

2LT William F. Higgins

1923 – 1980

EARLY YEARS

William F. Higgins, son of George and Louise Parkin Higgins, was born in Boulder, Colorado on December 31, 1923. After completing Boulder High School in 1942, he married Catherine this same year and together they shared a rich family life with seven children.

MILITARY SERVICE AND CIVILIAN LIFE



World events, as early as 1941, would have a direct effect on the family's immediate future as America joined other Allied countries in the declared war against Nazi Germany and Japan. Fortunately, Bill, as he was called, had all the physical and mental attributes which entitled him to apply for pilot's training in 1942. Due to the large influx of young men who wanted to serve their country in the Air Corps, civilian training bases were developed and operated mostly through the south and southwest. Potential pilots and navigators were put through their paces in five categories: Classification, Pre-Flight, Primary Pilot Training, Basic Pilot Training and Advanced Training. Cadets graduating at the top of their class, including Bill Higgins, were awarded their Silver Wings and the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

Source:

http://militaryhistory.fandom.com/wiki/Army_Air_Force_Command#

Assigned to the North African Theatre, LT Higgins and other American flyers became proficient pilots in the single seat British fighter called the Spitfire. Acknowledged as an asset which helped to save the British Isles during The Battle for Britain, this craft became a deadly force against the Axis powers.

Pilots, especially those in arial combat with enemy aircraft, faced the same dangers as soldiers on the ground and sailors at sea.

After being shot down then landing and checking for injuries, Higgins initiated the survival routine which would hopefully save his life—avoid the enemy and attempt to locate friendly forces. Despite his efforts, he was captured and kept in a series of confinement camps before being transported by train with other Americans to Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland.

After being processed and verified as an American, he was assigned to a barracks and began to search for others he might know. One tactic which many captured soldiers used was to scratch their names on the walls of their

cells, hoping that others who followed would do the same. This example shared by Higgins proved to be useful for both men:

“While the guards were struggling to get me in a cell I called out, ‘Anyone here named Frank Aten?’”

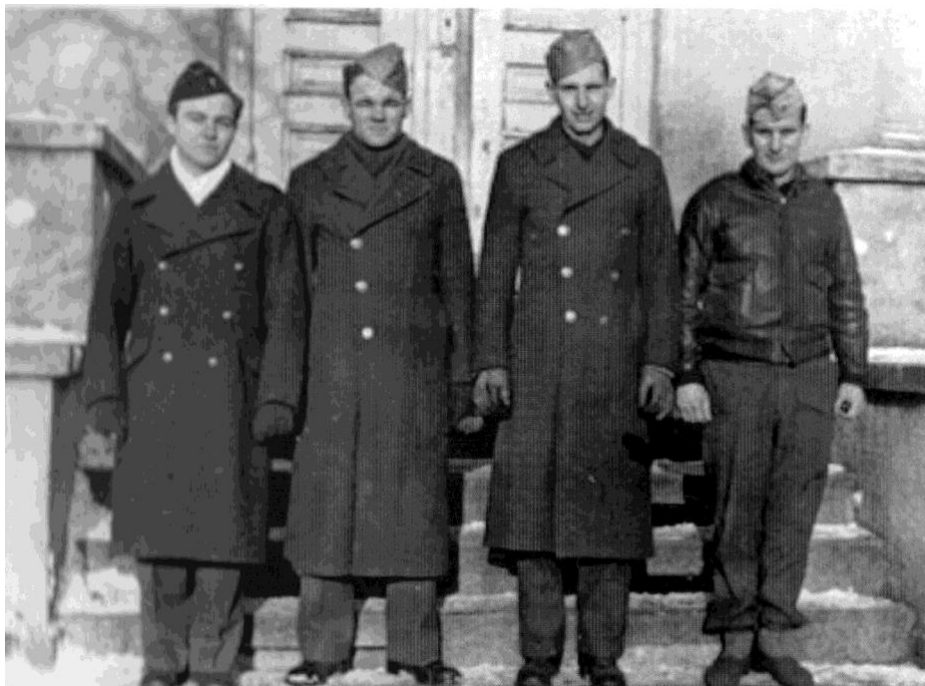
“My name is Frank Aten!”

“I was in a civilian jail down in Bolzano, Italy, and I saw your name on the wall.”

Aten replied, “That was me. Same cell, same jail!”

This incident became the beginning of a strong friendship and connections with others whose goals were identical to his—escape and evasion. While exploring the camp, Higgins confided with the group that he was an Air Force pilot, who had been shot down over Tunisia in a dogfight with an ME (Messerschmitt) 109s. Flying a Spit 9 Spitfire, a British plane, he had 3 and ½ kills to his credit when he was shot down. When captured, he told the Germans that he was an armored force officer in hopes that he would be sent to a ground force camp, where he might be able to use his flying ability to escape. Bill felt the opportunity would be much smaller if assigned to a Luftwaffe POW camp.

Higgins’ comradeship with others at Oflag 64, including Roy Chappell, Jack Van Vliet and Dick Secor, would lead to several escape attempts, all resulting in recapture; however, the determination to succeed despite punishment including solitary confinement, and in one incident, interrogation sessions by the Gestapo at Hohenzaltza concentration camp for Higgins and Aten, never lessened their determination to be free men.



When sharing his POW experiences with family, Higgins shared that the two most

difficult trials concerned the lack of sufficient food and the Long March toward Germany which began in January, the bitter winter of 1945.

After being repatriated, Higgins remained in the U.S. Air Force and served as a combat pilot in the Korean War. He retired in 1962 as a Major. Throughout his life, Higgins continued to fly in two other aircraft, as a certified helicopter pilot and as a crop duster.

His knack with machinery also led him to purchase a garage and body shop in Vails Gate, New York. After selling this business, he moved his family to Ft. Worth, Texas.

TAPS

William F. Higgins, a valued member of the Nation's Greatest Generation, was buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Ft. Worth Texas.



Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers