

Marcus Mitchell Interview

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Interviewer: Sir, what is your full name?

Mr. Mitchell: Marcus Mitchell.

Interviewer: And what branch of service did you serve in?

Mr. Mitchell: The Army Quartermaster.

Interviewer: What primary unit did you spend most of your time in?

Mr. Mitchell: The 386th Quartermaster Trucking company.

Interviewer: Okay. What were your parents' names and what did they do for a living?

Mr. Mitchell: My parents - my father was named Ira Mitchell and my mothers' named Mary Ann Wright Mitchell. And, when I was born he was working on the old Clarksville Paint for a guy named John Hancock. They stayed together about three years - I was three years old when my mother and father separated - we was living down there in Lafayette, Kentucky, and I guess grandmother was living there too with us. She died that same year, 1927 and right after that my mother moved to Hopkinsville and went to school there one year, and left there and went to Indianapolis, Indiana. Me and her and my brother, we went to school up there, I guess till I was in about sixth grade. After my mother passed then me and my brother came back down here to Lafayette, Kentucky with her relatives. In fact, my brother, he stayed down here a year. He went back, he said because he couldn't go to high school down here because the high school down here in Lafayette was only for whites and we couldn't go. I could have walked to high school, you know, if I'd been able to go to that school. But I decided not to go back, to stay with my auntie in Indianapolis and finish high school. But he said he wasn't going to let nobody cheat him out of an education. He went on back to Indianapolis and he graduated from high school up there. I just went one semester, I came back down here and worked on the farm with my uncle until World War II come along. I was working on construction at that time for an organization called M.T. Reed Construction out of (Belzoni?) Mississippi. I worked there for till, I guess, till they finished the project. I was on a construction crew, laborers, where we were - we dugged footings for those barracks out there at Fort Campbell. I guess have you ever seen any of the old barracks, they had round, pillowlike foundations. I was on a crew, we dug the round holes for the footings of those, that particular construction project. Worked there until we finished that project, a guy came from, an undertaker from Muncie, Indiana came down and wanted to get men to help him take up dead bodies down at Walnut Grove, think it was in Kentucky, down near Salina, Tennessee there. and we takin' up dead bodies down there where they was going to flood that area and build a dam. I never been back down there. I intended to go down there and see how the place looked. But we took up a lot of dead bodies down there. Sometimes they'd been buried so long you couldn't find but black dirt. They'd but it in a small box and bury it at another cemetery. After that job was over I went back to Indianapolis,

Indiana, and got a job in Nolensville, Indiana - that's a town not too far from Indianapolis, and I guess, I don't know the exact mileage, but it ain't very far. I got a job in a defense factory, building tanks - well, it was a rubber plant, in other words, they build tank chains for tanks. They put me on a job torque testing on...you know the tracks and did that until finally, I got my "greetings" to be inducted into the United States Army. And I went there and - first they called me from down here because I was registered here. I was one of the first to register, 18 year old in 1942. Cause that's the year they passed the law. I became 18 and so I had to register for the draft. And I registered down here but had to transfer up to Indiana. So when they drafted me in I went back up to Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. That's where I was inducted into the military then. From there we went to Camp Ellis, Illinois, went through basic training up there. Actually we got about halfway through basic training and somebody caught the mumps. So well, we had to be quarantined. So could nobody, you know leave the designated areas and so, consequently they told us to...we'd have to go through basic again. so we went back to infantry training, basic and after that we was went to taking a driver's skill - like we would convoy up in Chicago and Galesburg, Illinois and a lot of different towns up there in Illinois we'd convoy to. Some of the towns up there in Illinois, they hadn't ever seen any blacks, so... each town we'd go through we had to put out what they call road guards. One of my buddies, he was in charge, he was out there...road guard...he drew a big crowd. They was up there looking out trying to figure out what he was! (laughs). His name was Jerome Bluey, I never will forget him. We had some pretty good experiences. We used to steal trucks, and go up to Kilcutt, Iowa after duty hours. So we went up there one time, it was about, I guess, five or six of us, I had a buddy from Dover, Tennessee. His name was Hal Marcabee. He knew about, he used to drive trucks, you know, before he been drafted into the military. And he knew quite a bit about engines and stuff like that. So, we went up to Kilcutt, Iowa and those sergeants took the (rod?) out of the truck, so weren't nobody could drive it, till he got back. And just so happens that there was a little, I'll never forget, a little 1936 Chevrolet parked right beside it. So Marcabee, he raised the hood on that thing, pulled the rod out, and put in the old GMC 6 by 6 and we come on back to Camp Ellis and left the old sergeant up there, he was really tore up about that, but he couldn't do nothing about it (laughs). We used to drive up to Bloomington, Illinois and drive..we'd go up there on the campus, to that college up there, and girls up there, they was really amazed at them 6 by 6's. We'd give them rides in them trucks. Then we shipped out to Hawaii and went to Schofield Barracks. And so, we was operating in Schofield Barracks, we took over that motor pool there. We had 50 GMC combat 6 by 6's, plus at the motor pool they had a couple of, maybe about three, semi tractor-trailers that they hauled cold storage with. So we kept Schofield Barracks supplied with cold storage from the docks down there in Honolulu. Hauled cold storage there at the end of each month. And, we stayed in Hawaii about, till July of '44, then they were getting ready to invade the Marianas, so we went down there, we had all that trucks processed for that particular operation and we shipped out, with the, down to, got far as the Marshall Islands, and there still was hostilities, were, as such that we didn't want to go ashore at that particular time. In other words, they didn't have the island secure enough to go ashore and haul ammunition and supplies like we had to do for about, I guess, it was, we did that until they dropped a nuclear weapon over there on the, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We landed there, I guess it was around August of '44. We stayed on Saipan till we left there about the 24th of December of '45. And then we landed at, back in Camp Anza(?), California. That

