: The V-1? It was to hit the V-1 bombs. They looked like ski jumps. So, we call 'em ski jumps. They were on the coast of France. Remember, this France was only about thirty-five miles away from England then, and this was in the Spring of 1944 before D-Day. So, our first mission was to hit these ski jumps and put them out of commission. Flying along I saw the flak coming up, and you could

see the shells bursting, the black shells, and I was so scared that I almost got sick. I really was that scared, that frightened, but I had to fly the airplane. I mean, you know? If I didn't fly the airplane and do what I was supposed to do I'd a been kicked out and been disgraced the rest of my life so to speak. So, I did. I got over it and I flew it. We did the mission and came home, but I was scared. I really was scared. Really, I can't describe it anymore, more thoroughly.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: But that was our first mission.

Interviewer: So, on these subsequent missions what other source of targets were you hitting?

Hicks: Well, mostly manufacturing targets, war related material targets. We were not hitting, as I recall, we were not hitting railroad marking yards as much, because we had found that we'd hit a target, we'd hit a rail center and the Germans would have it repaired and operating in a matter of hours. So, it was really was not a fruitful mission. So, we hit the manufacturing. I didn't hit the ball bearing. I don't know exactly what they were. I hit Berlin four times. Well, no, it wasn't in a row, but four times close together. Remember, this point and time was before D-Day.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: So, they were trying to soften them up for that, but yeah. So, the other missions I flew as first pilot and I flew eight more and on the ninth one we hit Oschersleben, which was a munitions or an aircraft manufacturing plant or something like that. And the fighters, ME-109, jumped us after we'd hit the target. Incidentally, our bomb run would be, as I said, something like twenty-eight thousand, twenty-nine thousand feet, flying in tight formation, meaning as close as you could fly, not close, but pretty close so as to have a good pattern, straight and level. Well, our air-indicated air speed was a 150 miles an hour. That's indicated air and at that altitude it was translated into about 200 miles an hour. That's still pretty darn darn slow, and we had to hold that for something like forty-five seconds. Now, that's a long, long time when you have people shooting at ya, but we had to hold that altitude straight and level while the bombardiers could get themselves, or himself, straightened out and on target and getting everything set up, so as to drop the bombs properly.

Interviewer: So, is it other planes shooting at you or anti-aircraft guns?

Hicks: Okay, when we got close to the target the fighters were not shooting at us, because of the anti-aircraft guns. I'm sorry, I didn't make it clear. We had 88mm guns shooting at us. Now, this is—we're talking about five thousand feet—five miles up. So, 88's were shooting use then. They had 105's. They shot higher, but they weren't as accurate. We had 88's shooting at us all around any targets we had. That's when we had our loses from that. Is that the answer?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: Okay, no—there were no fighters. We had—also Berlin, we had no escort fighters. We did not have any Airforce fighters with us, because they couldn't go that far. They hadn't, at that point, had not gotten belly tanks on them like they had later.

Interviewer: Okay, so talk to me about that final mission when you were shot down.

Hicks: Well, let me—there's a couple of them before that that you might want to hear about. I had a whole airplane where the flight error mission was on. On one time, you ever hear of the Zuider Zee?

Interviewer: No.

Hicks: The Zuider Zee was a body of water in Holland, which was pretty much encircled with land except not totally, but it's part of the ocean. An inner saltwater lake so to speak. And the Zuider Zee was pretty large, and so on our way home we would let down over the Zuider Zee. You know, just get out of altitude, then go on home. One day we were let down, the six of us in one squadron, and the Germans had put a gunboat on the water. They fired one round of about four shells and knocked out I think three of the airplanes of the six. And I had a hole in my fuselage in back that you could've crawled through. That's how close they were. We were doing flat, dumb, and happy going home. And that happened—that was one thing. Another time we were flying toward the target and I was leading the top element. Remember, that was three airplanes, and I wasn't being real close to the formation, because we were not close to the target yet. And all of a sudden we heard that the radio "bandits twelve o' clock level," meaning fighters were coming in from level, from ahead. So, I poured the cold to it, and got out and got in there, and one of these—a German fighter came under my left wing. And I could—as I said, remember him today with his face if he hadn't had his mask on. He was that close, and right on his tail were the P-51 chasing him. The most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life [laughs], but anyway, that happened. I had to go back. And this—I'm saying this, it's true, and it's so—something that stuck with me all my life since then, and I think this is so very important. I think about my frame of mind, and my attitude, and my ability to even operate. And I think about this and not courage or anything else. It had nothing to do with this as a mental attitude. I'd be awakened in the morning, "Hicks you're flying today," and I would wake up and I said, "Lord is today the day I get killed?" I had, and thank you thank goodness, a peace came over me. And it happened. It happened every time. I was not worried about what was going to happen or not, because I knew that my feeling was if it happens it happens if it doesn't it doesn't. So, either worry left me. And this is real. This is as real as anything I can every say. So, I'm throwing it in, because it's true. Okay, this is what got me through. Okay, on the last mission Oschersleben was a machinery factory I think or some kind of

exactly what it was, and the fighters after we left—when we were leaving after a bombing run we would make a diving turn, the whole group, a diving turn to the left or the right [motions with hand] to change our altitude, airspeed, and direction all at the same time so as to throw the gunners off. And one day I saw a B-17 ahead of me flying like this [motions with hands], probably from his tail were the guns—the bombs—the shells were bursting, biting at his tail. That's how good they were, but okay. So, this day we were on our way home. I was flying my place. I was leading the low level that day, the low level second element, and an ME-109, which is Messerschmitt 109. It had a 20mm cannon firing through the nose. Now, all of our airplanes had their guns in the wings, because the propeller—the guns in the wings and they would converge. The bullets would converge out here at a certain point. I think six hundred yards or something like that, and they—so, they had to learn, and you do not have any depth perception at altitude when you're flying like that. You don't have no—you have no reference points to see how far away you are. You can't tell. You don't know. So, they had no reference to see where this convergence of shells could hit this airplane [motions with hands]. How they hit them I don't know, but anyway, but the Messerschmitt's had this nose—firing cannon, so they could aim it like a rifle, and I could see the shells coming and they had tracer shells every seventh shell, which had—it emitted smoke, so you could see them coming. I could see those shells coming and I couldn't dodge. They hit me in my two right engines, set them on fire, and we had fire extinguishers in the engines, but it didn't work. They were still firing. I put them on. So, I did what we called feather the props. Incidentally, training, training, training, training, I was trained. I was in training all the time. So, and this training included what to do in case of, and these things came back to me. And I'm not talking about Crawford, I'm talking about the fact that training was so good and so important, because I knew what to do when something happened. I didn't go into a panic. That's the reason, because I was trained and I had the training. I got the benefit of the training. Am I making sense there?

