

# CAPTAIN JOSEPH R. HIGGINS

1901-1950

## DIED WHEN HIS PLANE CRASHED

**Instructor in veterans' flight training program at Glen Dale.  
Also connected with Civil Air Patrol.**

*"...contributed to the nation's military effort,  
and channeled scores of young men into the ever-expanding sphere of aviation"*

Presented by Linda Cunningham Fluharty, cousin.

Joseph Raymond Higgins, born in Benwood on January 3, 1901, was the oldest child of James Thomas Higgins and Margaret Reymond Byrne. His siblings were Mary and Francis. He was the grandson of Irish immigrants, Patrick Higgins and Brigid Johnston, early residents of Benwood, and among the first parishioners of the Saint John Catholic Church.

At the time of the 1920 Federal Census, Joe, 19, was an Apprentice Machinist at the Benwood Steel Mill, the place of employment for many of the area residents.

In Wheeling, on June 6, 1925, Joe married Julia V. Charnock, the daughter of Benwood residents, Walter Charnock and Matilda Bellville. It's not known when or where Joe studied aeronautics, but by 1931, while employed as a salesman at the West Virginia Natural Gas Company, he was engaged in aviation.

**May 8, 1931**

**Joseph Higgins**, Moundsville, lost an airplane recently. Wind carried it pilotless into the air, dumped it from 300 feet up.

### **Wind Flies Pilotless Plane**

Moundsville, W. Va., (UP)—**Joseph Higgins**, of the West Virginia Natural Gas Company lost an airplane recently when a gust of wind carried it, minus pilot, into the air and dumped it from a height of 300 feet. The craft was demolished. It had been tethered to iron stakes when the squall struck.

ning, May 12, 1938.

## LOCAL PILOTS TO AID CELEBRATION

**Amos And Godsey Named As  
'Air Mail Pilots For A Day;'  
Will Fly Feeder Lines In Air  
Mail Celebration**

Harvey Amos of Bluefield, and Ernie Godsey of Princeton, have been selected as pilots for 23 feeder air routes which will cover West Virginia May 19 in observance of national air mail week.

David M. Giltinan, vice-chairman of the state celebration announced the honor pilots last night.

Flights will originate in Bluefield, Princeton, Parkersburg, Wheeling, White Sulphur Spring, Buckhannon, Beckley, Logan, Point Pleasant, Huntington, Matewan, Marlinton, Clarksburg and Elkins.

Other "air mail pilots for a day" include:

Jay B. Sodowsky of Parkersburg, Joseph Higgins of Wheeling, Carl B. Woodford of Weston, Herbert L. Sessler of Beckley, Grady Yeager of Ethel, Patrick Graynon of Point Pleasant, Herbert Guthrie, Garland Turley and Howard Mayes, Jr., of Huntington, Frank M. Allora, Matewan, Dudley B. Reed and Ted Leader of Elkins, Tri-State aviation corporation.

Six Charleston pilots also will participate.

1938

## GETS CERTIFICATE

**J. R. Higgins, Temporary Air Mail Pilot, Receives Paper Signed By Farley**

Joseph R. Higgins, Wheeling aviator, has received a certificate of co-operation in connection with the 20th anniversary of air mail week. The certificate was received today from J. W. Singleton, Charleston postmaster and state chairman of air mail week.

The certificate is signed by James A. Farley, postmaster general of the United States.

It shows that Higgins on May 19 flew air mail from Wheeling to Charleston via Parkersburg. Higgins intends to have it framed.

According to William L. Brice, postmaster, Wheeling shipment of mail to Charleston was the largest, while 22 planes from other parts of the state flew mail into Charleston on that special day.

## FIRST AIR MAIL PLANE LEAVES WHEELING



Pilot Joe Higgins, accepting the first air mail to leave Wheeling by airplane from Moundsville; Postmaster T. J. Hamilton and Julia Slokan, of the Glendale postoffice. The mail, with several pouches from Wheeling brought to the field by Postmaster William Brice, left Thursday at 12 noon after a delay of an hour and a half because of the downpour of rain. Moundsville's assistant postmaster, Earl

—News-Register photo  
Jones, is at the right of the picture. The flight was one in a number throughout the United States in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the first air mail flown in America. Whether air mail continues to be flown out of Wheeling is dependent on the government's placing Glendale field on the regular air mail route.