was the 3rd of January of 1946. And then we got a troop train out and we got back to Camp *Atterberry, Indiana on the 10th of January, 1946 and that's when I got discharged and we stayed on Saipan from, I guess, August of '44 until yeah, the 3rd of January. I guess we stayed there about fifteen months, at least, 15-16 months, like I said, until the war was over. And we first got there, we lived in foxholes about six weeks, we lived in a foxhole. We graduated from foxholes to perimeter tents and so, we stayed in there, after that, 'cause we had two men assigned to a truck. We run the trucks 24 hours a day, you know, other than breakdowns - all them bombs and ammunition. We hauled all the bombs that was dropped on Japan, our outfit did. We had two quartermaster trucks that (come?), the 386th and the 387th. the 387th didn't stay there long, they went on to the invasion of *Laytay and Okinawa. But we stayed there until the war was over. I was on Saipan when the first B-29 landed there, it was really a pretty sight, when the first B-29 landed there. And it was a little field, well, the Japs had it, but it changed hands twice, the 2nd Marines had to take it twice, because the Japs took it back one time. The first Marine that got killed was named *Eisley - so they - that was the name of the airfield - the Eisley airfield. It was old Army Air Corp at that time. We - while we had our 6 by 6's, we didn't keep them no more than about - I guess we kept them six months maybe, a year, and they changed our organization from a light trucking company to a heavy trucking company. so we got fifty combat cavalry engines, International tractor-trailer. And that's when we started hauling the big bombs then, to drop on Japan. So we hauled - I believe the largest one that I've hauled - I couldn't get but one on the truck, I think that was the thousand-pound Blockbuster. One on the truck, yeah. There'd be a hill there, we had to go up where they had a hospital, 148 general hospital, we called it, Hill 148. And we were heavily loaded, you had to go all the way down to first gear, low range to make it. Truck would be going so slow, I could almost get out and walk, if I had a remote, and kept up with it. In fact I seen one of the guys I was raised up with down here in Lafayette, he was a 2nd Marine, his name was Si William, and I seen him going up the hill, but I couldn't stop, you know. I knew it was him 'cause nobody walked like him and I knew he was in the 2nd Marines at the time from corresponding back to my uncle, he told me that's where Si was, on Saipan. He got (indiscernible) on Saipan. It really was amazing, Tokyo Rose used to talk to us every night. I never will forget, Christmas Eve of 1944 she said, "Hello you boys on Saipan, you gonna get a Christmas present tonight, we going to come over and give you a good bombing." And she was right. That's as close as they got to us, I usually never paid them no attention, I just laid in my bunk. But that night it got so close, well it killed six Seabees. They had an area right down below us at *Garapan and they were between us, where we were living at, and *Garapan. That's where they built their place down there, they had metal barracks - Quonset huts. They got a direct hit on one of them, right down through the center of it, and it killed six Seabees. They bombed one of our trucks, but it wasn't in the area, he had a load of bombs, and they got a direct hit on the bomb dump, and we couldn't find nothing but a piece of the wreck of the truck, it blew him all the way...we built an open air theatre in his name, his name was Wood, so we named the theatre Wood's Theatre. He was the same age as me, we both were at that time about 20 years old. That's the only man that we lost during that whole operation as far as, you know, from the enemy. We lost one truck and one man. Like I say, we hauled all the bombs and ammunition. In fact, one guy in my outfit, (indiscernible) he was the one that hauled a nuclear bomb. He hauled it first, he hauled it to Eisley Field, and then they took - from Eisley Field, they took a special - they had a special