Interviewer: Yes. Yes.

Hicks: So, I knew what to do, so I feathered the props. Feathering the props means instead of their biting into the air like a screw, you turn 'em straight, so they go through the air and they're stake, they're stopped. They are not turning, but they're not creating a big wind resistance. So, I feathered the props in two right engines and they were on fire. They were still on fire. So, I gave the alarm for all of the guys to get out. Incidentally, in the meantime here another fighter made another approach and hit us in the nose area with his shell, and the bombardier was right down here on the catwalk going down, and caught him in the body with a shell and killed him instantly. I could see his blood coming out of his—gushing out of his mouth. So, we left him in the airplane, because we knew he was dead, but then I was dropping out just trying to stay with the group and I couldn't do it, and I only had two engines. So, airplane went up on its wing and I got back in the

seat and set the controls and set the automatic pilot—the controls not the automatic pilot, the trim controls, so it would fly straight and level, but keep in mind we had two engines, so it was flying something like this [motions with hand] all the time, but then—So, everybody got out. Then, I got out. I—and this was my first parachute jump. I went out through the navigator’s hatch below here and I said, “Lord help me get through this,” because here again as I think, I knew that I had two things: one to get killed or do it. No decision to make, no question, no debate about it, you know, you did it. So, I did. I went out and my chute caught in a tree. I hit the ground. My feet didn’t even sting and I said, “Lord thank you,” and I was engaged to my wife then and I think—and I said “I know I’m okay, How’s Reeny, her name, and my mother.” What are they going to think about it? I thought about them. This was in the 30<sup>th</sup> of May in 1944. Then I was captured immediately and taken through the interrogation. they knew everything about me already. There intelligence gathering was outstanding. We had changed our altitude for that mission. The bombing altitude for that mission had been increased by two thousand feet. So, they had a sign up at the—a big bulli—a blackboard at the end of the runway, ‘angel plus two,’ telling the group to fly two thousand foot level higher than we had been briefed. We did that and they kept the navigator there in the interrogation center an extra day trying to find out from him why, not the fact that we had done it, but why we changed the bombing altitude that day.

Interviewer: Did he—?

Hicks: No, he didn’t know. We didn’t know, because we didn’t need to know and would do nothing but hurt for us to know.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: So, I didn’t know anything.

Interviewer: So, I want to go back to you hitting the ground.

Hicks: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, it was a fairly soft landing. Your legs didn’t even sting.

Hicks: No, don’t sting.

Interviewer: And, somebody comes over the hill. Who is that?

Hicks: Okay, that was a fellow on a motorcycle came over the hill. He was a policeman, and I didn’t know any German, but it seemed like I picked something up all of a sudden, and he came up to me and I said, “Deutschland?” “Yeah, mm-hmm.” “Deutsch” [points forward] “mh-mm, French.” I said, “oh boy, oh boy, oh boy I’ll get in the French Underground” [laughs]. That wasn’t true. He did not, anyway,

he—his job was to accost, to hold me, which he did. He searched me, and this is a funny, I mean here again I was—I know I was in a state of shock, but I was smoking at the time. I had a zippo lighter, which was very valuable lighter then, or hard to get, you know? And a zippo lighter and he took my lighter. I didn't have a gun or anything, and so that was—so I had to carry my parachute and my Mae West. You know what a Mae West is?

Interviewer: No.

Hicks: It's an inflation device. It's bright orange and you pull a cord and the air—the CO2 inflates it when you get into water.

Interviewer: Why did they call it a Mae West?

Hicks: Because Mae West had big breasts and this gave you big breasts. Mae West, that's what they called it, and that had been universal. Mae West was a star back then. [all laugh] We are talking about a thousand years ago, but she was a star and we called it Mae West. That's what it was called.

Interviewer: So, how long of a period of time before you were taken into the first POW camp?

Hicks: The guy—the man—the policeman oh, I have to tell ya. I got another funny. He took my lighter, which this is building up to something. He took me back into a little city called Nienburg, Germany, which was near the Belgium border. Not Nuremburg, Nienburg, and he was screaming, just screaming like mad at me in German, and I sort of figured he was angry. So, I took the lighter out of my pocket, which I had gotten back and handed it to him and he was set. He shut up and left, but then he had put me in charge of one of the villagers and they had a big long squirrel gun, so I had my parachute, which he had made me carry and I put that on the ground, put my head on, and went to sleep and slept for a bit. Then was taken from there—oh, I asked for a drink of water. German words are quite similar to English words. "Wasser" is water, "Heiß" is hot, "Kalt" is cold. So, I asked for a glass of water and they understood me, gave me a glass of water, drank it, went to sleep, and then they awakened me and we went to a military post, army post, and spent the night, slept on a hard—on a wooden bed. I had coffee, which was horrible, bread, which was horrible, and then went from there to interrogation. They knew everything about me. They even knew my fiancé's name and just knew everything about me already, so they went on through got on a—the navigator was kept there later, as I said, trying to find out why we changed our altitude. Put on a prison car, prison train, and taken to Stalag Luft III. We were let off there at Stalag III. This was about the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup> of June. We went down the 30<sup>th</sup> of May. This was 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> of June and we were standing there by the loading platform. This real mean looking German guard came up, hand on his hips, and I thought "oh boy," because all we had heard at this point was "Raus mitem, macht schnell." "Raus mitem," of course you know what that means, "get

with it,” and “macht schnell” means “hurry.” And it was screaming at us, so—sign language worked and, so that’s all we had heard up to that point, and he stood there and he said in the most beautiful broken English, beautiful, because it was home you know, “Jesus Christ fellas where you guys from?” He had been raised in Brooklyn and gone back to—and gone to Germany to visit and got impressed into the army. So, he was an army soldier.

Interviewer: He was a German soldier?

Hicks: He was a German soldier, yes.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Hicks: And he, this German, he was the one who told us about D-Day occurring, and D-Day occurred the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, as I said, this was the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup>, and of course this was a morale builder like you’d never seen before.

Interviewer: What did he tell you about D-Day?

Hicks: I don’t remember. All I know is that I think he said the invasion is starting.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: Words to that effect.

Interviewer: Okay, and I want to ask one quick thing going back just a bit where members of your crew just sort of started showing up in that same town where you were being held?

Hicks: Good point. The only members of the crew that showed up were taken to that town. The only ones I’d seen, saw later, was the radio operator and the copilot. I think just the two. I think those are the only ones who got picked up immediately when I got captured.

