Interview with Bob Mitchler

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, June 29, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in Oswego, Illinois, with Senator Bob Mitchler. Good morning, Senator.

Mitchler: Good morning, good morning.

DePue: We're going to talk a lot here, and we're going to have three sessions; two of them are going to be in what we call our Veterans Remember project, because you've got a fascinating story to tell about being in the Navy in World War II and then a fascinating chapter of being in the Navy during the Korean War—that'll be this afternoon in session two. And then we hope to finish off tomorrow morning because you came back after these two wars and decided you wanted to be an Illinois State Senator. We'll talk about that one tomorrow, and that'll be in our Illinois Statecraft project. But as we always do, let's start with a little bit of your background, and tell us when and where you were born.

Mitchler: I was born in Aurora, Illinois—that's in Kane County—on June 4, 1920. My parents were John and Clara Mitchler, M-i-t-c-h-l-e-r. And it was known as the Aurora Hospital at the time, and it later became the Copley Memorial Hospital; Ira Copley, publisher of newspapers, was the instigator and great founder of the Copley Hospital. And it still bears that name, Rush–Copley Hospital. Now they have a new one out on Route 34. But the original one, the

Aurora Hospital, was located on South Lincoln Avenue in Aurora, and that's where all the children and babies were born in Aurora.

DePue: Were your parents both from the United States?

Mitchler: No. I'm a first-generation for my father. My father emigrated from Hornbach, Austria, in the early 1900s. I do not have the exact date, and like many fathers and sons, never really thought that information was important. I knew that he emigrated from Hornbach, Austria, which shifted around in those days from one country to another.

DePue: Do you know if he came in before or after the First World War?

Mitchler: That would be before the First World War, early 1900s. Now, they came over as most immigrants did. My father was the oldest of the family, and he came over with his father, my grandfather, Henry Mitchler. My dad's name was John Mitchler. And then they brought their oldest sister with them, naturally, to help take care of the gentlemen. You know, somebody's got to cook and make sure that they're all right. So the three came over in advance of the other members of the family. Katherine, Kate, was the oldest daughter in the family. So they came over, and then they were followed by the other members of the family: his brother, Henry Mitchler; Jacob Mitchler—actually, they called him Jack; and little Freddy. Freddy was a lot like a baby. My grandmother Mitchler, who was married, died over in Hornbach, Austria, before she could come over with the last group. Now, in the last group coming over, there was also Rose Mitchler, my aunt. So they came over as a group following. I think they all came through Ellis Island. I tried to check in Ellis Island one time to determine that, but I couldn't find the information and what have you. But they came through as an early… They settled out in Rosebud, Pennsylvania.

I'm trying to give you the little that my father told me about. We made a trip back there in my youth one time, to Rosebud, and he pointed out the house they lived in, the church they attended. Very religious family, my father. Lutheran religion, Christians. And he was active in the church in Rosebud, Pennsylvania. He said he played the piano or the organ, sang in the choir, and later on he played the cornet in several bands after he got back to the United States here. So he liked music. That wasn't his big forte. When he first moved over into Pennsylvania, there was a lot of people from Hornbach, Austria, in his community, and that was typical of the immigrants at that time; they'd naturally try to settle where the other immigrants are because they could get along, and that's just a natural trend of people. He worked in the coal mines for a while, until they had a minor disaster or something and he discovered that's not for him; he's going to get the heck out of the underground.

DePue: Do you know why they came to the United States in the first place?

Mitchler: Well, as near as I can figure out, Austria at the time—the history that I've read and tried to figure out—was a huge empire, and you were either with the wealthy class or you were just with the so-called peasants, the workers. And they were always fighting, always having wars, this war, that war, and they'd conscript the men and have them fight their wars. And when they'd move the whole entourage from one place to another at great expense and everything. It was a lot of autocracy, and he just wanted to escape that type of a thing. Now, in early 1900s, that's when World War I was starting to brew.

DePue: Well, your grandfather and your father would have been from Austrian–Hungarian Empire at the time—

Mitchler: Yes.

DePue: —and you get to 1914, and they're going to be drafted if they're of age.

Mitchler: That's right. And I think the thought of another war and all that, my grandfather thought better get his boys out of there because the trend. Get over to the United States. Of course, there was a great immigration to the United States at that time by all countries. I mean, this was just opening up in the early 1900s after the Civil War, and they were getting settled, so it was only proper that he would come over here. And like most immigrants, they tried to settle in communities where they had friends, you know.

DePue: But how did they end up in northern Illinois?

Mitchler: I don't know what brought him to Aurora. He had some relatives in Aurora, and I think that's what brought him to Aurora.

DePue: You obviously aren't going to be coal mining in Aurora.

Mitchler: No coal mining in Aurora. No. He came to Aurora, and he got a job at Richards–Wilcox manufacturing in Aurora. It was a manufacturing company. They made steel door tracks for overhead doors and doors that operated… The Fox River Valley, along the Fox River, all the way from Elgin down through Aurora, was a very highly industrialized area. They had many factories, manufactured just about everything. The Fox Valley manufacturing district. And I think that's what attracted him here, because there was work, jobs. And he got a job there. His employment there—he had very little education coming over. I think he was probably about—I don't know his exact age, but maybe twelve, fourteen, something in there, so he didn't have much of a formal education. Not many did at that time, but I mean—

DePue: For the rest of his life did he keep a pretty strong German accent?

Mitchler: No, he lost the German accent. He could talk German fluently. My mother at one time, (laughs) I remember—I was, oh, maybe about ten years old or something, eleven, twelve years old, something in that era—and she suggested

to my father, "You know, John, we should talk German to each other so that our two boys"—I only had one other brother, younger, five years younger than me—"that they would learn German, the German language." That brought on a very discomforting feeling in my father. "No. You're in the United States; you talk English." And oh, he was… It was almost a family argument that time because he was so opposed to it. Yet he would talk with his friends, you know, joke back, and he had Germans that he'd talk German, and he had a lot of German words that I picked up and so forth. But I regret that I didn't pitch in and say, "Hey, Dad, yeah, tell me more German." Because then when I went to high school, I took two years of German (laughs) and sort of forgot it.

DePue: Did he identify himself as an American, then?

