



Lynn Higgins Interview  
Utah Vietnam War Stories, KUED

**Interviewer**

Lynn spell your name and tell us what year you served, how old you were, and about Vietnam.

**Lynn Higgins**

I was there from September of 1970 to September of 1971. I was 19 years old when I went in, 20 when I came out, and I first started as a Utility Helicopter Pilot. I did that for a couple of weeks, and then flew front seat Cobra Gunship for a couple of weeks, and then spent the rest of my tours as an Aeroscout Pilot in a Air Calvary Troop.

**Interviewer**

Aeroscout Pilot? Is that the Warrant Officer position?

**Lynn Higgins**

Well, the rank really doesn't have anything to do with it. Aeroscout is the job. There were Warrant Officers and Commissioned Officers, Lieutenants and Captains that were Scout pilots, but it's the job. It's what we did, as opposed to flying lift or flying guns. We were the eyes. We were the bait, if you will.

**Interviewer**

Explain what you mean by "bait."

**Lynn Higgins**

Well, in an Air Cav group they called them "hunter-killer teams," and what you would do is you'd have a commanding control ship, who would be overhead at altitude. He would have a Vietnamese counterpart in the back to tell you this is where we want you to look, this is what we want you to do. You'd have two, either Charlie model gunships, or in our case Cobra gunships orbiting over the same altitude just watching what was going on, and then the scouts would work down low; usually a team of two, depending on where you were, usually a team of two, and we would just work the treetops and the tree lines and the rice paddies and try to make contact with the enemy-- see what you could see, report up, see if you could get them to shoot at you so you knew where they were. You weren't usually lucky enough to find them first. They usually got a shot off at you first, so... and then the fun started. We were the bait.

**Interviewer**

You were the bait. And so there are five ships then. I'm trying to visualize...

**Lynn Higgins**

Ya, there's the commanding control bird, the two gunships, and then two scouts down low, except when we were up north in Laos in the mountainous areas, and you couldn't work two loaches, you only worked one loach at a time. They called those "prink teams," and when there was two of you they called it a "red team."

**Interviewer**

And what type of chopper?

**Lynn Higgins**

It was an OH6, a Hughes OH-6. The civilian version is a Hughes 500. They called them a Loach, (Light Observation Helicopter). They called us Loach pilots.

**Interviewer**

And were you ever medevac if you had to be?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Ya, I was a medevac a couple of times. I rescued a number of people.

### **Interviewer**

How many people could fit on a Loach?

## **Lynn Higgins**

It depends on how deep you stacked them. There were two seats in the front (you'll see the photograph). There are two seats in the front. The pilot sits in the right side. The observer/gunner sat in the left side, and in the back we had one fold down seat that was there, and then on the left side of that was our ammunition box and the mount for my mini-gun on the left side of the aircraft, so whatever you could stuff in there, and the thing would still take off with, that's what you went.

### **Interviewer**

And talk about the crew on that Loach.

## **Lynn Higgins**

There was the pilot, myself, and then I would have an enlisted man, you know a PFC or a sergeant or something and he was in the left side. He was trained as a Calvary Scout, and he had... there was just the two of us.

### **Interviewer**

Describe Operation Lam Son 719. You wanted to talk about that.

## **Lynn Higgins**

We didn't know what was going on. We were... my unit, B-troop, 7th Squadron, 1st Air Cavalry, not 1st Cav Division, we were actually in the Mekong Delta as part of a Calvary squadron, and that's where we worked, and then we got notice in January of '71 that they're moving us somewhere. They wouldn't tell us where, but "get ready to move," and so we packed up all our stuff, and then that morning they said, you're going to a place called Quan Tre, and then they handed out the maps, and it was clear up on the north side of the country up just south of the DMZ, so we moved up to Quan Tre and kind of got in there and they said, you're going to be going out into Laos for this operation, Lam Son 719, and we said, "ok," but we'd been flatlanders--we'd been working the Delta--completely different tactics--and now we're up in these mountains in Laos.

So we hooked up with one of the Air Cav squadrons up there from the 101st Airborne, and I went out because I was the lead scout pilot, and I went out and flew with one of their scouts as an observer, and then I flew as the pilot with one of them, but we weren't in Laos yet. We were working right next to the Laotian border right next to the DMZ and kind of seeing how they did business. This is how we changed from the pink to the red teams, and then when we went into Laos, it started on the 8th of February, our job was to go in and find the Ho Chi Minh Trail and rain mayhem and try to cut it to get ready for the ground troops to try to clear a path for the ground troops to move in--the South Vietnamese ground troops that were suppose to go in and cut the trail, which was a whole net of roads, and that's what we were suppose to do.

### **Interviewer**

Well, lets talk about this a little bit more. By that time we were only allowed to provide aerial, logistical, and artillery support. We couldn't have our guys on the ground in Laos.

## **Lynn Higgins**

That's absolutely correct.

### **Interviewer**

So can you make it clear that at that time in the war, in 1971, we were doing a lot of things to support the ARVN.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Ya, Vietnamization was trying full swing, which it was full swing in the Delta. To go into Laos, there were no American troops other than advisors, that you'd know of, and all of the air support came from the U.S., so we were inserting troops and trying to smash the trail and all this sort of stuff, so it was Vietnamese on the ground and Americans in the air... until you went down.

### **Interviewer**

So there was still high risk here. When you went down, you were telling me that SAMS were for higher elevation flying, and was this just machine fire? Is that how they took you down?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Ya, the SAMS are for high altitude aircraft. Our problem was with the heavy machine guns, what we call 51 cal's. They're actually 12.7 millimeter anti-aircraft machine guns, 14.5 anti-aircraft machine guns, 37 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, and then of course all of the AK47's and high-speed 30 calls that you could shake a stick at. I mean it made sense. We were flying at treetop level. You can't hit them with a SAM. You're launching a telephone pole. You can't hit a helicopter with a SAM when it's a treetop level.

So, we went in and the first day it go ugly real fast! I started, since I was lead scout, I went across the border, went into do the first visual reconnaissance, had my command and control and two gunships up there and I'm flying

around this and that, and holy mackerel, and looking at this and that, and after we'd been into this about 45 minutes, my chase ship, the command and control ship, said they were going down, and so we kind of popped up up to altitude just a little bit and I could see them, and they were on fire and headed for a ridge line, and as they got there they rolled over and... went in. So, my observer and I, we went over and, you know you're going to get them out. You don't leave them behind, and the terrain there is hilly and mountainous, not like the mountains here, but it's mountainous, and everything's overgrown either with trees or this really tall elephant grass--it's about 15 feet tall. Well, we couldn't land where they crashed, and of course they're burning, and so we couldn't land there.

We found a spot maybe 50 meters, 75 meters away, but the grass seemed to be a little lighter, and so we kind of did the weed-eater trick and mowed our way down into it and I actually didn't have an enlisted man with me that day. I had a captain who was a newer scout pilot, a good friend of mine, and I was training him how to do this, and he was acting as my observer gunner. Ya, we learned we should never fly together. Bad things happen when we did, and Jerry Shumaker (great officer).

So we landed, but in the process, unfortunately, we must have found a tree, a small tree and whacked the outside of one of the blades and Loach blades aren't very heavy-duty. They're not like Hueys, and immediately we had this pretty bad vibration, so we got it on the ground and I'm holding the aircraft, and I said, "Jerry, go see if anybody's left. Go see if you can get them out." So he jumps out and starts heading through the elephant grass, and he can't see where he's going, so he wanders around for about five or ten minutes before he gets there, and in the meantime I'm sitting, and of course the gunships are overhead and they're just shooting anything that moves and they're saying, "Ok, these guys in green uniforms are coming up the mountain after you, du du du," and I'm going, "Well, o.k.," and that's how Lam Son 719 started for me and kind of went downhill from there.

### **Interviewer**

How many were there in that chopper?

### **Lynn Higgins**

There were six, and we got two of them out, but one was burned a little bit, Sergeant Seeman, and the pilot, the aircraft commander was burned really bad. He was burned really really bad, but he did survive, Joe Bearden. We got him out. Jerry got him out. I sat there and sat there for about 20 minutes and finally a lift bird showed up and the fire had died down enough that they were able to hover down low and Jerry helped get the guys up and they were able to pull them into the aircraft, and then when they said, "Get out of there," I said, "I can't leave my observer so..." They finally said, "O.k. your observers on the lift bird. They're out of there," and I said, "O.k.," and so I rolled it back up to RPM and staggered it back to the Vietnamese border. It was shaking really bad. I couldn't see the instrument panel. In fact I had a Cobra pull up on my wing and he was giving me airspeed readings because I was, just in hopes it wasn't going to come apart, and got to... I could see, we had flown away.

We were probably about 25, 30 miles inside Laos and I saw some armored personnel carriers, some American armored personnel carriers, some 115's, and I said, I'm landing down there, and of course they were the Vietnamese sitting on the border ready to go in, and I'm going, "Hey, will you just wait here for a minute?" And I said, "Get me a lift ship." It was common for scout pilots to carry their own sling gear. What it is is a bit clavice that you put on the rotor head and you put it in with pins and another helicopter can come in, and you hook it up and then they can lift it out and take it away. So I said, "Bring me a lift bird, and I rigged the aircraft for extraction, and then sat there for about 20 minutes and then the Huey came in and I hooked it up and they took my aircraft out and another one came in and landed and I loaded the rotor blades I'd taken off, and the machine gun and everything in the back of the Huey and then they took me out.

### **Interviewer**

And you were 20 years old?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I was 20 then, 1971.

### **Interviewer**

The command ship was shot down.

### **Lynn Higgins**

The command ship was destroyed, crashed and burned.

### **Interviewer**

But they were shot down?

### **Lynn Higgins**

Yes, they were shot down. They figure 51 cal rounds into the transmission.

### **Interviewer**

When you got back to a safe place, how do you decompress and come down off of something like that?