Interviewer: Okay, and the navigator was picked up later.

Hicks: Yeah, he was picked up later, yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: Because, we got back together when we got to Stalag III.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me what the history of Stalag III was? What had happened there prior to your arrival?

Hicks: Okay, yes. Stalag Luft III. “Stalag” is “prison”, “Luft” is “air,” and three is the

number. Stalag III was made up of five, I call them compounds, each of which had about—and these are my figures and which are only close, and about 10 acres, and each of them had about two hundred people in them. So, that looks like about, what, a thousand, thousand people divided into five. Anyway, I'll let you do the math. Each of them, so. Alright, we were in the West compound. Remember the compounds were North, South, East, West, and central. We were in the West compound and the Great Escape, which was real, happened from the South compound, and so to put things into perspective. We were, most of us were—this is an officer's camp. The Geneva convention called for a certain for certain ranks of soldiers. So, you were allowed to do these. We're not allowed to do this. So, we were not allowed to—we were not required to work, but we weren't given much food either. We were given very moderate, very minimum of shelter. We had shelter. We had shelter, but it was not bad, but it was not good. We did have shelter.

Interviewer: Describe the shelter.

Hicks: Okay, you've seen Hogan's Heroes?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: Hogan's Heroes, movie, was designed with our camp—from our camp. We had that kind of shelter.

Interviewer: Okay, can you describe that for me?

Hicks: Yeah, okay, here again we had, now these figures our approximations. We had about two hundred people in a camp—in a compound. So, each of these compounds had about twenty or thirty people in them. Excuse me, each building had twenty or thirty people in them.

Interviewer: So, it's like a barrack?

Hicks: Just like a barracks. It was made up of—our room was initially a twelve-man room changed into a fifteen-man room, and the beds were triple-deck bunks around the room. It wasn't much room, but that's what we had. And my numbers, my numbers are not accurate at all in terms of numbers of people, but I have to tell ya about this. The numbers of people in the camp, which I'm thinking was two hundred.

Interviewer: Okay, was there a heat source?

Hicks: Okay, no heat no body heat. No heat for bodies. There was a—we were—this was a new compound and so we were allowed to go out and dig using our can. We had a milk can we got from the Red Cross from—yeah, Red Cross, and we used those as digging tools and the soil was sandy. We dug stumps up, which was left over

from the building from the forest when they built the camp and we used those for firewood. For that's the only heat we had in our rooms. We had no other heat than that, and so we didn't have much heat later on, but they did get some charcoal for the cook—cooking room. That's the only place we had any heat.

Interviewer: Cooking room in your barracks or somewhere—.

Hicks: In the barracks, in the barracks

Interviewer: So, you did the cooking?

Hicks: We did the cooking, yes.

Interviewer: What did you cook?

Hicks: Okay, we got one—the Germans gave us one meal a day, one allotment of food a day, and that was not very great. Sometimes, well, a typical thing was barely soup, barely and water and you'd get—but when you're hungry it's good, but we were given barely soup and we had—Now, incidentally, going back a little bit more, the British had a system called batman. They had, so the officers had an assistant, an enlisted man who helped them in their everyday activities. This is the British outside. We did not have that kind of thing, but they did have a contingency of our enlisted people who worked in the compound to help with accepting the food, dishing it out into containers for various rooms. That was our food situation.

Interviewer: Okay, so what kind of uniform were you wearing?

Hicks: Whatever we were wearing when we got shot down.

Interviewer: Okay, so they didn't issue you a new uniform?

Hicks: No, they did not. No, no they didn't.

Interviewer: Okay, what were your daily activities?

Hicks: We'd be awakened at ab—these times are only—I do not remember exact, but we were awakened at about seven in the morning and went out to rollcall, which meant that each of the barracks stood in formation only, so its own formation. So, we had a formation of people [motions with hand] around like this. All the barracks had a formation around, and the—each barracks also had a senior allied person in there. He was the leader of the barracks. So, he would stand and get us in formation, meaning we would stand, I don't know how many, maybe ten across and maybe five deep. I don't know exactly the number. We were standing in a group, these groups, according to our barracks and then the German captain or Major, the Hauptmann I think was the captain, would come around and count

these lines and in knowing how many men these lines represented, which should have been the number of men that were in that particular building, count these lines morning and night. About seven in the morning, about and about five in the afternoon or four, something like that. The times I don't remember, but we were counted twice a day. That was called "appell." It means rollcall or something like that. As the German counter—the captain would come up, our leader would call us to attention, rules of Geneva, and we would be counted then go on from there, and we would stay there until we all were and then we left. We were dismissed. Does that answer your question there?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: That was morning and night.

Interviewer: Okay, did you have names for the guards?

Hicks: Yeah.

Interviewer: What were those names?

Hicks: Some of them we called them goons or—no we didn't call 'em—we were called "Kriegies" by the—a "Kriegsgefangene." "Krieg" is war and "Gefangene" is prisoner, "Kriegsgefangene." We called ourselves "Kriegies." So, we called them goons, ferrets, and any other bad thing we could.

Interviewer: Did they realize what you were calling them?

Hicks: I think they did—I think they—the goon—I think they found out what a goon meant and they made us stop calling them goons. We called them ferrets then. And, the reason for the ferret, ferret is an animal that digs in the ground. The Great Escape occurred in March of 44'. I was there, and you're talking about June, starting in June of 44'. The Great Escape happened and it happened, because they dug the—each room had a fire—had a stove in it on a concrete block stand, and I think the Great Escape people were—went into the washroom or someplace like that, and dug a hole under one of the stands in somewhere so it wasn't detected. Exactly I don't remember. They dug a hole there and that's how they started their tunnel. They took the dirt out from the tunnel by putting it in the guy's pants, and they'd walk—you know everybody was out walking all the time to keep exercising, and they'd walk over the compound, which was barren, and let the dirt come out that way.

Interviewer: Well, do you have any sense that the rules changed because of that escape attempt?

Hicks: This is what I was getting to, because of the word ferret. We saw, I was—when I went in there I was not aware of the Great Escape, but then we were told about

it. One of our formations that month, or maybe the next month, and we had appells. We were called to attention, and we'd been instructed, we don't go to atten—are you in the military? Have you ever been in there military?

Interviewer: No.