Mitchler: Oh, very much. Very much. My father was a very, very strong United States citizen. I mean, he made homebrew, like a lot of them did, down in the basement, you know, in the early days, when I was a child, and he'd make some homebrew. Every time, one of the bottles would blow up. But he didn't sell it or anything; they drank it. Some of the guys would come over, and down in the basement, the Germans would be joking, and then one of the guys says, "Vell, John, ven we going back?" And he always answered, "When the water freezes." (laughter) I mean, he was very, very patriotic, and I think I inherited a lot of that patriotism and loyalty to this country. He loved the United States of America. He was proud, and he never flinched by admitting that he came from Hornbach, Austria, which now I think is in Poland. Those countries shift around over there so much you never know what they're in. But he was always proud to be an American. He always voted on election day and participated in community affairs, with the little education that he had.

His motto, he kept telling me, "Bob, make friends. Don't make enemies. Never make an enemy. Always make friends with everybody, because everybody should be your friend." He had that attitude, and I know in his work—he was sort of a peer down at Richards–Wilcox manufacturing company. A lot of employees would come to him with problems—personal problems, marital problems, anything—but they'd always come to my dad because my dad was a counselor in that respect to try to teach them the straight and narrow. He taught me that, and he taught my brother. I only had one brother, William George Mitchler, and he died at the age of forty-four from cancer. I lost him early in life.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your mother. Where did the two of them meet? Was it in Aurora?

Mitchler: My mother came from a different background than my father. She was born in Joliet, Illinois. She was a natural citizen. Her family was a different family than my father's. Her father, Henry Rub, R-u-b, "rube," they pronounced it, was deep in politics over there. I believe he was city treasurer at one time. He

had a second wife that my mother was born from. His first wife, he had I think three daughters and maybe about three, four sons. And when she died he remarried my grandmother, Augusta Rub, R-u-b, and Augusta Rub had Clara Louise Rub. Just the one child. And as near as I can see, her stepbrothers were very proud of her and she got a lot of attention. I mean, they really spoiled her. They thought she was something else, a little baby coming into the family. Because we would make trips from Aurora over to Joliet many times to visit the Rub family. A good family over there, yeah. And they were German.

They were in the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran church in Joliet, which is the very strict Lutheran core. So when my mother and father married, they went to the St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Aurora, which was the Missouri Synod. And my father was a Third Degree Mason, Master Mason, and he had his Masonic pin on one time when he took communion. Well, the pastor noted that, and he stopped by the house afterwards and he wanted to know all about that, how much time he was spending with the Masonic Lodge and what that was all about. Because at that time, the Missouri Synod was very strict. I mean, if you had any spare time, you donated it to the church. You know, I'm not knocking him; I think it's a good thing. They were very strict. And he wanted to know all about it. My dad says, "No." He says, "If you want to join, I'll get you an application; you can learn the whole thing." (laughter) So they shifted over to the Redeemer Lutheran Church, which is American Lutheran. It was a little more liberal and not so restrictive.

I just point this out because religion played a very important part in my life, my family's life, because we always went to church. I went to Sunday school. I went through Sunday school, and my Sunday school teacher, Newell Nelson was a great guy. He also worked at Richards–Wilcox with my father. And so I got a good Christian—and went to the Luther League and met a lot of friends there, both boys and girls, and we had a good time. I had a Boy Scout troop at the church at the time. That was during the Depression days.

DePue: Yeah, I wanted you to tell me a little bit more about growing up through the Depression, because you were at an age when you could start to remember at the height of the Depression, in the early '30s.

Mitchler: Yes. And I think that's what made me—I think I'm a good person, and I think that experience—you have to go through trying times and have challenges in life in order to bring yourself out. There's an old saying, "Heroes are made, not born." Nobody's born to be a president of the United States, a king, or a potentate or anything like that. It's what you develop in yourself. And I think a good, firm religion is very important. And I got that, and that was a good basis for my thinking and my way of life.

DePue: Did your dad retain his job all the way through the Depression?

Mitchler: Yes. We were very fortunate. Throughout the Fox River Valley, these factories were owned by, you'd say, individuals and their family. They were family-owned factories. Richards–Wilcox was—the big guy was Fitch, and out on Galena Boulevard in Aurora, he had a farm, Fitch's Farm. It was a dairy. He had milk and all that there. They had like Burgess–Norton, Charlie Burgess, all them there, the All-Steel Equipment there. You know, they were all family-owned. They were the country club set of Aurora. And he didn't hold anything against them.

And they had a great idea. The wages in the Fox River Valley were not the spectacular wages like you get at the Detroit automobile plants and that there. They were non-union. They had unions within the plant, sort of, and any grievances come up, they were solved by people in the plant. The wages were low. The wages were low, but they kept them employed. Now, throughout the Depression, you know, a lot of people get critical of those people that owned factories and plants and are the leaders. You know, they always think they're making all the money. But they had a tough time in the Depression in keeping their plant going, sell their merchandise, manufacture it, buy things, and you have to look at their position as well as the position of the employees. And throughout the Fox River Valley, there was work. Now, I can't remember if my father was ever cut down to a four-day work instead of a five-day work. I try to think at times that that might have happened. But he had enough money to put food on the table, and we did not suffer any problems during the Depression. We never had anything above the nutritious things on our plate.

DePue: Any question that you'd finish high school, or was that just an assumption?

Mitchler: My first schooling was at Young School, located on Fifth Street in Aurora. It was an old grade school. And I stayed there through the fourth grade, and then they built a new school, C.M. Bardwell School, named after the superintendent, C.M. Bardwell. That opened up when I was shifted from Young School to C.M. Bardwell in the fifth grade. My experience in Young School was interesting. It was an older school, so alongside the one area of the school, they had a great big chute that you could escape from the third floor, second floor, into a chute in case there was a fire. And that was always fun for young kids to try to climb up the fire escape, you know, during recess and so forth. I had several incidents that are memorable to me when I was going to Young School. I don't think I was the most disciplined little guy. I think I caused a lot of trouble at times. But I recall one time I didn't come home from school. My mother called school; she wanted to know where Bobby was. And she says, "You'll have to come and get him." She came to school and she says, "Where is he?" "Come, we'll show you." And I was sitting on a chair in the middle of the gymnasium, (laughs) all alone. I was told to sit there. I don't know what I did or what the problem was. I cannot remember that, but I remember my mother seeing me and had to come to school to get me, and I

was sitting in the middle of the gymnasium on a straight chair, for I don't know what I did. But I guess I was a little ruly [*sic*] or something.