outfit to do it, because all the top secret at that time - with an amphibious 6 by 6, they put that bomb on it and hauled it over to Tinian - that's another little island, a little atoll there in the Marianas. You could stand on Saipan and see Tinian, it was so close. And so they hauled it over there. That's where they had the two bombers that they, you know, they had to drop the nuclear weapon on Japan. They first hauled the bomb there, I guess, for...we'd take it off the ship there on Saipan, and then they'd haul it over there to Tinian. I guess it was for...top secret, whatever you call it. In other words, classified. That's why they did it like that. I don't know how many times they bombed us, but they really bombed us a lot of times on Saipan. They bombed us with Betty bombers. Another time I remember, I had a load of supplies on the truck and we were sitting down there at the harbor, just shooting the breeze and we heard, you know, the air raid horn go off, and everybody started taking cover, you know, and actually, one guy looked up and said, "oh, that's a P-47", - I said uh-uh, man, not that one, that's got the (wrong?) sign on it, that's a Betty bomber. That's the first time I'd really seen a Betty bomber. They'd come on low level, they were dropping bombs, but P-38's, they got up right away and before they could get away, they'd shot them down over the ocean. In fact, they said that there never was a Betty bomber that got away after bombing Saipan. We had some pretty good fighter protection, (indiscernible), because we had P-38's and the Marines had P-61's. That was a version of the P-38, with that double boom fighter. They really took good care of keeping them...and making sure that the bomber's didn't get back. Most of the time they shot them down before they got back to their home base, wherever that was out there. I don't think they wasn't coming - that was too far for them to come from the mainland of Japan, they had to be out there in some of those other islands. Actually they would bypass - they bypassed a lot of islands out there in the Pacific. They wasn't really as strategically as they thought at the time, worthwhile (indiscernible), so they bypassed a lot of it. I was really glad when all those ship horns and everything started blowing the day that the Japanese surrendered, 'cause I didn't really think I'd ever get back home. Stayed over - stayed over in the Pacific about - well, all together, the time I spent in Hawaii, stayed over about 25 months.

Interviewer: Now, the unit you were in, was it a segregated unit?

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, it was all black. Everything was segregated then, all the units were segregated. When I - we'd come back from overseas, we come back by points - you'd have so many points, so many months overseas, and so many battle stars, all that counted as points to phase you out of the military. And come back to the station, in other words. So I had 55 points, everybody in our unit would have 55 points and some more - that's when they shipped you back, they didn't ship you back by unit, they shipped you back by points. So therefore, we were integrated coming back on the boat. I never will forget, me and this (indiscernible) we got pretty good buddies, we both knew how to cheat with cards and stuff like that and we won a pretty good little bunch of money back that day. So we got off the boat there at Camp Anza, California, and the first thing they said...well, we thought about going to get a haircut and a shave, you know, and the first thing they said, "the colored barber shop down there and the white barber shop down here". You know that was really...that was really devastating. I guess that hurt me about as bad as sticking a knife in me, when he said that. And the guy, he just looked at me, and I looked at him and went on. Coming back, we got to gambling and

everything and living together there, we forgot all about segregation. But as soon as we got back here in the States, they were mad at us. With that particular action...yeah, it was...I had this one buddy though, that, he was really light-complected, like my wife, you see her up there (indicating picture). We used to go to weekend pass up in Peoria, Illinois. We'd go into the black neighborhoods there and there we'd fool around. He was nineteen, I suppose, that's when we went overseas. I was nineteen, and he was eighteen, I was a year older than him. His name was (Charleston McPearson?). So, we went there, and we'd get tired of the black neighborhood, and he'd say "let's go on the other side of town," I'd say "Yeah, I'm game, I'll go with you." So we went over there, and they had what they called bobbysock clubs at that time. We'd go in there and they'd have somebody on the door, you know, some grownup at the door - teenage. That's not what they would call it now, but they called it bobbysock club then. We'd go in there, and get to the door, the guy would look at me, he'd say oh, "that's my colored friend," "yeah, ok" (laughs). We'd go on in there, and we'd dance with the girls and everything. We'd have a good time. That's where I learned how to bowl. They had what they called duckpin bowling when I was there. And, I went up there and I done good, 'cause I was a good athlete and I started bowling. Them girls taught me the fundamentals of it. So we'd usually go up there whenever we got a chance, we'd go to Peoria and have a good time.