Hicks: Well, in the military when you're at attention you stand, look straight ahead, and you stand with your hands at your side. Then there's another formation called parade rest, where you put your hands behind your back and you stand. Attention is the formal way to do it. Parade rest is your rest. That's how you do a parade. Anyway, so we were told that on our command, that we would not stand at attention when we were called to as usual. We would go into parade rest, which was this way [puts hands behind back], and when the German Hauptmann—the Hauptmann came to count us we were standing in parade rest, and he would say something to the leader, and he would tell him that this was in retribution for your actions with that Great Escape, and that we were commemorating the Great Escape.

Interviewer: I see.

Hicks: Now, this happened in June or July. I forget exact when for our doing that, but the Great Escape. It happened, and these figures are reasonably correct, seventy—three people escaped. Now, this was from the South compound. The South compound was made up of mostly British and Polish flyers—yeah, flyers—who had escaped and gone to England and flown with the British air force. So, mostly those people. And they, seventy—three of them—I've heard seventy-six, but I think seventy-three is the correct number, escaped during—through this tunnel in March of 1944. Twenty of them were captured immediately. Now, this is pretty well correct. The fifty of them were—now in Steve McQueen's movie, The Great Escape, they were put in a barn and shot. I've heard another version. they were put in a barn and taken out two by—two at a time and saying they were going to do something and shot them outside. I don't know. I don't know which is true, but they were killed. Murdered, fifty of them. Only three of them got back to allied control. Now, we had been issued athletic gear and things of that sort by the YWCA and YWMCA and in this issuance of equipment they had sent in parts of a radio, or radio receiver. So, we did have a radio receiver in the camp, which was clandestine of course, and we were getting—we were hearing what BBC had to say, and they knew about it. We couldn't talk to them, but I don't think we could, but we could listen, see what they said. So, they told us, because of the Great Escape, because of the results that occurred, and because we were so far away from allied control—remember, this was in 44', and then 44' was before the Battle of the Bulge. [fades to another clip] The coast of France was the frontline before D-Day, and we were all the way across Germany, all the way across Europe, almost in Poland.

Interviewer: So, it was too great a risk?

Hicks: Too great of a risk, that's exactly right, and I—they, the powers that be, said you're of more value there to keep those troops there occupied than you are to try to escape, so don't do it.

Interviewer: So, was that—what was the response in camp to that command?

Hicks: Well, we didn't get a command as such. We got the word filtered down that said, "Hey, no escapes." And we did have an escape team by the way. One of our senior officers was in charge, and so he was the one who issued orders. Let's cut to that a minute. We were—we kept our own military hierarchy. Although, they were limited in what they—what kind of authority they had, but we still recognized their authority over us for whatever authority they had. That doesn't make any sense, but we did—we still maintained our military courtesy.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: So, we had a couple of full colonels there, and then we had lieutenant colonels, few of them, few majors, sprinkle of captains, and a *bunch* of lieutenants. We were cannon fodder. [laughs]

Interviewer: So, what was your general feeling, if I may ask, emotion living there? I mean, did you live in any sort of fear, well, were you generally content, or hungry, you know? What are the range of emotions?

Hicks: Okay, going back to our entry, when we heard about the invasion. We were ecstatic. We didn't like the idea of being prisoners, but then we—the Germans—I'm still answering your question, but I'm going around and around in circles. The Germans had given us—they had a radio in there for—they had out their speakers, so we could all listen to it, and we maintained a frontline, a map, showing on the frontline where the Germans said the fighting was taking place. Where the frontline was, but then our radio, our clandestine radio, showed us where the frontline was according to our information. It was quite different from that. That by itself gave us a lot of morale boost. That fellow that I told you about, the guard, "Jesus Christ where are you—where you guys from?" That was a morale boost to us when he, somebody from home, and he told us about D-Day, that was a morale boost. Depressed, depression, we were depressed, yes, we had—but we knew we were going to get and we knew we had something to get home to. So, hours was just biding our time. I literally wore the dec—the spots off a deck of cards playing solitaire. Well, we had—and I did learn a little Spanish and French, and the YWCA brought musical instruments and we had an orchestra, and we put on shows. And the Germans enjoyed the shows just as much as we did.

Interviewer: Did you participate in the show?

Hicks: Yeah, yeah. [laughs]

Interviewer: What—how did you participate?

Hicks: Well the navigator now—my navigator was from Tennessee and his father had been an entertainer, and he could do a bit of soft—shoe shuffling. So, he would do that, and I did a little bit of singing, and so, he and I got together—wait. Now, these are—look, anybody could do anything, and they put them up there. The 14 piece was a good band by the way, and—but, they put us up there and—well, it was something I did in high school. I did a little singing too, but they—but he—and he had done the same kind of thing, so we would do this, and did this as a couple, and the thing went like, something like—“Eeph, eye, give me piece of pie. Eeph, eye, what kind of pie. Eeph, eye, any kind of pie. Raspberry, Gooseberry, Huckleberry pie.” And, we’d do that and he was already—he was doing his soft-shoe shuffle for a moment or two, a couple minutes, and then we’d go back and do some more of this.

Interviewer: What’s the reaction from the—

Hicks: Oh, the crowd loved it, but are—we won first prize and our prize was a piece of cheese, which was a big prize. Believe it.

Interviewer: Wow.

Hicks: A small piece of cheese.

Interviewer: Did you trade different sorts of things?

Hicks: Oh, good point. I was smoking at the time and we had a trade st—trading store, and the Red Cross parcels including a lot. They were well done. We only got a half parcel per person per week. As opposed to a full one, which we were supposed to, but each one of them had a good size chocolate bar in em’, which was a high—nutrition bar, called a D-bar. That was worth its weight in gold almost. So, we had a little store, a little trade store, and Lucky Strike cigarettes were not very frequently in the bo—in the packages. Ches—Camels were not frequently there, but Chesterfields and the British cigarettes were horrible. They were like eating bird droppings, or something with a—and Turkish cigarettes were worse than that, but we had cigarettes in the store, and each kind, like the Chesterfi—the Lucky Strikes and Camels brought the highest—had the highest value. Then we had Chesterfields, which were more plentiful and they brought a lower price. Though, they had points, and then a D-bar brought a big bunch of points. So, if you have whatever your ability to buy and one of the—if the store had a capability of selling you could do it. We had that in the—.

Interviewer: So, it was purely a barter economy?

Hicks: Oh, yeah, very much just a barter. Oh, one fella I remember, had a belt with a inner lining—had a money pouch, or money compartment in his belt, and he had a ten dollar bill in it. And he had went down with it, which we looked at it as a matter of curiosity, because it didn't do us any good wasn't worth anything to us. You know, it was just something. It was curiosity.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: I don't know whether that says anything or not.

