

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MACK HOPKINS

Dr. Bobby H.

Johnson: Is, um, March, I believe it's March 15th . . .

Mack

Hopkins: That is correct.

Johnson: . . . 15th 1994. I am speaking with, uh, Mr. Mack H. Hopkins, H-o-p-k-i-n-s who now lives at 304 Albemarl, A-l-b-e-m-a-r-l, who is a native of Marshall and, uh was... I wish first you'd just tell me a little bit about your early life, when you were born, where, where you grew up and, you know, what happened to you before WW II came along.

Hopkins: Okay. First, I was born on the campus of Wiley College where my father taught Agriculture.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: And . . .

Johnson: What year was that?

Hopkins: I was born in 1917. November the thirtieth of 1917.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And . . .

Johnson: Who was your father and your mother?

Hopkins: My father was Mack Hopkins, Mack H. Hopkins, and my mother was, uh, Betsy Muckleroy. Betsy Muckleroy, she was a native of this area, but my father was from Louisiana.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: From around Jonesville, Jonesboro, I think, Louisiana.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: But he taught at Wiley, graduated from Wiley in 1911.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: And he taught from 1911 to 1925 but I was . . . we lived on the campus at Wiley. I was born on the campus. At that time all blacks were born at the home, you didn't have the hospital. We weren't born in a hospital. And, Uh, I attended the elementary School and high school in Marshall and then started to Wiley, graduated from high school in 1936.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And uh, started to Wiley in 1936, played football...

Johnson: Oh, really?

Hopkins: On the powerful Wiley football team from 1936 thru '39.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: Played. . .

Johnson: Who was your coach?

Hopkins: Coach, uh, Fred Long and Fred Long and his brother, uh, he had a brother was Long, another, Little Long they called him.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, h, this was 1936 thru '39. We played in the Cotton Bowl every year. We beat Prairie View every year I played.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: Uh huh. And, uh, this was at the State Fair.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: My first year playing was at, uh, in 1936 at the Texas Centennial in, in, uh. . .

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: In the Cotton Bowl.

Johnson: Yeah? What position did you play?

Hopkins: I played end. At that time they just called it left end and right end. I played left end.

Johnson: What formation did ya'll use?

Hopkins: We used a Notre Dame box and also the single wing and also a double wing.

Johnson: Yeah. Did they through a lot of passes?

Hopkins: Threw a lot of passes and I was one of the best, they said that I was one of the best pass snatchers in the [Johnson chuckles] Southwestern Conference. I want'd , I was on the Southwestern Conference, uh, Eleven.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Uh . . .

Johnson: All conference team?

Hopkins: All conference in 1939.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: They said in the paper it was '36, but it was '39.

Johnson: How big were you?

Hopkins: One hundred and seventy pounds. [Hopkins chuckles]

Johnson: I see. And, and fast?

Hopkins: And fast, I was fast. I ran the hundred in a hundred flat.

Johnson: Is in . . .

Hopkins: That's right

Johnson: In ten flat?

Hopkins: Ten flat. Ten flat.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: That's right.

Johnson: Well, that was fast then.

Hopkins: It was pretty fast.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: That was in football talk.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: And, and I also ran the track. I ran on track, but I ran the 440 and the 880.

Johnson: Um Hum.

Hopkins: I ran in the mile relays . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: In the Southwest Conference.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh, we usually, we came in first or second.

Johnson: Now that's the Southwestern . . .

Hopkins: Southwestern Conference.

Johnson: Which was black schools?

Hopkins: Black, all black schools.

Johnson: That's right. Well, before we go on, I, I, have to ask you this question. You grew up in a segregated society.

Hopkins: Completely on Wiley Campus.

Johnson: Totally segregated

Hopkins: Yes.

Johnson: That's right. Totally segregated.

Hopkins: Totally segregated.

Johnson: You were even more segregate probably because you were there at a black College . . .

Hopkins: College.

Johnson: Right?

Hopkins: Right, completely.

Johnson: Um hum.

Johnson: Did you, uh, so I guess you really didn't have much dealings with other people?

Hopkins: Other than in buying, going to town and buying things that's all at stores.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But other than that I didn't . . .

Johnson: Well was there a bad atmosphere here though between blacks and whites?

Hopkins: No! As far as I can remember.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: There was none. In fact I, in when I was taking, I worked for a Marantose store. I worked at a, uh, grocery store. Mr. Maranto that lived right . . .

Johnson: Maranto?

Hopkins: Maranto.

Johnson: M-a-r-a-n . . .

Hopkins: M-a-r-a-n-t-o.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And, I was just a part of his family. He had nine children.

Johnson: Uh, huh.

Hopkins: And I grew, he was right on the campus. Right next to the campus at Wiley at a grocery store.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: He was Italian and uh, we had no problems.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: You know. We didn't ca . . . we came in contact with no problems.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: You know.

Johnson: Uh, no meanness? Uh . . .

Hopkins: No! None . . .

Johnson: No Ku Klux Klan type activity?

Hopkins: No, I member just hearing about when I was growing up.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: There was, uh in Hallsville that uh, there were about twelve, they were about to lynch, well they lynched my, uncle, but uh, there were twelve whites that broke in a house. There was, they were going to kill uh, a black man and uh, he shot three or four of em and other blacks were around that they killed twelve black white people o . . .

Johnson: When would have that been in the early . . .

Hopkins: This would . . .

Johnson: . . . part of the century?

Hopkins: 'Bout eighteen', bout nineteen three or four I guess.

Johnson: Okay, so before you were born?

Hopkins: Yes long before then.

Johnson: Well, you went to a segregated school so . . .

Hopkins: Right. Um hum.

Johnson: Uh, what, uh, what kind of schools did you have?

Hopkins: I think we had some; we had very good elementary schools, high schools. Our teachers, most of our teachers, attended Northern schools which had better schools than the South at that time, the universities. Our teachers, uh, the black, lady most of 'em were women teachers.

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: Okay. The, they went to Cornell University and uh, Cornell with their husbands that got their PhDs, husbands that got their PhDs and they . . .

Johnson: And taught at Wiley?

Hopkins: And taught at Wiley.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: And Bishop.

Johnson: Bishop was here then too.

Hopkins: Bishop was here and so they were all very qualified . . .

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: teachers.

Johnson: Okay. So you felt like you had good public school...

Hopkins: Oh, yes we had . . .

Johnson: Educators?

Hopkins: We had very public school, however, we did get the, the books from the white schools there, they might have been used before.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: Some of 'em might've been obsolete.

Johnson: How were the facilities?

Hopkins: The facilities . . .

Johnson: At school.

Hopkins: Were very good. I mean, we had new school, uh, our school at the time was Pemberton was built in 1926 or '27.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And it was a brand new school right there next to Wiley.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: It was Pemberton High.

Johnson: And that's where you went?

Hopkins: I went to Pemberton.

Johnson: Uh, Pemb . . . Pe . . .

Hopkins: Pemberton, P-e-m-b-e-r-t-o-n.

Johnson: And it was a high school?

Hopkins: It was a high school.

Johnson: And named after . . .

Hopkins: After Professor Pimberton. He was H.B. Pimberton. He was the first graduate of Wiley.

Johnson: Oh, I see.

Hopkins: He was the first graduate of Wiley in about 19, 1896 or something like that.

Johnson: I see. How old is Wiley then? It dates . . .

Hopkins: Wiley dates back to 1873.

Johnson: 1873?

Hopkins: Yes, 1873.

Johnson: That's not long after the Civil War.

Hopkins: That's right. They came from the North there was some freedmen.

Johnson: To get it started here?

Hopkins: Started here. Right down the street, here.

Johnson: Part of the Freedmen's Bureau I guess.

Hopkins: Right. Uh huh. It started right down on the street down here on somewhere at Lancaster around in that area.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: It started there first and then they moved over farther.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Closer to town which was about half of a mile closer. [Hopkins chuckles]

Johnson: I have been over there. One of my students, a graduate . . . a guy that got his master's teaches history over there.

Hopkins: Oh really?

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Good, great.

Johnson: Raymond Fogg.

Hopkins: I haven't met him.

Johnson: I don't know if you have met Raymond or not. Uh, well so you grew up uh, in a little different atmosphere for East Texas, though, I would say.

