

Albert W. Mitchell

as interviewed by Judy Hansen

I was born in Jerome, Idaho on the 29th of May 1926 to Wilford C. and Eleanor Thompson Mitchell. I only lived there for about a year when we moved to Draper, Utah. My mother divorced my dad right after my kid brother Don was born. I attended school through the 9th grade. The war was going on lickity-split and it was during the depression so I went to work at Draper poultry for a short time.

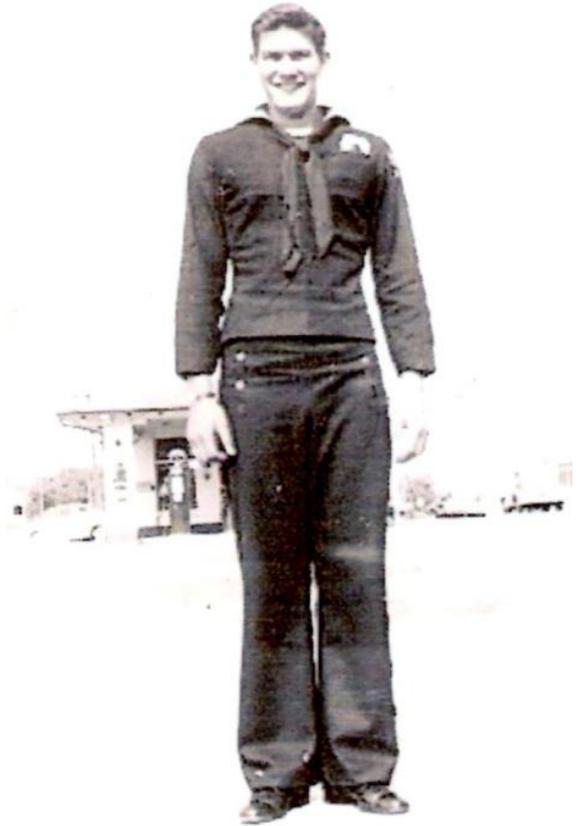
I decided I wanted to go into the Navy. I went to the Salt Lake post office and enlisted in the USN – not the reserves. I was too young to be drafted but they let anyone in who wanted to go. They sent me to Farragut Naval Training Station in Bayview, Idaho for my basic training. That was a wiz-bang stay and then they sent me to Seattle, Washington. I was assigned to the USS Edgecombe 164. My ship had just been built and was launched on the 24th of September 1944. It came down the Columbia River from Portland.

The USS Edgecombe was a Haskell-class attack transport which meant it was a troop transport with guns. When the ship came down from the place they built it we had to get it ready. We had to outfit it all up with its guns. I don't remember how long that took but after we were done they told us we were going to have a shake-down cruise to Alaska. The USS Edgecombe was commissioned the 30th of October 1944. The purpose of the shake-down cruise was to find out if there was anything wrong with this brand new spankin' ship. We sailed up to Alaska then turned around and came back. Everything was fine and dandy.

Our orders were to go to California where we loaded up with a bunch of rag-head Marines. We picked up a grunt load of 'em. I would imagine it was a couple thousand of them. Then we headed out west across the Pacific Ocean. We ended up in Finschhafen (Fitch Haven), New Guinea. Everybody was raising heck over there - lots of fighting going on.

On #1 General Quarters (GQ)¹ my place was on the forward gun. We had 40 mm guns and one five inch gun on the tail. I was a 1st loader on a 40 mm which was 14 feet above the bow of the ship. I had one barrel that I had to keep putting ammunition in. The 2nd loader would hand the ammunition to me, and the 3rd loader took it out of the cabinet and handed it to the 2nd loader. I would just drop a clip of shells in the barrel. Each clip had four shells in it. Then that 40 mm would pump those shells out as fast as it could.

¹ When the call to General Quarters (GQ) is announced, the crew prepares the ship to join battle.