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well, I'd been flying scouts for sometime, and you just get to a point where it's just business. I'm no whatever. You just learn to desensitize and you just, "O.k., well, that was pretty scary. What are we going to do tomorrow?" And I

am no hero! I'm probably a psychopath if anything. You just do it because you got to get up and do it tomorrow. The war's on, so you know, kind of like the guys in the B17's and the B-24's in WWII. You go do it again, but I'd been shot at by this time so much that... O.K., that's what you do when you're 19 years old, ten feet tall and bullet-proof, or so you think.

### **Interviewer**

Describe the strategic environment in 1971.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well, what had happened was they were trying to enact what was called Vietnamization, which means they wanted the South Vietnamese, or the ARVNS, Army Republic of Vietnam--Marvin the ARVN--they wanted the ARVNs to do all the groundwork, and they were also trying to have the Vietnamese Air Force do as much air work as they could, but the Vietnamese Air Force had its own problems, so the U.S. was still doing most of the air work. There was another faction, if I'm answering your question, those were suppose to be the good guys--us, the ARVNS, and VNAF, of course the Marines, but the bad guys were the Vietcong, Nationalist Liberation Front, and they were the insurgents, and then there were the North Vietnamese regulars. If they had green or blue uniforms on they were NVA regulars and they were much better trained, much better armed, and always a lot worse fighting, and that's what we were dealing with in Laos, were the NVA regulars and some Communist Chinese.

### **Interviewer**

Tell me why the South Vietnamese Air Force had problems.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well, it's just my opinion, but where I went to flight school, we went to flight school in the same helipads and the same air-fields with them--one, there is a severe language barrier, and two, there is a cultural difference, not that they're bad, not that they're wrong, it's just that the way that we looked at aviation and flying and managing machines and that sort of stuff is different than how they did, and one, they just weren't that good of pilots. There were just a lot of problems. They weren't real disciplined. It was always fun to watch... the running gag in country is if you were going into a little airstrip somewhere where there was a refueling point to get refueled, you know here comes your formation helicopters in to land, and right in the middle would fly this Vietnamese airplane, and the only radio call you may have heard was, "I land now," or "I take off now," and they just... well it was their country, but they just kind of did what they wanted, and it was always good for a thrill. They were on their own frequency I guess.

### **Interviewer**

Did you ever haul Vietnamese troops?

### **Lynn Higgins**

In my short time when I was a lift pilot, ya. All I hauled, on all the air assaults I was on, all we ever hauled were the South Vietnamese troops, ARVN, and then as a scout pilot, that's who I supported on the ground. A lot of times I was screening for them. Once we made contact with the enemy, they're insert the ARVNs and then I would screen in front of them or screen their flank or whatever. We always worked for the ARVNs.

### **Interviewer**

And you would radio down to their radio guys?

### **Lynn Higgins**

No, I couldn't talk to their radio guy. I'd talk to the command and control bird and he would talk to the Vietnamese in the back seat, who would talk to their people. The language barrier, but they also had command issues. They didn't want us dealing directly with their guys. Again, there's a lot of cultural, and I'm not saying it's bad, it's just really different. They have the thing of being dishonored where, you know, you don't just tell another Army colonel on the ground this or that, or you know, it has to go through their proper chain.

### **Interviewer**

So tell me about the morale of the SVA troops. How did they fight?

### **Lynn Higgins**

They didn't. With the exception of what were called the Hoc Bau(?). The Hoc Bau(?) were Vietnamese Rangers, and they were extremely good, extremely diligent, and extremely ferocious, but your regular everyday Marvin the ARVN wasn't good. A lot of them were Vietcong, supposedly recovered Vietcong. Some of them were definitely "plants," and then the ARVNS just didn't like us a lot. I've been shot at by ARVNS. It was not uncommon to insert the troops and back off and supposedly they would do their thing and the slicks, the utility helicopter, the slicks would go back in and extract them. Four hours later they're still sitting on their same rice sacks where you dropped them off. That was not uncommon. They weren't in the fight.

### **Interviewer**

Why do you think that is?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well one, their heart wasn't in it. Two, they knew there were bad guys out there and those bad guys were going to get them. They didn't want to be any part of that.

### **Interviewer**

I was told by many veterans that they just wanted to return to their villages and families.

## **Lynn Higgins**

You know, that's exactly right. Absolutely. They weren't interested in the politics. They weren't interested in this and that. They really didn't care who was in charge of... The majority of people didn't care who was in charge as long as nobody came and killed them, and they had rice to eat, they had water buffalo to plow their fields with, they had a home, a house, a hooch to keep the rain off, and you know some wood for fire. They just wanted to live, kind of like all of us, really truthfully. I'd probably feel the same way.

### **Interviewer**

So the SVA troops who, as you say, their hearts weren't into it, were the brothers and uncles and fathers?

## **Lynn Higgins**

I don't know about that. I don't know who they were except that I knew what they looked like, and I knew what their patches were, and if we were told that you're working with the Hoc Bau(?) it was always a good fight.

### **Interviewer**

Talk about the Chu Hoi program.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Chu Hoi means "open arms" in Vietnamese, from what I'm told, and what it was was people who had been Vietcong, or associated with Vietcong and wanted to come back to the good graces of the South Vietnamese government could Chu Hoi, showing they didn't have any weapons. They'd take them into a Chu Hoi camp and they'd reindoctrinate. It wasn't like a POW camp or any of that, but they would go through the reindoctrination process and they would move them, I believe, into the South Vietnamese Army. I don't know if they just let them go into the street or what.

We actually had a Chu Hoi camp just outside the wire right next to my airfield where I lived. It was kind of interesting to watch. In fact, there's a slide of it in there. It was just, "I don't want to be VC anymore. I want to be one of you," and that did and didn't work. There was also a bounty I understand, and I don't know the amount. I think it varied from time to time and where you were where they could Chu Hoi and they would give them so much money, and then of course a lot of times once they'd get out on a thing they'd just disappear again or whatever, so it was a problematic program. It didn't work real well from what I know.

### **Interviewer**

And then of course you said there were "plants."

## **Lynn Higgins**

Oh ya, there were some VC "plants" in there, absolutely. You know, the North Vietnamese, working with the VC, they were smart people. They knew how to gain intelligence. Take, for instance, when we went up to, we were going up to Quan Tre to go fight Lam Son 719, our hooch-mates knew where we were going before we did. They said, "You go Quan Tre. You go Quan Tre." This was a couple of days before we were supposed to leave. They had extremely good intelligence.

### **Interviewer**

You mention friendly fire. Tell me about that.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well friendly fire was everywhere, in fact Vinh Long Army Airfield, where I was in the Delta, if you took off to the west, you were going to get shot at on every takeoff, but you couldn't return fire because there was a village right there and it was supposed to be a friendly village. A lot of time we would take fire from the Vietnamese soldiers. They'd insert the Vietnamese. I'd go down... the ARVNS, excuse me. They'd insert the ARVNS, I'd go down to screen in front of them, and I would... here would come red tracers coming that way, and that was not uncommon.

### **Interviewer**

Was it deliberate?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well, I remember one day in particular that we were working in an area, and it looked pretty promising and we had all kinds of stuff, and so I said, "Let's go back and find a landing zone and bring the ground troops in," and so they brought them in and I'm out screening again in front of them. I hadn't been down into it maybe five minutes or so and here come the tracers and so I yell, "taking fire! taking fire!" Egress. The gunships roll in, and of course the Command and Control ship says, "Negative, negative, break it off," to the gunships. "Break it off. Break it off," because they were afraid they'd hit the friendlies, and I said, "Well hey, that fire..." (and I conversed with my observer) and I said, "Where did that come from?" It came from the ARVNS! Well, it came from the dinks, and I



won't go into that. You need to cut that. We were very racially... well ya. It was ugly. Go watch the movie, Grand Torino. That's how we were. Anyway, good movie. But you have to dehumanize people before you do what we did to them. Anyway, so they said... (my call sign was one seven). They said, "One seven go back in there. The back seat says they have that turned off and that was a mistake," and I said, "O.k.," because they were working through tall grass.

So we went back down in and started screening again, and in about another ten minutes here come the tracers again and we go through the same drill, and they said, "Don't return fire! Don't return fire!" because my observer started to open up when... The first thing you do when you're a scout when you take fire, whether I see it or he sees it, you key the mike and yell, "taking fire, taking fire," and he opens up. Even if you don't know where it's coming from, he's going to make noise. The second thing is, I immediately accelerate. The third thing is the gunships roll in and they're going to put rockets right under my tail as I go out, unless they can see where the fire's coming from, and then they'll put it right there. Also at times my observer would immediately pull the pin on a smoke grenade and drop it and then start shooting, because we're trying to mark where we were.

**Interviewer**

What color is that, by the way?

**Lynn Higgins**

Uh, pick your color. We had goofy grape, loudmouth lion. We had a plethora of different colors of smoke grenades.

**Interviewer**

I thought it was red when you're taking fire.

**Lynn Higgins**

When you're in a scout you throw what you got. There's a whole other story about colors and smoke, but anyway... So once again, the guns are broke off. We beat feet the area, and I said, "Hey, that's twice guys, we're through," and so we go off and hold off into a holding area and I said, "Can I come up?" meaning come up to altitude, and they said, "No, stay down there one seven, we're working this out," and finally they figured they've got it worked out and they said, "O.k. go back in there, but if you take fire, don't return fire." I said, "Guys, we've already played that twice. If I take fire, I'm going to return fire or I'm not going in," and so another big meeting happens up in the aircraft, and finally they say, "O.k. if you take fire you can return fire, but don't shoot toward the friendlies," and so I go back in and we're getting close to the end of my fuel load and here it comes again, more red tracers, and they're close. It's obvious that they're shooting at the aircraft, and so I yelled, "Taking fire, taking fire," and I just kicked the pedal of the aircraft as we're going and kind of fly sideways and squeeze off a burst with my mini gun and that's it. We've had it. We're through.