Interviewer: So, you have spoken about the ingenuity of some of the guys in the camp. Can you mention just a couple of examples?

Hicks: Okay, one of the men in our room, the youngest one, was a navigator and my navigator was a cook—had been a cook and baker before, and he'd study that in the army. He'd been to school. So, he was the cook, the official cook. And, he had—my room had—he got every bit of the food that came into the room. Every partial parcels, all the stuff, Red Cross parcels, the stuff from the Germans, he got it all, every smidgen of it. And then this fella, this other guy, was the genius, now in my opinion, building can, building pots. He took these Red Cross parcel milk cans called Klim, tin cans about this big [motions with hands], about that high. He separated them with the only thing he had—the only tool he had was a table knife he had stolen from someplace or other, and a wooden hammer that he built by pieces of wood, and a stick, and a [undecipherable 01:50:09]. And, he opened these cans up and then you had some soldering if they—then they used, and over the cookstove they heated those things and got the solder out, and that would save that, but he opened these cans. Now, you know the cans are being held together by—you have the coming here and they're held by crimping like that [motions with hands]. So, he opened—they opened these cans up and straightened those crimps out, made flat sheets of them, and then from that he would make—He made a pan, which was about that size on the base [points off camera], and about that high [motions with hand] on each side, slanted. I'm saying that's not too far off from being correct [points off camera].

Interviewer: So, that's about a foot by two feet? Approximately.

Hicks: I'd say eight inches by two feet, or something like that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: But, about that size. Remember we had ten—twel—we had twelve guys and then later on fifteen. So, we had to cook something—that much cook at one time. So he, the genius, he made several—he made pots and pans for us. Several like that [points off camera], smaller ones for other uses.

Interviewer: Do you remember his name?

Hicks: Don McDoogle. Fact is [undecipherable 01:51:42] I don't know if he's still alive or not, but he stayed in. He wound up, he was a navigator for [Sachen?], and he wound up retiring a lieutenant colonel.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: Ended up in Maine, but he did—he had that ingenuity and his job—the two of them did not do any housework in a room. So, he's the one who made those cans watertight. Can you imagine that? With nothing but a hammer and a little mallet. Okay, he made the pans. That was what he did. I mentioned the solder. You're talking about ingenuity of people, okay, we had the wings. The aircrew members had wings [points to left breast]. A pilot had a wing with a shield in the middle. A navigator had a wing with a, you know, a compass where you take a circle and shoot the moon with a—you know, with that insignia in the middle to show he's the navigator. Bombardier had a wing with a bomb in the middle. Then the crew members had wings. I forget what it was like, but they had a wing with something inside. Yeah, that's what they had, these things. Somebody had the ingenuity to take the solder out of these cans I was telling you about, and take the wing—take a pilot wing, and I had one. I still have it, pardon me, and made a mold in some sand and dirt. It was hard enough to hold it, and put a safety pin in there and poured solder in there and made a pin for you to wear on your chest, but the wing had one of the wings halfway clipped of and it had a ball and chain attached to it. The chain was what we had used on our dog tags and the ball was a little piece of solder. So, when you had it on, and I have one at home, you have it on—you have your wings out with one wings clipped with the ball and chain on it.

Interviewer: Wow, and what did that represent or symbolize?

Hicks: Been in jail, been in jail, ball and chain, you've seen the guy. Remember, the comic book see a ball and chain.

Interviewer: Mh-mm.

Hicks: Ball and chain was jail and the clipped wing mean we were no longer able to fly. That's what it was for, but this is what the guys made with nothing.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: This was the point. And we had—the musicians there were professional musicians, a lot of them, and we had a good band.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Hicks: So, this is the kind of—we had a lot of highly qualified people there who were flying.

Interviewer: Okay, so let's talk about your transfer to another camp.

Hicks: Oh, you can call it that if you wish, but that's alright. [laughs]

Interviewer: What would you call it?

Hicks: A march. [laughs]

Interviewer: And why were you being—

Hicks: But an exodus—what?

Interviewer: Why were you being marched?

Hicks: Okay. Now, history, the Battle of the Bulge took place near the Belgian border in Belgium. Exactly where, I don't know, but history shows where it is. The Battle of the Bulge started in something like December of 1944. December of 1944 we in that camp near Breslau, Poland. We were hearing the Russian guns at night. We could hear them, and this was not at all unusual to hear the Russian big guns. So, and we all knew something was going on. Of course, our little clandestine radio helped us and whatever information we knew. So, we knew something was going on. So, in the middle of January 1945 which was—what date I don't know, 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> or something like that. Now, keep in mind we had rollcall at something like seven in the morning, another rollcall at five in the afternoon. That was our day. One this more particular morning we had our rollcall when we were awakened. About noon that day we were told "you're moving out." I keep this time in mind. So, from that time, middle of the day or something like that, we took—we were all given four Red Cross parcel, because they were—they knew we were going to make the march, and the YWCA had brought in some extra clothing. So, I had two shirts, and extra shirt and an extra pair of trousers, two pair of socks, my G.I. shoes, and a French overcoat with a long nice woolly scarf, G.I. scarf, you know, G.I. being green. And, I took that scarf, here's the scarf [motions with hands], I folded it like this and at the top of it where the fold is about so big, and I sewed it together on the edge down here together to make a cap out of it. You with me? To put it over here [puts hands by his head]. So, I had a cap with ears on it about that long [motions with hands] or something like that, and warm as it could be, and I had a G.I. cap too with a—there's a cap and a helmet. So, I made that and used my French overcoat, which was all the way down to my legs. Two pairs of trousers, two pairs of shirts, and I had one more shirt and I put it in a box, which we had. It was a cooling box for something, and I put what little personal belongings I had such as my food from that Red Cross parcel, and anything else that—letters that I got from home, and whatever else we had of importance. And, put all of this in a box and made a knapsack out of that shirt, buttoned the shirt up, tied the tails of the shirt real tightly under the box in the shirt, buttoned the shirt up real tightly and then tied the bottom real tightly,

tore the bedsheets up and made ropes out of the bedsheets, and tied them to the arms of the shirt, so that—now, keep in mind, we're talking about zero weather outside, or something like that, pretty close to it. So, I had this knapsack, which I put over my chest with my jacket on, or I had my cap on with a hood over it with my neck down here and warm in here. I put this knapsack on my back, the ropes over here around the back and around front, tied here in front and a knot, and there it was. I was able to go.

Interviewer: Wow [laughs].

Hicks: It worked.

Interviewer: And, so you had that for your entire march?

Hicks: That's right, that's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, and did it do a good job?