Yeah, ol Mac, he (indiscernible) I went back there after I got out of WWII. I got a job in a foundry up there in Indianapolis, the National Malleable Steel and Casting Company. I did what they called "shift and dump", about six months and they decided to make a mold out of them, and I molded them on a conveyor machine. So it was a pretty rough job. When I first got there, well, Robert MacPhersons was working, there, Mac's brother and I asked him, "where's ol Mac?" He said, "oh, Mac, he stopped in Oakland, California, he met an Italian girl. He's been there ever since." So I guess he just went on and changed (indiscernible) and never looked back. But anyway, I used to go up there...I had a daughter that lives there in Oakland, 'course she still live there today. Sitting right in the middle there (indicating picture). Anyways, she married a Caucasian. I used to go out there and I'd always get the phone book and try to -and look up all the MacPhersons, but I never could get nobody to say that they - in fact, there were two or three Charleston MacPhersons, so I'd talk with all three of them, but the way I approached, it "did you ever live in Indianapolis, Indiana?" "Oh, no, no, I never lived there." So, in other words, I never could get anybody to own up to it, living in Indianapolis, Indiana (laughing). So, I didn't contact him again. But his brother told me he married an Italian girl right after the war.

Interviewer: Did you experience any racial tension when you went overseas, during the war.

Mr. Mitchell: In WWII?

Interviewer: During WWII.

Mr. Mitchell: There was always racial tension. What do you mean? (laughing heartily). I was raised on racial tension, right down here in Lafayette, Kentucky. My uncle worked for a white dude, by the name of -- well I better not call that name, ' cause he's got a daughter living right

down close to you, in Cadiz, a granddaughter. But he was one of the racist gentlemen, you know, they was all racist down there. He wasn't as bad as that, down in Lafayette. I guess they still are. (laughs). Oh, yeah, there's plenty of that. In fact, that's all there was. Now, just like the N-word, this guy, and I ain't gonna call his name, he never called nobody but...nothing as far as their name go -- he had a garage right there in Lafayette -- he sat up there all the time and -- he was a real tall dude. And his arms were so long, he'd sit up in a chair like this, with his arms laying down, he could put the palm of his hands on the surface down there. And so, anytime anybody come up and spoke to him, "Hey, what you doing there, N?" Course he didn't say "N", he said the real thing. Another nationality come up there, "What are you doing, peckerwood?" That's right, that's the only two words he knew far as names go, was the N-word and peckerwood. You talk about racist, man, it was really racist. Like I said, I could have walked to school to get a high school education, but I was the wrong color and so was my wife. She lived right there in Lafayette, that's where she was born and raised, right there in Lafayette. All of her people were real light-skinned, mother and father. Grandfather on both sides was white. So they are all light-complected. If it'd been anywhere else, you know, they could've just changed doors. I tried to take one of -- one of her brothers back to Ohio with me, cause I had a neighbor up there that liked him. He was married to a black woman, but he was white when he wanted to be. But anyway, he was a machinist for Northrup aircraft right there in Columbus. Her brother's name was William, we called him Jake. I said, Jake, come on, go back to Columbus with me. I said shoot, all you have to do is get up there and get you a job, just go on about your business. You don't even have to speak to me no more. I said, you can just change right over. "Oh, well, you're just kidding me, ain't you, Marcus?" I says, no I ain't, I'm telling you the real stuff. You're just down here wasting your time. I would tell him the truth, but he didn't believe what I was telling him. Plus he'd never been nowhere around here. He had straight hair and everything, same complexion as you. Straight hair. So he could pass for Caucasian easily. But it's right back to the main thing that most black people want is the right opportunity. Didn't get the main thing at that time, and that was education. Like I tell my boys all the time, if things had been like it is in your day, I said, boy, I could...(session cuts off and new session starts).