Had another incident happen then that I think should be told today. This was when I'm up to the fourth grade. There was a contest in Aurora to save coupons and all that. This was in the early Depression days. And they gave prizes. I don't know what it was. The main prize was an automobile. My mother was working hard to collect all these coupons and whatever it was. I remember her—oh, she worked hard, she wanted to win that automobile. She was a very energetic lady, very positive on doing things. But at one point there, you could get a BB gun. And I wanted a BB gun. And I pleaded with them, and they had enough coupons or so that they could get a BB gun. And for some reason or other they did get a BB gun for me that they didn't have to pay for because they didn't have extra money, and so I had a BB gun. So I told all the kids at school I had a BB gun. Well, I'm only in like third or fourth grade, and the older one says, "Well, bring it to school. We want to see your BB gun." So I didn't have any BBs in the BB gun, but I brought the BB gun to school. Now, you try to think, guy bringing a gun to school—

DePue: Today? Oh, my.

Mitchler: Yeah. So they had it and they all looked at it. You know, you cocked it, and *bing*, one shot. You know, that was BB gun. You had to load the BBs in it and so forth. And it was quite a thing. Bobby Mitchler brought his BB gun to school. We had an overflow in the school—that's why they built the new school, C.M. Bardwell School, and behind Young School they had portables. They were small, one-room buildings with a furnace in the back, and I think they had two of them in the school to handle the overflow of the students because they couldn't put them all in the main, big building. It was a three-story building. I cocked the gun and I came in the door, and as you come in the door, then seating to the right, facing the students, when they come—this was before the class started—and I cocked the gun as I come in, and I shot the gun, *pop*. And the teacher was sitting in the chair there, (laughs) and I think she jumped ten feet. (laughs) You know, what was going on? So I got disciplined for doing that. I had to sit behind the stove the rest of the day or something. I did those pranks. I never did anything harmful, though. I was a good kid. My parents taught me right and wrong. I never stole anything, or I never got in any trouble or… Of course, we didn't have anything like drugs or anything anytime that I was in school.

DePue: Bob, by the time you got to high school, what were your interests at that time?

Mitchler: Well, when I transferred over to C.M. Bardwell, which was a brand-new school, one of the most beautiful schools in Aurora—it still is—and I liked school. I liked drawing. I enjoyed going to school. I enjoyed my classmates. I made a lot of friends. I look at them today and I watch them die off. I'm ninety-one now. And Bob Critton, who was president of our senior class in

high school, he was always a year older. He must be ninety-two or -three now. He lives out in Kansas. I made a lot of friends in school. My interests—I never got good grades. I was an average student. Oh, I'd get a few B's and C's, but I enjoyed myself. I was a good marble player. Shooting marbles, that was a big pastime in those days. I went out for cheerleading one time. I was a small child. I wasn't big and heavy for the big sports. I wasn't tall, as you see now. So I wasn't an athlete, but I played in the band. I started in the band at C.M. Bardwell and started cornet. My father gave me his cornet that he played, and he played in the Masonic Band, in several bands. He gave me his cornet. It was a Henry J cornet. I was so proud of that cornet, and I played that cornet all the way through Bardwell, junior high, and East Aurora High School.

DePue: Do you remember when you were growing up paying attention to what was going on in Europe and watching the news or listening to the news and reading the newspapers about all the troubles that seemed to be brewing in Europe?

Mitchler: Well, in my junior school days, grade school days, no, I didn't get thinking much about that until I got to high school. And I don't think in high school we thought too much about the growing problems. Let's see. In high school—I graduated in 1937, so, see, I was right in the deep Depression days in high school.

DePue: Well, 1938 is the year that the Nazis occupied Austria.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah.

DePue: You remember that?

Mitchler: I remember it was starting to go, and of course Roosevelt—**I know** about Roosevelt. My father voted the first time for Hoover because—

DePue: 1932?

Mitchler: Yeah. He was a Republican, and he voted for Hoover because Hoover and the Republican Party was for high tariffs on bringing foreign goods in. They wanted everything manufactured, and he wanted jobs for the United States. And he sort of felt that the Republican Party—that was one of the platforms that he felt—high tariffs on incoming products for other countries, which was not at the rate it is today because of shipping and, you know, airlines and what have you. So he was very there. The second time, I think, though, that Roosevelt ran, I think he voted for Roosevelt because he saw that Roosevelt had some ideas and he was trying new ideas to come out of the Great Depression.

DePue: And that would have been 1936, towards the end of your high school years.

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah. Well, let's see. He first ran in '29, wasn't it?

DePue: Roosevelt first ran in 1932.

Mitchler: '32?

DePue: Yeah, because Hoover was president from 1929 to 1932, so.

Mitchler: See, my history at that time… We didn't get that much in high school. They pushed you through.

DePue: But your father came from Austria. Do you recall his feelings about the Nazis and about Hitler and about the occupation of Austria?

Mitchler: Yes, he didn't talk much about that, and coming from Austria, they'd call him a German, you know, Austrian but German was the same. He always emphasized that he was United States. He was always proud that he came from over there, and he'd talk about it with his peers and that, but he never voiced any opinion on that. I remember we listened to the radio. One time we listened to what Hitler was making, and he listened in German. You know, he could understand what he was saying. And he was very much disturbed over what was happening over there, that there would be war. I think he sensed that he had two sons, and he sort of felt like his father felt when his boys, they came over here, as a lot of immigrants did, to avoid the wars, because it was war after war after war, and all the young men, that's all they had to look forward to, at some time getting drafted. We'll get into that later about my entry into the military and his reaction to that.