**Interviewer**

Did you have ultimate confidence in the gunships that were covering you?

**Lynn Higgins**

Ya, absolutely.

**Interviewer**

What did that feel like to have that support. This is your life.

**Lynn Higgins**

It's there's too. That's why I had to fly utility helicopters first and then a little bit of front seat Cobra so I knew everybody else's job. I knew what was going on in the operation, because everything in the visual reconnaissance, what we call VR's, focus on what the scouts were doing, and ya they had my back and I had there's, you know. If they went down, I was going to be there to get them.

**Interviewer**

And you're only 20 years old.

**Lynn Higgins**

They liked us like that. That's why warrant officers didn't have to go to college. That's why they took me five weeks right out of high school. They want you young and dumb.

**Interviewer**

You weren't dumb. You can't be dumb to do what you did.

**Lynn Higgins**

At 19 years old, ya that's not real bright.

**Interviewer**

Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**Lynn Higgins**

I enlisted. I wanted to go to flight school. I actually enlisted. I found out about the program when I was a junior in high school, the Warrant Officer Flight Training Program, and wow, that's really cool. I loved aviation. I could never afford to take flying lessons. My dad was a steel worker and that's before steel workers got paid good, so when I

got to my senior year I actually went and talked to a recruiter to find out about it, and of course he gave me the hand bills and the pictures and all this and I'm, "oh ya, this is for me," and when I got, I think it was March, ya March of '69 I was still in high school. I went into the recruiter and he said, "O.k. we'll have you go up to the Army Air Force Entrance Examining Station in Salt Lake and you can take the tests and the physical and all that and see how you do, see whether you qualify, and I said, "Right on!"

So I did that for two days and I passed their flight aptitude selection test and all the other stuff and the flight evaluation board, and the flight physical, and they said, "O.k. we'll give you Class 70-19, Warrant Officer Flight Training if you'll sign on the dotted line, but you haven't graduated from high school yet so you have to get a letter from your dean of boys saying you're going to graduate," (which was another story in itself).

So I signed on the dotted line... actually it was a month later. I did all of the tests and it took them a month and they said, "O.k. we'll take you. You'll be Class 70-19, and I went up on the 22nd of April I think it was, and signed on the dotted line and then went into what was called "delayed entry," pending graduating from high school and I was suppose to go in on the 20th of July. When did they land on the moon? Twentieth of July, '69, and I'm getting close, and I'm getting close, and they called me the day before and said, "Don't come in tomorrow. They're going to land on the moon. Nixon has declared it a national holiday. Come in on the 21st," so I said, "O.k." So I sat with my buddies and we watched them land on the moon and the next day my folks took me up and I signed in and did a little more physical to make sure I hadn't messed anything up, and put me on an airplane and sent me to Fort Polk, Louisiana for basic training.

### **Interviewer**

Lets back up here a little bit. You're from Provo?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I'm from Provo, ya. Grew up there.

### **Interviewer**

And tell me what you told me on the phone, the environment, what was going on, your friends.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well, when I grew up I had, you know I was kind of part of the outcast of the great society at the local high school, so I was hanging out with guys who were not mainstream. They weren't really hippies, but they saw things a little different, but still I'd grown up in Provo, mother, apple pie, the flag, rah rah, and so I thought I was doing the right thing, and I wanted to fly. I wanted to be a commercial helicopter pilot and I figured the best thing to do... I can go in. I'll give them four years, do my tours in Vietnam, get out and go get me a commercial helicopter pilot job, so that was my goal.

### **Interviewer**

What were your buddies telling you?

### **Lynn Higgins**

They didn't say too much. They'd give me some crap now and then, but they really didn't say too much.

### **Interviewer**

You grew up LDS. What was the political environment there?

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well at the time then I really didn't know that anything was really, anybody was hostile. It was after I got back when everything had changed.

### **Interviewer**

We'll talk about that in a minute.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Ya, my folks couldn't afford... you know I didn't have enough money to go to college, so I knew that was out. My folks said, "Well, if you'll go on a mission, we'll pay for one semester." I was like, "Not so much. I want to fly." I'm all about the flying, so that's how all that came down.

### **Interviewer**

Lets talk about... I want to make the distinction here. You hear quite often about friendly fire because there were a lot of casualties by friendly fire. Can you make the distinction? Are the statistics about friendly fire including the SVA shooting Americans, or is it just American injuries by...

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well there's two types of friendly fire. Friendly fire is anytime there is a supposed non-hostile fires a weapon and injures another friendly, same forces. You had the ARVNS, the South Vietnamese who were supposed to be our allies. We were supposed to be their allies, so if you got shot at by them, that was friendly fire. That was sometimes accidental. Most of it I really believe was purposeful. Then there was friendly fire among American forces where you just made a mistake. There was, you know you shot into a bunch of friendlies that you didn't know were there. You thought they were somewhere else. I don't have experience with that. I just have experience dealing with the

ARVNS and there was all kinds of friendly fire.

As you traveled around Vietnam by air there was always artillery barrages going here and there. They were calling for artillery fire, and so you'd have an artillery fire support base here and there, and I remember one of the few times I got to fly up to Saigon, you had to call... in one place you had to call, it was called TANANARTY(?) which was a radio frequency that you call and you talk to these folks and you say, "O.k., I'm going from Vinh Long to Sadek and then up the highway to Saigon, what have you got that's hot?" "We've got no artillery fire." "O.k., no problem," and five minutes later you'd be flying along and all of a sudden you'd hear this BOOM, and you'd look down and there would be three artillery pieces there with their barrels lined right at ya, and I don't think they were doing it purposefully to shoot down the helicopter.

They just don't coordinate with anybody. They work on their own rules, and they don't talk to people. That went on all the time. In fact, we used to... it was procedure that the first round, if they were going to put in an artillery barrage, the first round they would shoot is an airburst white phosphorous round, which is a big white puff of smoke to tell everybody, o.k. we've got artillery going here, and so we would... often times when the operation was really developed at the end of the day, they would release the scouts, because we were the slowest aircraft out there. We were really good down low, but up high everybody could fly faster than we could, and so they would release the scouts to head for home and we'd be listening to what was going on on the radio, and we carried white phosphorous grenades because that's what we used to burn hooches with, and we'd hear, "O.k. guns, you guys can head on back," and you'd hear them talking this and that, and you could tell when they were just a little bit behind you and I've have my observer pull the pin, release the plunger, count a few seconds and then drop it, and then we'd get this air burst, and immediately they'd think, oh we got artillery going in, and so the guns are going over here, and so we'd fly over there and then we'd do it to them again, so you know kids will be kids, and then they'd fly right past us because they were so much faster.

**Interviewer**

Anything for a little excitement, which brings me to the next question about boredom. Talk about boredom and morale. You told me before that soldiers without a mission are the most dangerous guys in the world.

**Lynn Higgins**

Soldiers without a mission are a catastrophe. They are. It's terrible. If you don't have something to do, something to keep them busy, and it has been proven time and time through history, (pick a war) the guys who are sitting around get in trouble. In an Air Cav Troop you've got the scouts platoon, you've got the gun platoon, you've got the lift platoon, you got operations, and then you have what's called, the blues platoon, which are the American infantry that once the scouts make contact, the guns do what they need to, you develop the situation, then the lift ships would infill air assault the blues to work it. Well, Vietnamization had now happened and our blues didn't have a job. They didn't do one air assault the whole time I was there. In fact, they didn't even go with us when we went up to Lam Son 719. They stayed down in Bien Long.

**Interviewer**

Just to understand, the lift ships are Chinooks?

**Lynn Higgins**

No, UH-1s.

**Interviewer**

Oh Hueys.

**Lynn Higgins**

Hueys.

**Interviewer**

There are so many different types and names of choppers.

**Lynn Higgins**

I'm sorry, there are, and there's a lot of names for them, and I apologize because I am into detail so. They were Hueys. The attack helicopters were AH-1 Cobras. The lift ships, we called them Slicks, because other than the two M-60's, they weren't gunships, they were Hueys, UH-1H, and I was flying OH-6's--the Loaches.

**Interviewer**

The back loading ships?

**Lynn Higgins**

Marine Corp H-46's. That's Marine Corp. And the Chinooks, which are bigger, they were Army aircraft. The Marine Corp had some Hueys and H-34's and H-46's, and then the Army had OH-6's, AH-1's, UH-1's, CH-47's, and CH-54's. Ya... like you care. I got pictures of all of them in there. The command ship was just a Huey.

**Interviewer**

Those command Huey's had air-conditioning right?



## **Lynn Higgins**

All the air-conditioned Huey is... it's what we call a 290 air-conditioning--two cargo doors opened and 90 knots. The only people that had air-conditioning were the Cobra pilots.

### **Interviewer**

More on boredom and morale. What were some of the behaviors?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well first off, the flying troops didn't have much boredom because we were working every day. It was not uncommon to... you were only suppose to fly 110 hours a month, and it was not uncommon that you'd have to go to the flight ? desk for an extension at times, usually. The ground troops was a different story. All they did was pulled detail, guard duty, and got in trouble. They had a lot of free time in the Delta. You could go off the base down in the town of Vinh Long, and you know they had girlfriends and you could buy dope and just, you know, what soldiers in a horrible place do. Pick your war. And it was a real problem. Drug use... marijuana was thing, but there was a real heroin problem later in my tour there, real severe, and of course the racial tension was ugly in that bunch too.

### **Interviewer**

We interviewed someone who, I was surprised he opened up and told us he became addicted to heroin.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Not surprising at all. They were trying to do what the guys in WWII did with alcohol. Alcohol was an interesting thing. They could buy beer, but they couldn't buy a bottle (the enlisted guys couldn't). You had to be at least, actually I think you had to be at least a first sergeant or an officer to buy a bottle of alcohol. Well, I was 19 years old and I use to have E-5 and E-6's come to me who were, you know in their late 20's and 30's asking me to buy their bottles for them from the PX. Weird! So, what they could get was heroin. It was 95% pure, come in a little plastic keg about like this, either clear or green or blue plastic.