Interviewer: Okay, before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, did you ever give much thought to the Japanese threat, or the Nazis? Did you ever think we would go to war with them?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I had a black preacher down here in this old church that's still standing here, the (indiscernible) Baptist Church, his name was Allen Dade. He used to preach all the time that the Japanese was going to take the scrap iron that we would sell them, and make it into bombs and attack us. He preached that. Never will forget that, I was 12 or 13 years old. He used to preach that all the time. But, me, personally, I had never much given it a thought. I didn't think the Japanese had that much power, they could come up and bomb Hawaii. Never thought they was that powerful.

Interviewer: What did you think about FDR? Of Roosevelt, at that time? Of course we were coming out of the Great Depression. Did you see him in a positive light, did he make a difference in your life or in your community at all?

Mr. Mitchell: Roosevelt, to me, he seemed to be one of the best presidents, yes. I think his wife was more of a liberal than he was. I think she had a big influence on him as far as him helping minorities. You ever seen this commentary about the American Black Eagle?

Interviewer: Yes, yes I have. I've heard of that.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, she went down to Tuskegee and she was hearing that black people couldn't fly airplanes. And so, the black instructor down there...she went down there to see for herself. And he was flying all around Tuskegee there and when he landed, well, she had all the people with her, you know, to see it happen. And when he landed, she went up to him and told him I want to take a ride with you. They've been telling me that black people can't fly no airplane. I want to take a ride with you. Anyway, she got up there and got in the airplane with him, in the back...it was a two-seater, you know, I guess trainer, whatever it was. And they went around, and came back and landed, she said well, you can fly. And that's where they started the program of...as far as the Tuskegee airmen. It helped them to get it off the ground in some respects, 'cause they didn't want them to fly anyway. They didn't want the program to be a success. They did just about everything they could to try, you know, that - except this. Flat refused to make the program...go down the drain. But the black people were so determined they kept it going. I got the thing here, I got the...Tony Brown's tape of it. The Discovery Channel had it too. I'll show it to you if you got time.

Interviewer: While you were in the Pacific, did you keep up with what was going on in Europe?

Mr. Mitchell: No, we didn't have any way of knowing. In fact, I don't know if they had any type of military papers at that time. If they did, the black units didn't get it. No, we had no way of keeping up with it unless somebody in your family send you a clipping out of a paper or something.

Interviewer: How often did you hear from back home?

Mr. Mitchell: I used to hear from my girlfriend every week. Finally she got married, and that was the end of that. I got a few letters from relatives, my cousin and things. That's the only correspondence I got from the States.

Interviewer: Did you have any type of an opinion on MacArthur, how he ran the show over there?

Mr. Mitchell: No, I didn't have no opinion of MacArthur, (indiscernible) he was a general, that's about all. No opinion on him. The only general that I had much of an opinion on was Blood and Guts. I guess cause he got so much publicity. Only one I paid any attention to, you know, what they were saying about him. Especially when he slapped that kid down there in Italy, he got a lot of publicity. Patton, yeah, that's about the only general that I had any controversy over.

Interview: How'd you feel about Truman? 'Cause, you know, Truman, he made the decision to...

Mr. Mitchell: Truman, I think he was one of the good presidents. He had a hard decision to make and he made it. He was more blood and guts than Patton.

Interviewer: Did you feel that dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was that the right thing for Truman to have done?

Mr. Mitchell: It probably saved my life. We were getting ready to go to Japan. I don't know if it was right or wrong. It was right for me at the time, I didn't want to die. I didn't have nothing wrong with the decision, I'd been overseas long enough.

Interviewer: How'd you feel when you heard that news, did you have an idea what was going on, that something secret was...?

Mr. Mitchell: When I heard the news about what?

Interviewer: About the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mr. Mitchell: Oh, I was glad. Yeah, I knew I'd be coming home. I didn't think it'd take much more than that devastation. That was powerful bomb, that day.

Interviewer: While you were over there, how was the quality of living? You said you started out in a foxhole and graduated to some temporary tents. Did it get any better than that? How was the food?

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, we got prefabricated barracks. They built us prefabricated barracks and built an outdoor shower. Had cold showers, but that's better than no showers at all. We had good food. First we was on C-ration. I'll tell you, on the way to Saipan, we stayed in the Marshall Islands forty days and we about ran out of food. We were getting an apple and a cup of tea and a big ol' D-ration for dinner before we got a chance to land on Saipan. We stayed out there forty days. (Indiscernible) Shark-infested waters, some of the guys jumping off swimming, but I couldn't handle that.