But my dad was a good worker. Their life was centered around the family. You didn't have much money to do anything else but that. You came home, and, you know, Mom always had a good dinner on the table, five o'clock. Dad would come home about 4:30; 5:00 o'clock, he wanted to eat. (DePue laughs) He was a very domineering German on that there. If supper wasn't ready at 5:00 o'clock, there were a few words exchanged. You know, got to have dinner on the table at 5:00 o'clock. He'd take a lunch, but he'd always eat it at about 10:00 o'clock during a break, and then during the noon hour he'd play checkers, because he was a good checkers player.

He used to play down at the fire barns, go down there on Saturdays and Sunday with the firemen, because they always had a checkerboard going down there. And we have a picture of him and the Aurora Checker Club. And he was a pretty good checker player. They'd have a real hotshot checker player come into the YMCA and all the amateurs would sit around, they'd have a board in front of them. This guy would walk around, and he'd make a move here, make a move on this one, go around. He'd beat them all, you know, (laughter) and they couldn't figure that out. They had all the time to think, and he'd come around, he'd look, he'd just make a play, you know. I remember my dad entered those tournaments, tried to beat him. I think he got

a draw out of the guy one time or something. But he was a good checker player.

DePue: What did you do after high school?

Mitchler: I graduated from high school in 1937, right at the end of the Depression. Let me preface it by my time in high school. Always took a lunch to school. I never went to the cafeteria; I don't think I was in the high school cafeteria once. It's now the junior high school in Aurora. They built a new senior high school. But I never had a nickel in my pocket. I never had any money. Some of the guys would—there was a place called Hydrox Delicatessen there half a block from the school—and if you smoked, you could buy a cigarette for a penny, you know. I didn't even have a penny, so I did any smoking or anything like that. I never had any change in my pocket all through high school. I didn't date or anything like that—never had any money to buy a girl, go to—well, we didn't have the proms like they got today. They had a prom, but I never had any money to buy a corsage. I never dated girls. Oh, I'd ride my bicycle to see some girls at night, you know, stop over and see them. I recognized that I was a boy and they were a girl by then, you know, (laughter) and I was attracted to young ladies.

I played in a band, and so we went to all the football games and basketball games and events, and I had a lot of good friends in school. I followed my father's teaching, "Make friends; don't make enemies." And I tried to make friends with everybody. I didn't want to make any enemies. And I got along good with a lot of people and made a lot of good friends. I got a lot of memories of high school.

But I wasn't a brilliant student. I was a C student. My father, I would ride with him from Simms Street, where we lived, Simms and Fifth, up to North Avenue, and then they'd go North Avenue—they pooled the car—and I'd sit in my dad's lap in the front seat of the car, and then I'd get off at North Avenue and I'd have to walk the rest of the way to school. That was early in the morning, so I'd get to school early, 7:30 in the morning, and I'd always have time to study a little bit before school started at 8:00 o'clock. But I enjoyed school. Nothing like the kids do today. They have so many opportunities today. Like my wife Helen. She followed me. She graduated in 1942, I think she graduated from high school, a little later. She never had a telephone in her home all during the period she was in high school. That was the norm. I mean, nobody could afford the phone unless—we had a telephone, but… Imagine a girl going through high school without a telephone in the house. They were living in an apartment there, and the lady downstairs would knock. She'd go down and have a phone call come in for her or something like that. They helped out a little bit like that. People were helpful to each other. They got along with the neighbors.

DePue: But again, what did you do after you graduated from high school?

Mitchler: I was very fortunate. In the last, senior year of high school, I was able to have a part-time job at Aurora Dry Goods; that was a department store down in the North Broadway. Now, Aurora was like most communities, a small community, and they had a downtown shopping center, and people would shop downtown. Didn't have the malls like they have outside. So everybody, especially on Friday and Saturday, Saturday night, everybody would come to Aurora on Saturday from all the smaller towns around. Aurora was the big town, and everything was concentrated downtown. The Aurora Dry Goods, it was a dry goods store, all things: ladies', men's apparel, all types of dry goods. I had a job in the men's department, and I would work there on Saturdays from 9:00 to 9:00. They were open 9:00 to 9:00. And wages were twenty-five cents an hour. And I had a very wonderful fellow that was head of the men's department, Ivan Little. Ivan Little. And he was very nice to me. He taught me about how to approach people, as they came in, to help them. He taught me the sales technique. He taught me how to write up an order, how to wrap up a package. We wrapped a package there. He gave me the book that we wrote the orders on, and he says, "Wrap this." So I'd learn how to wrap, you know. Learn thing. And very good instruction. And I'll never forget that. Ivan Little was a good mentor. That's the way people were. The older people taught the younger people, and the younger people listened. You had respect for anybody that had a position above you, and I learned that. I learned that chain of command. Oh, we'd measure guys for suits, you know, their trouser length and their hat. All men wore hats at that time. If it was a little too tight, we had a hat stretcher, you know, we put in there to stretch the hat a little bit. And I learned how to fit suits and all that in the men's department.

Now, what happened, just about time I graduated, they had a big sale, and they passed out a lot of literature at the door of the department store. People took it, and they went out, and they looked at it, and they threw it down on the street, and Broadway was cluttered up with all this Aurora Dry Goods sale material. The manager of the store—his name was Palmer—told the guys in the men's department, "Now, when we quit tonight at 9:00 o'clock, I want you to go out and pick up all of our Aurora Dry Goods sheets that you see laying on the street. We don't want to be accused of cluttering downtown Broadway." Well, they told him they weren't going to go out and be street cleaners and that they're… Well, he fired them all. You could do that back then.

So what happened is that there was an opening came up for a full-time job, and that's just the time I was graduating, and so I got a full-time job as a result of that. There was one other part-time employee that was kept on, but he had other job. He wasn't full-time. But I got a full-time job. So I worked from 9:00 o'clock, when the store opened, till 5:00 o'clock, Monday through Friday, and then on Saturday I worked from 9:00 o'clock till 9:00 o'clock at night, and that was my workweek. I made fifteen dollars a week, cash. I mean,

no deductions for withholding tax or anything. And I worked that job then from early June, right at the time I graduated—boy, I was so happy to have a job. You know, Depression days. And I was able to save—I took at the Aurora National Bank—I was very frugal, and I saved a hundred dollars. And when I got my savings account up to a hundred dollars, I went home and I showed my mother. I says, "Mother, I want to show you something. I have a hundred dollars." I was so proud. Now, here I'm sixteen, seventeen years old, and I got a hundred dollars. I was so proud to show her that.