(Provided by Kathleen Roxby.)

# The Wheeling Intell

WHEELING, W. VA., FRIDAY, JUNE 14

## PILOT HIGGINS GAINS TOP C. A. A. RATING



—Intelligencer Photo.

The first results of the top flying instruction rating of the Civil Aeronautics Authority gained by Joseph R. Higgins, manager-flying instructor at Glendale airport, were accomplished this week with solo flights by four young flyers

Wheeling. Mr. Higgins is pictured above with his Taylorcraft plane.

The young men who soloed at Glendale field were William Han-

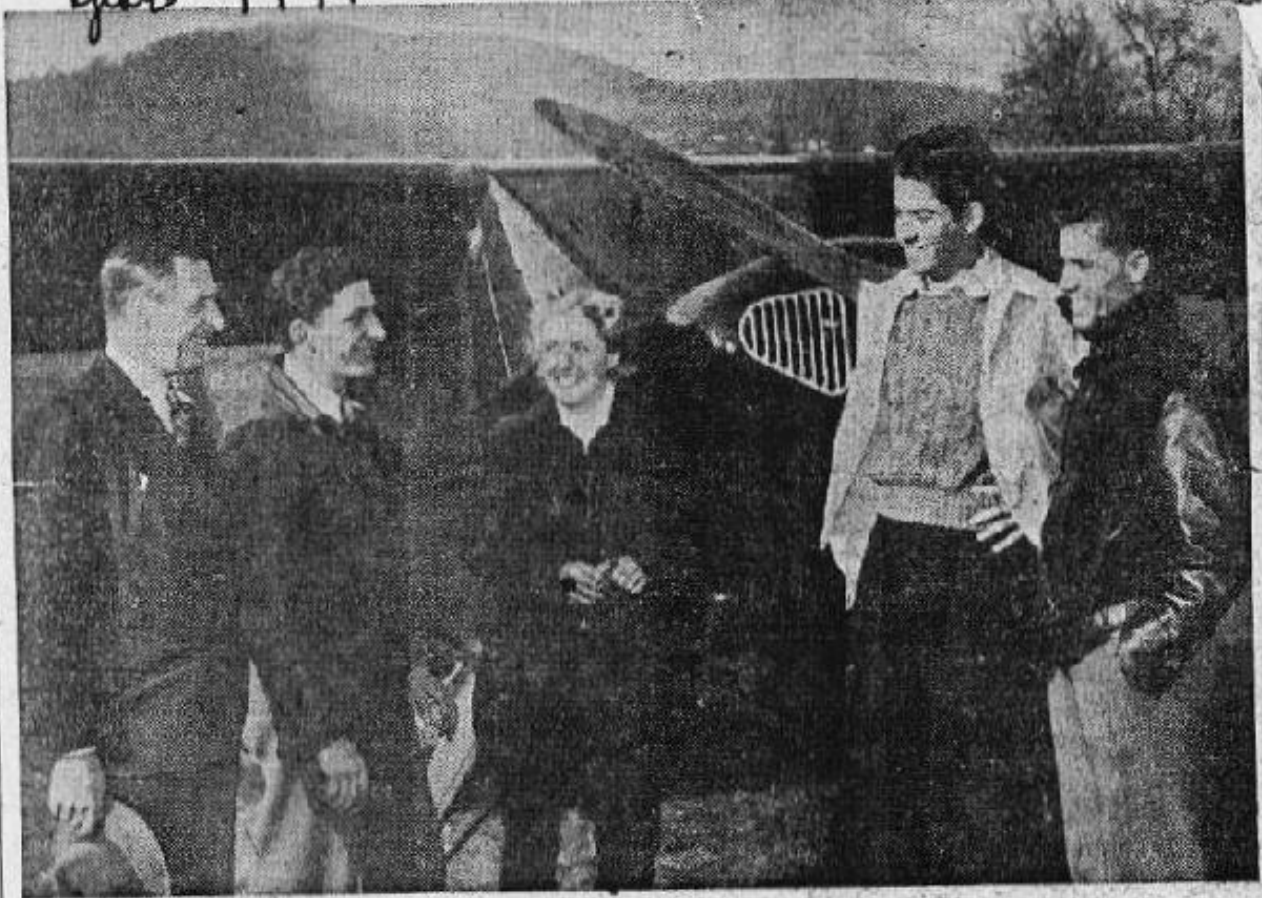
nig, Vincent Zanke and Edward O'Hara, all of Wheeling and William Connor of Elm Grove. These are the first student flyers here to complete flying instruction under the new C. A. A. setup.