I remember because they were all over the place out by the bunkers empty. It cost them five bucks, and these guys were just trying to get through it all. You know, I feel for them. I don't know about their background. Most of them were ethnicity. Not a lot of white guys in that unit, which means that they were carrying the white guy's war on their back, and there grew to be, towards the end of my tour, a horrendous heroin problem. If guys were smoking dope that was one thing. In fact, I would even tell my enlisted observers, because we had a couple of them that started doing smack, and I said, "Look, all I ask is you don't come to the flight line drunk..." and I've flown with people that are drunk..."if you're going to smoke dope, o.k. Don't get caught. Don't tell me about it, and come to the flight line straight. That's all I ask, and your business is your business, but don't be tipping the needle. Don't be doing this heroin crap, because if you do that and I find out, I will turn you in."

And so I got along with almost all of the observers. There were a couple of them that were hard-core and they weren't going to hear that, but I got along great with my observers, and you had to depend on them. I mean it was you and him and him and you, especially if you ever went down, but the morale for the enlisted guys who were in the blues platoon was just horrific.

### **Interviewer**

Well the war was changing. Do you know if they were informed, or by then were you informed of what was going on?

## **Lynn Higgins**

Ya. We all knew about Vietnamization. They all knew why they weren't going out and fighting the war.

### **Interviewer**

I don't know if you interacted with these guys much, but were they wanting to battle?

## **Lynn Higgins**

I didn't interact with them very much. That was kind of no-man's land. That was a good place to go over and to get into trouble. You know some young warrant officer going in there and, you know this and that and let the sergeants deal with that because it was just a bad place to be.

### **Interviewer**

You talked about the monkey barrels.

## **Lynn Higgins**

The kegs of heroin? Like I said they were about that big. It reminded me of where you have the barrels where you're a kid and take them apart and at the end you'd take it out and they'd be a monkey in the middle of it. It was about that size, but it was clear plastic, either green or blue or clear, and by all of the hooches that you had there was always a bunker made out of sand bags and beams so that if you took mortar rounds at night, or took mortar rounds at any time you had some place to go, and as I would walk through--their call sign was "powder valley"), as I'd walk through "powder valley" area, past their bunker, that bunker there was just hundreds of those thrown all over the ground. They'd go out there and shoot up or whatever, and I don't know if they were leaving them there intentionally or what, but I just remember seeing that and thinking, that's weird, o.k. on with what I was doing.

## **Interviewer**

It's interesting that it was done so non-discreetly and out in the open like that. We've interviewed guys who say that absolutely didn't happen.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well I'm sure there were. Earlier in the war that didn't happen like that, and maybe in other places where the ground troops were still going out and fighting, ya I'm sure it was. That's the thing... as the war goes through phases, and depending on where you are and what you're doing, it's a whole different war. The only common is, you're in Vietnam and it sucks!

## **Interviewer**

I'm glad you said that because if you could read some of our online transcripts, and they're on our website... completely different experiences... from Branch to geology, to geography... Highlands or the Delta...

## **Lynn Higgins**

Central Highlands, up along the DMZ, down in III Corps, around Saigon, down in IV Corps, into Cambodia, into Laos. I did Cambodia, U Minh Forest, Laos and IV Corps.

## **Interviewer**

We have an interviewee who was interrogated North Vietnamese officers and was fascinated by the people and their morale and culture. What was your relationship, thoughts on the enemy?

## **Lynn Higgins**

And their people of done it for 100 years, you know. As a 19, 20-year old scout pilot, I lived in my little microcosm world. I knew the South Vietnamese that I had to work with and the distain I had for them. I knew the Vietcong and I didn't hate the VC, but they were my enemy. I don't remember ever hating them or being angry at them. Even when friends were shot down I kind of flipped a switch mentally and, o.k. it's business, somebody's down, now we do this. It wasn't the, I'll get you. I'll get you. I have a friend... I'm sorry I'm going to segway for a minute.

I have a friend who had a friend of his who was shot down and he knew he was shot down and he was in the area and he yells, "I'm coming Daniel. I'm coming," and ends up crashing right on top of the previous wreckage because he got his hair on fire and instead of being methodically and thinking it out, he made a mistake and ended up with two aircraft on the ground.

I was fortunate, not that I was good or a superman, but I was fortunate that I was able to flip a switch or a switch flipped when guys were down and it was just all business. Now once you got out then it was a different story, but... o.k. that's my rabbit hole for that. I'm sorry.

As far as the difference in the Vietnamese, or how I saw them and other people saw them, they were just the bad guys. They were Chuck. They were the VC. They were Charles. And if they were NVA regulars this is not a good day. It's just what you did. You went out, and like I alluded to before, because it was a very personal war, yes I was flying, but I was amongst it. You know I'd been shot at from here to that tree, you know the guys sticks his barrel out of a bunker as I fly by, a camouflaged bunker, and you know we'd been shot at that close, but we rained a lot of mayhem and death down and they're just the bad guys. You don't hate them, you're just doing your job and lets see how many of them we can kill.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Not to get into what the modern day Army calls the "Huah" of everything, again I was really lucky I had a knack for it. I had good eyes. I seemed to be able to sense things, and I had a very good kill rate, and I got shot up a lot, but I never went down that I didn't choose to go down. So ya, I had a friend that said--you know I was a good little Mormon boy--"You know you don't go downtown. You don't go down and whore around. You don't drink or smoke. You just go out and kill people everyday." I was like, "o.k. That's what I do."

## **Interviewer**

So it was a job then, but you've had all these years to reflect on it.

## **Lynn Higgins**

Well, you know you compartmentalize. You stuff things down. Sometimes you're not wise enough or worldly enough or smart enough to realize what's going on, and so you'll do a lot of things when you're 19 and 20 that you won't do. Like when I deployed to Iraq with the National Guard I was 55, and like I use to tell people, you know this is a lot easier when you're 19 and 20 than when you're 55 and 56, and basically there's a lot of things that you learn not to do in a lot of spectrums.

## **Interviewer**

Lets talk about Operation Golden Flow.

## **Lynn Higgins**

I left Vinh Long on the 29th of August and my friend Jerry Shoemaker that we went into save the guys, or his call sign was, "Big Ugly Shoe," but he flew me up to Long Bien to drop me off, to send me home, and when I got to the 90th Replacement Battalion the first thing you check in and they give you the briefing and then they say, o.k. you got to go over and you got to do a urine test.

"What?" Ya you got to do this urine test to see if you're addicted to anything, or if you're using, and if you are we'll deal with it. If not, it will probably take about two days and then we'll get you on a flight manifest and then you can go home, so we used to call it... first you got to get on the piss test manifest and then once you past that then you can get on the flight manifest, and then you can go home. And that just started before I got there, which normally you'd be there about a day or so. I was there for about four days going through that drill.

**Interviewer**

Can you describe that drill?

**Lynn Higgins**

Well I don't remember all that clear other than you showed up and you'd have to go pee in the bottle and then you'd just kind of wait around and out-processed. Because you couldn't go off post you'd change your military payment certificate back to greenbacks, and you'd sit around and go to the club and watch everybody drink, watch everybody get drunk and wait around and see if your name showed up on the piss test.

**Interviewer**

One of the guys said this test was humiliating, out in the open, guards watching.

**Lynn Higgins**

Oh ya but so what. I mean we used to shower and our hooch mate would come in... our hooch maids, in my unit, were the women that would come in and wash your clothes and clean your room. There was no hanky panky with us, but you'd be standing there in the shower--and that was the only running water in the whole place, and it just came out of a tank, and they'd come in and push you aside and, (makes grunting noise) jabber at you, and you'd stand there, "O.k. are we through mama-san, thank you," and then you'd finish with your shower. It was just no big deal.

**Interviewer**

Talk about the end of the war, the economy, the prostitution, and the corruption.

**Lynn Higgins**

Wow. Ya, these are my personal observations. The Americans had been there long enough, we'd built up a lot of things, and honestly, in my opinion, what we had done is we had (both the war and us) really destroyed a lot of the Vietnamese original social system--the family system, the family values, their way of life, and they'd been pushed into the cities with the G.I.s with money to spend, whether it's for booze in the bars, for hookers, for drugs, whatever it was their city culture had evolved into something not really nice. I've always held with the position, and it's just my observation, we taught all of their kids to steal, and we turned all the women into hookers. And it was really sad, it was. They were just trying to get through all of this just like the soldiers were trying to get through all of it and the worlds were colliding.

It was interesting even on base... well it wasn't a big base, what you think of a base. We had what's called a PSP. It's perforated steel planking that they would put down for the runway, and then we had hooches and we had a little officer's club, and this and that but it wasn't a big base. We had a PX, but every place that you had any sizable, of any size force emplacement, the Army Air Force Exchange System would set up a steam bath for you.

Now we didn't have hot showers, so that was great. They'd bring in water heaters and set up half a building and a steam bath and you could get a steam bath and a massage. Well the massage therapists, if you will, were South Vietnamese, and ya we ended up referring to it as "The Steam and Cream." You probably don't want to print that, but you would go in and get your hot shower and you'd sit in the steam bath for a while and then go in and you could get a massage and whatever developed there. You know the common, "You like something special?" You know that's how all of that started, and it was under the Army Air Force Exchange System, which is us, which is the government, and that's a sad essay on how things developed.

**Interviewer**

Were there 13, 14 year old prostitutes? I've been told villagers would send their daughters into the cities.

**Lynn Higgins**

That's where the money is. Whatever you can steal, whatever you can turn, whatever you can do, absolutely, and it's...

**Interviewer**

And the black market?