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: Uh . . .

Hopkins: I think so.

Johnson: In a educational setting really.

Hopkins: And we had everything. We had all our movies and everything at that time on the campus.

Johnson: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Hopkins: So I really didn't come in contact with, uh, you know the segregated feeling . . .

Johnson: You didn't feel that too much?

Hopkins: Feel, no, no, cause we had everything that we needed . . . on the campus.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: On the campus.

Johnson: Um hum.

Johnson: Well, uh, you, uh, graduated in nineteen thirty . . .

Hopkins: Nineteen forty- one.

Johnson: Forty-one from Wiley.

Hopkins: From Wiley.

Johnson: What was your major?

Hopkins: I majored in history and minored in economics and sociology.

Johnson: I see. [Both men chuckle] Well, what did you plan to do?

Hopkins: I planned to teach at that time before I found out that there, they were going to open up the, uh, the schools for, I mean the Air Force, for blacks to fly.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: I was going to teach. I had signed the contract to teach.

Johnson: Here in East Texas?

Hopkins: Uh, at Hallsville, Texas. I signed the contract, uh, as soon as I finished in March of '41.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And I signed the contract to teach in Hallsville. Teach Geometry.

Johnson: [Johnson chuckles] I see.

Hopkins: Teach geometry. I was a good math student.

Johnson: Uh huh, uh huh.

Hopkins: But, but so I was gonna teach geometry. But then, I caught the next bus to Barks Airfield, that, someone told me . . .

Johnson: Now the war hasn't started yet?

Hopkins: Oh, no. this was . . .

Johnson: I mean for us.

Hopkins: This was March of '41.

Johnson: Right.

Hopkins: So I . . . there was a man that had a shoe shop down on Carter Street and he said, "Mack there is going to be a, they gonna let blacks fly in the Air Force."

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Now at the time I didn't know blacks weren't flying in the air, I didn't know they was even flying, I knew, uh. I saw somewhere where they flying in Italy or something, one fellow . . . and uh, but I didn't know they weren't flying in the Air Force. I didn't know anything about the Air Force.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: In fact I had only seen one plane close up and it was right next . . . it had a force landing behind Wiley there and I saw it.

Johnson: You had never been . . .

Hopkins: This . . .

Johnson: Been up in a airplane?

Hopkins: Never been close to a plane but one time and that was in 1926 or 27.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: I was a little boy then.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: And I didn't, and when he said he was, they gonna let blacks fly in the Air Force I said fine. So I's, I came back and I caught the next bus to Shreveport to Barks Airfield.

Johnson: Yes, and did you, you then join . . .

Hopkins: And I volunteered. I had just finished college. I finished in March of forty-one. So as soon as I finished I, I went, went, right straight . . .

Johnson: Joined up.

Hopkins: I joined . . .

Johnson: At Barksdale?

Hopkins: Barksdale.

Johnson: Uh . . .

Hopkins: [Hopkins chuckles] That's right.

Johnson: Were there many other, uh blacks join?

Hopkins: Okay. Now there were blacks over there . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: When I got there. Over to Barksdale I saw all these boots lined up in front of a, a barrack, where the blacks lived. And I saw blacks cutting grass and everything out there. So the black fellows asked me where, where, what, what are you doing. I said I'm, I came over to join the Air force to fly. They said that's what we doing, that's what we were going to do. [Johnson laughs]

Hopkins: So [chuckles], that's all they were, so they were shining boots that's the only thing and cleanup, you know they did all . . .

Johnson: Doing the, doing the . . .

Hopkins: Dirty work.

Johnson: Doing the dirty work.

Hopkins: Uh huh. So I went in took my examination and everything and uh, I remember the, one of the interviewers asked me, he said, "What's the distance between that post and that one you looked out the window?"

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And I told him almost the exact distance because I knew about football. Ten yards and so forth.

Johnson: Um hum, Um hum.

Hopkins: And I passed the examination. I was through, in July I finished all my, everything, and I was ready to go.

Johnson: You mean your, uh, uh, basic training?

Hopkins: The . . . no, no. Just, uh, my examinations . . .

Johnson: Oh, I see.

Hopkins: And everything. Physical exam. I had perfect, my eyes were . . .

Johnson: Did you stay over there at Barksdale . . .

Hopkins: No. No.

Johnson: For a . . . amount of time?

Hopkins: No, just one . . .

Johnson: You came back?

Hopkins: They told me to bring three days of clothing.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, but uh, when I got there with all the whites. I was the only one black, but the whites that were there told me to bring me to bring three days of clothing. They sent them on to camp. They told me to come on back home . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And wait for a call.

Johnson: You had not been swore in yet?

Hopkins: Oh, no. No . . .

Johnson: I see. Um hum.

Hopkins: ... just, just wait for a call.

Johnson: Um Hum.

Hopkins: So that . . . this was in July of forty one.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And December the seventh, Pearl Harbor.

Johnson: That's right. Where were you? You remember that?

Hopkins: Yes, I was on my way from, I was working out at the Darco here in Marshall.

Johnson: Out at what?

Hopkins: It's, it's called a hydrocarbon plant.

Johnson: Okay.

Hopkins: It's a hydrocarbon plant.

Johnson: How do you spell that?

Hopkins: Uh, the Darco? D-a-r-c-o.

Johnson: Okay. All right.

Hopkins: Darco plant. At that time.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And then . . .

Johnson: You were working on Sunday?

Hopkins: I was working everyday. Yeah Sunday . . .

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Making twenty- eight cents an hour. [Johnson laughs] And [Hopkins chuckles] uh...

Johnson: And happy to have it.

Hopkins: And I, was on my way to work that morning in the car with a fellow and, and we heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We have never heard of Pearl Harbor, but . . .

Johnson: You didn't know where it was.

Hopkins: No. No, but if Pearl Harbor had been burned and we heard, uh, the president say that we are in war. You know.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, I got my notice the next day from downtown to report to the army.

Johnson: You mean from the draft board . . .

Hopkins: Draft board . . .

Johnson: The next day.

Hopkins: The next day. Report to draft, you know. And so I went and we went to Houston for an examination, physical examination . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, I let em draft me. I didn't have to be drafted cause I could, could've stayed out because I had already volunteered to fly.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But I said no I want to go. I want to fly. I want, I want . . .

Johnson: Well, now you went to Houston?

Hopkins: I went to Houston and took the physical examination.

Johnson: Were, were you . . . did you go with other blacks?

Hopkins: All blacks.

Johnson: And back then . . .

Hopkins: In a bus.

Johnson: It was strictly segregated wasn't it?

Hopkins: Completely segregated.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: All blacks.

Johnson: Yeah. From Marshall?

Hopkins: From Marshall in a bus.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And, uh, we went down there took our physical examinations and came back to Marshall. And this was December, in December. And then the next, uh, it was, uh, in February, let's see January, I got my call to go to the army.

Johnson: Okay, you came back home after you went to Houston.

Hopkins: Oh yes. We just down there a day.

Johnson: Physical.

Hopkins: Physical.

Johnson: All right.

Hopkins: Went right straight to. So they sent us to, uh, sent us by bus to, no, by train to, uh, Camp Walters. Here in Texas.

Johnson: Mineral Wells.

Hopkins: Mineral Wells.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh, so I got and then they sent me, uh, I was there just a couple days and they sent me to Cheyenne, Wyoming to quartermaster, quartermaster company.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh. So I took administration and personnel.

Johnson: Had you had your basic training yet?

Hopkins: No, I am taken, taken it now with the, uh, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Johnson: Okay. All right.

Hopkins: At Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming.

Johnson: Uh huh. And was that, uh, only black troops there?

Hopkins: All, no, all blacks in, they were completely segregated, segregated. They have whites on the post, but blacks, all blacks and all whi . . . you know.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: So they, uh . . .

Johnson: Your training was all segregated.

Hopkins: All segregated. Completely segregated.

Johnson: Did you have white officers?

Hopkins: Yes, all white officers.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: All white officers at that time.

Johnson: Um hum, Um hum.

Hopkins: All white officers . . .

Hopkins: And uh, all, all officers . . .

Johnson: That was at, uh, at, in, uh, Wyoming?