Interviewer: Did you ever earn any awards or honors or get promoted while you were overseas?

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, I got promoted to T5, what they call Technician 5th grade.

(disc skips)

Mr. Mitchell: I think he was...in other words, I think he should have been a five-star general. I think he should have been a five-star general, ol' Eisenhower. But politics, you know, really get ahead of everything in a democratic government.

Interviewer: Well, when you were a part of your service in WWII, while you were serving, did you ever have the feeling that you grasped the big picture of what was happening at that time throughout the world, that you were a part of this gigantic event that was happening?

Mr. Mitchell: Oh, yeah, I could feel that, that...that they were going to finally crush Hitler, because he overstepped his grounds, especially when he was going to take Russia. That was one of his big downfalls right there.

Interviewer: After the service, you had an opportunity to work on a very interesting project I'd like to speak about just for a little bit, though it deviates from WWII. You had an opportunity to work on the SR-71, is that correct?

Mr. Mitchell: That's correct. I was the 13th original crew chief in that wing. It was a real, I would say it was a real exciting job, working on the SR, it was a real good aircraft. It really had an important job, too, because it could fly outside the 100 miles, outside the coast of Russia and take pictures 100 miles inland. It could fly in and out of space. The reason why I know that, because it every time it lands, I go debrief my aircraft, I would ask the commander, "what was your maximum altitude?" "80,000." And the 781B was the form that we kept on aircraft records. the 781B where we kept all the landing and altitude and such functions as that. Every altitude I had in there was 80,000. So I knew something was fishy. I knew I wasn't getting the truth when they told me that. But I guess I didn't have the need to know. I had top secret clearance, but didn't have the need to know that. But one of my sons who went into the Air Force Academy, he found out that they were lying to me, because he said they told him they went into outer space.

Interviewer: What year were you assigned to that project?

Mr. Mitchell: 1964. I had been in England for...I had worked on 47s for ten years. I was flight chief over six bombers and three ECMs and a tanker over at Greenham Common, England. When the Cuban crisis came along, we was only fifteen minutes from the nearest Russian site, down at Greenham Common, England. All nine of the aircraft, after the horn blew -- we had ten minutes to have all nine aircraft off the ground. I was stationed there for two years and nine months. I was over there nine months before my family got there, my wife didn't like England much 'cause of the weather.

Interviewer: And this was after you had finished your service with the United States Army and you'd switched over to the United States Air Force?

Mr. Mitchell: No, well, I joined the Reserves. They was begging for reserves up there at Camp Atterberry when I got out in '46, so I was only 21, so I decided if they had a war in ten years,

they'd get me again. I didn't have no idea of getting married, or nothing. Anyway, I joined the reserves and in '49 I re-enlisted in the reserves. And then here come the Korean War. I was assigned to the 444th Field out there, all- black unit in the reserves at that time up there in Indianapolis. and one guy I used to work with there at the Malleable Foundry, he was in the same organization, so he called me up and said Mitch, they're getting ready to call that unit back to active duty. Not me (laughs). I (indiscernible) went down on Virginia Street, that's when the Army was recruiting for the Air Force. The Air Force as it is known today was just only five years old. So I said, you think you can get me in the Air Force? "Yeah, I'd be glad to help you get into that unit." I said "I'm in the Reserve." "That don't make no difference." Sign me up, the rest is history (laughs). I wasn't going back there and let them kick me. (Indiscernible). But that's the way I felt about it.

Interviewer: You were in school for the most part of the Korean War, is that correct?