**Lynn Higgins**

Ohhhh, the black market! Well that's why we had military payment certificate. You didn't have greenbacks in change. You turned in all of your money and you got paid in this MPC, and then they would re-print it about every five or six months and then you'd have to turn in all the old MPC and you'd get new MPC and part of the idea was to keep from going into the black market that the Vietnamese had, and so that was always a... Greenbacks were outlawed. If you got caught with them it was punishable under the uniform code of military justice.

**Interviewer**

Define Greenback.

## **Lynn Higgins**

U.S. dollars. Greenbacks were U.S. dollars.

### **Interviewer**

We're getting to the end of the war. Were you aware of the B-52 bombings over the north?

## **Lynn Higgins**

We didn't know at all what was going on in the north. We experienced a lot of B-52 bombings in the south. We called them Arc Light strikes. You'd be out working somewhere and suddenly on--there was a frequency called "guard" that all the radios could listen to. If you switched it to that it would be that plus whatever frequency you're working, and they called it a heavy artillery strike, but it was an Arc Light strike, a B-52 strike, and you'd hear, "Attention, attention, heavy artillery strike going at coordinates da da da," and they'd rattle off the coordinates for the center of mass, and of course I'd key the mike and say to the command and control ship, "Hey where is that?" because we didn't carry maps. We had to be vectored around by the other aircraft, one because scouts would notoriously get shot down and we didn't want them to get our stuff, but also there's no way you could read a map and fly at tree-top level and do what we were doing, and they'd say, "No, it's a ways," but also every once in a while, "Hey it's just right here. Turn left and de-mount," because the bombs were coming right in on top of you. Those were the Arc Light strikes in the south, and you could see them from a distance.

It just rattled the earth, but as far as what was going on in the north, we were in a different war. Between the Air Force and the Army it was a different world, a different war. They were fighting up north. They were dealing with the SAMS. My world was in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, The Mekong Delta, the U Minh Forest, and it was at tree-top level fighting with AK47's, high speed 30's, 12.7, 14.5, you know. I saw many times the eyes of the guys I was killing. "I got another KBA... next." That's how it felt. "I got gooks in the open. The guys running through the grass," and of course they can hear my observer shooting, "Taking fire, taking fire. No, I want to stay down, bla, boa." It's what we did. We're not supermen. We're probably crazy men, but that's just what you did. It wasn't their world, and their world wasn't our world. You know they had their mission to do and we had our mission to do.

### **Interviewer**

So you really directed the gunships?

## **Lynn Higgins**

I would find their targets, ya, and we would mark it with smoke or we'd yell, "Taking fire, taking fire from the tree line on our left. Taking fire, taking fire at 9 o'clock. Taking fire, taking fire at 7 o'clock," and they would see... I was working a rice paddy with a tree line. They maybe even saw the tracers coming from the tree line, and so they knew where to hit. Sometimes if it wasn't too bad, I'd come around and we'd engage it ourselves. We liked the play when you're that young, up to a point. I'd been in country nine, almost ten months (about 9 1/2 months I figured), and I think the switch broke because all of a sudden I was having real trouble. I was afraid every day. That last two and a half months was really ugly for me. The switch must have broke. I was just very tired. I was afraid, and I just... you know what? I may not come out of this. Prior to that I was 19 years old, ten-feet tall and bulletproof.

### **Interviewer**

War wore you down.

## **Lynn Higgins**

It did. Working in the Delta, flying scouts, Laos... kicked my butt! An interesting phenomenon, it seemed when I was down in the Delta at the start, we'd take a lot of fire but they couldn't hit anything. You know, they'd hit the aircraft, but we didn't take a lot of personal injuries--a lot of fire--then we went up north into Lam Son. We were up there for three months, and then when I came back down to the south it's like somebody had come in and taught these people how to shoot, because you'd be flying along and all of a sudden you wouldn't even hear it and you'd take a hit. Somebody would take a hit. They just got really good. And then we were working a lot more of what's called the U Minh Forest area, and the U Minh Forest is in the Southwest side of the Mekong Delta, and it's always been bad guy country, regardless of who's holding the country. That's where the bad guys went, and we worked the U Minh a lot, and we lost again, after losing a lot of people up at Lam Son, we were starting to really lose a lot down in the U Minh Forest, and it just... I guess I just lost my nerve.

### **Interviewer**

Talk about leading up to the end of your tour.

## **Lynn Higgins**

We worked the U Minh a lot. We started doing what were called SOCC missions, Special Operations Supporting Cambodia something. Anyway what we were doing is, the only way they could resupply the city of Phnom Penh in quantity, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is they would take these two or three ocean-going ships and they would come all the way from the ocean up through South Vietnam up the Mekong all the way up to Phnom Penh. Well they would have us, as cav units they'd take three cav packs and we'd pick the ships up with this, they always had 15 or 20 of these little PBR, Patrol Boat Rivers, supporting them, and they would make their way all day long up to Phnom Penh and then the next day you'd make your way all day back, and those were really long missions

because you start early in the morning.

I don't ever remember shutting down an entire day. I think I flew 14 hours straight without shutting the aircraft down, because you couldn't refuel up inside Cambodia, so you'd have to fly up in, work your recon, and then fly back out, and when they were getting close to Phnom Penh it was like 40 minutes in, 40 minutes on station, 40 minutes back out, hot refuel, back again, and we did that quite a bit and they really weren't that bad a mission unless something went wrong. You weren't dealing with Vietcong. If they ever sprung a trap to get those ships, it was always North Vietnamese regulars and you always lost some helicopters, so that was interesting. In fact, when you look on the slides you'll see a lot of really pretty Buddhist temples and aerial pictures of downtown Phnom Penh city. That's how those got taken.

## **Interviewer**

Was there any individual that you got really close to?

## **Lynn Higgins**

My first roommate, John Hummel, who was a Cobra pilot, good boy from Texas. Good guy. He was my roommate up until we went up north to Laos and John was lost up there. He was declared missing in action for seven years and then they finally declared him dead, but we've never found him or found the wreckage. Lieutenant Ronald Babcock, he was a scout pilot, a lieutenant, came in and he was just a peach of a guy. Good old Ron. He used to tell me stories about when he was going to college in Flagstaff, Arizona. He'd spend his summers living in a forest fire spotters tower on the mountains up there watching for forest fires and Ron, when we would get... they would always rocket and mortar the ammo dump about a mile away from us when we were at Quan Tre, and he'd take a bottle of Jim Beam... he says, "I'm going to take Jim and I'm going to go adjust the artillery," and he'd climb up on top of the bunker and he'd sit up there and yell at the Vietcong, "Right five zero, add five zero you dumb dinks, you can't hit," and he would adjust the enemy artillery onto himself. Of course they couldn't hear him.

Ron was a great guy. He's also missing in action. He and I were the last two scout pilots in my unit who hadn't been injured where they couldn't fly, who weren't dead or missing in action, and he and I were the last two on the last day they let the scouts fly into Laos, and he was shot down and lost with his observer. Another fine sergeant. I knew a lot of people, but the people I was really close with was Ron, Captain Sharp was another one. When we were at Lam Son we all kind of... there were about eight of us who lived in this hootch, and Captain Sharp (another nice guy), he had to fly as my observer.

I had to try and train him and I'll always laugh, the day we hit... he's over there with him M-60 and he's watching all of this going on and we took fire and a round came in and went right into the side of the... and OH-6 cockpit is really small, and the instrument panel is right there, and of course we don't have any doors, but it came in through the door jam just past my knee, the instrument panel, went through the altimeter, the air speed indicator and lodged in the control head for one of the radios, but in the meantime, it shot all of it's glass and plastic out into our faces, and I looked like I had zits or something. He got a big piece of metal right in his lip and I looked over at him and he's just spewing blood, and I go, oh geez he's really bad, and I said, "Sharp are you o.k.? And he goes, "I think I am," so there was some good humor, in fact I even took a picture. You can look. There are splatters of blood all over what's left of the instrument panel is from spraying blood out of his lip. I thought you're such a weeny.

And then when we went back down to the south he finally started flying as a lead scout and got himself shot down and I wasn't able to recover him because of the bad guys. There's a whole plethora of them--kids that were sitting next to me and got shot. My wing man, Lyle Borders, who is alive and well and still a helicopter pilot to this day, he was flying my wing. He was new. In fact, he was my roommate at the time and we took fire a couple of times and went back in and still trying to do it and work the situation, and he took fire and took a round that entered his knee, traveled up his femur and exited right here, and he lost his leg right there, but he has a prosthesis and he still flies helicopters, I think, for Questar. He flies the repairmen in and out of the mountain radio sites, a lot more people.

## **Interviewer**

You know they did at first, they really did. Ya because the cav, first off the cav sucks. If you don't believe me ask someone who is in the cav, because you're going to go wherever the crap is, but they were hard drinking. When you came into the unit they had you drink a newbie drink and what they'd do is they had a toilet seat and on it they painted the call sign Dutchmaster 365 for the number of... Dutchmaster was the unit call sign. Big Ugly was the scouts call sign. It said Dutchmaster 365 because that was the number of days you had left in country. And they'd put that around your neck and put a Calvary hat on ya and a cav sword in one hand and then give you this drink and then you'd have to drink it down and we won't go into what was in the drink, and they would get together on a night where they had a couple of newbies come in and that's what they'd do.

It was interesting, I'd been in country about two weeks, and I guess the word had gotten around that I didn't smoke or drink and that, you know that I was a Mormon, and so they put me on officer of the guard that night, and I had to drive around and check all of the bunkers around the air field for about six hours while they had their newbie drink party, and I thought, "Somebody's looking out for me." And so I took crap for a while. I was a new. I was in slicks, and then I flew guns, and I guess I showed an aptitude, and then I went into scouts and I flew wing scout for the first three months. You fly wing and you learn from the old guy, and I guess they like what I was doing. They'd give



me crap about it, ya ya. And when I made lead scout and I started getting all of the kills I was getting, the knack kicked in, and nobody gave me a bit of problem.