Hicks: Yes, it did. Yes, it did. Well, yeah, because it was whatever—all I had. We also had—we also had got some cubed sugar in our Cross—in our parcels, and each of us had put a box of sugar in our pocket to help periodically. A big thing that happened in all of this, we were awakened at seven o'clock or six o'clock that morning and we did not get to sleep—here's twelve o'clock at night or one o'clock or something before we started moving. We didn't get any rest or sleep until about the next night or something like this. So, we were walking for all this time.

Interviewer: It was on foot?

Hicks: On foot. We could stop and rest periodically, but we walked the whole time.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about Mortimore Greenwald?

Hicks: Mortimore, fabulous person, we had some wonderful people. Mort was Jewish and he even had the middle eastern features of hook nose and so forth. Very Jewish, very obviously Jewish. We were in Germany, and as you know, and of course, with Dachau and all of these other places, you know, he was very vulnerable. He spoke five or six different languages. He liked languages, and he was always studying a new language, but very quiet and likable, very, very likable person. There were two—Carol Whitten was a fellow from Kentucky and he spoke a little bit of German. He had been in college and studied German. Well, he spoke a little bit of German, but Mort could speak it pretty well and Mort would go—would communicate with the guards for us, on our behalf, whenever it was necessary in terms of all the time, but on this march, he would walk up and down the lines helping people who had dropped out for some reason or another. Now, on that point—I'm sorry, I'm going into a lot of detail here, but these are

things that were important.

Interviewer: No, please, tell me.

Hicks: Attitude was a big thing. We had—I think our morale was tremendous in our room, tremendous, because we had hope and we had—well we had a reasonable amount of discipline in terms of Mitch ran that room with an iron fist and we liked it. So, anyway, we were in good shape. We had some fellas who were giving up, and they would fall by the wayside, and Greeny, we called him Greeny, would walk up and down and he would interpret between the guards and the guys about what was going on and try to help them up and down. Now, he was as tired as the rest of us, but still he was doing this. They were falling out, because they were tired. That's what I'm trying to get across.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: But he was that good. He was that good of a person.

Interviewer: What was your destination?

Hicks: Our destination was Nuremburg from Stalag Luft III.

Interviewer: How far?

Hicks: You know, I don't know. Nuremburg is—well, we were near Poland, and so, Nuremburg is to the West of Berlin I believe. Well, I can only you about, in terms of time.

Edna: South.

Interviewer: South. It's in Southern Germany. Southern Germany.

Hicks: South, okay. We walked all that night, all the next night, and most of the next night that we walked having a rest stop here and there. I'm addressing it and I have to, because these things to me are very important. We had a rest stop near these villages and we were allowed to go and mingle with the people who were there usually, at night, and I remember going in one time we were there, stopped, and a lady came out with a pitcher of hot water and poured it in our cups and it was just like nectar, because we were thirsty and cold and she did that. She didn't have to do it, but she was a German, just a German lady, and she poured a ton. And Edna—can you—you wanna tell the story hun? [asks Edna off camera]

Edna: No.

Hicks: Okay, I'll tell it—

Edna: Nope.

Hicks:

Okay, I won't tell it. Okay, another time I stopped and we stopped in a village and I knocked on the door, "can I come in and get something to eat?" So, she let me in and gave me some potato soup, which was potatoes and water, that was all, and she had a radio there and I turned said, "okay?" "Mh-mm." Yeah, we had a lot of communication with sign language. I turned it on and it was the BBC. She said, [motions with hand in fanning down motion] "keep it down, not so loud." She didn't mind my listening, just didn't want the other people to hear it. Now, the reason I'm bringing it up, it's so important. This was the—this reflected the attitude of the German people about the war. This was—the war had been going on—this was still the middle of the war. This was in early 1944-45,' and this is how the German people who had not been on the receiving end of bombs before. That's how they felt about it. So, this was important there. And, let me see. Oh, yeah, another—and then one night—that night—one of those nights, we were walking along and a team of horses was pulling a wagon, had apparently gotten out of control and was running—coming toward us, and so we all jumped to the side and I remember lying—I remember being there and, but some of the people got—some of the POW's tried to escape, about three of them, three or four of them running through the woods and the Germans saw them and they took their guns out and let their dogs loose, and started firing. And, I remember lying on the floor—on the ground and the minute the snow was in my face it felt so good. I could feel it, and I was wondering to myself, "I wonder if my knapsack," which was a cardboard box and clothing, "would stop a bullet." [laughs] I just remember the thought went through my head, because they all got captured and got thrown back and it was—So, it went on from there, went to a place and rested for a bit and then we were put on forty and eight boxcars, yeah. If you don't know what that is, I'll tell you, because it's a World War I term. These were cars, which were train cars, which were built to handle forty horses or forty men or eight horses, so they called them forty and eight's, and First World War I people that was a symbol to a lot of things. So, we were put on these boxcars, fifty-two of us to a boxcar plus a guard. That was a forty man capacity, and we were put on that train and we were on the train for about three days. We would—the guys would take their blankets—they had some blankets, as they had taken from the beds, and made hammocks out of them, and so we got some rest and some space from that source, but we'd have a rest stop periodically, but we were standing on it for three days. Of course, these stops—we had a lot of stops for air raids, and the air raids would be the American flyers coming over and the Germans would lock our trains and run to the shelter and we would stay there. Of course, we had solace in the fact that the Americans knew we were there, so we didn't panic too much. That was for three days. Then we went to Nuremburg. It was not at all good there in Nuremburg. The conditions were—the barracks were poor, their food was very inadequate, and I don't know how long we were there, two weeks, three weeks, something like that. I remember an incident. My navigator was sort of—I loved him—He was sort of a showoff too, but I loved him. He was a highly capable person, but this had snow on the ground. This was in March of 1945, snow on the ground. We had one source of water, a water spicket out in the middle of the