I think that points out my frugality in my life. Never go into debt; always keep yourself above the level. Those were the things that my family taught me and the qualities that I got from teaching and listening and all that there, not to go into debt. A lot of fellows seem to have a little jingle in their pocket, and they'd buy magazines, you know, Western magazines or any type of magazines, read them. I never did that. I never bought any magazines, never had money to buy any hamburgers or Cokes or anything like that. But I remember I worked there.

Now, when I was there until September, that was June until September, during that period of time a job opened up in the receiving department down in the basement of the dry goods store, and that was where all the goods coming into the store was brought in, The receiving clerk down there would have the department head come and they'd mark the price on everything that come in for their department, and then you take everything to their department—men's department, ladies' department, bargain department, and so forth. And I learned that when the umbrellas came in, they separated the bright umbrellas from the dull-looking umbrellas and charged maybe five cents more for the fancy umbrella than the other one and they sorted. I saw how they merchandised, you know. I learned a little bit about that. I got sixteen dollars a week as clerk. And then on Saturday, of course, nothing came in, then I had to go up on the floor and work in the men's department from 9:00 to 9:00. So I had the same number of hours to put in but I made sixteen dollars a week instead of fifteen dollars a week.

Now Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad: Aurora was a division office, the division headquarters, for the Burlington Railroad. It was located on South Broadway, and on North Broadway was located the Burlington shops. I have a railroad caboose on our property here that was built in Aurora up at the railroad shops. The foundry and everything up there; they had a turntable for steam engines, they'd repair steam engines, they could do anything. And they also had the warehouse, the storehouse, of all the supplies for the Burlington Railroad. That was a separate building up in North Broadway. In Aurora, one out of every three males worked for the Chicago, Burlington, Quincy Railroad. A lot of them worked as conductors, brakemen, engineers, firemen. They had all the call up North Broadway. That's where they called all the firemen and engineers to work, and down in the division office, they'd call the brakemen and the conductors, the passenger end of it. Now, there's an opportunity come in there for an office boy in the division

office, and my mother heard about it through a friend of hers from Batavia, that they were active in the Order of the Eastern Star—that's the ladies' division of the Masonic Lodge—and she was active in that. She was a worthy matron, went through the chairs and so forth on that. And he told her, he says, "You got a son, haven't you?" "Yeah." He said, "We're looking for an office boy. How old is he, and what's he doing?" She said, "Well, I'll send him to you." So I went to Marty Hassle was his name, H-a-s-s-l-e. He's from Batavia. And so I went to him and interviewed. And he says, "Yeah, in school you took typing and sort of a business course. You'd fit right in." So then I left my job at the Aurora Dry Goods and I went to the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy division office on South Broadway and Aurora as office boy. It paid eighty-five dollars a month. Now, you only worked 8:00 o'clock till 5:00 o'clock Monday through Friday, and then on Saturday, one day—one Saturday you'd work from 8:00 o'clock till 1:00 o'clock, and then you'd have the rest of the day off. The other ones, you'd work from 8:00 o'clock to noon, you'd take a noon hour, and you come back at 1:00 o'clock and work till maybe 2:00, 2:30. I don't know, goofy hours. But you had to get in the time there. But that was nice. Gee, I didn't have to work till 9:00 o'clock at night on Saturday, and I had a little jingle in my pocket, so I could have a date on Saturday night then. That's the first time I started dating.

DePue: Were you still living at home and—

Mitchler: I was still living at home, yeah.

DePue: —5:00 o'clock meals?

Mitchler: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. My parents were very nice about it all. We always had enough food on the table. I never went hungry. I don't know how they did it. But my mother was a good cook. Good German cooking—oh gosh.

DePue: Were you paying any rent or—

Mitchler: But it was basic food, nothing real fancy. She could bake pies—oh, apple pies, pumpkin pies, cakes, make cakes, pot roast. Oh God, we ate more pot roast… But it was good. Boy, she cooked it. I'd try to find restaurants, if they ever have pot roast. You don't see too much pot roast in restaurants. Once in a while you'll see a restaurant that features their pot roast. God, that was good food.

DePue: Were you helping pay for the food by this time, or…?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. I helped out a little bit at home, yeah. And I don't know how my folks did it on my dad's salary, because his salary was very low. He liked cigars. He never smoked cigarettes; he smoked cigars. Went to a doubleheader Cubs ball game with him one time and he smoked twelve cigars (laughter) at the doubleheader ball game. I didn't smoke.

DePue: Well, there's another thing that would be changed today, wouldn't it?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, that's—

DePue: So we're up to about 1939, 1940. Of course, in September in 1939, the Nazis invade Poland, and in 1940, they turn west and invade France and the Low Countries. And again, I would imagine you're of an age now where you're starting to pay attention to this a little bit.

Mitchler: Yes, I did. In fact, I started to pay attention. At a young age, we talked about it as young boys. When they started the draft—

DePue: That was 1940.

Mitchler: '40. They started the draft. I was working—I promoted myself from office boy. There was an opening as secretary to the assistant chief clerk. Now, what I did on my own, I went to Metropolitan Business School, which was in Aurora, and I brushed up on my shorthand, Gregg shorthand, and typing when I was an office boy because I knew that the next opening would be there. Now, I went from 85 dollars a month to 110 dollars a month. That is one big jump—100 dollars a month. And I took all the guys out, and we all had a beer. Now, I wasn't twenty-one, but hey, back then there were places you could pull in. They'd have drive-in. A girl would come out, and you'd have a tray, and they'd put the beer on the drive-in. You were kids, you know. I mean, it isn't like today. There was more freedom then. We didn't violate it. I wasn't getting intoxicated or anything like that. But hey, I liked the beer back then, our guys did.

Then I went from that job over to secretary to the chief clerk, and he was a dynamo. He was always pushing. Boy, I'd have to take quick letters and talk fast. I really was an excellent typist and an excellent stenographer. That's the way you elevated yourself in the railroad. Women never got the top spots in stenography and that there, because if you had to go out on a business trip or something, you wouldn't take a woman out on a business trip, or if there was an accident, you wouldn't even take them out of the office to go up to where the accident was to make the recording and everything like they did with me. They had a journal[1] break off and have an accident, and we'd go out and investigate it with the superintendent or the assistant superintendent. I would take it all down in shorthand, then type it up. And I was an investigative reporter.