Hopkins: Wyoming. Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Johnson: Did you ever think you would go there?

Hopkins: Never had heard of Cheyenne. [Both Hopkins and Johnson laughs] Other than, uh Tim McCoy I think.

Johnson: Yeah, right.

Hopkins: I remember Tim McCoy.

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: But any way, so they sent me, then I got my call from Washington, D.C. I mean I got a letter from Washington, D.C. to report to Tuskegee for flight training.

Johnson: When was this?

Hopkins: This was in, uh, February, February of, of uh . . .

Johnson: '42?

Hopkins: '42.

Johnson: That's early.

Hopkins: February of forty two. Now the first class, I got there, I had to go to, uh, Denver to take another physical examination because it has been six, you know, six months.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: So I went to Denver and over to Laurie Field.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And took physical examination and then, uh after passing it and everything and all physical, then they sent me to, uh, came back and they sent me to Tuskegee. I got there when the first class was graduating.

Johnson: Okay, so . . .

Hopkins: They were just before the first class.

Johnson: So you were not in the first class?

Hopkins: No, no.

Johnson: But you were pretty close?

Hopkins: I, I was there when the first class graduated. No, it took, see it was nine months for.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Nine months. They had been in for nine months.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And it was only five in that class with General [Benjamin Oliver] Davis was one of them.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: Yeah. General Davis. Uh, well he was a captain at the time.

Johnson: Yeah. He had been . . .

Hopkins: D O. Davis.

Johnson: He had been in the army.

Hopkins: Yes, uh huh. He, see he went to West Point; he took his training at West Point.

Johnson: Um hum, um hum.

Hopkins: You remember they didn't speak to him for four years.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: You' member [Hopkins chuckles].

Johnson: I saw that, I saw that on T.V.

Hopkins: Right. Uh huh.

Johnson: He's, he's still alive, isn't he?

Hopkins: Yes, uh huh. I see him every year.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: I see him every year. Um hum

Johnson: Uh, so you got to Tuskegee in, uh, how did you travel, by train?

Hopkins: Train, by train, all the way from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Tuskegee.

Johnson: Well, let me ask you, where the trains still segregated then?

Hopkins: Uh, the trains were segregated but I had, uh Pullman.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: I had Pullman. It wouldn't segregated for the army, for me...

Johnson: For the army.

Hopkins: All the way from Cheyenne Wyoming to, uh, from Cheyenne to uh, uh, Memphis, Tennessee. From Cheyenne to Memphis, Tennessee I was on a train that wasn't, wasn't segregated . . .

Johnson: But when you got to the South it was.

Hopkins: But when I got to, to the South, and went in to eat . . .

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: They, they waited until all the whites finished eating and then, then they pulled the curtain and in this little section here I ate, I ate.

Johnson: By yourself?

Hopkins: By myself.

Johnson: How did you feel about that?

Hopkins: Oh, I was use to it.

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: To tell the truth about it . . .

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: I, I, was used to knowing that, I knew that things were separate.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: You know, separate but . . . I accepted the things separate but equal even though it wasn't equal.

Johnson: No.

Hopkins: I accepted it.

Johnson: But it didn't bother you.

Hopkins: No. No. It didn't bother me.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: It really didn't.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: No, uh, the waiter, the waiter said, told me to wait just a minute. He took all the, the, everything off the table and he set the table up with brand new everything on it, silver and everything and he said, "All right Mack come in."

Johnson: Was he black?

Hopkins: Uh, he was black.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: All the waiters were black and on trains at that time. All the waiters were black.

Johnson: All the porters, huh?

Hopkins: Porters, yeah, uh huh. Waiters and porters.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Were black.

Johnson: So you got the, uh, welcome to the south? [laughs]

Hopkins: Right, back to the south. I am back home now.

Johnson: You knew you were home.

Hopkins: I knew I was home. [chuckles]

Johnson: Okay, so you went on over to, uh, uh, to, uh, Tuskegee...

Hopkins: Tuskegee.

Johnson: Which is over there in the eastern part of Alabama near the Georgia Border, idnit ?

Hopkins: That's right.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: That's right. That's right.

Johnson: And uh, I wish you would tell me a little bit, you got there in February 1942.

Hopkins: March of '42.

Johnson: March of '42, okay.

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: Uh, what, uh, what kind of facilities did you find there? Was it a milt- there was a military base there, right?

Hopkins: It was a military base.

Johnson: At the airport?

Hopkins: They were building; they were building the air field. In fact they had one runway.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: About one run, runway at that time.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh, I saw hills out there, but they were working all night long with bulldozers and everything, you know. Putting in other runways and building, buildings and everything else. But we had our cadet. We had two building let's see, two buildings with cadets in it at that time. Only two.

Johnson: Barracks?

Hopkins: Two barracks.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: With cadets. And they were upper classmen and all. Now, we went into preflight training. We had our preflight training which is five weeks in lower preflight and then five weeks in upper preflight. That's, uh ten weeks in, that's learning all the, uh, things like, uh, meteorology and, uh, navigation. You know the beginning of navigation and aircraft identification.

Johnson: Now that, uh, base was out there where that airport is over there now, I guess, isn't it, still?

Hopkins: No, I . . . its, its went out of existence . . .

Johnson: Oh I see. It's not working.

Hopkins: Its, its . . . they closed that completely.

Johnson: Okay and . . .

Hopkins: Um hum.

Johnson: There is an airport over there still?

Hopkins: They is an airport but that was where we took our primary training.

Johnson: Okay. All right.

Hopkins: That's a Tuskegee that belonged to Tuskegee.

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: And the . . .

Johnson: You were in a different base?

Hopkins: We took . . . well we were at the base. Then we, when we took our primary training we went to, over and stayed at on the campus at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Okay, so you did stay on . . .

Hopkins: For six, yeah for ten weeks we owned the campus at Tuskegee.

Johnson: In the dormitories?

Hopkins: In the dormitories.

Johnson: Was school still going on, to?

Hopkins: School was going on. Dr. George Washington Carver was right there at that time.

Johnson: Is that right? You saw him?

Hopkins: I saw him. I ate breakfast with him many Sunday mornings.

Johnson: Is that right? What kind, what kind of person was he?

Hopkins: A fine fellow that talked real fine, had a fine voice, tall. He would go along picking up trash along the way, anything that he saw. But, uh, he determined the type of food we should eat, the cadets, cadets.

Johnson: Oh, really?

Hopkins: Uh huh. I was Cadet Lieutenant at that time over the cadets at, you know, my group. And, uh, I usually led them, we marched to eat every, on all the meals, except Sunday.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh, but I met him.

Johnson: Were there many students, just regular students there who were not military?

Hopkins: Oh, yes. At Tuskegee?

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Oh there were many. They had a lot of students at Tuskegee at that time.

Johnson: Several hundred?

Hopkins: There must have been much, many more than that.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: I suppose at that time.

Johnson: Well, did they still have, uh, weren't the boys gonna be drafted?

Hopkins: Uh, you mean at Tuskegee?

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Some of em were.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: Like Chappy James was one of the fellows, I don't know if you heard of Chappy James was the first black four star general. Chappy James was first and he was over NORAD. He was over the whole North American Air Defense before he died.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Uh, and he was a fighter pilot too. He took fighter pilot training and then he became a bomber pilot.

Johnson: But was he a student at Tuskegee?

Hopkins: He was a student at Tuskegee.

Johnson: And came out and went into the military?

Hopkins: He came out and went in, but while he was waiting to go into the milit . . . into the Air Force. In fact, uh, he was, he took that civil pilot training program. He went into civil pilot training. You know he took that . . .

Johnson: Silver?

Hopkins: CPT. They call it

Johnson: Oh, civil. Okay. Civil air patrol.

Hopkins: Civil pilot training program.

Johnson: Yes they had a training program, uh huh.

Hopkins: Okay. So they, they trained em . . .

Johnson: As a civilian?

Hopkins: Uh, and all the civilians at different, uh, schools.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: You know that had there airports close.

Johnson: Right.

Hopkins: And he, that was one of 'em at Tuskegee and he would drive us out every, every day to the, while he was waiting to be called. It took a whole year for blacks to get in.

Johnson: Um hum. In the Air Force?

