

Speaker: Tom Wynn Jr.

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My name is Tom Wynn, Jr., US Coast Guard retired senior chief, AE, an aircraft electrician basically, aviation electrician mate. I joined when I was 17 years old in 1972, July the 27th at noon. I remember that because there was a picture of me when the clock is in the picture of me swearing in. I swore in here in Mobile. I went to Davidson High School here. My father was stationed here in what they called EB SEC back then. It's called POP DIV when I went in it, but later on I joined. I was 17 years old when I went in the Coast Guard, and I went on the Coast Guard cutter, Rush, and I went to boot camp in Alameda. When I went to picking choices, I said, "If I gotta go to sea, I'm going on the biggest, nicest thing the Coast Guard has," so I picked the Coast Guard cutter Rush, which was in Alameda.

I came home on boot camp leave and married my high school sweetheart. Her name is Mary, but she goes by Lynn. We went to highschool together. Then I went to the Rush for five months and 15 days, and they said, "You're gonna be here for 18 months," and I said, "No I'm not. I'm going in aviation. You don't understand." No, no seaman comes aboard ships without staying at least 18 months. I said, "No, I'll be here less than six months." Sure enough, five months and 15 days later, I left the ship and went to AE school in Jacksonville. So that's how I became an aircraft electrician. I wind up ... I asked for Mobile and got it on the first try. It was amazing. That's why I got stationed with my father who had been in Coast Guard since I was three years old.

He joined and went to Dinner Key, which is down there by Miami. He flew in what we called the Goats, the HU16Es. He carried me to the base to pick up his paycheck one day. I was five years old. He asked the Coastie that was standing outside the hangar to hold my hand while he went in to get his check. While he was doing that there was a helicopter, I believe it was the H19, was cranking up with a crewman, and they were getting ready to go on SAR case. This man was holding my hand while I watched for the first time a helicopter leave the ground. I was fascinated with that. My whole life I thought about that helicopter, and I kept was, "How come the pilot is so high?" He was way above the engine. And the crewman was telling him things over the ICS. You could see that. Then they had the head cut running and then they left. I was impressed with this.

When I was 12 years old, my dad got stationed in Opa-Locka, Florida. They moved from Dinner Key to Opa-Locka. Well, before that he was stationed at St. Petersburg and Naples, Italy before that. He wind up in Naples when I was nine. On Coast Guard Day weekend, it was the Coast Guard Day picnic, 1964, my father and I jumped in the water at Treasure Island where they were doing the picnic. The wives

and everybody were up at the pavilion getting ready for lunch. And so my dad and I went swimming.

Well, he found out I couldn't swim and he was appalled. He said, "What? You're nine years old. You don't know how to swim?" He says, "I've been swimming since I was five." And I said, "Dad, you've never taken me. I don't know how to swim because I've never been." Pretty much. When I was a little baby he used to take me, but I didn't know how to swim. So he taught me how to dog paddle. Man, that was the greatest thing, to learn how to dog paddle. I was learning and he was teaching me. It was real easy. It just needed a little bit of instruction.

We left the water and we went to the pavilion to help Mom prepare the food that everybody was up there doing. Well, while they were busy doing that, I got brave and I went down to the water by myself, which my father told me never swim alone. He had just told me that. But I disobeyed him. I got in the water. Just as I jumped into the water, there was a log underneath the water and I hit my leg on it and hurt it. On the other side of the log, the waves had washed out the sand underneath. And so, the distance from where I was standing and on the other side of the log was about a foot taller than my head. I couldn't swim because I hurt my leg. And of course, I was new at it anyway, few minutes really.

I was bouncing off the bottom and taking a breath of air and going down. I kept doing that until I ran out of energy. I was on the last try, but I couldn't speak because I was so busy trying to suck air in. There was nobody on the beach. There was a clump of trees where nobody could see me from the pavilion. And so I was going down for the last time and as I was going down I saw somebody running along the beach shore. It was a young man. He was very handsome and he had a reddish-blondish hair. His chest was fuzzy. This reddish, fuzzy, hairy man. But he was very, his physique was perfect. He had a Coast Guard bathing suit on and it had the Coast Guard emblem on it. I know that because my father had one and I was issued that same bathing suit in boot camp later.

