

(12:31)

If you would just first state your full name and where and when you were born.

Mrs. Mitchell: Caroletta Terrell G_____ was my maiden name and Mitchell was my married name. I was born in San Pedro, California, April 25, 1925.

Which branch of the service did you serve in?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh the Navy of course. San Pedro was a sea town. One of the big thrills of our childhood was when daddy was home. He would take us down to the harbor to give mother a break and put us on a H10 water taxi and we would go out and ride around the hospital ship, the battleships and all the ships that were there.

So you were in a family at that...?

Mrs. Mitchell: My father was a Marine engineer so "the sea, the sea, the beautiful sea."

What unit did you serve with?

Mrs. Mitchell: It wasn't exactly a unit. I was with aviation. I was an instructor teaching pilots and flight students how to fly by instruments.

Okay. Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh gosh yes. I sure do. I think that is one of the reasons that our generation could step up to the plate because with the depression there weren't; you didn't have choices. They had the WPA where the men worked on the roads or whatever construction was necessary. The pay was \$50.00 a month which was a lot of money in that time because bread was .05 cents for a short loaf and .09 or .10 cents for a sandwich loaf; lettuce was a nickel for a head. You just didn't waste food.

So did the depression affect your family greatly?

Mrs. Mitchell: It affected it to a certain extent. My mother was a school teacher and had a regular salary which of course wasn't during the summer. During the summer we ate two meals a day. During the winter or the regular school term it was three meals. Mother and daddy took in two cousins who one went to junior high and one was in senior high to help relieve the pressure on another family.

Okay. So did the rationing during the war seem like a big ordeal or did it not make much of a difference?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, you have to remember that the depression was kind of a refining period because you took it and you did what you had to do. When the rationing started it was the same thing, it was because you were; World War II was an all out effort. I can't think of anybody who didn't do something. Even the fellows that were 4F, they would do either air raid wardens or work in the factories but I mean everybody did something. I can't think of anybody who didn't put their shoulder to the wheel. Rationing was just an inconvenience.

Were you old enough to have a job before your time in service?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes. I graduated from school, from high school, two months after I was 16 and I had a job with a store like a Macy's only it was Bullocks. I worked, I had to work away from the counters

because of labor laws, but when I was 18 I could work on the floor and I worked the toy section. I did that until I was old enough to join. At that time to join the Navy you had to be 21 or 20 with your guardian's signature and you had to have three character references. You just didn't go down and enlist.

That was quite a process.

Mrs. Mitchell: They were a little picky.

Do you remember before Pearl Harbor did you read the newspapers and keep up with world events? Did you see the Nazi's as a threat at that time?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes. Of course we didn't have TV and it definitely was the newspapers and radio. Yes, definitely saw the Nazi's as a threat. Remember when they first started taking over Europe and Czechoslovakia and Chamberlain went back to England and thought they really had stopped him, but there was no stopping Hitler. He was going to get everything he could. One of the lasting impressions I have was the newsreels, the German tanks rolling into Poland and the Polish Calvary was trying to battle the tanks. There also was another newsreel I saw, the Norwegians on ski patrol and trying to turn back the enemy. Yes, the newsreels caught it pretty well.

Did you expect an attack from Japan at all?

Mrs. Mitchell: Living on the coast we had, we definitely had air raid warnings and we had black outs because on the horizon the lights of the country; ships accelerated against the coast so we had blackouts. I wasn't really too concerned with attacks because they found a couple to man submarines. It wasn't attacks so much that we were concerned about because we just didn't; at least I didn't. I felt we had armed forces that were patrolling pretty well.

Okay. Do you recall where and what you were doing when you heard the news of....?

Mrs. Mitchell: I will never forget it. I had just come out of church and I had gone across the street to that park, the church was across from a big park, and I had gone down to the boat house. I was going to treat myself to a hamburger and the man that ran the boathouse said, "The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor!" Of course the answer was, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" I remember where I was and I remember the time was about 12:30.