Then I got a little tired of all the pressure on that steno job, and there was a job opening that was tonnage clerk, and that was way in the back of the room in the corner. So I'd make a bid; you know, you'd run seniority list. My seniority in 1937 when I went on the stenographer's job, there wasn't anybody ahead of me until the guy way back in 1929, because they didn't do any hiring

[1] **Journal** bearing and **journal** box as formerly used on a US-style **railroad** truck

during the Depression. So I had a job, guaranteed job, for fifty years at the railroad. Now, that was something that, you know, I treasured: protective job. So I was on the tonnage clerk job back there. I think that paid about 135 dollars a month. That was about the most I earned before the war, and that's the job I left when I went into the military.

Now, war is brewing in Europe. President Roosevelt: "I hate war. I will not send our men overseas to fight in a war." He never got re-elected if he said what he was going to do, but he knew what he had to do. I'm a Republican, but there's a lot of things that President Roosevelt did that he made good decisions. He was a smart man and all that there.

DePue: Well, that would have been the election of 1940 when he was—

Mitchler: 1940, yeah, that he had, "I hate war…but I love the smell of powder." (laughter) That was the slogan back then, you know. We knew what was happening over there; there was no way you can keep out of it. I was mostly young. Then they came with a draft. I had a number. I forget my number. I think 158 was the first number drawn, and then all the numbers. Everybody had a number. I had a number, being of draft age.

DePue: Yeah, 158, that represented a particular birthday or something?

Mitchler: Yeah. They drew numbers out of a big bowl that was down there and then they equated that number to your birthday or something. I don't know how they did it. But I wasn't early called. I had a couple fellows that were called—they got early draft, so they were drafted. And they went up to Fort McCoy or someplace. They had a song back then: "Goodbye dear, I'll be back in a year, I'm in the Army now," and that was a popular song. A couple of my buddies that I know, two of them, Roy Testin and Eddie Matthew, they were called in, they served their year, and they came back home. They weren't back home too long and then the war broke out and they had to get re-called again. But they actually were in and out in that period. A lot of the guys were in that period, for a year. It was mandatory service for a year, and then they came back. And then, of course, when the war…

Now, I knew that I was going to be drafted. My dad was a great Moose member. He was down at the Moose one time and the chief recruiter from Aurora was in the Moose. He knew my dad. He said, "Got any boys?" He was looking for guys. He says, "Yeah, I got two boys," and he gives them the ages. Well, my younger brother was too young; he was still going to school. I was ripe. I was just about—well, 1940—twenty years old, twenty-one. I turned twenty-one on June 4, 1941, so I was twenty-one. And he says, "What does he do?" "Well, he works for the Burlington Railroad." "What does he do there?" "Oh, he's in the office. He's a shorthand, typing and office work." "Oh." He says, "He could fit in the Navy, you know, clerical, and…" So he explains to

my dad, "Send him down and let me talk to him." So my dad told me, "You know, this recruiter is telling me maybe he's got a good deal in the Navy."

So I went down and talked to him. The Army never appealed to me. So he talked to me. He says, "You know, you got a lot of qualifications. You know shorthand; you take it down fast; typing, you type over a hundred words a minute, you know. I could put you in as a third-class petty officer." I said, "What's that? (DePue laughs) You know, I don't know anything about the Navy. I live in Illinois." He says, "Well, that's yeoman. Third-class petty officer in the Navy is equivalent to a sergeant in the Army." "I'd go in like a sergeant? Hey, now we can talk." He says, "Yeah. You get sixty dollars a month instead of going in as a private at twenty-one dollars a month." "Man, you got me." (laughs) So that's what really induced me to going into the Navy. So I told him, I says, "Yeah, I'll go in. Instead of getting drafted in the Army, I'll enlist in the Navy."

DePue: And that was what month, what year?

Mitchler: Well, I was talking to him about it in July of 1941—'40—'41. War broke out in '41, December. So then what I planned on doing, I told them at the office, I'm going to enlist in the Navy, so make plans to replace me, which they could do. And I said, "I'd like a little time off ahead of time, maybe," and I thought maybe I'd go out and visit my aunt and uncle out on the ranch in Wyoming, take a little vacation first.

DePue: Sounds like quite an adventure for a young kid.

Mitchler: Yeah. You know, what the heck, before I went in the Navy. Well, he came to me, and he says, "Bob," he says, "I got to meet my quota. I don't have time." So November 17, 1940—

DePue: One.

Mitchler: '41 is it? Yeah, '41. Before Pearl Harbor, before the war broke out, '41, I enlisted in the Navy. There was a fellow lived over here in Bristol, Orville Hextel. He enlisted at the same time. And I don't know where Orville is today. He's probably gone. The two of us, we took the train into Chicago, went down there. There was an office, and a captain. Raised our hands and we swore ourselves in, and we enlisted in the Navy. They put us on a train, sent us up to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. I got up there in the afternoon and assigned to a building in the barracks.

They had these big steel posts around, and they had these hammocks strung. So the first night, I slept in a hammock. You know, the hammock strung. All during my recruit training I slept in a hammock. Now, in the Navy, they issued you a small mattress; a mattress cover, which is a sheet, so you put the mattress cover on there; blankets; pillow; pillowcase. That was your bedding. Each morning, we had to put all the bedding in there, and then we

had to lash up seven turns and lash it up tight and pass inspection that your hammock was all lashed up. Because they had hammocks aboard the ships in the Navy, the battleships in the—

DePue: So that's the equivalent of going through Army boot camp and bouncing a dime off your bed.

Mitchler: Yeah. Fix up the bed, yeah. And I tell you, during my recruit training—now, this is the first time I had an experience like that. And I was naïve; I didn't know. I said, "Hey, this looks like wonderful!" I fell in love with the Navy. I took my—

DePue: They didn't have any crusty old sergeants who were training you?