I saw him running so that gave me enough energy to go up one more time. I raised my arm up in the air as high as I could go and I went up and took another breath. I was done. I kept my arm up in the air while I was under the water. He reached and jumped in the water and grabbed my arm and jerked me out of the water instantly. And then, "You okay?" He told me. I said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm okay. I'm doing all right. Thank you for helping me." And then he began to fuss at me. He says, "Now, you know you're not supposed to go swimming alone." I said, "Yes, sir."

As we walked toward the pavilion, he was talking to me and telling me this. He says, "Your mom and dad is right up there at the pavilion." He says, "Go over there and be with them and don't go swimming alone anymore." I said, "Okay." As I looked that way, I turned around and he was gone. Never saw that man again the rest of

my life. I walked up to the pavilion and I told my father what had happened. He said, "There's nobody at the base that looks like that." I said, "Dad, I'm telling you. This is what happened." He said, "I believe you." But he says that "I don't know of anybody at the air station that looks like that man that you described." And so, okay. He says, "Don't go out swimming again anymore." He says, "I told you not to."

He fussed at me for a couple of seconds and then we went to eating. And so, the Coast Guardsman saved my life. Guaranteed, I would not be sitting here today. I was on my last breath and nobody would have known it because they were so busy doing preparation of the food and there was nobody on the beach and there was nobody swimming because they were all up at the pavilion getting ready to do whatever they do, bless the food and celebrate Coast Guard Day. Coast Guard Day picnic, I got saved by the Coast Guard from somebody that we don't know. Someday we'll know who he is. But for right now we don't. I thank him very much for saving my life.

He represents all the Coast Guard that's ever been out there that has saved people's lives and those people don't know who they are. But somebody does. Somebody knows them. We have to thank all of them. Because of that man, I grew up and joined the Coast Guard at 17. And then I became a rescue aircrewman, too. I was stationed in Mobile. I was stationed Air Station Houston and other stations all the way up until I was Senior Chief and I retired at 20 years.

But in Houston in 1979, at 5 a.m. in the morning, we got a call. I was the flight mech for that night. I was also an EMT. I was the crew leader for the duty section. And so, about 5 a.m., the clock was sitting there on the counter and we could see it. The phone rang. I had to be getting ready if it was for sure. Well, I could hear, he said, "A ship's exploded." I said, "That's it. I know I got to get dressed." I couldn't get dressed fast enough because we had to hurry. I knew it was important. I left the room and started heading for the helo. We couldn't get the mule cranked up, so JC Cobb, our pilot, he runs up and says, "Let me try it," because this thing was finicky. He cranks it up so then we move the plane out really quick.

We had a world record. We got in the air in seven minutes. It's recorded. It's documented. And there's witnesses including Jack Armstrong, AM3, who was the crewman who went to the radio room while we were moving the plane out. My duty section was Jim McMann, Jack Armstrong, myself, and Chris Danoway. Danoway wound up being the crewman for the second helo to show up at the Burmah Agate collisions, Burmah Agate-Minosa collision, in Galveston Bay. The minute we got in the air, you could see this gigantic glow 40 miles away. It was monstrous fire. We immediately realized that this is something major. JC Cobb and Chris Kilgore, who was the co-pilot, they were my pilots. I love those men to death. They're heroes to this day. They saved my life many times and you'll hear that.

What they did was they got on the radio and they said that they needed to clear the air over the disaster so that we don't run into public affair type helicopters and the news media. So they cleared the air for us. And then he told Jack on the radio and Jim Stevens was the JOD that night. He's since passed away. He said, "Get more crews in. Get every helo in the air. We got a big one here." And so this is what I heard over the ICS that was going on. They were real busy up front.

I realized, when I looked through the window of the cockpit, this is big. We thought for at least 15 or 20 minutes until we got on scene, there was three ships involved. It turns out there was two and they were both exploding and on fire. Oil was spilling all over. It turned out to be one of the most prolific oil spills in human history, the Burmah Agate. It's still in the top 10, I believe. Millions and millions of gallons of oil spilled. It was on fire. There was a puddle of oil on fire that was the size of a ship. The flames were hundreds of feet in the air, leaping into the air. We just thought it was a third ship.