My #2 GQ was on the boats. We had landing craft. On an evasion we would get all those Marines down in those LCM (Landing Craft mechanized) and LCVP's (Landing craft, Vehicle, Personnel) and get them as close to the shore as possible. We had to make sure they could stand up in the water. They would lower the front of the landing craft and the men would run out as fast as they could to shore. Then we would back off and return to the USS Edgemcombe to get more people to take back to the shore bank. My job was to lower the boats on #1 hole. I would go down and get on the crane. We would have to hook up to them, get them in the air, swing them out above the water, and then lower them into the ocean. It didn't take very long to get those boats in the water. We only needed three people to do it; one to hook it up, one to unhook it, and the crane man. I was the crane man. There were three outfits working; the front, the middle, and the rear or fantail. I imagine they had about 14 of those little landing crafts and they each held about 18-20 people. We made quite a few landings in New Guinea. The shooters were scattered all over. My golly, you could hear rifle fire all over the place. They would target anybody. Our Marines were the naughty guys. They would go in and wipe out anything that got in their road.



After we left Fitch Haven we went out into deeper water where the Japanese couldn't get at us. When their aircraft would come at us we had to give them all they wanted. We would go different places and pick up more Marines but after we dropped them off they were gone. We went all over that Pacific Ocean and we were looking for trouble. We sailed on to Hollandia, West New Guinea.

I was at GQ up on the 40 mm and we were really being shot up by the Japanese. Somehow the gun got swung around – I really can't remember how it happened – but when I woke up I was layin' there and I didn't know where I was or much of anything. I had fallen 16 feet. I shouldn't have been alive because that deck was solid steel. The next thing I knew after that I was in sick bay. I was relieved of all my duties while I was there. They got a patrol boat or something that pulled along the side of us and I asked where we were going. They told me I was going to the hospital. I asked them where and they told me Hawaii.

We got to Hawaii and they took me up to the big hospital there. I still didn't know why they took me there or what was wrong. They never told me what my medical condition was. They told me they were taking me back to the States. I remember telling them I didn't want to go back to the States. I told them I joined the Navy to be in the Navy but they insisted I was going where they sent me. Well, when you're in the Navy you have to listen a lot because if you talk a lot you get into trouble. So there I was on my way back to the United States. I had to go along with whatever they said.

They put me on an army manned boat and sent me back to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California. I was in with a bunch of guys that had been hurt bad and they kept asking me, "What's the matter with you?" I had to tell them, "I don't know." I kept telling everyone I wanted to go back to my ship. They told me I wasn't going back to my ship because I was going to Colorado. I didn't want to go but they put me on a troop train and sent me to the U S Naval Convalescent Hospital in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. I went through all kinds of tests and everything. I was there for two months. They said they were going to discharge me but I said, "I don't want to be discharged." I had to keep my mouth shut and I was discharged. I had enlisted for three years but only served one year and five days.

I come home and worked as a butcher in the locker plant up in Draper until they didn't need me anymore so I went down to Geneva Steel and applied. They asked me where I wanted to work and I told them anywhere they make the money. I was told that was the Open Hearth. I agreed and worked there. I started out as 3rd helper, went to 2nd helper, then 1st helper, and my last year there I worked as a melter. I made the heat that came out of the back of the furnace. I not only had one furnace, I had four of them and sometimes five. We had ten furnaces down there and two melters. We had to add all the additives into the steel in the building. The steel was 350 ton. We tapped it every 8 hours. Tapping meant to take the liquid steel out of the furnace and put it into a ladle. They would pick the ladle up with the crane and then pour it into the molds. From there the steel would go to the roller mill where it was rolled out. I worked there for 37 years. I made money but it was hard work.

I married Beth Williams from Murray on March 19, 1947. We settled in Lehi because my Grandfather Thompson's wife came from Lehi. My Grandfather Thompson married one of the Knudsen daughters. When I first came to Lehi I was renting and a guy that I rode back and forth to work with told me there was a little place for sale just around the corner. I bought that home and we lived there for about 12 years. Then I had this home I am living in built (176 West 200 North) just next door to the west of our home. I had to tear down the big old house that was already here so I could build. This is where I have been ever since.

I have four children; three sons, Dale (Lehi), Dean (Saratoga Springs), and David (Lehi), and a daughter Joyce Baum (Murray). I've had a good life and would never believe that I would have lived to the ripe old age that I am.