compound, which I don't know how big it was. Well, forty yards—fifty yards across, something like that, anyway, it's beyond me, and he went out and disrobed totally in front of God and all the rest of us and took a shower, a very leisurely paced bath. He took his soap and his towel and he would put his hands under the socket on the water, cold ice water [motions cleaning armpit]. He did this. I remember him doing this [washes face and laughs]. We were all watching him, and I know that he was doing it for show, but he wasn't that dirty. We were all dirty, who cares, you know? But, he did this and, of course, you know, it made him a hero like nobody's business, but he got—and he dressed—and he dried off very calmly, and put his clothes back on, and sauntered back into the room. He did—I know he did it for show, but I loved him anyway, so, that's the way it was.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: But that's on them. Now, in 16<sup>th</sup>—the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 16<sup>th</sup> of March was Easter Sunday of 1945. We moved from there. We started marching from there, from Nuremburg Southwest toward Munich. It was called Moosburg, and it was a hundred kilometers, and it took use ten days to do it, which was a piece of cake, but here again the relationship between the guards and ourselves changed quite a bit for the better. And, a couple of other fellas and I were able to get a two-wheeled cart, which was German built and boy it was constructed so that you pushed down on the end—it had a front rod sticking out for rest—resting rod and it had two wheels, big wheels, and the handle back here and you just pushed down on the handle and it went forward [motions with hand]. It was that very well constructed. So, we got that and we were able to get meat and bread and things like that and rooms from people. Those D-bars I told ya about, were worth their price—their weight in gold. We could sell them for literally anything we wanted to have, anything. That was our real barter for food on the way. We were on the road ten days from there to Moosburg. We went to Moosburg and it was really a lot of POW's there, a lot of them, barbed wire fence and all the rest of things. We lived in a tent, a huge tent, and I remember lying on the floor and it was raining and water was coming in billet was getting wet, but none the less, but on a Sunday morning we heard small—arm fire over the hill and a little bit later the tanks came across. This was the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, and this was Patton and he came in, and he was about the second tank. The first one came in and broke the gates down and put the flag up, and I tell ya we cried, we cried. It was so—we knew what it meant. It meant so much. And, Patton was there and bigger than life and three times as nasty. No, really, he was about—I'm 6ft and he was about 6'3" or something like that. I was trying to walk beside him. I did walk beside him a little bit trying to get a better look at him, you know. And I'd tell people, which didn't happen, I would've kissed him if he had let me, but he wouldn't let me [laughs]. No, really, walked beside, and he was—he had a real quick inspection. In his high pitched voice he said, "Men, you've done a good job here." [imitates voice] Zoom, [claps hands] he took off and went on somewhere went on, and said we were free.

Interviewer: Well, how did the German guards respond to the arrival?

Hicks: Okay, that's a good point, thank you. When it happened, after they showed up, the Ger—the guard—I remember 'em, a whole squad of them, were outside the fence. And, the gates were here [motions with hand] and went across here, then the fence over here. They were outside the fence walking around the fence. I remember they were throwing their guns over to us, throwing their stuff, whatever they might think, and people were looking. I didn't do any of this. I wasn't interested for some reason, but we got cameras and everything up, but they threw—throwing things over the fence to us including their guns, but there was no guard relationship at that point. We did not—we were not at odds with our guards and overall, you know. We were not treated badly by our guards, so we did not have a lot of animosity, but this was at Moosburg, stayed there about two or three days till we could get transportation, flew in a C-46 from there to Paris to Reims, France, and got our clothing changed, we gotten told wire set wires home. We got a little bit of money and put on a boat, and I ate three gr—four meals a day. I was down to about a hundred and fifty-five, got out of camp. I weighed about a hundred and eighty when I got home. [coughs] I ate four meals a day. Boy they were good.

Interviewer: Can you quickly tell me what Camp Lucky Strike was?

Hicks: Camp Lucky Strike was at Reims, France. That's where we got—okay, they took all my clothes away from me and deloused me. Now, we did not have any lice on us, but a lot of people did. They deloused us, gave us a complete change of clothes in G.I. clothing, and that's where I got the little bit of money and we were able to send a wire home.

Interviewer: What type of camp was it?

Hicks: I'll use one word, demoralization, which doesn't answer— it was a interim camp to do exactly what they were doing. To helping us get, you know, recovered from—.

Interviewer: Reorienting people?

Hicks: Yeah, no, we didn't do any classroom work or anything like that, more taking care of our physical needs, I think.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: I think that would be the best thing to say.

Interviewer: Tell me about your homecoming.

Hicks: Oh, wait, one thing.

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Hicks: About historical importance. V.E. Day was where the day that Germany signed the armistice. I was in Reims, France. Reims, France was right next door to Lucky Strike, and I was in Reims that day at night when the armistice was signed and then bedlam occurred, bedlam. Edna was in London when the bombs stopped over there and they had bedlam over there too.

Interviewer: Describe the bedlam.

Hicks: Well, everybody was out in the streets. They were street walking up and down the streets, and fireworks are going up, and just everybody was happy and singing and happy and loved everybody. This is what it was.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: Joy, joy, joy.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your homecoming, your return to your family?

Hicks: Okay, we got—and we took a liberty—I forget what they call it, either a victory ship or a liberty ship. I think a victory ship. They'd make an average, we are talking about size. Back home, I was a first lieutenant then, landed in Boston, spent the night at Boston, got on a train, sent back to Camp Attberbury in Indiana, and took a bus from Indiana to Louisville. Indiana is close to Louisville, took a bus to Louisville and left my main bags in the bus station and took my carryon bag and went to see my fiancé who—we lived in Louisville, and met her and, of course, it was quite the meeting. And, spent some time with her. Then, see, my mother did not have a telephone, so I had them take me up to my sister's house, which was on the outskirts of Atlanta, and spent a little time with her, and then went on out to the farm. They lived on a hundred acre farm out in Okolona, Kentucky and I got reunited there, and we were all happy and I was happy, and I was in good shape. I was really in good shape.

Interviewer: So, how was your return to civilian life?

Hicks: [pause] Different from a lot of people, I guess. I was going to stay on active duty, because I liked the military, but my wife was pregnant, and we were in Albany, Georgia at the base there and I was given a desk job, and I didn't re—I know now that desk jobs are important in the military and that's really where you do your job, but I did a little bit of flying, not much. And, I hated the desk job, because I just—I could see no purpose to it and I just didn't like it. So, I made a decision to get out, because also, I didn't have any education, just one semester of college, and I knew that pilots were a dime a dozen, and they were. So, my probability of staying in the service was very small, for me, very small. So, I didn't do it. So, I got out and ended up going back to school. Went back to Kentucky. We had a

house—got a house and I started college in January of—this is in 1945 got January of 1946, yeah, 1946.

Interviewer: Where did you start to college?

Hicks: University of Louisville.

Interviewer: Okay, back at Louisville.

Hicks: Yeah, and started there and pretty soon we ran out of money, because I was getting—I got the G.I. Bill, but, so, I worked fulltime at a job and my wife helped, and of course we had the baby. Rob, our oldest son, was born in May of 46'. And, so she helped by working a little bit. Well, she couldn't do much with a baby, and then I had a second job as well as my G.I. Bill, but that was my transition back to civilian life.

Interviewer: What jobs were you doing?