But as we got closer, we realized it was just a ball of fire, that this big oil spill was on fire. It was everywhere. We began to search the water immediately for survivors. We didn't find any. But we did find one dead man. We found two dead people, but this first one was hard for me to deal with. He was face down. His arms were spread out. He was covered in jet black oil. He was near this big oil spill and the fire, so I could see him pretty good. Remember, it's pitch black dark out, except for the fires. His head glowed from the reflection of the fire. The smoke was so thick it was choking me. It tasted like burning tires if you've ever been around burning tire, jet black smoke. It was choking me.

I'm standing in the cargo doorway. We're very close to the water. JC says, "Go put out a marker beacon so that they can find the body later. We haven't got time to deal with a dead man. We need to go find living." And so, I felt so bad because this is the first thing we saw, was a dead man in the oil, face down. We found out later that anybody that jumped off, died from the spill, the oil. You can't swim in that stuff. You can't breathe. It's all over you. The fumes were terrible. The fires were everywhere. It was an inferno, everywhere. And so, we later on found another man dead.

But we went to the Burmah Agate first. As we approached the Burmah Agate, it exploded in our face. Hundreds of feet in the air, just a gigantic explosion right in the front part of the ship, right in front of the bridge area. It blew us out of the sky almost. It took us and just blew us backwards like that. And so, I was standing in the doorway between the pilots as you go walking to the cockpit. It threw me backwards but I was able to grab ahold of the radio rack, which is on the right side and caught my hand. I also caught the doorframe and kept me from falling. I did have a gunner's belt on, which we hang from the ceiling so I can't fall out of the plane if we get tilted in any direction. I did catch myself.

Just as this is happening, as I'm standing in the doorway, a gigantic gust of hot wind, burning, scalding, hot wind, came rushing at us. It came through both of their windows. As it did, it hit me right in the face. This hot air, gush of wind. Luckily, I had my visors down because we always fly with the clear visor. In the daytime, we always have the sun visor, it's like sunglasses. But we were wearing our clear visors. That hit me right in the face and I could feel it on my cheekbones and around my face and my lips and everything. As it blew me backwards, too, with the force of the wind and the tilting of the aircraft. I knew that stuff was hot, but you don't realize it when something explodes like that, that gust of hot wind comes, like bombs and things of that nature.

Well, JC Cobb, being an expert pilot, he had 20 years experience and this was his last flight, his last case, his last duty night. Thank the Lord he was the pilot because he was so good. He grabbed that stick and recovered us right away because if we'd have kept tilting, our tail rotor would have hit the water and we would've crashed. He saved our life immediately from that. Chris Kilgore turn of, he was a very, very skilled pilot also. He was in the Vietnam War, and he was a direct commissioned officer who had flown aircraft, helicopter, in Vietnam. He was an expert. The minute he got into the Coast Guard, he was an expert in flying.

I had two of the best that you could have flying and I'm the crewman. We were invincible. We found that out to be true. And so, after it exploded in our face and we could recover, JC got us under control again. He said, "We still need to start searching the ship looking for survivors because this thing's going boom." The other ship was on fire. Everything's exploding around us. The fires are everywhere. We started searching the ship. As we got to the tail, the fantail, I saw dead bodies. I noticed at least three to four dead bodies. This is really starting to upset me. They were laying on their back and their arms were raised up like this and their legs were up like this, you know, like this. It just floored me.

I says over the ICS, I said, "Why are their arms and legs raised like that?" They were jet black. They had been cooked. They had been burned. And, of course, they were dead. A calm, strong voice came over the ICS. It was JC Cobb. I'm sorry. I'm wrong. It was Chris Kilgore. Chris Kilgore says, and he began to explain to me what happens to the human body when they get burned. He took me out of this event and put me into a scientific mind. I was able to realize, okay, let's go back to what we need to do. I realized then, I says, "We've got to find the people that are alive. We keep finding the dead."

Just as that happened, we left that little area. On the side, on the left side was two men, standing on a hand railing. I told the pilots immediately. I said, "I see two men standing on a hand railing." We went from this inferno, death on the tail cone, on the fantail, to two men living. It just felt good, right? We were very high up in the air and we had to stay that way because of the debris that was all over the ship, we

were going to hit it with our rotor head. And so the pilots had to constantly keep notice of that and I did, too. And so I was already prepared to hoist these men because I knew this was coming. And so JC was shocked that I already was preparing. I said, "I'm rigged and ready. Let's do it." We flew over the top. As we approached them, these two men saw us.