It was really rank, status, everything was all about how you did your job. You know there was a rank structure there, but it really... how long you'd been there, and how you did your job is what mattered. You know, and still some of them wanted to be called captain, whatever, O.K., ya ya, but those are usually the captains that are still co-pilots. I was actually an acting scout pilot platoon leader, which is a captain slot. I did that for about five or six months because every time we'd get a new captain in, he thought he was going to be a lead scout pilot and he'd probably go out and get himself killed.

### **Lynn Higgins**

I wasn't the smartest kid in the world. I'm still a dumb kid, kind of a little Asperger's sort of kid from Provo, Utah, and you know I got some things and they worked for me, but I also watched what did and didn't work with the guys, and it was not like I was any rocket scientist. And I think I was just lucky. Like an old cowboy friend of mine says, "I'd rather be lucky than smart." You know you can pick your fights.

### **Interviewer**

Lets talk about coming home and your story of the Volkswagen van.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well first off I was leaving my unit. I'm going home, and I was really going home. The Army had realized they had too many pilots, and so they were giving everybody that went--all warrant officers an early out--whatever you had left on your obligation. I had two years left. The Army sent down an edict that if you went home between this and this time they were going to automatically kick you out of the Army unless you put in paperwork to go volunteer indefinitely. I still had two years left and so I said hey I'm out of here, and so that was the first thing that made it a bit surrealistic is that all this time and I thought, oh I'm going back to the states. I'm going to go to another unit and then maybe come back to Vietnam or whatever.

I was going home! I was really going home back to Provo, Utah, which (I love Utah, I do). So my buddy flew me up. I got through all the stuff the 90th Replacement Battalion and then they took us over to Long Bien Air Base and there's this big beautiful yellow brand of 707, and there's me and five of my other buddies who had come in from other units that we had all been in flight school together, and we were all going home, and we were all getting out! So it was a great day. And I had my Calvary hat with me, which they wouldn't let us wear around there. We could wear it out in the (?), but they wouldn't... you know there's colonels and stuff here, you gotta look like a soldier, so we're walking to the airplane and me and my five buddies and some colonel had just jumped me because I had my cav hat on, so I took it off and put my other hat on, and as I walked up the gang plank I took this hat off and put my cav hat back on and turned around and went, "See ya colonel," and got in and we got the exit row seat. It made it even better.

So here's me and my six buddies on the exit row seat and here's these beautiful, round-eyed American flight attendants, and they're being nice to us, and they smell good, and this is around noon and it's a sunny day and we taxi out and I guess everybody did it, but they spool the engines up and you start to accelerate and the aircraft rotates and it lifts off and as you do, everybody cheers and then we settle in for the long trip and we stop at Yukota Air Base for an hour and refuel and then the long trip all the way back, and it goes through the nighttime, and I remember I woke up and I'm looking out and there's the coastline... that's got to be the U.S., and we knew that we were going into Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California.

I'm just looking to see the states as hard as I can look, and we come in and land and now it's back into the bureaucracy, and you're tired and you've been in this airplane for twenty, whatever hours it is, and you go through customs and I'm carrying a couple of weapons--war trophies. Scouts always had the best war trophies. We got first pick on all the arms cache busts. We go through that, and then they load us on this bus. O.k. we're going to the Oakland Army Depot. Oh I thought we were going to out process right here. Nope you're going to the Oakland Army Depot. O.k., it's about an hour and they say, "It's going to take longer. We've got to go a different route because there's a protest at the front gate." O.k. this is a Sunday. So we take some circuitous route, which I don't remember because the whole thing is just massively surreal. Still to this day it is very surreal.

And finally we get in and I remember they dropped us off, and we thought we were in processing and they said, "Nope, you officers... we don't have processed officers on Sundays. You got to come back tomorrow, so get a room in the BOQ and come back tomorrow," and me and my five buddies go over to check in and they say, "We're going to go over to the club and get drunk," which was the order of the day. And I had a friend who lived up in Arenda, California, and so I called him on the phone to say, "Hey, I'm back..." He wasn't there, but his parents were and I'd met his parents when they had been out here for his graduation at BYU and they said, "We're going to come and pick you up!" And I said, "No, that's o.k." "No, you're staying with us overnight and I got to be back here early in the morning, no problem, you're staying with us."

So I kind of weighed it out and here comes this brand new Ford Thunderbird. He was a Ford dealer, and his mom and his dad are there and they put me in the right front seat in this Thunderbird and we pull out the front gate--apparently the demonstration had gone away--and I remember we made a right turn and stopped at a stop light

because it was another left turn to get onto the freeway, and as we're sitting there--I'm in my TW's and I've got my scare badges and my wings on and my Army haircut--and this Volkswagen bus pulls up and immediately they're hanging out the window and they're calling me a baby killer, bla bla bla, and I remember, "What?"

And all I remember is "Where's my M-79?" And I... oh, O.K., and the light changes and off we go, and of course his parents are just really embarrassed by all of this and I said, "Hey, don't worry about that. It's cool," because I'm pretty spacey, not from drugs or alcohol, it's just this is an event, and they take me to their house and we spend the night and then my friend shows up. It was a nice affair. He took me into San Francisco that night and it was just very nice. I went back the next day and out processed and did my thing and got my ticket and came back to Provo.

### **Interviewer**

What was it like seeing the Wasatch Range as you flew in?

### **Lynn Higgins**

To this day on the first day of September I will always, if I can, drive south on I-15 across the Point of the Mountain. It has changed a lot since then, but I'll always remember just what it looked like, and I just want to see it again. It was really good to be home!

### **Interviewer**

Who picked you up?

### **Lynn Higgins**

My mom did. My dad had to work. Well maybe my dad did too. I don't remember for sure. And then I came home and my mom had a big long table in the living room and she cooked all this food for me and I was going to have this banquet, which was really nice, and she'd invited a friend of mine who had married an Army aviator and they were home on leave and they came over to eat too, but my mom is a fantastic cook, but I just couldn't eat. I ate a little bit, and for a long time I couldn't eat a lot. I think I was just so conditioned to a way of life. The food we had... the worst mess hall in the world was the cab mess hall. I lived mostly c-rats for that whole time and the crappy sandwiches or something you could get in the little officer's club we had.

### **Lynn Higgins**

I know what PTSD is now. I understand it, and ya I was pretty serious PTSD'd. We didn't know that's what it was then, but all of the symptoms when I go back and look at it, ya, but you do what you do. That's what you signed on for.

### **Interviewer**

Most of the guys have admitted they getting help for PTSD.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Well I've been fortunate to help a lot of the kids I took to Iraq with me deal with their issues, and in no way am I going to demean what those soldiers did over there, but what we did and what I saw compared to what we were doing in Vietnam, the conditions, everything, the environment, the politics, and you know it was nothing like we went through in Vietnam. With that said, it takes it's own toll, and I've been lucky enough to help a number of kids through that, or at least help them to a place, because you never get over it you just learn how to manage it.

### **Interviewer**

I've heard these coming home PTSD and adjusting to life experiences. Where does the soul go? Is it locked away?

### **Lynn Higgins**

All of these things are down in the subconscious, and they rear their head. Well, first off you're conditioned to a number of things. You know it causes you increased alertness. You are always paying attention. For the longest time... the majority of when I took fire it was always as we'd fly by. The gooks (excuse me)... the V.C. were (I'm falling back to being 19 years old, I'm sorry) were not stupid people, and what they knew was that it was easier to hit you after you went by, also it was harder for me to shoot back after I'd gone by, so most of my fire came from this quadrant or this quadrant, and I still at times I'm sensitive here because I had an open door, a little bitty of an armored plate, but when I came home, for a number of years any noise or anything that came from that direction, oh ya it was... ya. Not so bad here because I had the seat and I had my observer, but definitely if I took it from the right rear it was very sensitive. Increased alertness, irritability, unable to sleep. Now not everybody has the same symptoms and the same problems.

Of course any chemical treatment at all is a death wish. It is. Unable to have a relationship or be interpersonal. You feel very isolated. I'd have to pull out the whole laundry list, and it's very long. I can't whip it on you right now, but it is tough, and it is very... I was fortunate because I was single. I came home and now I'm 20 years old, and the first thing I did was try to get into the National Guard so I could keep flying, and I knew they weren't going to Vietnam. The second thing was to try to get registered for school because I was just a high school graduate, and the GI Bill

was going to pay for my education, or at least part of it. So to be a 20, going on 21-year old former scout pilot at BYU, to go into a college campus like that and college classes and deal with the whole society and all of that plus I found out real quick that if girls knew you were an Army guy--a Vietnam Vet--they didn't want to hear about what you'd done. They didn't like you. Girls wouldn't date ya, even at BYU.

There was a faction there that was supportive, but for the most part they didn't like guys with short hair. They didn't like guys that were in the National Guard. At least that's what I experienced. Of course maybe I'm just abrasive and a dork, but it was not always a good experience. And you felt extremely alienated just because this was a world--ya I'd seen it before. I grew up around BYU campus. I knew what school was, but I also knew what a lot of other things were too, and when you've been so entrenched at such a young age, it's very hard to be the best citizen I guess. I mean I didn't break laws or get drunk or anything, but it just... it was very hard to connect. I was lucky I had a friend that I used to play in a band with. I was a band nerd. I wasn't a football star. I was a band nerd when I was in high school.

### **Interviewer**

What did you play?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I was a tuba player and percussion and stuff like that, but I hooked up with him as soon as I came back, which was really lucky, and it's not an alias. His name is John Smith, but I'd pal around with him, and I'd never been able to afford to ski before because I was a poor kid, and John was a big skier, and I finally had some money and he took me up and taught me how to ski, and that was good therapy for the first while. We actually did a lot of stuff together and we played music and he'd learn to play the guitar, and I'd always been a guitar player, and that was helpful but there's just so much disconnect, but you know you just want to be normal. A lot of times you don't even know you're not.