Mr. Higgins, who has operated the flying school for the past several years, recently completed a course of advance instruction training under government supervision at Cincinnati. He gained

re-rating instruction certificate from the C. A. A., the first pilot in Wheeling district to obtain the new classification. The re-rating course consists of several maneuvers which heretofore were not necessary in flying instruction. However, by October 1, 1940 all instruction pilots must have the rating to operate. Higgins spent two weeks at Cincinnati, the flying course including all previous instructions necessary in addition to the new maneuvers.

# COLLEGE STUDENTS RECEIVE FLIGHT TRAINING

year - 1941



1940-41

(Intelligencer Photo)

West Liberty college students, enrolled here in the Collegiate Pilot training course of the C.A.A., have the distinction of being the first pupils to receive flight training from the new Ohio county airport. Three of the students are pictured above with flight instructors.

Miss Wilma Schulte of Follansbee, at center, was the first of the students to start training at the airport.

The group, left to right, shows: Joseph R. Higgins, who supervises the training course; Joseph Aroney, Ebensburg, Pa., instructor;

Miss Schulte; Paul Garvin, Sherrard road, a junior at West Liberty college, and Don Danford, of West Liberty, a graduate of the college. Miss Schulte is a junior. The airplane in the background of the picture is one of the Taylorcraft ships used in the course.

The Raleigh Register (Beckley, West Virginia) · 19 Jan 1942

## 50 Local Pilots Are Part Of State's Air Patrol

The 50-odd civilian pilots in the Beckley area now have a war-created job, and the Beckley-Mount Hope airport is one of about a dozen in the state at which the comings and goings of civilian craft now come under the dictates of the federal government.

The sportsman pilot can no longer don flying togs, take off and set his ship down wherever fancy happens to dictate.

The government, explained David M. Giltinan yesterday, not only wants to know who is flying commercial ships but where they come from, where they're going and why.

As wing commander of the Civil Air Patrol in West Virginia, much of the responsibility for organizing and keeping this state's civilian pilots in compact units ready for any emergency develops upon Giltinan.

### Set Up Five Areas

For aeronautical purposes, the state's rugged terrain was mapped out in five areas and most of the official personnel to administer these five group organizations has now been set up.

Giltinan, 49-year-old executive of a Charleston wholesale house, took up flying on his own back in 1931 and has been an ardent enthusiast ever since. His interest first brought him recognition as secretary of the West Virginia State Board of Aeronautics.

He outlined today some of the purposes back of the Civil Air Patrol, which has been set up on a nationwide basis and broken down through state organizations to group organizations, to squadrons and then to flights of three planes.

Primary among the government's aims, he pointed out, is that of giving "purpose" to the functions of commercial pilots.

The organization is so designed as to give civilian fliers the broadest possible training in the "lay of the land" within their jurisdiction, combat tactics, emergency flying practices and the like.

### Flying Backlog

The nation's 900,000 commercial pilots, Giltinan continued, provides an important backlog upon which the air branches of the army, navy and marine corps may draw for new material.

"Although not trained in handling combat ships," he pointed out, "many of these private pilots right here in our state have many hundreds of hours in the air to their credit and, under most circumstances, they are just as good fliers as you'll find anywhere.

"Then," he continued, "there's another phase of this program which might be regarded as selfish, and that constitutes the effort to keep commercial flying alive during wartimes."

As part of the "checking up" process, the Civil Aeronautics Board twice has grounded all commercial pilots and reinstatement entails birth certificates, fingerprints and other items of personal identification and proof of citizenship.

New regulations will require pilots to have clearance papers to show at their point of destination in order to avoid reams of red tape. This is part of the routine of knowing at all times who is flying the commercial ships and for what reason.