Now, later on, Mike Sailor, who was the assistant ops boss in the hanger, the next day I believe it was, he walked up to me in the hanger and says, "Those two men were in the hospital and they've been interviewed. They said you literally saved their lives." He says, "I wanted you to know that." I said, "Well, thank you, sir." I believe he was a lieutenant or lieutenant G at the time, it's been so long, 37 years. But in any case, I says, "Oh, good."

Well, these two men, there was a problem. The problem was, how am I going to get them. There's nowhere for me to put the basket down and we're really high up in the air. The fires directly underneath them, 60 feet down, they would've died from the fall, they would've died from the oil, they would've died from the fire. They said in their interview, that their shoes were melting and they had no choice but to stand on the hand railing. There was a problem. I had nowhere to put the basket down, which we normally do on ships. I didn't know, "What in the world? How am I going to get these men?" We couldn't get close enough because there was debris hanging over their heads. The helicopter couldn't get close enough to even go directly over their top of them.

I figured out a way to do it really quick. I told JC to move closer. As he did, I began to swing the basket with my foot, like a pendulum. Okay? I kept doing that. As he got closer, one of the men got the idea and they reached, one of the did he reached for the basket and as he touched it, it shocked him. I could see the arc, the blue arc. This is common when this happens because the static electricity. I'm thinking to myself, "He's not going to grab that basket again." I went at it again and sure enough, he did.

They both took a leap of faith into the mid-air, in the darkness of night with fire 60 feet below them, oil everywhere, the ship's on fire, exploding, the deck is so hot their shoes are melting, they're on a three-inch hand railing, standing there. One can't swim. The other one can but he don't want to leave his friend. This is what they gave testimony. They also said that they were about to die and they knew it and then they looked up and they saw this light in the sky. They go, "Oh my gosh." And then they saw the helicopter as we kept approaching from the light. They told this in their testimony. We literally saved their lives. We plucked them out of the inferno.

My basket, as it came over, they leaped into mid-air and both grabbed the basket and hung on for dear life. As soon as they did, I told JC, I says, "Move away and

down because if they fall they're going to fall in the fire. If they lose their balance, if they let go, whatever." And so he did exactly what I said. Every moment, everything was perfectly done and orchestrated by our two pilots in the midst of all of this smoke, black smoke. You can't see. You can't see through it. There was no light except the glow of fires. It was not daylight yet.

The wind was blowing at 25 knots. The ships were moving. Well, I think the Burmah Agate was sitting still, but the Minosa moved at 12 knots in a circle and it was about to hit another oil rig. The oil rig that, I forgot the name of it right now. But that's where we wound up taking the victims that we picked up and dropped them off, went back for more.

These were my first two. My first two real hoists, live hoists in my Coast Guard career, where all the others had been practice. This was first two. The first one and the second one at the same time. I brought them up into the cabin but they didn't know what to do and they tried to climb out of the basket before it got in the door. I held them down and I grabbed the basket and leaned it up against the door. And then I grabbed them by the scruff of the neck and just pulled them in because I had more to do and they didn't understand. You can't hear anything. And they don't know anyway. And they're scared to death.

So I seated them down and I know two men hugged my neck. It may have been them two or it was two of the 20 more I rescued. I can't remember but two hugged my neck. I told the pilots that they were in and I'm ready for more. We immediately searched the ship and didn't find anymore. It turns out that these two men were the only two survivors. And then there was, I think, two more that one popped out later on in the daytime and I think they found one more in the water. That's all. Everybody up on that ship died. They were either burned to death or they jumped in the water and died. There was 31 people that died. Most of all of them were there except for one on the Minosa. We saved everybody else on the other ship but one, and he died in the explosion, first explosion.

So we go to the Minosa. The Minosa we start searching. I rescued 20 men off the bridge way of a little bitty space, again, nowhere to put the basket. The ship's on fire. It's moving at 12 knots in a bit circle because the anchor is on the ground, under the water, and it's dragging its own anchor. The engine room's exploded. The bridge wings exploded. Everything's exploded. It's on fire. These men are scared to death. They're in this one little spot. I couldn't put the basket down because there was too many people.

What do it do? I says, "What am I going to do this time? There's no swinging the basket. There's 20 men. I'll hit them. I'll hurt them." The only thing I could think to do is I had to make JC Cobbs hover directly over them at a very high height with the wind gusting and the ship moving and the smoke getting in his way he couldn't see.