Did you listen to FDR's speech the next day?

Mrs. Mitchell: I certainly did. The one thing I can remember and I don't know if it was that speech or not but the one thing I remember of FDR's speech is "the only thing to fear is fear itself."

So did you approve of the way FDR was handling the situation?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes. FDR was a very charismatic person and he was a strong leader. He could convince you; he was good. I don't think we have had a leader since then that has had the charisma that he had. Kennedy came close but FDR was; if you have ever seen any newsreels or anything, he was one in a million.

Living there in California, did you have any Japanese friends?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes. I went to a school that had quite a mixture. In fact now it would be called an inner city school. We had Jewish and Chinese and Japanese. I want to say this because I think it's important,

there wasn't a racist background with us. We had student body elections twice a year and in January when the seniors were running for President there were several very well-qualified students and a young man that won was Anise and he just cried because it meant that the student body accepted him for what he was. Later on that term he and his family were relocated.

You entered the service voluntarily. Did you, any you had a preference I guess for the Navy.

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes.

What was the specific task that you were performing again?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, after I got out of boot camp I was sent to the training command at Pensacola, Florida, and assigned to one of the fields. I taught flight students and aviators how to fly by instruments when you can't see where you are going how to do it. I have over 5,000 hours of instruction. The girl that taught me was very, very good and since my mother was a teacher I probably had picked up some mannerisms and as a result I was a pretty good instructor. I got everybody nobody else wanted to teach.

Were you tested for your skill and IQ levels?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes. I was offered, they had six billets for control tower and they urged me to take it. I was 20 and you were supposed to be 21 and I said no because I froze in the first 30 seconds. They offered me aerographer which at that time was the Navy's top billet as a weatherman. I said, "No!" I didn't like science. I really wanted to be a post man because I felt there was a future in civilian life. When they got through with my choices; _____ instructor was the first choice, aerographer was the second and postal clerk came as a poor third. I was so happy when I saw the draft posted for Atlanta because I knew I wasn't going to Lakehurst to be a weatherman.

So how far away did you end up traveling away from home? What was the greatest distance that you had to travel?

Mrs. Mitchell: New York.

New York.

Mrs. Mitchell: Boot camp was at Hunter College in New York.

Did you think that your training prepared you well for the task that you had to perform?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yes, yes. I was like I said 20 or 21 and some of the older waves in the hangar were kind enough to tell me; women don't like to give women compliments, but they were kind enough to tell me that the scuttle bug around the hangar was that I was the best instructor on the field. I was also the youngest. I'm not trying to brag. I'm just telling you like it is. I would get some of the students that they couldn't reach and I felt that if they were smart enough to be in the flight program then they were smart enough to learn and that the instructor wasn't adjusting the lesson to meet the person. There was one time I just couldn't get the student to understand the relationship of the compass to the plane and I got desperate and I spread myself across the desk. I pointed to my nose and I said, "This is a nose" and I pointed to my left arm and I said, "This is the wing" and right arm, "this is a wing." I pointed to my bottom and I said, "And this is a tail." He said, "I've got it." I was willing to try whatever it took. Fortunately I didn't have to do that with everybody.

Did you ever travel overseas at all?

Mrs. Mitchell: No, there were very few WAVES. Now the WACS travelled overseas but there were very few billets overseas for the WAVES and they were mostly in the Yeoman and I can't think of the....disbursing agents. It was Hawaii and I think some went to Bermuda but I am not sure of that.

Were you promoted during your service time?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes.

What was your highest rank?

Mrs. Mitchell: First Class.

Did you feel that the promotions that were received; were they deserved by the people who received them?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes, there was a very strict testing system. The first crow, that is what they called the rank, we were given by being willing to extend during the time that Congress was trying to decide whether or not to have women. The thing of it is, in order to be advanced there had to be a place and in order to lure us into staying in this uncertain situation we were advanced and given a crow regardless of the openings. After that there had to be an opening for us to advance, that was the carrot in front of the horse.