### Stark Heads Group

Giltinan's own administrative set-up includes Hubert H. Stark, inspector of the State Board of Aeronautics, as executive officer; Dr. W. B. Wilson, of Charleston, medical officer; P. D. Koonitz, Charleston attorney, intelligence and public relations officer; J. B. Pierce, jr., Charleston, training and operations officer, and John A. Kramer, Charleston, communications officer.

The group organization (home address headquarters unless otherwise designated):

No. 1, Central West Virginia, headquarters, Charleston—Glenn T. Clark, group commander Robert Mitchell, executive officer; Archie Clemons, Montgomery, adjutant; Dr. W. F. Work, personnel and medical; John Courtney, intelligence and public relations; J. Bruce Craig, training and operations; Archer H. Gravely, jr., equipment and supply; Howard Kelly, transportation; Samuel Moore, communications; Squadron commanders—Gene Hensley, seaplanes, and David K. Williams, Institute, land planes.

No. 2, Southwestern West Virginia, headquarters, Huntington—Howard G. Mayes, commander; John H. Zell, executive officer; Rebecca Ann King, only woman member of the entire state personnel thus far, group adjutant; Dr. Russell Cook, medical; Squadron commanders—Dr. H. E. Guthrie and William L. Gibson, Huntington, and J. Wayde Stewart, Parkersburg.

No. 3, Southeastern West Virginia, headquarters, Princeton—Dr. J. I. Markell, commander; George Lynch, executive; Phillip Sasser, adjutant; Dr. Ben W. Bird,

communications; Squadron commanders—C. O. Tate, White Sulphur Springs; Hulett Smith, Beckley, John C. Anderson.

Group 4, Northwestern West Virginia, headquarters, Clarksburg—M. R. Bingman, commander; James L. Gaylord, executive officer; Dr. S. S. Hall, personnel and medical; squadron commanders—Jay Burdette Bucy and Harris S. McCann, both of Clarksburg, and Joseph R. Higgins, Wheeling. (only appointments announced).

Group 5, northeastern West Virginia, headquarters, Morgantown—Dr. Earl N. McCue, commander; Lawrence J. Van Gilder, executive; Lee Renick, adjutant; G. J. Sweiger, personnel; Dr. S. W. Cottle, medical; Kenneth Mason, intelligence and public relations; Paul H. Keister, training and operations; Ted Snyder, communi-

cations; Squadron commanders—Ralph Boone, Morgantown; D. S. Baker, Burlington, and George Scheder, Martinsburg.

## Parents' Obituaries

Died February 11, 1939

### JAS. HIGGINS DIES SATURDAY

FORMER WHEELING STEEL  
EMPLOYEE SUCCUMBS AT  
HIS BENWOOD HOME

James Thomas Higgins, 64, retired employe of the Wheeling Steel Corporation and former member of Benwood city council, died Saturday afternoon at 3:15 o'clock at his home, 433 Main street. Death followed a lingering illness.

He was born in Benwood, June 30, 1874, a son of the late Patrick and Bridget Johnson Higgins.

Mr. Higgins was an active member of St. John's Catholic church and at the time of his death was a registrar of Union district. He served four different terms in council and was active in civic affairs in the community.

Up until Mr. Higgins retirement from the steel corporation he was foreman of the shipping department of the Benwood plant.

Mr. Higgins is survived by his widow, the former Margaret Byrne, who he was united in marriage to in 1899 at St. John's church. One daughter, Mrs. Clarence Flading, Benwood, and two sons, Francis Higgins, Benwood and James Higgins, Mozart, also survive, as well as two grandchildren, four sisters, Miss Catherine Higgins, Mrs. William Pearl, Mrs. Mont Bonar, all of Benwood; Mrs. Alice Roper, Wheeling, and two brothers, John Higgins, Benwood, and Charles Higgins, Springfield, O.

The body has been removed to the Cooey-Bentz funeral home, Thirty-sixth and Eoff streets, where services will be held Tuesday morning at 8:15 o'clock. Requiem high mass will be celebrated at 9 o'clock at St. John's church, Benwood. Burial in Mt. Calvary cemetery.

Died July 21, 1943

1943

OBITUARY

### Mrs. Margaret R. Higgins Dies In Wheeling Hospital Today

Mrs. Margaret R. Higgins, 68, mother of Lt. Joseph R. Higgins of the Higgins Flying Service at Glendale, and a lifelong resident of Benwood, died this morning at 2:50 o'clock in the Wheeling hospital where she had been confined ill for the past five days. She had been ailing for several weeks.