He had to listen to everything I said. He did it. It was so bad that JC Cobb and Chris Kilgore kept taking turns flying the helicopter whichever one could see. They did this seamlessly. I didn't even know it was happening until they told me later.

We rescued those 20 men. You know how we did that? I hung the basket directly over their head, and they climbed in two and four at a time. The basket's only supposed to be one person at a time, but they don't know this. So I rescued four at a time. Before long, I had so many men in there I had seated them on top of each other in a seat. Then I sat them in the floor. And then I went to discussion with Chris Kilgore, "Well, I'll put some in the tail cone if necessary." He says, "Go ahead. You're not supposed to. Nobody's ever supposed to sit back there or go back there." It can't take the weight, per se, but it was against regulations. But we were willing to do that to save lives.

And then they determined, well, we're full. We had 15 people in the helicopter. It's a world record in a H52A. Three of us with crew, and 12 people we saved, two from the first ship, the Burmah Agate, and 10 from the Minosa. We flew to the oil rig and dropped it off. We realized that that ship was going to hit that oil rig if it kept going. The Coast Guard got there and some other people and they were trying to foul the prop to keep it from doing this. We dropped our passengers off now and they're all in good shape. We went back and I got more and more. We did 10 more. We took them and we dropped them off.

What I wanted to really stress here was that when we first went to lift off with the 15 people in there, JC Cobb told me and Chris Kilgore over the phone, 37 years later, we almost died. We were 15 feet from hitting the water because we were so heavy. Later on, Jim McMann told me recently that we had put eight minutes on the over torch clocks for the transmission, which meant a transmission inspection, which would've downed the airplane while all this was going on. Luckily, you need 12 minutes to do that so we did 8 minutes. But we didn't know that.

But we were 15 feet from hitting the water because we didn't have lift. When we moved away from the ships, all that hot air was keeping us up and we got cold air, and it's also daytime now and the air's cold. And so we sank. About 15 feet before we hit the water, we finally got lift and he creped us up to 300 feet is all he could get because we weighed so much.

We meandered over to the oil rig and we dropped our people off and we went back for more. The 14266 came, was Commander Changolini was our CO, he was the pilot, and Kim Rose was the co-pilot, who was a Navy exchange officer. AT3 Chris Danoway was his crewman, which was part of my crew that night. They rescued five people. In that rescue, one of them that they were doing, I think it was their first one, they hoisted a man up on the front part of the Minosa and it hung up in the

rigging that was all messed up. That man was 15 feet off the ground, my estimate. I watched all of this. I witnessed every bit of this.

We stood off the ship waiting to see what was going to happen, what to do. They were going to have to shear that hoist and that man's going to die because he's going to hit 15 feet down on a metal deck inside a basket that's made out of metal, or they've got to get this thing unhooked from the rigging. I mean, it's a dilemma. What do you do? I was discussing this over the ICS with the pilots. I was praying, too. And so I was, "Oh my goodness. What's going to happen?" We didn't know what to do. I mean, we couldn't help them. We couldn't do anything. Nobody could do anything. Chris Danoway, he manipulated that cable and talked those pilots into moving around. Meanwhile, the ship is moving at 12 knots. The wind's blowing and gusting' at 25 knots. There's smoke and fire everywhere. The smoke would change directions and we couldn't see at times. They couldn't see.

The pilots had to listen to us, the crewmen, exactly. Five feet, we meant five feet. 10 feet, we mean 10 feet. Well, how do you estimate that in a helicopter doing all of this stuff? They did it. These guys were miracles. They're wonderful pilots. Just heroes. He manipulated that and that thing got loose. He rescued that man. They rescued five people. When we went back for our last 10, the last man to leave was the captain of that vessel. We saved all that crew but the one that died in the explosion, original when they collided.

This was the Burmah Agate Minosa collision, 5 a.m. in the morning 1 November 1979. Those fires burned and those ships exploded for another 69 days. Our air station flew every day and night for 69 days on that case. The Coast Guard cutter Valiant, which had Jim Louis on there, who later on became the Commandant of the Coast Guard. He was there with us. He pulled up. He had just come back from a trip. He wasn't even dressed properly. He'd run back to the ship with his little skeleton crew. They went out there and they orchestrated everything. On-scene commander.