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, I went to turret system, mechanic gun reel, B-29, B-50's up at Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado. We graduated from gunnery school there in June of '53. The last part of June, when I was back home here on (indiscernible) getting ready to go down to Texas to crew training and the war was over, while I was here at home. So when we got back to Lowry, they had cut orders on 783 of us to go to A&E mechanic down at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. Well that was a 120 day course, 120 academic days, about seven months. When our class graduated from that, they didn't need no more B-29 mechanics. So they cut orders on it and shipped us to, the land route to Amarillo, Texas to a jet engine specialist course. When I graduated from there, I went to McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas and that's where I went to work on B-47s. We had ninety B-47s on that flight line and we used to fly them just like they fly fighters, because we were running a transition organization, transitioning B-29 pilots, out of B-29s into '47s. And they used to come into there from all organizations, getting upgraded to B-47s. We had ninety of them, and we used to fly...I have flown the same aircraft, just like you'd fly a fighter aircraft, three different missions in the same day. If it'd land with an ok flight, we'd refuel it and another crew take it over, fly it for four more hours. On each four-hour flight, they'd make seventeen and eighteen landings, what they call touch-and-go. Teaching them how to land B-47s, because B-47s were a hard aircraft to learn how to land, because it had bicycle-type landing gear. And they would - yeah, a lot of pilots came to there, from just about every wing in sight. After I stayed there for about three years, I got out for about ten days and come back home, me and my wife and two kids, and we - I didn't really get out to stay out, anyway, I just - because I wanted another base, I just wanted a change of station, so I got out and went to see the recruiting (indiscernible) so he - here in Hopkinsville and I went back in and got stationed up in SAC(Strategic Air Command?). I wanted to get into SAC, because they say you made a lot of rank in SAC, which was a lie...(laughs). So I got out, went up to Lockbourne Air Force Base, that's where they send to SAC and got into the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. It was a reconnaissance organization, yeah, I went to work there as crew chief on '47s and that organization didn't stay intact about eleven months before they deactivated it and then they brought up the 376th ECM wing up there from Barksdale Air Force Base and they brought all the aircraft up there and we took them on. Till I left - I left there after being there about - stayed there about six years working on aircraft there at Lockbourne and

then I volunteered to go overseas to England, that's when we moved to England. When I was stationed at Lockbourne we used to pull a duty called reflex, that we used to go to England and go over there and what they call, you know, prepare for war for 21 days, we'd cock (?) the aircraft, let them stay cocked, for 21 days, then we'd download all them emergency war equipment, and come back home. And come back to Lockbourne. They'd fly about six training missions, and then after that they had to fly six training missions, they'd upload all their emergency war equipment and go to what they called the Mole Hole, that's the (indiscernible). And we'd go up there and be cocked for war for three weeks there. And then after that - that was the cycle we done. After we come off home alert, then we'd come and fly six training missions then go to England for what we called EWO - Emergency War Operations. And that was the life of SAC. The crew chief - twenty-four hours a day he was only a phone call away from his aircraft. No matter where we went, we was on -the whole crew along with- snub-nosed '38. The whole time the aircraft was on the ground, it was guarded by dogs and a sentry, a pair of policemen. I worked under those conditions for thirteen and a half years. SAC was really ready for anything that Russia done. It was a - I'll say it was a tough organization, that's for sure, and it was a ready organization. I guess one of the readiest organizations in the world at that time. It was for real. It was just like war every day, as far as the Air Force goes, the Strategic Air command, I give them that. They knew what they were doing.

Interviewer: When did you first hear about the SR-71 program?

Mr. Mitchell: I first heard about it when I got orders saying I was going to it.

Interviewer: So it was very top secret?

Mr. Mitchell: Very top secret. Very top secret. From the crew chief on up, only had top secret clearance.

Interviewer: Do you feel that that plane, that piece of equipment, that we had, the SR-71 Blackbird, do you feel that that gave us an advantage over the Soviets?

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, because they couldn't reach us. When they built something to reach us, the MIG-30, we (indiscernible) our business. They couldn't get up there. I've forgotten now how many minutes they could stay. They could stay at mach 3 at over 80 thou - wasn't very long, had to come down, and they would disintegrate. Yeah, it was a good aircraft. It was one of the best weapon systems that the Air Force had. Kelly Johnson, he was a smart man to build something like that. it was a good aircraft.

Interviewer: Well, that is all the questions that I have for you. If there is anything you would like to add pertaining to WWII, Korea, or your time at the SR-71, you can feel free to include it.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I don't guess I have nothing to add. I just about went through everything that i can remember worthwhile.

Interviewer: If I could, I neglected to ask, what year you were born, when was your birthday?

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Mr. Mitchell: April 4th, 1924. (on Hancock?) farm, on old Clarksville Pike, so my mother told me.

Interviewer: Well, if there's nothing else, on behalf of Austin Peay, on behalf of everyone involved in this project, I thank you very much for participating.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I thank you for letting me participate, John, it was an enjoyment for me to sit down and give you some of my experiences, as an old man to a young man.

Interviewer: Yes, sir, I enjoyed it too.

<end of interview/tape>