Mrs. Higgins was born in Benwood May 18, 1876, a daughter of James and Mary Ann Healy Byrne. She was educated in the Catholic schools. She was married to James T. Higgins at St. John's church in Benwood in 1899. He preceded her in death February 11, 1939.

A member of St. John's Catholic church in Benwood for many

years she sang with the church choir. She was also a member of the Altar Society of this parish.

Three sisters preceded her in death in the past two years.

Surviving are one daughter, Mrs. Clarence W. Flading, Benwood; two sons, Lt. Joseph R. Higgins, Glendale, Pvt. Francis J. Higgins, at Port Moresby, New Guinea; and two grandsons. Three brothers, John Byrne, Clarksburg, Joseph Byrne, Benwood, and Vincent Byrne, Parkersburg, also survive.

The body was removed to Alt Meyer & Sons funeral home pending the completion of funeral arrangements.

<--Son, "James" should be "Joseph".

# PLANE CRASHES ON HILL NEAR SHADYSIDE; LOCAL MEN ESCAPE

**LT. JOE HIGGINS PILOTING LOCAL MEN WHO WERE GOING TO CHARLESTON**

When the compass failed to function properly in a fog, a Stinson plane from the Glendale airfield, crashed Wednesday morning on a hill south of Shadyside. Piloted by Lt. Joe Higgins, who was accompanied by Hal T. Kain, Ohio county commissioner, F. Leslie Voight, manager of the Ohio Valley Board of Trade, and Henry J. Voight, manager of the Genuine Parts company, all escaped from the vehicle without injuries.

The plane took off from the Glendale airport at 8 A. M., to make a flight to Charleston, where the party had planned to attend the state aviation conference. Shortly after leaving Glendale fog was encountered and Lt. Higgins set his course by compass. However, a hill suddenly loomed up before him. Realizing

a crackup was inevitable the pilot pulled up the nose of the plane, forcing it into a stall. The plane settled down into the trees and to the ground, the wings and fuselage being wrecked, but the cabin was little damaged.

### Make Way Down Hill

As the plane touched the ground the four made a hurried exit and climbed down the hill, planning to get at a safe distance before a possible explosion. However, there was no fire.

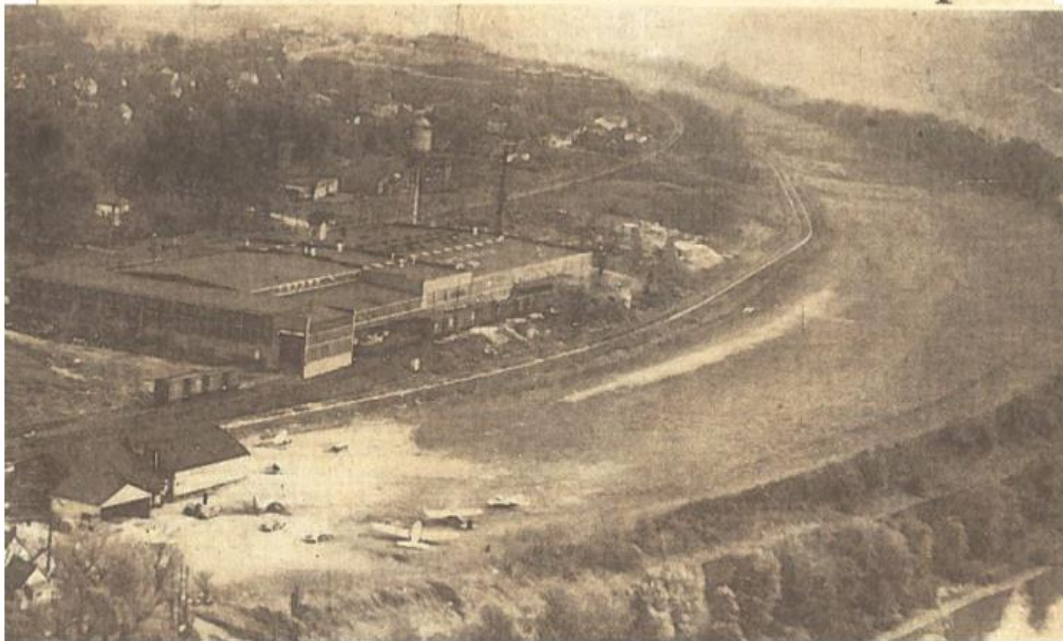
The party reached Route 7, below Shadyside at the point where the Ohio roadside park is located. They hailed an auto and were given a lift into Shadyside, where they contacted the Glendale airport.