And so this is the story of the Burmah Agate case and the 1426 that I flew in is now hanging in the Smithsonian Institute since April the 14th at 10:30 in the morning, we had a celebration and a ceremony, induction ceremony. And so that helicopter flies for our whole nation and the whole world to see and know that story. I've only told that story a couple of times, three or four times in my life, because I had dreams about it and it's just better that I just try to forget it. But since I talked to my two pilots on the phone, which I haven't talked to or seen and we thought JC was dead all these years. We found out he wasn't. That was great.

But we talked on the phone and ever since then, they reminded me. He said, "It's not those that we couldn't save because it already happened. It's the ones we saved that counts." And we saved 22. The 1466 saved 25. I'm sorry, five. And the boat

crew saved four. It's kind of like the 50-50 thing, half died and half lived. That's the Burmah Agate case. Thank you for letting me share.

At the induction ceremony in Washington DC at the Smithsonian, after the ceremony, Commander Frank Shelly came up to me. He had received an award there. He walks up to me, he's a perfect stranger, I don't know him. I found out that he was the daddy of the H52 helicopter, the configuration. All of the things that we used, he either invented it or come up with to put it in the aircraft, and made that happen in 1962. He told me that that was the worst case in US Coast Guard aviation history, the Burmah Agate Minosa case. He said it's unbelievable what we suffered and went through and survived that. I didn't know that. That made me feel really good. He was emphatic about that. I said, "Well, how do you know that, sir?" He says, emphatically, "Because I did the research. I went to Washington DC into the archives and I studied them all. This was the worst case in Coast Guard aviation history."

Speaker 2: Can you tell them?

Tom Wynn, Jr.: Okay. Well, after I joined the Coast Guard, and like I said, I went to the Coast Guard cutter Rush and then I asked for orders to AE school, which was in Jacksonville, Florida. It was a navy school. The Coast Guard didn't have them yet, didn't have their E City schools built yet, so I got to go to the Navy. I was there six months. I asked for Mobile and I got it. I got to be stationed with my dad and got to go back to my hometown. This was really exciting for me. That was in October, the 9th of 1973. I checked in and they said, "Oh, you can go home for the weekend." I said, "Man, get to the base and I already get two days off. This is really great."

And so come Monday morning now, my dad is stationed there. My dad's name is Thomas William Wynn, Senior, and I'm Junior. We both lived at the same address. We were both stationed at the same station. So, this caused some problems, we found out. The minute I get to the base, they immediately, I'm TW's son. Well, my father was highly respected. At that time, he was near 20 years. He had 19 years in. He was a First Class Petty Officer Electronic Technician and he was highly respected. Very well loved by everybody. These men, I found out later in doing all my study and research of these people that I was stationed with, I looked back in history and find out that they were all stationed with my dad at Dinner Key and Opa-Locka, which they called Air Station Miami, and in St. Petersburg. And so these officers and these chiefs know me all my life, but I didn't know them. They knew me. Only a few that I knew.

My first assignment was the tool room. I walk in the room with a piece of paper to check in with the chief. And the chief is sitting there in his chair with his feet up on his desk and he's wearing boots and a brown uniform, which they khaki's they called them. He was white-headed. Completely white-headed. He had his hands

behind his head. He leans back in his chair and he says, "Tommy Wynn, Junior. You remember me?" And I said, "No, Chief, I don't." "I carried you off the airplane when you were four years old in Naples, Italy." And I says, "You did?" And I say, "Well, Chief, I think I was five." Well, guess what? I researched it out and he was right all these years, but he's dead now, I can't tell him. But he was right. I was four years old. And so now I've got to work for a chief and he's known me since I was four years old. I was, "Oh, this is going to go over well."

Well, they all took good care of me. Behind the scenes, they were always making sure ... I was always getting in trouble for little things and I couldn't figure it out. There was this chief named Jack Bunch. In the middle of the hangar one day, he was standing there. He was what they call a 4-0 Petty Officer. His uniform was impeccable. Leadership was just oozing out of his veins. Man, he was a wonderful man and just a wonderful Coast Guard Chief. He was standing in the middle of the hangar and his arms were folded. He was looking out at the paint locker from the middle of the hangar, he could see it.