Mitchler: No, we had a Mustang, we called them. He was an old Asiatic sailor, and tattoos, and he was over in Asia, Asiatic. Once you got over in Asia, that was so far away, you stayed over there. You became Asiatic. He was our head instructor. Then we had one other young instructor, a college graduate that they made chief. Of course he didn't have any hash marks, so they were called slickies.

DePue: Hash marks would mean you had years in service.

Mitchler: Yeah. He had just come in. They would put them in training because they were football players, you know, and they'd work with the company. They were nice guys. They were like coaches, you know, try to teach you how to fold this, your ditty bag, and how to—we always put close tops around, rolled everything. When I go with Federal Judge Dick Mills down there in Springfield—you know him—he's a very good friend of mine.

DePue: Yeah, I've interviewed him.

Mitchler: When we go on different trips together like we have, he noticed that I have all my clothes in my bag all there with rubber bands on them, rolled: my t-shirts and my shorts and everything. (laughs) He'd always look and say—he's an Army guy, you know (laughter)—and he just, "Mitchler, I can't figure you out." I said, "Well, they never get mixed up. When you pick them up, you don't get tangled all up like yours does in your bag, you know." So I learned a lot of things, and I liked the Navy.

Well, now, we went to church that Sunday morning, December seventh, came back and into the barracks—it was a small training center at the time—, and in each barracks you had a wooden table, and on the table was a little tiny radio, about this size. We had a radio. And about noon it was, after we'd been to church and had our breakfast, you know, we were listening, and they bombed Pearl Harbor. Where the hell is Pearl Harbor? We didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. We got ships down there. We got battleships. What's a battleship? You know, we don't know all this here. We're just as inquisitive

as anybody else. That's what you learned about there. So I was in November seventeenth, and then war broke out on December seventh, 1941 there.

DePue: What was the mood in the barracks then when you went back, knowing, okay, you'd just joined the Navy, and now they've bombed the main harbor, main port…

Mitchler: Yeah, everybody was shook up, and of course we read the news just about like everybody in the Midwest. I didn't know anything about ships. I didn't know a battleship from a cruiser or what it was until we read the news. Now, that was in November, and I stayed there. Well, they dropped all further training. I mean, they got to get these guys out. We graduated. We didn't have any formal pass and review or anything like that. We graduated, and our company—which you saw the picture in there—did get Christmas leave. I was home Christmas day, and I had to report the day after Christmas, and immediately boarded a train and out to the West Coast. So that ended my training. From November seventeenth to the day after Christmas, December, I was at Great Lakes. And then I got on a train and we took that two-, three-day trip out to Seattle and over to Bremerton.

DePue: What was the mood like when you went home for Christmas?

Mitchler: Well, everybody was excited. My father was very disturbed, I could tell. I'll never forget the day I left to go to Chicago to sign up. I think I noticed a tear in his eye. His voice was a little shaky, to think that his son was going to war, you know, in the military, getting drafted. He knew what was ahead. He knew what was happening over in Germany and all that, listening to the radio, and he knew that there was going to be a war. Everybody knew there was going to be a war. President Roosevelt knew there was going to be a war. Here's poor England get the hell knocked out of them over there, and we're sitting by, our closest ally, with Lend-Lease and all that excuse to get over there. He was very disturbed to see me go.

Now, I fit right into the picture, though. I liked the Navy. I don't think I ever troubled myself about being in the Navy. I knew my job. Any assignment they gave me, office work or whatever it was, I was very capable of doing it. And so when I tell you about my career in the Navy, I fit right in and rose all the way up to be chief petty officer and top rank. I had a good Navy career. I'm very proud of that.

DePue: Your initial specialty—I mean, because even your basic training had been interrupted right in the middle.

Mitchler: Yeah, my basic training, prior to that there, I might add that in 1937—this is an important thing in my life—in 1937, after graduating from high school in 1937, Roy Testin, who was one of my good friends in school, come to me, and he says, "Bob"—he played trombone in the East High band—"the

American Legion wants to have a Legion band, a cadet band." We had a big American Legion, World War I veterans, in Aurora, Main Street there in Aurora had their post home. Well, now, I'm out of high school; I have no place to play my cornet. He says, "Let's go down there and see what they got." So we went down to the post, and there was a couple of the Legionnaires, they wanted to have a band. And so we joined the American Legion Cadet Band. We wore those doughboy helmets, silver; they were all silver. We marched in parades. I was in the American Legion Cadet Band from 1937 until I got called into service. During that period there, we went to all state conventions. Oh, they were proud of their band. We marched in all the parades. And I got to know all these World War I veterans; these were terrific guys, believe me. These were all the heads of all these manufacturing companies. When it comes time for me later on to tell you about my political career, and I was coming, a lot of these guys, they were the CEOs of all the companies, the World War I veterans, you know, and they knew me because I played in their band and went to their conventions. We'd go down to Peoria and a convention, and they'd want the band to go in there and get all the free beer we could stuff in our shirts so that they'd have beer when they got back to the… (laughs)

DePue: Once again, Bob, you're making friends.

Mitchler: Oh, making friends like crazy! These guys all knew me, you know, from way back. I learned more from those World War I veterans—what a great gang they were—which I'll tell about in my life and association in the Legion. The American Legion, which I joined after I came back from military, was one of the basic tutors or gave me the ideals that I tried to practice my life for there. I particularly got this. Before each meeting—I was the commander of the local post, county commander—we all got up and recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, and then we'd recite the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion. It goes, "For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes," and then we listed those purposes. And that has been my creed, and besides my religion. I follow that. And that's what the American Legion was all about, and that's what I follow. That's—

DePue: Can we go ahead and read that into the record here?

Mitchler: Let me read that into the record, because I think it's important:

For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a 100 percent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom,

democracy; and to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

That's a good creed. And I recited that so much. My last office site had a glass over it, and I had that under there. I memorized it so I could say it from memory. And I like that. That's been sort of my Bible throughout life. I think that gives you a good purpose in life as a good citizen.

DePue: Well, it packs a lot of meaning in those words.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. And those guys that formed the American Legion back in 1919 and '18 and had their first convention, what the American Legion did in the '20s and up through the war and during the war, they were a powerful and an honorable association. I was very active on a national level and all that prior to my going in.