Do you like the war changed like women's role in society much? I know a lot of women went to work in factories.

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes I do. I very definitely do because like I say everyone was behind it. As you say women went to work in factories and they discovered that they could earn money and that they could spend it; they didn't have to beg a husband for money. I think it was really a revolution in a way because after the war was over a lot of them just didn't want to go home and be moms. They had something tangible that they could work with.

Did you have relatives or close friends that travelled overseas that were on the front?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes, I was very fortunate, out of all of my school friends and my relatives I only lost one really close friend and that was at the Battle of Guadalcanal. One of my close friends had been raised in China of Russian parentage and only knew about five languages so they sent him back in the intelligence and he made it home. One of them was in the Army in Germany. He is still alive; the rest of them I'm sure are dead, but they didn't die on the front. One was in the Merchant Marine. He graduated from Kingspoint as a company commander. My cousins, my two cousins, one flew bombers over Japan and the other one was in the paratroopers so they are alive. I was very fortunate.

Do you feel like you ever had a sense of the big picture of the strategy, the war strategy, or was it just kind of your part?

Mrs. Mitchell: In retrospect I had read a lot of things and looked at quite a few videos. You know war can be planning but it is also a lot of luck, believe me. You would read stories that survivors have written and there is a lot of luck.

Do you remember the day when they announced that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes.

Did you have any particular feelings?

Mrs. Mitchell: No, not really.

Were you happy that was coming to a close?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well I knew that the handwriting was on the wall but none of us knew how soon it would be. Actually at that time I was in _____ School learning my trade so it didn't mean as much to me as if I had been maybe active duty.

How long did you serve in the military?

Mrs. Mitchell: Just short of seven years.

You made it through to Korea?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes definitely. At the Korean War I was out in San Diego, that is where I met my husband, and was teaching the flyers how to get aboard the carrier without being shot down. They had a disc, a 360 degree disc, with a pie slice cut out of it. You had to come in that pie slice. If you came in any other way you were shot at. The pie slice was rotated and you had to know when it was going to be rotated and what heading. Yes, besides basic flying and what instruments but definitely had a hand in that.

Do you remember hearing on the news that North Korea had invaded the south?

Mrs. Mitchell: Not really. I don't remember that as much as I do some of the things of World War II.

Not as big as news, maybe?

Mrs. Mitchell: Yeah. I just knew we were involved and that the carriers were docked right behind the WAVE barracks and we could see the preparations of supplies and the planes and everything going aboard.

Did you feel like the military was well enough prepared for Korea when it began?

Mrs. Mitchell: Uh, I really don't know too much about that because that was really an Army thing. Of course the Navy had to take them there. I was more involved with what I was doing.

Sure. Do you remember any particular, like does anything stand out about the Korean War? What is the first image that you think that would come to mind in terms of that?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well it was mainly I think an infantry war. The newsreels and things that we saw, and television was just in its infancy, was of hordes of literally overrunning positions. Since I wasn't over there on the ground what we got was mostly newsreels of course because everything that they could censor was censored. That is why it took so long to come out about the code _____.

Did you have friends or relatives that fought in Korea as well?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well about that time, in 1951 my husband and I got married. He flew the early warning system, the DEW line and that was during the Korean conflict and that went from Alaska over to China. I know it was dangerous because he told me once that they had gold in the safe on the planes so that if they

were shot down they would have something to bargain with. My recollections really of Korea was holding down the home fort and watching my husband deploy.

Was that at all troublesome for you?

Mrs. Mitchell: No, like I say, surviving the depression was a real refining process. In World War II you did things; there weren't any choices, you did them. I think that is one of the reasons that military wives could back their husbands so much is because they grew up in this. Now I don't know about the ones now. I mean we grew up in you had to do it. You tell your husband goodbye and pray that he came back safely. Every once in awhile you would think, at least I would, "Well what would I do if the chaplain came to the house? What will I do first? Where would I go? Every few months I would reevaluate the situation. Go on and finish your questions.