Hicks: Well, first job, let's see—first job I had—Oh, I know, a friend of my wife's owned a taxi company, and I drove a taxicab in Louisville and I made something like ten dollars a week for six days, something like that. I forget how much money, but I drove that taxicab. Then I got a job with Piedmont Airlines as a ticket agent in the airport, and I had that for a while. And then, got a better job with Seagram's Distillery. Now, the vice president, and this Wendle Willkie, was the presidential aspirate, and his brother Windle Willkie was the executive director of Seagram's Distillery, and he had a policy that any, any, college graduate who wanted a job, he was going to get—have a job. Well, I wasn't a college graduate, but I applied there and they worked hours, so that I could work there and go to school. And I did. I went to school. I had to work three shifts a week, and the last one was pretty bad, because I had to go school the next day, but I did. I worked that in order to bring in money. Then, I kept that. I joined the National Guard. We were getting into more money. Now, I could stay in the military I [undecipherable 2:20] all this time, and I stayed in the Guard. The Guard was called back in 1950, yeah, 1950 back to active duty, and I came back with the Guard and went back on active duty as a captain. And, I was very happy about it, because I loved the military. My wife didn't like it a bit, because she was—she wanted to put our roots down, because we had two children at that point, but—no we didn't. We only had one child at that point.

Interviewer: So, what did you do for a living after, you know, for most of your career?

Hicks: Well, most of my career—Oh, yeah, okay. I got recalled into the Airforce, and I got a job. I got an assignment at the University of Kentucky teaching ROTC, and I took—my main subject was World Political Geography, which I loved, and which was a very good course and enlightening, and so I did that for four years. And, after that, because of my—I'd been through law school, well, I had one

semester to go before finishing law school. So, when I finished the ROTC assignment of four years I was sent to OSI. The Office of Special Investigation as a special investigator as a captain, and went to the school there, was sent to—kept in Kentucky for a year to get oriented. Then, went to Alaska, spent three years in Alaska, which we loved. My wife loved it. Well, she didn't like being away from home, her mother, but we still had a very good time up there. Fairbanks, Alaska, a hundred and eighty miles South of the arctic circle, and we went fishing and we went out in the snow in twenty—I walked to work one day at thirty below zero just to say that I had done it. It was about four blocks.

Interviewer: What were you doing in Alaska?

Hicks: I was in the Office of Special Investigations. Okay, at that point the air corps investigation outfit had had a big shakeup. Somebody was stealing a lot of stuff from them, from the Air Force, and the local commander was—I think a general or captain, or a general I think, or a colonel, one of the two, but he was part of the group that was stealing. So, every time the investigator would find—start to find a lead and he would stop the investigation, because he was in charge. It was his responsibility.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Hicks: And so, the Air Force got wind of that and finally, and so, they said okay. I think this is when Congress wanted to have a separate Air Force. That's what it was. You can do that, but you must have your own investigating unit, which is not beholden to the local commander. So, we were, the OSI was set up and yeah. When you get into the military you start down at the bottom someplace or other and work your way up in rank, but they took this man from the FBI and made him a full colonel to start with and had him organize the OSI, Office of Special Investigation, which is patterned exactly like the FBI is patterned, same kind of designation for cases, same kind of departments, and things like that. So, we were the FBI of the Air Force, and our jurisdiction was identified, and so that's what I did.

Interviewer: Did you finish law school?

Hicks: Yeah, okay. I finished law school while I was on active duty and graduated 1960, and didn't pass the BAR until I was 52 years old.

Interviewer: And, then you would go on to practice law?

Hicks: No, I did not. I was in OSI all this time and I retired down here at Robins Air Force Base in 1967.

Interviewer: As a member of the OSI?

Hicks: Correct.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hicks: I was OSI for thirteen years.

Interviewer: So, you came to Georgia through Robins Air Force Base—

Hicks: Correct.

Interviewer: As a—working for the OSI.

Hicks: Yeah, correct.

Interviewer: Okay. And, could you tell me about your family?

Hicks: Okay, we, as I said, married, had a total of three boys, three children. One will be 70 this year. Another one will be 56 this year, and another one is already 52 this year. They are my babies, three boys. Luckily—well, they bother, and really they are good boys, good boys. So, we had them. Two of them—all three of them were in Alaska with us. They loved Alaska. We all went fishing together and caught fish together and did a lot of wonderful things like that. The two other boys went to Auburn, and this is when Auburn had a reasonable tuition rate, but we were able to get them to go there, and the other one went to Florida State, because he didn't want to go to the same place his brothers went, but all three went through college. Rob, the oldest, is an industrial engineer. Second is—has a degree in psychology with a Masters in industrial engineering—or in engineering—industrial management. And the third one is the wealthiest one of them all. He's an incredible investigations and he's a real estate man. He owns real estate.

Interviewer: I see and—

Hicks: He's the most successful, financially he's the best though.

Interviewer: When did your first wife Reenie pass away?

Hicks: 1990.

Interviewer: Okay, and that's—y'all were living in Georgia in retirement.

Hicks: Right, we had—we lived in Atlanta. I was working for the civil service then. For housing and urban development—no, I had retired from there. I retired from there. I was practicing law in Atlanta, and then she died there in April of 1990.

Interviewer: And tell me how you met Edna.

Hicks: We used to go to the—well, we had a group meeting over at the officer's club at Robins and Edna was a widow, and she and a couple of widows would go over there too, and we met there and we liked the—I was single for thirteen years and I said "I ain't going to get married. I ain't. I ain't." Bang! And then she walked away waiting for something to happen.

Interviewer: So, tell me Mr. Hicks, why do you think it's important to share your World War II story?

Hicks: [pause] Well, okay, I'm trying to think of why I would like to hear it, and is a— from somebody, because as a non—military person I would not be aware of the quote "crap" that occurred, or the things that happened, and I think that's very important. I honestly, honestly, honestly think that combat was good for me in that it helped me to get a perspective, a better perspective. You know, whether or not I can translate that into or transfer it to anybody else I don't know, but it was— it is the truth, and I remember when I was a kid I used to—I would pick up the magazine American Boy in a Boy's Life, and they would have stories about West Point and Westwall, military school and I loved it. I loved the things that happened. So, why would anybody want to hear? Because, these things happened, about flying my airplane across the ocean. I was proud. I am proud of that. I was 21—how old—22 years old and they let me—they gave me a brand new airplane. That's something. It wasn't me it was, because that was the system.

Interviewer: Right.

Hicks: I don't know if that says anything or not, but—These are some of the reasons I can think of.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much Mr. Hicks, and we'll stop there.