Hopkins: In the Air Force. Like, I like I volunteered in March, it took me a whole year to get in.

Johnson: Well, do you think they were screening you?

Hopkins: [sighs] Well it was, actually they didn't need, they didn't want us. They didn't want any blacks in there. But somehow or another Roosevelt, they decided that they should, and also Truman, at that time, Truman said that if you can fly these old raggedy planes up there, somebody went to Washington one time from Chicago and he said I'll put in... I try to get it through Congress that you fellows can get in the Air Force.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: There's Harry Truman. [chuckles]

Johnson: Because, uh, uh, else, otherwise in the, in the military blacks were relegated to labor battalions...

Hopkins: To labor battalions.

Johnson: Or doing, working in mess halls.

Hopkins: That's right.

Johnson: It just, uh, it followed the uh . . .

Hopkins: That's the way it was.

Johnson: The civilian society.

Hopkins: Um hum.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Cause I had volunteered to, to, for the Navy a couple years before then and I told em I did not want to cook and they said okay, uh, what happened they said you well can't see. They, they said that I couldn't see well enough to be in the Navy.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: And the next year I volunteered to fly and I had perfect vision. [both chuckle].

Johnson: You had a remarkable recovery.

Hopkins: But they had opened it up.

Johnson: Yeah [laughs]. Uh, okay, so, uh, you're taking training, you're there on the campus of Tuskegee . . .

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: Which is a pretty place, by the way?

Hopkins: Oh, beautiful. Um hum.

Johnson: I have been there. And, uh, uh what was your training schedule like? In your pre, your pre, your earliest part?

Hopkins: Oh, oh, well now the training at, at Tuskegee; see now we are flying now.

Johnson: Um Hum.

Hopkins: We are, uh, we are taking this, this uh flying in PT-17s. That's a bi-wing plane.

Johnson: Okay. That's what you started out in?

Hopkins: Now everyday we go out, we go out to the airport and we fly about a, a, half hour to an hour.

Johnson: With an instructor?

Hopkins: With an instructor, everyday.

Johnson: Um hum

Hopkins: Now all the instructors in primary were black. All our instructors were black.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And, uh, the, the captain, the head of it, was white. He was from West Point. Uh, Captain Smith.

Johnson: Well, tell me, what, what was your feeling the first time you went up in an airplane?

Hopkins: Uh, you know the first time I, I really felt good. I didn't feel afraid or anything. I fe . . . you know, I, I . . . it was the first time I had gotten close to a plane since I had saw the one fall at, at Wiley.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Now this was in 1926 or '27. The next time I got close, the next time I got close to the plane was there.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: At over there.

Johnson: Did it make you sick to go up in the first flight?

Hopkins: No, un uh. But one thing it did bother me, I thought of it. I thought of it and talked to Dr. Carver about, that. You know, I said now I didn't want to eat one morning, I didn't want to eat. He said, "Look, eat fruit." Eat fruit and things like, you know, he told me things that we should eat, you know.

Johnson: That's interesting.

Hopkins: And, uh, so I never had any problems, but there was one fellow in the class I remember his name was Webber.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But he did have problems and, uh, let it . . . [chuckles] sick.

Johnson: Did he make it through?

Hopkins: No he didn't but he became a sergeant major. He was ahead of the, he headed the whole thing at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Oh, really? [both chuckle] He ran things huh?

Hopkins: Oh, he ran things.

Johnson: So how long did that preflight take?

Hopkins: Oh now pre, now this is [talking over each other] primary.

Johnson: Primary, yeah.

Hopkins: This is primary for ten weeks. We are in Tuskegee. Lower primary and upper primary. Now its ten weeks. That's sixty hours that we get in, in primary.

Johnson: All, all in that bi . . . double wing plane.

Hopkins: Double wing plane.

Johnson: What was the number of it?

Hopkins: It was PT- 17.

Johnson: PT- 17.

Hopkins: Okay. Then . . .

Johnson: Were those canvas planes?

Hopkins: Yes. Yes they were canvas.

Johnson: Wooden and canvas.

Hopkins: Canvas, uh huh.

Johnson: Uh hum.

Hopkins: And then finally some of 'em I think they began, they get another metal, metal, they became metal. But at first they were, uh, canvas.

Johnson: Any bad accidents during that for anybody?

Hopkins: No. There was no accidents, I don't, there were no accidents in primary at all.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: No accidents. There was one fellow I remember had a forced landing but it was no, but he didn't, didn't hurt the plane at all.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: He landed out close to Tuskegee and, uh, little white kids ran up to him and their parents came up and asked him where the pilot was. [Johnson laughs and then Hopkins laughs]

Johnson: I guess a black man wasn't supposed to be a pilot, huh?

Hopkins: Uh huh.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: But that was the only, but no, no accidents.

Johnson: Did whites live in Tuskegee?

Hopkins: Not, in, yeah at Tuskegee, town. They lived there but no blacks lived in town.

Johnson: Well, I didn't see any when I was there?

Hopkins: No, not now. But see, now, uh, all whites live in town at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But now Tuskegee Institute is out, out from, its, its about . . .

Johnson: Well, I grew up around the town and I didn't see any whites when I was there.

Hopkins: There, there is probably not now. [talking over each other]. They probably left.

Johnson: Yeah, I guess.

Hopkins: Let' see, because at that time we couldn't go downtown at night. We couldn't go down after; you couldn't be downtown after eight o'clock, unless you were getting off the bus . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Or going to the bus.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: Yeah. You couldn't, you couldn't, uh, you weren't allowed down town.

Johnson: Well, was that true of Tuskegee students too? Regular students?

Hopkins: You know, I don't uh, I don't know. I really don't know.

Johnson: You are talking about the military.

Hopkins: I am talking about the military. They had problems with the military see, they wouldn't let our, uh, military police, they wouldn't let them go down, I mean be down with guns.

Johnson: Right.

Hopkins: You know they took their guns away from 'em. You know they told 'em that.

Johnson: So it was still the South and segregated?

Hopkins: It was still the South. Well, uh, the, our, the man that was over when we first got over to, on the campus of Tuskegee when our first class went into the first class he said, "Now I don't care where ya'll are from," this is a white officer, "I don't care where y'all are from, you in the South now you are, you are going to abide by the laws and customs of the South." See, it didn't bother me cause I was already from the South.

Johnson: Yeah, but some of the guys were from the north.

Hopkins: But some, most of em were from the North. These are guys that were great milit . . . uh, football players . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Top football players in the country. Like Sidat Singh.

Johnson: Who?

Hopkins: Sidat. Wilmot Sidat Singh. He was from, uh Syracuse. He was one of the all-american basketball and football players from Syracuse.

Johnson: Sidat, how do spell that?

Hopkins: Sidat. S-i-d-a-t.

Johnson: Okay. Sing, s-i-n-g?

Hopkins: Sing. Uh huh. S-i-n-g-h.

Johnson: Okay. All right.

Hopkins: Singh. He was . . . his father, was from India.

Johnson: Okay.

Hopkins: And his mother was, uh . . .

Johnson: A black?

Hopkins: American. Uh huh, black.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: She was mixed with white and black.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: And, uh, I have that picture and everything right there. [chuckles] I have it.

Johnson: Uh, do have a picture of you in your early flight?

Hopkins: Yeah, um hum.

Johnson: Okay, I might want to borrow that and make slide of it for the play if I could.

Hopkins: Okay, I will help you.

Johnson: All right, uh, we are getting low on tape on this side. I am going to have to turn it over. But, uh, let me just, uh, kind of end up this period. So you went through ten weeks then of you're . . .

Hopkins: Ten weeks of primary.

Johnson: Your primary flight, uh huh. And then, uh, you're going to do what?

Hopkins: Then we go into basic. We go back out to the airfield, Tuskegee Airfield.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Tuskegee Army Airfield. Now we go out, back out there. It's twelve miles out of town.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: We go back out there and then we start our basic training which is in a BT-13. That's a, a single, you know wing.

Johnson: Model, model plane.

Hopkins: Yeah. Yeah, uh huh. That's a single; okay . . . that's our basic training, BT-13.

Johnson: Is it a small plane?

Hopkins: No. It's pretty, it's pretty good size. It's same, it's the same . . .