The cause of the crash was due to the compass failing to function properly. Late in the day Lt. Higgins in a Piper cruiser flew over the course and definitely determined that fact.

April 28, 1946

SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 28, 1946

## Joe R. Higgins Buys Glen Dale Airport



## Plans Hangar Improvement At Old Field

Joseph R. Higgins, of Mozart, who has operated the Glen Dale Airport under lease for the past ten years, has purchased the field from the Industrial Land and Building Corporation, it was announced Saturday. Consideration in the transaction was not revealed.

Higgins announced that the field will be modernized in the near future and the hangar capacity increased.

The property consists of 24 acres, with 3,200 feet frontage on the Ohio river. It is out of the reach of all but the highest river floods, and can be used the year 'round. It is large enough for all but the biggest four-motored planes, and during the war big planes of both the Army and Navy landed there.

The field has been used for planes for the past 20 years, first being used by the Fokker company when that organization built planes at Glen Dale from 1926 to 1930.

### Field Has Grown

Higgins took over the...

(Provided by Kathleen Roxby.)



Nov 10, 1950

## W. Va. Airman Killed In South

Moundsville, W. Va., Nov. 9. (AP) —A body specified as that of Joseph R. Higgins, 49-year-old manager of a Glendale airport, was recovered from a tidewater marsh in Georgia today, relatives here were informed.

Harold Porter, assistant manager of the airport, said after a telephone conversation with Georgia state police that the body was identified through papers found in clothing.

At Savannah, Ga., Lt. Commander John B. Hunziker of the coast guard, which recovered the body, said a small plane piloted by Higgins had plunged into the Marsh off St. Catherine's island late yesterday.

Higgins left Moundsville last Sunday in the company of Joseph Speidel of Wheeling for Hollywood, Fla., where he was to acquire a new plane to be used in a training program at Glendale.

Porter quoted Georgia officers that the plane had not been located.

Speidel returned to Wheeling alone earlier this week via a commercial airlines after leaving Higgins in Florida to fly the new ship back.

Higgins had been an instructor in a veterans' flight training program at Glendale, and also was connected with civil air patrol work. He had been a resident of Moundsville for about 20 years. He is survived by his widow.

# Georgia Plane Crash Kills Joe Higgins

One of the Ohio Valley's foremost airmen Joseph R. Higgins of Moundsville was killed Wednesday night when his plane plunged into a marsh on an island off the coast of Georgia.

Joseph Speidel, business associate of Higgins, was waiting for clearing weather at Dayton, O., yesterday to fly to the crash scene and return Higgins' body to Moundsville.

Higgins had a brush with death only two weeks ago when his plane developed engine trouble and he made a forced landing in the brush southwest of St. Clairsville, O. He was flying three high school youngsters in a U. S. Conservation Commission tour of Eastern Ohio. Two of the youngsters received scratches but Higgins was not injured.

Captain Reuben Lewis, operator of a shrimp boat, said Wednesday night he saw the plane "fall in a steep dive" about 5:30 p. m. and crash on St. Catherine's Island, about 20 miles southeast of Savannah, Ga.

Georgia state police recovered Higgins' body at 10:20 p. m., on Wednesday, the U. S. Coast Guard search crew reported, but authorities were unable to determine the cause of death since only the tail



Joe Higgins

assembly of the aircraft protruded above the swamp yesterday morning.

Higgins, operator of the Glen Dale airport, was said to have left Hollywood, Fla., Tuesday and was bound for Glen Dale in a four-place Stinson Reliant, according to the Civil Aeronautics Authority.

The aviation pioneer started flying about 1929 at Glen Dale airport and bought the airstrip about 1938. Friends report that Higgins, who is certified as a flight examiner by the CAA, probably trained more flyers than anyone else in the valley.

He bought the plane in Hollywood Monday and telephoned Wheeling friends that he would be forced to lay over a day to complete tuning the engine of the ship.