Well, if you want to keep go talking that is fine.

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, we are missing a big chunk. After World War II was ended the powers to be decided that they wanted to keep the women in the military. As I said before they gave us a crow if we would extend. See at this time we were all reservists. There was about two years there where we were in the situation when we really didn't know what was going to happen. They weren't making uniforms so we were piecing things together. We all had one uniform for inspections, a winter uniform and a summer uniform for inspections. I had one shirt that was nothing but bonex from the shoulders down to the waste. When they closed the base they would send the uniforms out to the bases that were open but you never knew what was going to be available. I heard that one of the things that Congress was trying to overcome; they felt that the men wouldn't take orders from women and that was expressed in a mixed group. This man said, "I have been taking orders from my wife all this time." That was one of the factors. When they finally, and it took about two years; when they finally mandated that the women would be part of the regular forces then we were asked if we would stay and if so we were regular Navy. We went from USNR to USN. There were a lot of changes. When I was in you couldn't have a dependent under 18. Of course now they are families. Some of the women that stayed, especially the older ones who didn't get married, made it a career because they were supporting their parents or a relative. If they had a civilian job and you got sick, then you are docked; your pay is docked. In the service if you got sick, you are in the hospital or whatever the allotment check still went to your dependents so there were quite a few that stayed for that reason. Gradually the Navy started transferring people around. At that time we were all wherever we had been when the war ended. They started transferring people around and started working on making it a career, but there have been a lot of changes. I think the women's lib movement forced the services to make it attractive for families.

So you think that began well during that time during your service?

Mrs. Mitchell: No, well when I got out they were still working on it. If you were married there was no guarantee that you and your husband would be transferred to the same place. There were a lot of glitches and things that had to be worked out.

So it was about two years?

Mrs. Mitchell: It was about two years of, well while Congress was going to make up their mind and then there were a few years after that when they were trying to get their act together. That is the best way I can express it....your act together.

Do you remember in that time between World War II and Korea that you had a sense of the beginning of the Cold War?

Mrs. Mitchell: Not really, because we were all involved doing our own thing. Like I say, TV wasn't even around; it was in its infancy. They were still experimenting with it. Our news came in either over the radio or in newsreels. That is different than seeing it two or three times a day on the news. I think, in a way, we weren't as aware as we would have been if we had the news services that we have now.

Was Korea at all a surprise for you; that we would be involved there?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yeah, that kind of snuck up on us because everything was focused on Europe and Japan. Korea was like Pearl Harbor, who had ever heard of Korea?

A lot of people I know I have read some accounts of people who found it odd that our allies became our enemies and our enemies became our allies kind of relatively quickly.

Mrs. Mitchell: Well it's like we are doing in Iraq, you know, we have always tried to rebuild. I went to Europe last summer and took the trip down the Rheine and the thing that impressed me the most was that there weren't any scars visible from World War II. Everything had been rebuilt and the architecture of the time; just no scars. We did the same thing with Japan.

Yeah it was rebuilt remarkably well.

Mrs. Mitchell: Actually we are trying to do that in Iraq.

So you didn't hold any grudges against the Japanese or the German people?

Mrs. Mitchell: No. Germany, I love history and you have to remember that Europe had the _____ for centuries. Germany and Italy were two of the last countries to break the _____ system. The Germans were used to being told what to do and to have a leader that could inspire them or hypnotize them; they were well I hate to say suckers because my grandfather came from Germany. I don't know what prompted him to leave because he was a barren and he had served in the Army under Bismarck. He said that Bismarck was a great leader but that the military system would one day be Germany's downfall. He made his children promise that they would never set foot on German soil. My father was an orphan when he was 14 so that is all I know about my grandfather. No, I do know one other thing. I know that he had a lot of vision because he was an engineer, a civil engineer, and he gave a speech in front of a group of his peers in New York about the feasibility of building an underwater tunnel. He evidently had some good gut feelings. I don't have any animosity towards the Germans or the Japanese because you are what you are taught.