Johnson: Is it single?

Hopkins: It's two.

Johnson: It holds two?

Hopkins: It holds two just like the, uh . . .

Johnson: The other one did?

Hopkins: The primary.

Johnson: Behind each other.

Hopkins: Yes. Right. Uh huh.

Johnson: Open cockpit.

Hopkins: Open cockpit. It's open cockpit.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: The BT-13 is a open cockpit. Uh, so we are in that for another sixty hours.

Johnson: Well, let me ask you, uh, is that the, are whites learning to fly in the same kind of airplane.

Hopkins: Yes. They learned to fly but they . . .

Johnson: In the same kinds?

Hopkins: Same kinds.

Johnson: I see

Hopkins: Same kind, in fact we, we shot landings a lot of times with the British air, airfield. British were over there training to.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And, uh right close to us the shorter field. We would shoot land, they would be on one side of the field and we would be on the other side of the, you know field. We would be shooting landings over here and they would be on the other side bouncing all over. That was the British air that was the British, yeah. [chuckles]

Johnson: Flying the same kind of planes?

Hopkins: Same kind.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Same kind of planes.

[Side Two]

Johnson: Okay this is side two of the interview with, uh Mack Hopkins about, uh his days as a flyer in WW II. Well we were talking about your early days there, uh, at Tuskegee learning how to fly and you said you had gotten into a, a secondary stage, I guess, and that flying the, uh, this P- thir-

Hopkins: P, BT-13

Johnson: BT-13.

Hopkins: BT-13.

Johnson: Which is a two place trainer, I guess?

Hopkins: Right. That's right.

Johnson: But a single man, wing.

Hopkins: Single wing. That's right.

Johnson: Did it go, ran a little faster?

Hopkins: Ran a little faster, around one hundred and forty, hundred forty miles an hour instead of a hundred and twenty.

Johnson: Was there much trouble going through the transitioning a new plane?

Hopkins: No. It was, uh, I think I, I soloed that plane. I went up with the instructor for about two or three hours, and I solo . . . then I soloed.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: It didn't take as long, the first plane, the first time I took, in the Bible, in the PT-17, it took seven, uh, eight hours. I think it was eight hours.

Johnson: Before you were solo?

Hopkins: I soloed.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And this one, it was only four hours

Johnson: Um hum. Well, uh how long did you spend in that segment of the training?

Hopkins: Then we are in this, we are in lower basic and then upper basic. We lets put thirty hours in lower basic and then thirty hours in upper basic.

Johnson: That's thirty flight hours?

Hopkins: Flight hours.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Um hum. Flying hours.

Johnson: So this takes a period of several months, I guess?

Hopkins: It takes . . .

Johnson: Weeks?

Hopkins: Well, it's ten weeks.

Johnson: Ten weeks, huh?

Hopkins: Ten weeks.

Johnson: Um hum. And your day was you got up early morning in the morning, I guess?

Hopkins: We got up early in the morning and we took off. We went to; well we were going to class. We would go to class a lot of times . . .

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: In the morning, taking navigation . . .

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Aircraft identification and Morse code.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: We still took Morse code and uh, then we would take off to fly.

Johnson: Did you use Morse code on your radio?

Hopkins: Yes. Well, it was a, yeah we had to dit dah dit . . .

Johnson: In the planes?

Hopkins: Yes, uh huh. We had that.

Johnson: You did not have voice radio?

Hopkins: We did have voice radio but we also had the code to.

Johnson: I see, I see. Did you ever use it?

Hopkins: We used it sometime when we were flying, uh, on cross country.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: We used it sometimes.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: We weren't supposed to a lot of times. A lot of times we weren't supposed to, but we did.

Johnson: [Chuckles] Yeah, okay. [Hopkins chuckles] Well, where did you fly on cross country?

Hopkins: Well we went from, uh, Tuskegee, Alabama to, uh, Atlanta and to, uh Chattanooga, Tennessee . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And to Birmingham all back to Tuskegee.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then sometime we would fly from, uh, Tuskegee down to Dothan, Alabama and over to Columbus.

Johnson: Would you land?

Hopkins: No and sometimes, sometimes we would. Sometimes we landed in Chattanooga.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: We would fly to, uh Atlanta from Tuskegee and then, uh go and land at Chattanooga.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then we would leave Chattanooga, go close to Birmingham, Alabama, fly over Birmingham and then back down to Tuskegee.

Johnson: Um hum. All right, now uh what's your next stage?

Hopkins: Then we go after leaving basic, our basic training, then we go into the advanced stage of flying we're flying the AT-6.

Johnson: Still there at...

Hopkins: At, still at Tuskegee. All of it . . .

Johnson: All of it was there?

Hopkins: All of it was at Tuskegee.

Johnson: So all black flyers learned to fly at . . .

Hopkins: Fly at Tuskegee.

John son: I see.

Hopkins: All black flyers learned to fly at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Uh huh. And the AT-6 is a Texan I believe, wasn't it?

Hopkins: That's, that's right, uh huh.

Johnson: It's got uh, a . . .

Hopkins: Now it has a canopy.

Johnson: Right. Uh huh.

Hopkins: It has a canopy. Good thing it does cause . . .

Johnson: There is still a lot of those flying, today, I've seen those.

Hopkins: There are some, yeah, uh huh, that's right, cause I see em at the Confederate Airforce.

Johnson: Right, I do to.

Hopkins: I, I go and get in 'em when they, when they have . . .

Johnson: And you had flew in those?

Hopkins: I flew in the AT-6s.

Johnson: They are even faster?

Hopkins: Oh yeah they're faster. They are a hundred and sixty miles an hour.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: At, you know, on, in cruising speed.

Johnson: Do have much of a, the sensation that you are going faster in these different planes? Can you, could you tell it?

Hopkins: Um, really, I didn't. I couldn't tell, not, uh, not in the AT-6 until I got in the P-, P-40, it really didn't, didn't make much, you know . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: That hundred and twenty, twenty, hundred and twenty, hundred and forty, hundred and sixty miles . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But it was smoother. The AT-6 was a smooth ship, it was nice and smooth.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: We'd go up to a hundred and, I mean up to twenty thousand feet in the . . .

Johnson; Is that right?

Hopkins: Twenty two or twenty five.

Johnson: Did you have to have oxygen?

Hopkins: Yes. When we leave, when we go up above ten thousand feet going up. Then we would always put on our oxygen, uh, masks.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Uh, to go up . . .

Johnson: That's not a, that's not a pressurized cabinet, though, is it?

Hopkins: No, it isn't and it's cold.

Johnson: Yes.

Hopkins: It's cold up there.

Johnson: All right so, uh, you, you graduated up to, uh, the Texan, the AT-6.

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: And uh, what's the next step after that?

Hopkins: Well, then you go, uh in the advanced stage of, uh, the AT-6. You go to Egland Field down at Florida . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: To take, uh, gunnery training.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: You go down to Florida and take gunnery training.

Johnson: You actually stayed down there?

Hopkins: You stay down there for a while, taking your gunnery training, you, uh, uh, flying behind these, uh, um . . .

Johnson: They pulling targets and . . .

Hopkins: Pulling targets, you fly and you know shoot at those and also you go in and, uh, straight, you know, bomb like you would bombing something.

Johnson: Now what kind of planes you flying, still the AT ...?

Hopkins: We still flying the AT-6.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: So we had, uh, my group each time, each, each class would always be better than the, the other class, the previous class, you know in the gunnery.

Johnson: How, how, you say class, how many would say be in your class?

Hopkins: Oh there were only twenty in a class.

Johnson: Twenty in a class.

Hopkins: Twenty in a class doing that, uh, doing the first year.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Twenty would start in a class and they would let one third graduate.

Johnson: You mean that was just built in?

Hopkins: Built in, uh they had a tentative flow chart for colored pilots and that's how what had happened.

Johnson: Well did they do whites that way to?

Hopkins: No, uh, not that way. If they were good, if they were, you know they didn't have a quota.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: You didn't have a quota.

Johnson: You had a quota?

Hopkins: We had a quota.

Johnson: So you . . .

Hopkins: According to this, uh this, this classified chart that I had.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: That they had.