I said, "Chief. Whatcha doing?" I'm standing in the middle of the hangar with him talking to him. And he says, "I'm watching them boys over there." I said, "What's wrong?" He says, "They don't know it, but I know what they're doing. They're going in there to smoke dope." There was three or four of them. He says, "I watch them every day. They go in there at lunch hour and they smoking dope." He says, "They think they're getting away with it." He says, "But they're not."

I said, "Dadgummit." I say, "I'm always getting in trouble for every little thing and these guys are smoking dope and getting away with it." He says, "Tommy Wynn, let me tell you something." He said, "Do you see them, boys, over there?" About that time they came out the door. I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "They're not going to re-enlist." He says, "They don't know it, but I'm not going to allow them to re-enlist in the Coast Guard. They're not Coast Guard material." He says, "You, on the other hand." He says, "You are." He said, "That's why you're in trouble all the time to keep you straight so you can stay in the Coast Guard because you're a good boy." I said, "Yes, sir." You don't call Chiefs yes, sir, but I did that day.

I went, going on about my business, and then one time I went to my dad. I said, "Dad, how do I get higher marks?" He said, "Well, you look for a chief or a petty officer that's getting 4-0 marks, 4.0," that's the highest you can get. And he says, "And you imitate him." He says, "That's how you do it." I said, "Okay." I went to Jack Bunch and I watched him. His belt buckle was perfect. His uniform was always spiffy. Haircut was ... I said, "I'm going to be like that chief." And so I did. And I became him. I had those, they didn't call them 4-0 marks anymore but I have equivalent to them later on in my career. But I spent my whole career looking like him and doing like him. I followed their leadership. My dad, Jack Bunch, and guys like him.

One day, they kept moving me from one job to the other and I couldn't figure out. I'd stay three or four months and then they moved me to another one. It was always a more sophisticated or more complicated job. And so they moved me to the battery shop. I was doing experiments in there because Mobile was an R&D type for aviation community. We did experiments and whatever was going on would redesign the aircraft if necessary. We did all the experiments like that. They put in the battery shop by myself and they said, "You're going to do these new NICAD batteries for the H52. This is what we're going to be doing." I said, "Wow. This is cool."

I did a really good job. I did such a good job I had documented every little thing that was wrong with the battery so they could figure out why these cells were failing. And they figured it out by my research. My first classes would come in and they'd interview me and say, "Well, what are you doing now and what's going on with this battery and why is this?" I explained it all to them. They really liked that.

So I'm in this job by myself as a third class, brand new. I'm getting this. Man, this is really cool. Well, one day my father comes in and sits down in the chair, all serious. I'm going, "Oh, boy. What's going on here?" He says, "Tom, we got a problem." I said, "What's that, Dad?" He says, "My paycheck got put in your account at the bank." I said, "Well, that's a good deal for me." He goes, "Yeah, but it's not for me. I didn't get paid. Your mom'll have a fit if she finds out." I said, "Wow." He said, "You're going to have to change banks." I said, "Dad. Why am I going to change banks." He said, "Because I had my bank account first." I said, "Okay."

Well, what we realized at that moment is I had the same name and I had the same address because our address was his when we first got back to Mobile. So the banks, they don't look at the account number. They just went with the name and the address matched. That was something funny that we had to deal with. Of course, every time they would call for my dad over the PA, it was Petty Officer Wynn. Well, which one? Mobile had about 750 people stationed there and they all giggle when I and him would both come running.

So we had to come up with some way to figure out how to separate me and him when they called Petty Officer Wynn. My mother would call a lot to the base and Petty Officer Wynn, your wives on the line. And so I told my wife, I said, "Whatever you do, don't call the base unless it's an emergency because they'd make fun of my dad because my mother does it." So it had to become TW Junior and they say, now, TW Junior Wynn, go to so and so. We had to work those things out.

When I got qualified to fly in the H52 and the HU16, my dad was flying HU16s at the time. I went to the maintenance chief and I said, "I want to fly with my father." They said, "Okay." So time would go and I'd get on the flight schedule and my dad wasn't

on there. So it just kept going a couple months there and there. I kept going. I said, "Listen, I don't know what's going on here, but I want to fly with my father. I want to fly with my dad before he retires." And they say, "Okay." Well, that never happened.