Yeah. A lot of people it's just kind of hard to go against the currents, I guess.

Mrs. Mitchell: Well like I said my grandfather must have or he would have stayed in Germany. I figured he got out of dodge ahead of the sheriff. To make his children promise that they would never set foot on German soil, I guess his picture was on the post office wall, "wanted." He was smart; the military system will be its downfall, and he left. I don't know anything more about it than that. You know if we, well I can change that, right now history in art schools are being rewritten. Someone said that there was a school book that had almost a chapter on Marilyn Monroe and just a page or two on Washington. Okay, so what are you learning? You are learning that the entertainment industry is more important than the basic history of our country.

A real shift in priority.

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, yeah. I was reading the other day in the paper where it said that they had interviewed college students and high school students about American History, basic American History, and the percentage of corrections that were correct was like 55%.

Pretty poor.

Mrs. Mitchell: So where are we going? What kind of education, what kind of values are our children getting? I love history. I don't care about the dates; I care about the events. We have so much history and so much to be proud of and so many people have died to keep this country afloat.

Do you remember like seeing images of the Holocaust and things like that?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh God yes.

Do you remember how that affected you or affected the people you know?

Mrs. Mitchell: It's unbelievable. You would see the newsreels. You would see bodies stacked like cord wood. The ones that were still alive were just emaciated; they just looked like skeletons, walking skeletons. You would see some of the soldiers just picking them up and carrying them to ambulances. There are still people that say the Holocaust didn't happen, but there is no way in God's world as good as Hollywood is with all of their props and stuff; there is no way that they could have staged so many

Did you have any Jewish friends at the time?

Mrs. Mitchell: Oh yeah. One of my best friends was Jewish. In fact I would go to synagogue with him and he would come, when he was home on leave, he would come and sit in the congregation on Christmas Eve while I was in the choir. If I went over to his house his mother was always trying to feed me. Oh God. Maybe I would just have supper and she would, "Caroletta, eat, eat!" I thought, "I can't do this, I can't do this." Yeah I had several Jewish friends but this one was very close.

I guess we are; I am almost out of tape. Is there anything else you want to....?

Mrs. Mitchell: I can't think of anything. I told you about the ups and downs. Do you have any other questions?

Did you have any children during the period while you were in the military?

Mrs. Mitchell: Again we are going back to this. You couldn't have a dependent under 18 you see.

Oh okay.

Mrs. Mitchell: So if you got pregnant you had to get out. My husband was 27 and I was 25 when we got married. We figured if we were going to have a family we had better get started. We were married about a year before I got pregnant and then of course I had to get out.

Overall was it a very rewarding experience for you?

Mrs. Mitchell: I loved it, I loved it. Everyone had always said, "Well you are going to be a teacher like your mother." I watched my mother come home with shopping bags full of things to prepare because they didn't have the visual aids then that they have now. "No I'm not going to be a teacher. No I'm not going to be a teacher." So I end up in the Navy and what do I do? Teach and I loved it because there is this

satisfaction of seeing someone learn. I will close with this. I had this commander, three stripes, who everybody had had and he was still on the first lesson which was basic climbs and glides. I thought, "God what is wrong with this man?" I put him in the trainer and I got on the step which was on the side. I took the stick and I showed him how to do a turn. I looked at him and I said, "I can do it and I'm a girl!" He glared at me. I showed him the next thing and I said, "I can do it and I'm a girl!" I did that for an hour. He climbed out of the trainer and gave me another look and stomped into the office and told the chief to sign him up for two hours every day before lunch. That is what I mean when I say you have to adjust to the student. It turned out that he hated _____ trainers. He was against them to start with. I had him for two hours every day and I had to prove everything I taught. I know he appreciated it because Christmas came and he gave me a box of chewing gum. That's a lighter note to end on.

Thank you very much.

(End of Interview)