Johnson: So you knew that you stood a two thirds chance of not making it.

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: So you must a been good.

Hopkins: Well you had to be good. I was cadet captain at the time.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: So, uh, I was, uh, executive officer in basic and then when it got to advanced stage I was cadet captain.

Johnson: Well, now you don't have a rank yet other than cadet captain?

Hopkins: Just, just cadet captain [Johnson also talking], you are still a cadet.

Johnson: An Air Force cadet?

Hopkins: Cadet.

Johnson; And that's a, kind of, uh, in between officer and enlisted man?

Hopkins: Yes. Right. Uh huh.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: You just, well, you just over the cadets. I was over all the cadets, black cadets at that time. And then we finished, when you finished that two hundred hours of flying time then you, uh you graduated and then you go into, uh, uh you take your P-40. You take [chuckles] care, you are checked out on P-40, now its only one person in that plane.

Johnson: Where was that?

Hopkins: It was at Tuskegee. All at Tuskegee.

Johnson: I see. Okay.

Hopkins: Everything at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Was, uh, the P-40 was the, uh, it was one of our early planes wasn't it?

Hopkins: Well it was the one that Jim Chennault had flown in, uh . . .

Johnson: In China.

Hopkins: In China.

Johnson: Um hum. Flying Tigers.

Hopkins: Yeah, Flying Tigers. We had, they had, still had some of the markings, we were using the same planes that he had flown in China.

Johnson: Is that right? And still had the Flying Tiger marks on it?

Hopkins: Flying Tiger marks on 'em.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: Markings, you'll see, yeah all of 'em ma . . .

Johnson: Well they had been they had been in battle then before?

Hopkins: They had been in battles. A lot of those planes had been in battles.

Johnson: Could you tell that they had been in battle?

Hopkins: Well they were old.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: But, but we had some very good mechanics. Our mechanics went to; they took their training at Chanute Field.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Chanute Field and they were very, they were all black. All the mechanics, they trained em up there . . .

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then they came down there and they were all black, but they were very good, you know.

Johnson: Well how was the P-40 to fly?

Hopkins: Oh, sweet, but its narrow landing gears I didn't like too much.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: The narrow landing gears you have to come in, you have to be on the guard at all times make sure that you don't ground loop, you know.

Johnson: Um hum. It flew faster though?

Hopkins: It was much faster.

Johnson: Than the AT-6.

Hopkins: And than the AT-6.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then there were a few of us that flew the P-39, but most, uh, most Americans, I said black and white were a little bit, uh, too large for a, uh, P-39s. Most of us were cramped. We were sort of cramped in a P-30 . . .

Johnson: I see because you are a tall man . . .

Hopkins: Yeah uh huh.

Johnson: What are you six- three?

Hopkins: Six . . .

Johnson: Two.

Hopkins: Even six.

Johnson: Oh six feet?

Hopkins: Six, uh huh, but we had some that were six-two or six-three, you know.

Johnson: And they were cramped.

Hopkins: And they were cramped to. But we flew the P-40 that's what we took all of our training mostly . . .

Johnson: Is it . . .

Hopkins: Fighter pilot training.

Johnson: Is it; was it still a training plane at this time?

Hopkins: Yes, oh yes. Uh huh.

Johnson: But it was not being used in combat? Or was it?

Hopkins: Oh yes it was being used in combat.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Sure it was.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Oh yes it, it, in fact my first my group that went over, the 99th Fighter Squadron, they went over in March of '43.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: See they, they were here in the states a whole year after graduating some of 'em.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then they went over in, in March of for . . . to Africa.

Johnson: Africa?

Hopkins: They went over to North Africa.

Johnson: Now was this your group or the group ahead of you?

Hopkins: This is my, the same group that was ahead of me. This is the head of, the group that was ahead of me.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: They were in the 99th Fighter Squadron.

Johnson: You were . . .

Hopkins: The next group that came, then they sent, we sent a group to, uh, to, uh, to uh Detroit, Michigan, into Michigan.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: To take their training there, SelFridge Field.

Johnson: Selfish?

Hopkins: SelFridge

Johnson: S-e-l-F-r-i-v-g-e.

Hopkins: Right, uh huh. And they took their training the hundred, the hundred, the three hundred, the 301st, and 302nd.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: There were three more squadrons. Now the 99th was already overseas. Now Davis leaves one man over there, [George S.] Spanky Roberts, as commanding officer of the 99th and he comes back and he forms the 332nd Fighter Group.

Johnson: That's the man that later became general.

Hopkins: Yes, right, uh huh.

Johnson: And you knew him well?

Hopkins: Oh yes. We flew together many time.

Johnson: Did you go overseas?

Hopkins: No, no. I stayed on this side as the, the instructor.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: As the flight instructor.

Johnson: Well, what do you, what do you . . . ?

Hopkins: The reason I stayed, uh there was a, a Huey P. Long had a nephew called, his name was Robert Long.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: Robert Long said "Look we need, I know you want to go with your group," he said, "But I'm gonna save your life now. You won't thank me now but you will some day," he said, "Uh, I am gonna keep you on this side as an instructor," you know. So he sent me on . . .

Johnson: And he was the Air Force?

Hopkins: Yeah he was a, he was the head of the advanced training. He was the head of the advanced training at Tuskegee.

Johnson: But he was a white man.

Hopkins: He was a white man.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: All the, all of our instructors in basic and advanced, in advanced training were white.

Johnson: Well . . .

Hopkins: 'Cause we had no blacks that had ever gone through the fighter. You know.

Johnson: And you were a college graduate.

Hopkins: I graduated in '41.

Johnson: You were good at flying.

Hopkins: Yeah, all of us were grad . . . all the blacks that were flying were college graduates in my class.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: They were all graduates of colleges.

Johnson: And he actually told you he was going to save your life? [chuckles]

Hopkins: Yeah. He say, "I am gonna save your life." He say, "I know, I know you wanna go with your group but I am gonna save your life keep you on this side as a flight instructor." So he sent me to take civilian pilot training first, you know. Civilian, see I had never had civilian pilot training in the civilian train, planes.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: That's over at Tuskegee. That's at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But not, see they had three fields actually. One was civilian, one was Air Force, and then one, then we had the one out at where we were flying. So I took the civilian pilot training so I could become an instructor, you know. And then I came on back as and, and trained, you know trained with others.

Johnson: What rank were you by this time?

Hopkins: At the, lieutenant.

Johnson: Okay. First, second lieutenant.

Hopkins: I only made, I only made first lieutenant.

Johnson: First lieutenant.

Hopkins: First lieutenant.

Johnson: And you went, okay.

Hopkins: Right.

Johnson: After you become, after you get through the cadet part

Hopkins &
Johnson
together: You become a second lieutenant

Hopkins: Second lieutenant.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And just with your wings that's all.

Johnson: I see. And you became a, you went through the rank of First Lieutenant?

Hopkins: Right, uh huh.

Johnson: And you stayed there at Tuskegee?

Hopkins: I stayed, stayed Tuskegee but I was sent to Laurie Field. I, I did go to Laurie Field on detached service.

Johnson: That sets in Colorado.

Hopkins: Colorado.

Johnson: Okay.

Hopkins: I was, I was there flying those in, well what we were doing, we had formed a B-25 group.

Johnson: Oh really? Two engines.

Hopkins: In, in Kentucky, see. So we had a, blacks were flying B-25s

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: That's a bombing group.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: See.

Johnson: Light bomber.

Hopkins: Yeah, a light bomber, see. So they were going to, they were getting ready to go overseas so they sent me to, to Laurie Field to take aerial photography, you know, there and to also fly, and uh, and come back and be over that, uh, aerial photography group, see. You know, with the photography, knowing, somebody had to know something about photography.

Johnson: Did you ever fly a B-25 yourself?

Hopkins: I didn't fly it myself. I flew in 'em many times.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: As co-pilot.

Johnson: Well, uh . . .

Hopkins: And also the B-29, the-17 at Laurie Field.

Johnson: You flew in all of those?

Hopkins: Uh huh.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: I flew it as a, when Roosevelt died I was in, I was on detached service in Colorado, at Laurie Field.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And we took off within, within thirty minutes after Roosevelt died. Soon as he died and we, we got the message. They called us all to the airfield and told us, you know, to get in. You know, we, we took off and patrolled the coast, west coast. Check, taking pictures, area pictures of the whole, all the way from Seattle, Washington to San Diego.