### **Interviewer**

From your experiences, how did people who haven't been there and don't understand, how do they help young men and women re-connect? What would have been helpful for others to know and do for you?

### **Lynn Higgins**

In a lot of cases a lot of people do need at least some limited professional help. First off, like anything, just love you and accept you. Accept your symptoms. You will never understand. You can't, and honestly I don't want you to. I don't want you to understand. I remember the day I came home from Iraq, and that's a whole different story, but I got home and got out of uniform and got back into civilian clothes and my wife was doing something in the kitchen or something and she said, "I got to go get this," and I said, "No, I'll go to the store for you," and I went over to the local store there by where I live because I just wanted to be back in the states, and I wanted to be back in my life. I wanted my life back.

I remember walking in and all of the housewives with the kids and people and shopping and this and that and kids misbehaving and the housewives grabbing them, and I thought you know, you haven't got a clue, and I'm glad you don't. And I don't remember if I felt the same way about that after Vietnam, but I think maybe if I understood better how much they don't understand... A lot of times you're so wrapped up in your own issues because they're just wrapped around you like an octopus, and a lot of times it's smothering, and you're lonely and you're happy and you're scared and you're glad and you're on this roller coaster and a lot of things just don't connect.

It's helpful for other people just to be nice. Be kind. Accept when you can. When they need time let them have their time. Like I said, there are a lot of people that do need professional help--a spouse or a parent or a friend can't fix a lot of that stuff because you don't have the ability, and it's just the way it is. You can't cure cancer just by being nice.

### **Interviewer**

Lets talk a little bit about the geopolitical foundations of the war. I understand McNamara said later in life that he and his senior colleagues were terribly wrong.

### **Lynn Higgins**

By the way that was on KUED, and it's a great show. If you haven't seen it watch it.

### **Interviewer**

He basically said, "I misunderstood Asia."

### **Lynn Higgins**

He misunderstood a lot of things. As I have done some research, people may contest this, but the research that I've done is that Vietnam has been in turmoil since who knows when. They've always been fighting somebody. Somebody has always been trying to take them over because if you own the Mekong Delta and it's not at war, you can grow enough rice to feed all of Asia. And lots of other reasons, but what happened is that Vietnam had been fighting for its freedom for a long time. It had fought the Chinese, it had fought the French, and then it fought the Japanese, and then after WWII it fought the French again, and then it finally defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, and then we got involved. And all they want was to live. Now there were people who had a political agenda. Back in the 50's after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the powerhouses in the country were the Catholics, not to disparage

the religion, but ten percent of the people were Catholics in South Vietnam, and they were the ones who were also landowners and they better off than your average Joe Vietnamese, or I should say Nguyen(?) Vietnamese and they were the ones who didn't want communism. They had the most to lose because of communism. Everybody else really didn't care. They just wanted to have "rice and rats to eat," as we would say, raise their family. Don't come and kill me.

And so the problem was Ho Chi Minh (and there's a whole story there) was declared as a communist, and he'd been alienated by the U.S. and Soviet Union and China said hey come to us, we'll support you, which they did militarily and financially, and the mindset in the leadership of our own country is, well they're communists; they're evil, which if you look at the polls that were taken back in the time of the Geneva Accord in '56 when it was determined that South Vietnam would be a whole country, it wouldn't be divided in half with the north and the south, even the U.S. signed onto that and then we went backwards on our signature to the Geneva Accord. When they polled, 90% of the people wanted Ho Chi Minh to be the president. Well we're not going to hear that because he's a communist, and that's how we got into it.

### **Interviewer**

So as a veteran, and with this knowledge, how do you speak to the veteran who feels he has failed his country?

### **Lynn Higgins**

No you didn't fail your country. You were one of the faces in the crowd just like me, and we did what we were supposed to do. We were fighting with the wrong tactics. We were fighting for the wrong reason. They had everything to win and we had nothing to lose except our bodies and our minds.

### **Lynn Higgins**

People say the politicians... well some of the generals were in on this too later. You know they were sending reports back that this was happening and this was happening, and they were lying their butts off, and McNamara was taking it and painting a picture. Johnson painted a picture even before them. People knew (and if you'll actually do research and read a number of people's books--and I won't say the names), and if you'll actually do your research, we knew we were in trouble from the get-go. The people would actually admit it, that would critically think, and we fooled ourselves right into it. You were part of the grist in the mill. You were another face in the crowd just like me.

### **Interviewer**

Is that why the Vietnamese call it, The American War?

### **Lynn Higgins**

That's exactly right. I would concur with that, but you know guys, unless you did something personally bad, you know you may feel bad about that, but don't feel bad about serving, and I'm not even going to go into what "personally bad" is, but you need to learn to love yourself and forgive yourself. We did what we were told. We didn't have a choice, you know the draft was on for you guys. I was dumb enough that I enlisted for a reason. I was a little mercenary about that, but most of you guys were drafted. Come on... you get to love yourself, and we used to say that Vietnam is the unwilling doing the unwanted for the ungrateful, and we weren't calling the shots guys. We were just taking the orders.

### **Interviewer**

Tell me... to this day, you said, that you're not comfortable in a uniform and you can't sing the Star Spangled Banner. Tell me why.

### **Lynn Higgins**

I was in uniform for 41 and 1/2 years, and I had wear my, you know coming to and from, I worked full time for the National Guard for a long time, and I was an M-day soldier. I have never been comfortable in uniform in public, and it goes back to when people would disparage, you know make comments and there was so much upheaval, and unfortunately during Vietnam they were made at the... they thought the war was the soldiers. It wasn't the soldiers. We were just the dummies that had to do the dirty work. You know that was the problem, and that's where I am still to this day uncomfortable in a uniform in public. I've had to do it a lot, but it's still not a place I like being.

I'm extremely patriotic. I love this land. We are far from perfect, but we have to do what we can to make it as good as we can, but I love us, and I love this land mass, I do, but it's just too emotional for me. I'm usually the last one that stands up when the flag goes by because I don't want to look like some flag-waving rah, rah, I'll fight your wars. I'll eat your crap. I'll do your dirty work for you. Just don't make a deal of it and just like this talking about it, I can't sing the Star Spangled Banner, not because I'm ashamed. It's just too emotional. I have too much invested in this. And it started when I was 18 years old. A dumb kid from Provo, Utah joined the Army, went to Vietnam. I thought I was doing the patriotic thing, which I guess I was. I have fought in two conflicts; Vietnam and Iraq, and in both cases I wish just once... I look at the guys who fought in WWII who were fighting for a truly righteous cause, and I just can't seem to get it right.

### **Lynn Higgins**

I did what I needed to do. I did what I thought was right. I did what I was asked to do. Just once I'd like to be part of some valiant cause. I've done a lot of humanitarian work in the military too, and I'm real proud of that. I've fought a

lot of fires, helped build schools and clinics in Central America, flown the floods in Utah, you know. And maybe that's vanity. Maybe I shouldn't feel that way. Maybe it's part of that "Huwah" if you will.

**Interviewer**

Tell me about when you visited the Wall.

**Lynn Higgins**

It's a very spiritual experience. I had my wife with me at the time and my two small sons--my older boys who are now grown, and we were in Washington D.C. and we went to the Wall and it was kind of a gray, cool day in autumn, and it was just a very spiritual experience. I looked up where Ron Babcock was. I looked up where John Hummel was. I look up where Captain Sharp was, Henry Atkins. There's a whole list of names, and I'm sorry I'm getting senile. I can see their faces. I just can't pull the words out. And to see the names there, it was just a very spiritual experience. And I'm afraid, like a lot of guys, that we have survivor's remorse. Why them and not me? John was supposed to be married when he got home. Captain Sharp had a wife and two kids. Ron Babcock had a new young wife I believe. And they all had their life, whether they had anybody at home or not, they all had their life. Why them and not me? But that's the way it is with soldiers.

**Interviewer**

Everybody's experience is a little different there at the Wall. You know part of the reason we're doing this project is that, coming on 50 years later after the war, it's our way of saying, "welcome home." Is there a way that you want to say welcome home?

**Lynn Higgins**

Well me personally, I wish they could have got the same thing that the young kids that I brought back from Iraq got. It's what you did guys... well done! You get to be proud. We may not of pulled it off the way it should have been but it wasn't our fault. You did what your country asked. It's o.k. And it's o.k. to hurt, and it's o.k. to feel bad, and it's really o.k. to get some help. You get to be proud.

**Interviewer**

Do you find that some guys don't want to hear, "welcome home?"

**Lynn Higgins**

Ya, and I understand that, I do. And that's o.k. too, but I would say, find some peace because you got to find some peace with it. But if they feel that way, you know what, that's o.k. with me. You're o.k. with me. I'm still your brother.

**Interviewer**

And you haven't visited Vietnam yet?

**Lynn Higgins**

No I haven't.

**Interviewer**

I hear it's very therapeutic for some guys.

**Lynn Higgins**

I would like to go back, but I want to go back to the places that I think I need to see, and they're not on the regular tourist route, and I need to do it on my terms.

**Interviewer**

You said that everybody has their own brand of pain. The one thing that binds you with other veterans... you were mentioning something written on your t-shirt.

**Lynn Higgins**

The Disabled American Veterans do a really nice job. They had a t-shirt last year or two years ago and it says, "Because you have shed your blood with me, you will forever be my brother." And I know it comes from somewhere else, but honestly whether you were a clerk back in Long Bien and just sat there and sweat and ate crap, or you were out on the front lines or whatever, it doesn't matter. You're still my brother, and if you were there we are one.

**Interviewer**

What are your thoughts today regarding what Truman once said, "No piss ant country will ever make the U.S. look bad?"

