

A letter from Mike Higgins about His Father's experience in World War II.

In 9 months, Patrick Higgins earned 5 Air Medals and 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses. It earned Him enough points for an immediate discharge after the War. Keep in mind that Dad was enlisted. The Officers in his crew got one medal higher in each instance. They were a highly decorated crew!

Pat was in VPB 102 squadron, a patrol bombing squadron flying the Navy PB4Y, the Navy version of the B-24. It had 2 - 50 caliber guns in 4 turrets - Bow, Top, Bottom and aft as well as port and starboard side guns. It had a lot of fire power for its day. As the Aircraft Commander you wanted your best gunner in the bow - that was Dad's gun. Their plane was named "The Lady" and their "Nose Art" was a dachshund dog next to a fire hydrant. I'm sure they endured all kinds of grief and laughter over that but Stewart got them home alive.

In WWII we had no United States Air Force. It was the Army Air Corps. They did the high altitude bombing like you saw in those videos while the Navy did most of the low level work like shipping and airfields. I'm sure you have heard of the famous Norden Bomb Sight. Dad's crew took it out of the plane and junked it because they never flew high enough to use it so it was just dead weight. Truk was one of the islands we hopped while we were "Island Hopping" across the Pacific. Japan's largest floating dry dock outside of their mainland was in Truk Lagoon. The Army had been High Altitude bombing it for months and couldn't hit it. Some Brass had the idea for a coordinated attack. The Army would make their usual High attack while 2 Navy bombers would come in at low level immediately following the Army bombs. Dad's crew was one of the 2 crews that volunteered.

The Navy planes came in at wave top level. Dad was the bow gunner with the best view of all the action. Dad said He never saw so many ships in one place before. They had to zig zag around the Jap ships on their way in. Dad's pilot, Stewart, kept saying "Higgy don't shoot -- Higgy don't shoot - they're looking up"!! Stewart didn't want them to draw attention to themselves yet. The Japs were so used to the high attacks that they didn't scan the horizon. They got through and unloaded their bombs, destroying their target. Dad said that on their way out, they really peppered the Jap ships and their gunners inflicted heavy casualties . Pat was 19 years old at the time!

Dad thought He would get the Silver Star for that raid but He got a Distinguished Flying Cross for it. He figured it was Military Politics. It wouldn't look good for the Army if the Navy accomplished in 1 raid with 2 planes what the Army couldn't do in months with whole squadrons!!

My Dad never talked about the war except for the rare funny story. He finally told me this story in the final months of his life. He was a true "War Hero". He was a child of the "Great Depression" who lost his "Youth" in WWII and never asked for anything in return.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
U. S. NAVAL AIR FORCE
FLEET AIR WING EIGHTEEN

Serial:


In the name of the President of the United States, the Commander Fleet Air Wing EIGHTEEN takes pleasure in presenting the GOLD STAR in lieu of a fifth AIR MEDAL to

PATRICK MICHAEL HIGGINS
AVIATION MACHINIST'S MATE THIRD CLASS
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For meritorious acts while participating in aerial attacks against the enemy in Truk Lagoon on 29 April 1945. As Bow Gunner of a Navy Patrol Bomber, he contributed materially to the sinking of an enemy Merchant Ship and the damaging of a Floating Dry Dock in company of another plane. During the attacks the planes received anti-aircraft fire from ship and shore batteries. His cool and effective performance was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."


M. R. GREER,
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy.

Temporary Citation.