Johnson: Why?

Hopkins: To see if the Japanese, we didn't know whether the Japanese had put any, uh, camouflage, anything on the coast, you know, or what, you know. So we would take pictures in three dimensions.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And then come back as soon as we'd land we sent em through the lab and everything to see if we saw any depth in it. You know, if there no depth there we knew it was three, you know it, it was nothing.

Johnson: You never found anything?

Hopkins: Yeah, we never found anything. We saw, we never did find anything. So for two or three weeks after Roosevelt died . . .

Johnson: Why after his death, I wonder?

Hopkins: I don't know. They didn't what Truman would, you know, what uh, what people, what the Japanese might do...

Johnson: How do you, did you feel about, uh, Roosevelt?

Hopkins: Oh, I was crazy about Roosevelt. I was crazy [chuckles] about him. All of my people were, you know, down here. You know, 'cause, 'cause, he put all of these programs in the CCC and my brother went to and, uh the NRA and all those things, you know.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: I, we were crazy about him.

Johnson: How about Truman?

Hopkins: Truman, a crazy, ooh, crazy about, I, uh, just loved Truman. It, it . . .

Johnson: He's now being considered a great president.

Hopkins: We heard so many things before, while he was, you know, when he first came in that he had been a Ku Klux Klan man and all that kind of stuff. But he was the one that actually integrated the, [Johnson says something that is unclear] and he was the one that made it possible for us to fly. He was the one that brought it before Congress, I think, to begin with.

Johnson: Um hum. Well, uh, were you disappointed that you didn't go overseas?

Hopkins: I wanted to go, and fact, my wife was in the Air For . . . my, my wife was in the WACs at that time.

Johnson: Oh, is that right?

Hopkins: And she was sent to Chattanooga to get ready to go overseas. They were sending this black group of . . . WACS overseas to England.

Johnson: Uh, huh.

Hopkins: And I wrote to the War Department and everything else and told em look, I say I am ready to go, I been ready to go to go overseas. I want to go.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: And I said my wife doesn't want to go, and you know, and uh, they gonna send her over there before they send me. You know, I so, so I was, you know, I wanted to go. I really . . .

Johnson: Did she go overseas?

Hopkins: No she didn't go.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: She got out of it. Red Cross finally got, somebody got her out of it.

Johnson: Was she an officer or just . . .

Hopkins: No she wasn't. She was sergeant major.

Johnson: Where had she entered from?

Hopkins: Uh, Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

Johnson: Right. [he says something that is unclear]

Hopkins: Now see, she had graduated from Columbia. She had her master's in foreign languages and from Columbia and she volunteered with all the white girls up there.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: They told her they would be officers, but they kept her in three years. She was never. . . . [chuckles] She headed all the departments and everything else, but she was never, uh . . .

Johnson: An officer.

Hopkins: She was a, a corporal.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: Whatever that is. [chuckles]

Johnson: Well, uh, what would you say the value of your having been in WW II and learning how to fly was to you in your later life?

Hopkins: [Sighs] The only thing that happened was that I wanted to go into aviation, uh, after the war.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: After the war, I after going in, to Tuskegee and everything, I wanted to stay in aviation. So when I came back to Marshall, after the war, I, I had already signed up to go to California for aeronautical engineering. So I went straight through California to Cal Aero Tech and took aeronautical engineering.

Johnson: To where?

Hopkins: Ca . . .

Johnson: Cal . . .

Hopkins: Cal, Cal Aero Tech, California Aeronautical Institute. That's [Johnson says something unclear] in Glendale, California.

Johnson: Okay and you studied . . .

Hopkins: I studied engineering, aeronautical engineering and finished engineering school in, in uh, '47.

Johnson: Yeah, did you get another degree?

Hopkins: No. It was actually a certificate.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: There were certificates.

Johnson: I see. Okay.

Hopkins: There were certificates in uh . . .

Johnson: What would, do you learn there? What types of things?

Hopkins: I learned how to design planes. I learned all the drafting there, I had had all the math at Wiley.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: I had had all the math and I could teach the classes in Math but I had no, uh, drafting and no design of planes and nothing.

Johnson: You did that on the GI Bill I guess.

Hopkins: I did.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: I did it on the GI Bill.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: But when I finished engineering school I couldn't get a job. They were, they weren't hiring blacks at that time.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: For engineering.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: They had only hired one black and he flew with me at one, he had flown with me at Tuskegee.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: And they hired, he was from MIT though. He graduated from MIT so they hire him at Douglas.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: But I couldn't get a job, so I said look I can't, I am gonna go, I went into work in the post office. I went into the post office.

Johnson: You were a victim of the racial system.

Hopkins: And they wouldn't let us fly either. They wouldn't let us fly in commercial flying. No flying, no commercial flying. You could, you had to go to South America.

Johnson: To fly.

Hopkins: In order to fly. Or to work in the tower. You had to go somewhere else, you couldn't work . . . there was one fellow that worked in the tower at Lockheed, but they thought he was white. [Johnson chuckles] That was Chaw Chester, they thought he was white.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: He wasn't, but, uh, but other than that we couldn't, we couldn't work in, in, we had to go South America or anywhere.

Johnson: So you never got to use your flying?

Hopkins: I couldn't, I didn't get to use it, but I, we started a flying club. I flew for many years in Los Angeles out at Compton.

Johnson: [speaking over Hopkins] You lived in California for . . .

Hopkins: I lived in California thirty- six years.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: After the war and I worked in the post office for, I retired from the Post Office in 1972.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: I, I retired when Nixon said you could get out on twenty five years regardless of age. I had thirty- one years of army and post office.

Johnson: Um hum. Was your wife a teacher?

Hopkins: My wife was a teacher and principal. She was principal of the biggest high school in Los Angeles, Los Angeles High.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: She, she was principal and she was principal of North Hollywood High. She had been principal for many, you know.

Johnson: So you moved back to, uh, Texas when?

Hopkins: When I retired from Hughes Aircraft. I worked, worked for Howard Hughes.

Johnson: Oh you did? How was that?

Hopkins: I worked in the space program. Oh it was fine. That was fine . . . I worked in the space program.

Johnson: When did you get that job?

Hopkins: When I retired from the post office, I had a friend that was working in, that was the production manager of, uh, of the first communication satellite that went up.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: He would flown with me at Tuskegee too. But he worked . . . see we took engineering at the same time. He went to Pierce and I went to Cal Aero Tech. But he went into; he went on into Hughes, working for Hughes.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And so he was over the, the satellites, you know. Building the satellite.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: So he went to there when they sent off the first satellite down there at, uh, Cape Canaveral where it was. And he asked me in the me . . . , you know we belonged to the same club that 332nd veterans or 332nd fighter group. He said, "Look Mack, why don't you come out and give us a hand?" He knew I could . . . but they needed help at Hughes. So I went . . .

Johnson: After you retired from the post office?

Hopkins: After I retired from the post office.

Johnson: Did you have a second career?

Hopkins: Yeah. So then I went, so I went, I said well okay if I, if they, if I can do anything. So they put me into the space program. I worked in, behind closed doors.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: 'Cause I now did work, I worked with two of the guys that went down in the [*Challenger*] shuttle. Greg Jarvis and [Dr. R.E.] McNair.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: McNair and I worked on . . . I was on the beginning of the Pioneer Venus Program. McNair determined the type of material to use to send those, uh, satellites, those, uh, the probes that landed on Venus.

Johnson: So you knew people who were killed in that?

Hopkins: Two. Two of 'em. I worked with McNair and also Greg Jarvis. Greg Jarvis was a . . . worked in the same section with . . . in the commercial section. I, I worked behind closed doors also. But he worked in the same section.

Johnson: You did some spy stuff you mean?

Hopkins: Yeah, uh huh [both laugh]. Right.

Johnson: Well how long did you work for them?

Hopkins: I worked exactly seven years.

Johnson: Is that right? And enjoyed it?

Hopkins: I enjoyed every minute of it. I Enjoyed it. I can't remember working in the post office, I enjoyed it so much working at Hughes.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: It was really . . .