**Lynn Higgins**

That's where it all started was with Truman. That's true, and it was the hubris of America--it's inability that if you are communist then you are evil, and that's not always true. Ho Chi Minh was actually a pretty good guy, and people say, well look at all the people they killed. Well look at all the people the South Vietnamese killed. They were terrible. We just need to critically think, and labeling someone or something, you have to be real careful of that. You know, you have to look at what really what is best for someone, and we as Americans--where's our place to say what's best for them? You know it gets into strategic... well it's a strategic place in Asia and all of Asia will fall. Well, how does that impact us. And I'm not a politician, and I'm a dumb stupid scout helicopter polite, but it becomes obvious to me that labeling someone a communist, therefore we can't let them thrive in Southeast Asia was our



demise, and the hubris of the country that we're not going to let some little third-world piss ass nation make the greatest nation in the world look bad? Come on folks. Pick your fights. Pick the ones you can win. It's just really sad. We were there because of hubris.

### **Interviewer**

What would you say to high school kids today on that war?

### **Lynn Higgins**

Learn from its mistakes. Learn that it's very complex, just like Iraq is very complex, and just like Afghanistan is very complex. You need to do a lot of study if you really want to find the answers. Be careful what you hear on the media. Be careful what the loudest voice says. It's not always, "He who shouts the loudest wins." Anyone who serves anywhere--if they serve in uniform--you need to respect them. But as far as the political situation and war, nobody hates war--unless you're just a psychopath, which maybe I am--nobody hates war worse than the people who have to fight it. Now there's some people that get off on that stuff, but if you have any sanity at all... In the Civil War there was a term called "See the elephant," and at the start of the Civil War all of the south and the north, the soldiers, "Ya, we're going to go in and we're going to get them. We want to see the elephant. We want to go into battle."

And the thing is, once they actually went into battle and had to deal with that horror, they never wanted to see the elephant again. And that's the way I think all sane soldiers are. It was interesting to watch the kids that I took to Iraq because they wanted to go do this and that and I was like, "O.k. you want to see the elephant." War is ugly. It's painful. It's tedious. It's boring. It's miserable. It's hot. It's cold. It's full of bugs. The food's bad. And people tell you to do crap that's just asinine, and then you might be in a bad enough position that you're going to part of that ten percent that goes out and does the fighting and the dying, so be real careful about what you judge and how you judge it. I'm glad that there are patriotic kids that want to go do that stuff, and we need brave soldiers. We always do, but war just sucks. Even when you think you're having a good time in it.

### **Interviewer**

As you said, you wanted to fight the valiant fight, as WWII guys did. I personally have listened to the thoughts and stories of almost 100 veterans. I feel like your valiant fight is perhaps your message. You are the messengers of truth. And you personally are doing it so well.

### **Lynn Higgins**

It's a hard medicine to take. The people--and not to disparage Utah, I love Utah, it's my home--but there is a mindset of... you know they're not opposed to war and this and that. War has its place. We're always going to have war. You can't beat the swords into plowshares. As long as there are two people something about you is not going to get along. There is always going to be people in this world that want what you've got, or want to take advantage of you, whether it's your resources, or they're just nasty people. I wish I could remember the quote President Obama made when he received the Peace Prize, but he said (I'm having a hard time paraphrasing it) but it's something to the affect that their will always be people who are malcontent. There will always be people who want to take what you've got.

And it's true, and you have to be in a position to have that big stick. And be real careful when you think you're going to fight for someone else that, I don't want to be an isolationist because I believe we have a role in the world, but I'll always remember sitting in the mess hall in Vietnam going, "What the hell are we doing here?" And I also remember sitting in the mess hall at Balad Air Base in Iraq going, "What the hell are we doing here?" And this war is dirty business. It's ugly business. And it's critical business. And there's a lot of romance and all of that. I've been there, you know, I joined. I'm going to go be a helicopter pilot, ya. There's a lot of romance, but once you've seen the elephant...

### **Interviewer**

Can you talk about the perceptions out there of the Vietnam Veteran?

### **Lynn Higgins**

Longhaired hippy weirdos. Well look and see what they see on TV. When they watch Full Metal Jacket or Apocalypse Now or Platoon or all of that stuff. There were a great number of very valiant, good soldiers over there that did it and did it right. There were a significant number of soldiers that tried to do it right and maybe didn't always do as well as they could. In the military there are great soldiers, there's mediocre soldiers, there's kind of crappy soldiers, and there's absolute scumbags. In every war, in every campaign. And it depends on what you want to highlight at, but you also have to understand that with the pressures... know one in any war had ever been under these kinds of pressures. The country was at each other's throats. The Civil Rights era. And who were a lot of the guys who were fighting this? African-Americans. They were getting drafted because all the white kids had college deferments. You don't think that doesn't chap them just a little bit.

The people back home were against it. There was a drug problem being pushed into it, and the drugs were flowing, they were, and the government is party to blame for that too (thank you very much CIA). It was a perfect storm for morale and breakdown of the troops. You know you'd go in and I would do visual reconnaissance in one area, and I'd been in there three times, and we'd burn hooches and we'd run into the bad guys and we'd shoot them up and

we'd insert troops, and then the troops would do whatever they do, and then we'd extract them back out and three weeks later, "You're going back to Veton?" How come?

And I know the ground troops had to force through and go up and get into a big battle and take the ground. O.k. now lets move on. And the bad guys come right in behind you. We used to have a saying, you know the only way there would be peace in Vietnam is if you took everybody off the country, you put them in ships, you nuke it, you leveled it, you black-topped it, you put white lines on it and then you sunk the ships. That's the only way peace would ever be. And it's a sad essay.

### **Interviewer**

Oh don't do that to beautiful Vietnam.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Oh the place is fantastic. It's gorgeous.

### **Interviewer**

Is there anything that you want to talk about that you haven't talked about? Something that's been compartmentalized that you want to address?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I have a whole years worth of things still down in me, but no. I just wanted to answer your questions. You know the difference between a war story and a fairy tale is one starts, "Once upon a time." and the other one starts, "No B.S." So I really try to not... you know soldiers can get full of themselves and as you get older your memory fades and so there's just a lot of things that are best left. I'll just think about them.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us what your thoughts were when you saw the fall of Saigon.

### **Lynn Higgins**

I remember vividly the day the first POWs came home. I remember that clear as glass. The fall of Saigon, I believe I was still living in Provo, nope actually I was living in Pleasant Grove and I was a fire fighter for Orem City, and I don't remember exactly. I remember the footage but I don't remember where I was, but I do remember thinking, well bad guys one, good guys zero.

### **Interviewer**

Were you following the news? Were you aware of the Christmas bombings?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I followed the news real close.

### **Interviewer**

How did you feel about the Christmas bombings to get the guys to sign at the peace table?

### **Lynn Higgins**

I didn't know that's why they did that, and I don't think until years later that anyone else know why they did that. If you ever read Ellsberg's book, he goes into depth about the whole thing, about the bombing, and how that whole fiasco went, so I don't really have an opinion, it was just, oh o.k. that's happening now. Sure glad it ain't me. I was just trying to get through life.

### **Interviewer**

As most veterans were. Some of these veterans either went to the bars, or they went right into school or...

### **Lynn Higgins**

You know I have friends that I served with that are bank presidents and have their own business and have done just really well in life, and I know other people that are just disasters, and I think the officers as a whole, not that they were better people--I think we had a better leg up--they have done better. Some of the enlisted guys have done really well in their lives through. You know they're healthy and they're happy and they work hard. Not that being a bank president means you're better than anybody else. It doesn't.

You know I have one guy, Derimian, who was one of the crew chiefs on the Hueys I knew who drives trucks still to this day and makes a good living for him and his family and he's happy and he calls me every once in a while, usually in the middle of the night, John Derimian, and you know good for you, you're living the dream bud, and then there are others guys that have just not done well at all, and I think... I see one think that if they got involved in drugs in Vietnam they were prone to having an issue when they got back, and that whole thing of the drug issue just... what a millstone around the military's neck, around the soldier's neck. That's just bad juju all around.

### **Interviewer**

And one veteran, when he came back he said he felt there was just one big dark cloud over this whole country, anti-Vietnam.

### **Lynn Higgins**

Anti-Vietnam, race relations, everything. I consider it the most divisive time in our nation's history second only to the Civil War. We were that torn apart. People were at each other for different, you know, Kent State. I mean we're

shooting American students, and the peace movement and drug, sex, and rock and roll. We were out of control.

**Interviewer**

Not only as a society at large, but guys came back and their families didn't even want to hear their stories.

**Lynn Higgins**

No, they don't .

**Interviewer**

That's what got to a great deal of them. They felt so lonely and so isolated. For your dad to just say, "Well, you lost the war son, pull your boots up."

**Lynn Higgins**

"Get over it!" In fact, I saw there was a sign, it said, this and this, Get over it! O.k. this happened now get over it. You know people need to be validated. When you've gone through things, when you've worked hard, even when you didn't want to be there, you put in the time and it was uncomfortable, it was unhappy, it was hot, it was wet, it was dirty, it was stinky, all of those things and you were away from where you wanted to be. You had somebody saying, "No, you go here for awhile." You know people don't understand that. Just that alone, the asspain of being a soldier. Whether you ever go into combat or not, you know that's enough, and then to be invalidated, because you know we were doing this and this really stinks. "Hey, get over it," and they don't want to hear it. Oh ya, that invalidates you as a human. That's really tough.

**Interviewer**

I really appreciate your interview, and your stories and your honesty.

**Lynn Higgins**

Ya, my metaphor's, "but then again, what do I know?" I probably got it all wrong, but that's how it appears from my foxhole. That's what it appears from the seat of my Loach.

**Interviewer**

Now after this interview, is it going to be hard for you to go have your day?

**Lynn Higgins**

Ya, but I have made compartmentalizing an art form, much to my demise at times, and I'll shift gears. Probably tonight I will... I may not sleep so good tonight, but then I don't sleep so good as much anymore.

**Interviewer**

And I'm sorry to be a part of that. I appreciate you coming in.

**Lynn Higgins**

This has all been stuff that I've always had out. I've gone deep about other things, but we won't talk about that. There are some things that I don't want you to know.