Operating the airstrip at Glen Dale until World War II, he flew coastal patrol and towed aerial targets at Ft. Lewis, Md., for two years during the war.

In 1948 he sold the field at Glen Dale and moved to Tucson, Ariz., where he taught flying. He was also an instructor at San Diego, Calif. He returned to Moundsville a year later in 1949 and repurchased the airport.

The fatal crash was Higgins' third bad accident in a number of years. Some six years ago he was ~~the~~ <sup>captain</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> the ~~Ohio Valley~~ <sup>Ohio Valley</sup> ~~Board~~ <sup>Board</sup> of Trade and Henry Voigt of the Genuine Parts company to Charleston when the plane plowed into the trees near Shattleside. Only two of four escaped injury.

Higgins was also a member of the Civil Air Patrol, holding the rank of captain and commanded the Ohio Valley unit.

## Capt. Higgins' Body Enroute from Georgia

Marshall county awaits the return of the last mortal remains of a native son, Captain Joseph R. Higgins, whose exploits and devotion to aeronautics contributed to the nation's military effort, and channeled scores of young men into the ever-expanding sphere of aviation.

Captain Higgins, born in Benwood January 3, 1901, son of the late James Higgins and Margaret Byrne Higgins, died when a new plane he was ferrying from Hollywood, Fla., to Moundville, crashed in a Georgia tide-water marsh Wednesday evening. His body was found floating on the nearby Savannah river, off St. Catherine's Island, according to the latest information obtained by his bereaved family.

### Body Coming by Train

The family said today that the body was placed aboard a train at Savannah this morning, and was due to arrive in Moundville about midnight Saturday. It will be taken to the Lutes mortuary, 1109 Second street, Moundville.

No arrangements for the funeral have yet been made.

### Plane Sighted From Air

The coast guard sent up planes to look for the plane Capt. Higgins was piloting when he left Hollywood, Fla. A pilot sighted the tail of the ship thrusting up from the marsh.

No statement was available today on what steps may be made by Joseph Speidel of Wheeling, owner of the Glendale airport operations, which include a GI instruction school and a CAP training program to salvage the crashed plane. Mr. Speidel had accompanied Capt. Higgins to Florida and bought the plane, returning Monday by plane to leave to the flier the task of bringing the new training craft to the local airport.

Possibility loomed that full details of the tragedy and its causes will never be known.

Mr. Higgins had been engaged in aeronautics in the local valley for about 20 years. He had had several previous close brushes with death, the latest but about two weeks ago in eastern Ohio when a plane he was flying from the Glendale base was forced down.

Surviving are his widow, Mrs. Julia Charnock Higgins, 605 Eleventh street, Moundville; a sister, Mrs. Clarence Flading, and a brother, Francis Higgins, both of Benwood; two nephews, William Flading and James Flading also of Benwood.

City of Benwood  
15 Jan



Greenwood Cemetery, Wheeling – Photo from Find-a-Grave memorial.

Joe is buried at Greenwood Cemetery, Wheeling. The space on the gravestone, intended for his wife, is blank. She – Julia V. Charnock – remarried after Joe's death. Her second husband, William Tappe, was first married, in 1914, to Nellie Cunningham, a daughter of William Grant Cunningham and Nettie Atkinson, of Boggs Run. Nellie died suddenly on October 30, 1954 while they were residing in Pittsburgh, where William worked at the Pittsburgh plant of Continental Can Company. William and Nellie had one child, Charles William Tappe, in 1916.

The date of Julia Charnock Higgins' marriage to William Tappe is unknown, but William retired in 1957 and they moved to Hagerstown, Maryland. William died on July 29, 1960 and he is buried next to his first wife, Nellie, at Halcyon Hills Cemetery, Sherrard. Son, Charles William Tappe, died in 1968 and he is also interred there.

Julia V. Charnock Higgins Tappe remained in Hagerstown, Maryland, and she lived to be 100 years of age. According to her obituary, she is buried at Greenwood Cemetery, presumably next to her first husband, Joseph R. Higgins.



Julia V. Charnock Higgins Tappe, 1903-2004,  
at grave of Joseph Higgins, Greenwood Cemetery.

(Photo provided by Kathleen Roxby.)