Finally, my father came to me privately. He says, "You've been trying to fly with me, I hear." And I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, I got to tell you something but you can't tell your mother." I said, "What's that?" He says, "I turned my flight orders in because you can do that when you get so close to retirement up to two years you can turn your flight orders in." And he says, "I turned my flight orders in so I don't have to worry about flying in the middle of the night and duty stand-in and all that." He said, "I'm getting tired." I said, "It's a privilege to do that." He says, "So, that's why you can't fly with me because I don't fly anymore." He says, "But nobody knows that. It's kind of keeping it quiet about it." He said, "People get jealous that you don't have to fly anymore. But your mother finds out that I lost out flight pay, she'd really be upset." So I had to keep it secret. That's how I didn't get to fly with my dad anymore.

Time goes one and all of a sudden, remember I told you they moved me from one job to another and it seems, well, I went to the H52 shop where you tear down the H52 and build it back up and these inspections that we did. All of a sudden, I had two or three First Class coming over to me and trying to teach me everything. Oh, this is how you do this. And so I'm suspicious. What's going on here? Well, later on, I found out that all because these men respected my father so much and they liked me, they made sure that I did everything just like it needed to be and that I had good marks and that I was squared away and I had future in the Coast Guard. But I didn't see that as a young 18, 19, 20 year old man. But that's what was going on.

All of a sudden, I got Chief calls me into the AE shop and my dad was working in supply for AE and AT shop, that's where you go get your parts where you need tuned whatever it is, nut and bolt for something that has to do for the electronics world. He was in charge of that. He was changing out the from part number we were going to what they call NSN numbers, which is NATO number like a social security number for each part so that NATO, when you ask for something, a part, you got the same part, all over the world. He was installing that system.

The chief calls me into office, he says, "You're going to be working in supply for a while." I said, "Oh, okay." After I had been in the H3, no, the 52 shop. I said, "Okay." And he said, "You'll be working for your dad." And I says, "Oh. Really?" I said, "Oh, that's kind of fun." They put me in there with my dad for his last two weeks. That was nice for them to do that. I got to be stationed with my dad for the last year of his career at Air Station Mobile. And I got to work for him for his last two weeks. Literally work for my dad. He was a bear. I said, "Dad, what's the matter?" He says, "Tom, it's taken me 29 years to 20."

Because he got out. He started out in the Navy in 1947. He did two tours in the Navy and then he got out and went to Bible college. And then after Bible college, he went in the Coast Guard when I was three years old in 1958. And so, he got out after Naples for two years to go back to that Bible College to be a teacher. When the two years was up, he went back in the Coast Guard. He says, "I'm just going to go ahead and do it out and get it over with." It took him 29 years to do 20. He almost made Chief twice, but they didn't make him. He almost made Warrant once. He said, "Well, I've had enough of this." He said, "I'm just going out as a First Class Petty Officer."

He retired and he lived here in Mobile for 35 years before he passed at 78 years old. He had a happy life in the Coast Guard. He was a wonderful. He had full stories that I used to sit and listen to. And then when I came in the Coast Guard, name of the stories meant more. And then when I got stationed with him, they really meant more because I could understand what they go through because I was HU16 crewman and so I know exactly what he was saying and what it meant. He had a bad back from flying so much it compressed his spine. So he had difficulty with his back his whole life from that. But he had wonderful stories, even famous stories from flying the GOAT back in Miami times.

Now, I have my own stories to tell. I listened to his for all my life and now I get to tell mine to my grandchildren and to my great grandchildren, I have coming up with three. Two live here in Mobile. It's wonderful. These men that you're going to talk to, they've got so many stories, so many lives saved. I have run into people who says, "Oh, the Coast Guard saved my life." My uncle said the Coast Guard boat saved him. He was a fisherman up in Massachusetts and he just was so excited to tell me his story.

So there's life-saving stories over and over and over again these men would, they sacrificed, their families sacrificed. I went to Antarctica twice, five and a half months and three and a half months. I went to Antarctica twice. And that, on a ship, with 15 Coasties, Air dells, and two helicopters. That was a big deal in my life. I was on five different ships over my career and several air stations. I loved every minute of it except going to Antarctica. That was hard to do because it was being away from my family, but that was exciting. I went to foreign countries. I've been to 22 nations in my lifetime. I'm so happy. And I'm glad they put the 1426 in the Smithsonian. And I'm glad I got to meet my old buddies I haven't seen in 45 years, some in 45 years, some in 37 years. It's been a rush.