Johnson: It was a shame you couldn't have done your whole career there.

Hopkins: Right. Uh huh. It was, it was really nice to work in, in a place like we build, in the commercial section we build satellites, you know. We build satellites, I work . . .

Johnson: So you went . . .

Hopkins: In the structural, in, uh, structural engineering.

Johnson: So your engineering, your, your flying career took you from open planed, bi-wing airplanes to space satellites?

Hopkins: Space satellites. Right.

Johnson: Did you ever think you, that would ever happen?

Hopkins: No, I didn't. I never, in fact [chuckles] I really didn't.

Johnson: Well that's amazing. Let me ask you this, uh, did any of your friends get killed in, uh, uh, combat?

Hopkins: Oh, yes.

Johnson: Yeah I mean in fighting.

Hopkins: My three, there was four, four of us that roomed together when we were tak...in advanced stage of flying.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: All three of 'em were killed in combat.

Johnson: Is that right? In Italy?

Hopkins: In, in Italy.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: One was just found in 1978, they were . . . remains of a plane were found in, uh, in 1978, uh, in, in the Adriatic Sea.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: See they bombed, we bombed Yugoslavia. And, uh, that's why they go over in straight, but they had to get down low, they had to fly over the Adriatic Sea real . . . right down on the deck.

Johnson: Right.

Hopkins: And the waves, one of the waves hit and he went under, you know, uh . . .

Johnson: They just found his body?

Hopkins: Found his body in 1978.

Johnson: He was still preserved?

Hopkins: Nah, I mean not his body but his plane.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: His plane. And his markings of the plane. That was his name was Q.C. Walker.

Johnson: Yeah. So you lost several friends?

Hopkins; I lost three class, uh, three of, three of my, uh, roommates. My three, my three roommates and then there were sixty six of my, uh, cadets. I mean sixty six officers, you know, uh, uh, flying officers that were killed.

Johnson: In the war?

Hopkins: Yeah.

Johnson: How many did they ultimately train?

Hopkins: We sent over 450. We sent 450.

Johnson: Overseas?

Hopkins: There were 996 graduated.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: 996.

Johnson: Half of 'em went over seas?

Hopkins: Yeah. That's right.

Johnson: And about then, how many were died?

Hopkins: Uh . . .

Johnson: Sixty-six?

Hopkins: Sixty-six. Sixty-six died.

Johnson: So out of a, sixty-six, not quite a fourth.

Hopkins: Um hum.

Johnson: Maybe.

Hopkins: Now we had ten thousand on our post at Tuskegee, ten thousand people complete. You know, total.

Johnson: That went through?

Hopkins: No, no. These were the whole, all the whole ...

Johnson: Support and everything?

Hopkins: Support and everything.

Johnson: Well that was a big base.

Hopkins: But only 996 gradu . . . you know pilots.

Johnson: That was a big base then.

Hopkins: Yeah. And then we train . . . we trained all the B-25, not the B-25 but the, uh, we trained the, the cessna 190.

Johnson: Did any blacks ever fly B-17s?

Hopkins: No. Not during the war.

Johnson: Not during the war.

Hopkins: No. I flew as almost a co-pilot, as a co-pilot in the 17 and also B-29, but actually didn't fly. No we, none, no, nothing but the B-25, that's the only one that they flew.

Johnson: I see. In combat?

Hopkins: None, none in combat. No B- twenty, no, no bomber, the bomber group didn't go over [Johnson is talking underneath Hopkins].

Johnson: Strictly fighter pilots.

Hopkins: Yeah. Strictly fighter pilots and you know that we didn't lose a bomber for . . . into enemy aircraft in two hundred missions. We flew two hundred missions in . . . my group flew two hundred missions escorting bombers over Germany and didn't lose a bomber to enemy aircraft.

Johnson: Is that right?

Hopkins: We shot down every, my group shot down every plane that came close.

Johnson: And what were they flying?

Hopkins: They were flying P-51s.

Johnson: P-51s.

Hopkins: P-51s. They were flying P51s in.

Johnson: So you were really part of an elite group aren't you? In a sense.

Hopkins: That group, it's fine, it's a fine . . .

Johnson: I mean that's, there is not many of you.

Hopkins: Lot of em left. Ooh we have, we have hundreds. There's, there are a lot of em left. We have . . .

Johnson: But I mean, uh, it's a small group.

Hopkins: Oh yes, a small, a smaller, uh huh. Well all of my, class most of all of my classmates, uh, lets see all three, in the class ahead of me, they are all dead. They are all dead and many others. They, they not too many left.

Johnson: General Davis is still alive.

Hopkins: General Davis is still alive. I see him every year.

Johnson: And he made what, four star?

Hopkins: He a three star.

Johnson: Three star?

Hopkins: He was a three star. Chappy James was the one that made four star.

Johnson: And you knew him too?

Hopkins: I knew . . . Chappy was my chauffeur. I called . . . I'd, I'd meet him every year. But anyway what happened was, see he was over all the North American Air Defense so he was in charge of the space program that I worked in.

Johnson: Um hum.

Hopkins: So anyway when, behind closed doors he came to Tuskegee, I mean he came to Hughes Aircraft and he came in and saw me, put his arms around me, you know. 'Cause I said just think you were, you were my chauffeur and now you over the whole North American Air Defense. [Johnson laughs and then Hopkins chuckles]

Johnson: Well, as you think back on that period, do you ever think back to WW II?

Hopkins: Oh, yes. I think about it. I think about it a lot. In fact I meet, see we are having, this week we are, I am going to San Antonio for the Texas Tuskegee Airman will meet, I mean Tuskegee Airman will meet in San Antonio next week.

Johnson: I see.

Hopkins: We are going to meet in San Antonio on the twenty sixth.

Johnson: The Texas . . .?

Hopkins: See most of these are fighter pilots now. These guys are most, uh . . .

Johnson: Oh, I see. Most of 'em are WW II.

Hopkins: Some of 'em, just a few of us are WW II.

Johnson: Um hum. How, like how many of em will there be you think?

Hopkins: Of uh, WW II?

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: There might be four. Four or five of us.

Johnson: Any that saw combat?

Hopkins: Yes. One. I'll show you a picture, I'll show you, I'll show you one that's, that . . .

Johnson: But, uh you are still active in veterans groups and organizations?

Hopkins: Oh, yes. Um hum. Uh, with the Tuskegee Airman and the veterans of 332nd fighter group. Its all one group mostly, you know the same people belong to both.

Johnson: What, what, impact did that war have on your life?

Hopkins: [sighs] I, I would say that I didn't want to teach. I never wanted to teach because I was, my father and mother had been teachers and uh, I really wanted to, I really didn't want to teach. I, I didn't think that I could I...

Johnson: So it got you out of teaching.

Hopkins: I didn't know that, I didn't think I could ever know as much as the teachers that taught me. I said I wasn't, I didn't think I would ever be qualified, that qualified. So I thought I'd find some other field, you know. So I was glad to, I [chuckles] that was it. I was happy to get into some other field, you know.

Johnson: Um hum. Even though you didn't, uh, get to, uh, use it for a good part of your life?

Hopkins: No. That's right. I went into the post office but the post office was, I thought was a good job cause most of the people who had anything here in Marshall were railway mail clerks, the blacks, those who had two story homes and everything so I said that is fine. I'd, I'd like to be a mail clerk maybe. [chuckles]

Johnson: Were you happy coming back to Marshall?

Hopkins: Oh yeah. I'd enjoy, happiest, that I, I enjoyed being home, you know.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: Everything is . . .

Johnson: Things have changed a lot haven't they?

Hopkins: Things have changed and, uh, even though we had no problems, you know. I knew there were problems here but there wouldn't no problems. You could live anywhere you want to, I, I'd just came off the school, I was on the school board here in Marshall. They appointed me.

Johnson: Uh huh.

Hopkins: And now I am on the Region VII Board out of Kilgore.

Johnson: Yeah.

Hopkins: I am on the Region VII Board and, uh, I am just enjoying life and just, you know it's really; it's really a pleasure [chuckles].

Johnson: Well I certainly have enjoyed talking with you and I appreciate this very much. Thank you.