DePue: Let's get you back to just leaving basic training so you could head out, I think you said to Bremerton, Washington. That was your first—

Mitchler: Yeah. I got out to Bremerton, Washington. Of course, when you land out there, everybody's waiting for an assignment. Everything's in the computer poll. So I remember I was on a detail—they put you on a detail, you know how it is—and it was a night detail. And we got in the truck. Rainy. Puget Sound area—it rains every night. We went out on this big tarmac, great big cement area there, and we were going to weave iron rope, make a submarine net. We were going to make a submarine net to put across the entry so any Japanese submarines sneak into the harbor. I don't know, I don't recall too much if I was dragging that net and weaving the submarine or what it was. The only thing I remember, that night, they gave us an orange to eat. You had to peel the orange, and it's wet weather and all that sort of stuff, and I got all that dang orange stickiness on my hands and I had no place to wash it. I tried to catch rainwater or find a puddle of water. (laughs) It was a miserable night. I said, "Hey, I'm not for this." So I went to the guy and says, "Any office job? You know, I'm a yeoman. I should be doing work." He says, "Well, at night, we got some fellows that—you're good at typing—down here at the office where they're typing out nameplates for address labels." You type them out on a machine. Instead of typing a letter or something, you type out a name label on a little thing, and it kicks it over, so they could send out for soliciting war bonds and different things. "They got a crew that does that during the day, but then at night, so we get a lot of them done, we use extra help. You know typing, and that's a good job for you." So that's what I did for a couple of nights; I did my typing and typed those slugs out. And then I got a call and I got my first duty assignment.

DePue: What was your feeling at the time? Because this is right after Pearl Harbor, and there's so much uncertainty in the world, and you're on the West Coast of

the United States. Was there actually a thought that the West Coast might be invaded by the Japanese or attacked?

Mitchler: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Everybody's afraid. Yeah, they evacuated all the Japanese off the coast, you know, put them in concentration camps.[2] Well, President Roosevelt knew what he had to do, and he didn't know if they were going to invade or what the Japanese were up to.

DePue: Did you feel that certain tension that something might happen at any time?

Mitchler: Well… I'm a third-class petty officer. I had no burden of the war on me; I just had my job to do. You know, I never was called upon to make any decisions (laughs) at a high level, so I didn't do that. I just read recently, when Pearl Harbor got bombed, Roosevelt called on Admiral Nimitz. He was in Washington. He says, "You're going to Pearl Harbor. I want you to take command of Pearl Harbor out there." Nimitz flew out to Pearl Harbor, and he took a boat cruise of Pearl Harbor. He looked around, and he says, "Huh, they weren't as smart as they thought they were," and he named off the mistakes they made. "You see, they came in, those planes, and they saw those lines of battleships, and they couldn't resist to sink them. They hit all our battleships and turned them over in the water. Now," he says, "had our battleships been out at sea and they sunk them, we could never get them up, but we have no problem right now. We can upright those battleships, and we can repair them." That was a mistake they made. They weren't too smart, the Japanese. Another one was, he says, "They bombed us Sunday morning. Don't they know that 80, 90 percent of the crew on Saturday have weekend liberty and they're ashore; they're not aboard the ships that they bombed? They're ashore, and they were safe." Same way with the Army guys. They were out of the barracks. That was another mistake they made, bombing us on Sunday instead of during the week when everybody was aboard their ships, not on liberty. Another one was "Just over the hill there, where we had all of our fuel supply and everything, they didn't even bother that. They left all of our fuel supply and everything over there. They were interested in the ships; they didn't understand what could knock us out." And he says, "We're going to have no problem. We can fight back." Nimitz was a very smart admiral. In fact, I just got that on an e-mail a couple days ago. I remember reading about it. And he analyzed, and then he took over the Pacific and did a good job.

Well, getting back to me, my first assignment came through that I was to report over to Seattle, Washington, and I was to go to Sand Point, Seattle, which is in the northern section of Seattle, to the Naval Air Station - Sand Point. Now, we had a Navy air station there that trained pilots, these little yellow single-engine pilot trainers. That was one section. We had a Marine

[2] The correct term, Internment Camps, distinguished them from the Nazi concentration death camps. They were housed and fed in large enclosures and kept under surveillance for fear there might be assistance to the Japanese war effort. Many decades later the U.S. Government apologized formally for the treatment. In fact, many Japanese-Americans eventually served honorably.

unit on there that guarded the gate. Had a supply, and it sort of serviced the northern section of the Thirteenth Naval District, and we'd have PBYs[3] come back from the Aleutian Islands and up in there and land. And that was my first assignment. I was sent over there, and I became the operations yeoman, and my assignment was at the foot of the tower next to the airfield.

Another buddy of mine that was with me all the time, Billy Rau, R-a-u, from Indiana, he was assigned to the personnel office that they had on the base.

DePue: This was at Sand Point?

Mitchler: At Sand Point, Seattle, yeah. Naval Air Station - Sand Point, Seattle. I was down at the base. Now, that's the first contact I had as a job in the Navy, and I had no problem with it. I didn't have to take much dictation or anything, but I had typing, and the operations department, I had a phone box there that was up to the tower, out to the storeroom, and around. So I had to hit the buttons, you know; very antiquated (laughs) from what they have today. I was in the headquarters there. Good liberty. My gosh, the barracks were all brick barracks, all beautiful barracks. You didn't have your hammock anymore. Thick mattresses. Oh my. Good chow. Movie theatre every night. I mean, it was a country club. But my gosh—

DePue: Girls when you went into town?

Mitchler: Oh, down Seattle, that was a good sea town. And that is when I first made my liberties. When I'm twenty-one years old now, so I'm old enough to drink and all that stuff. Hey, put the blues on and put the cap on the back of your head and make a good liberty. I was a good liberty man. And go down there, and I learned to jitterbug, and they all had a whole lot of action down there, you know.

DePue: Did you have a steady girlfriend when you went to—

Mitchler: No. I left a girlfriend behind, yeah. That's the best thing that happened to me. That's the way I got out of it. (DePue laughs) I was going with her a while. They're always talking marriage, you know, getting married. No, I wasn't even thinking of getting married. No.

DePue: So you're telling her, "I got to do my duty; I got to enlist."

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah. By the time I put four and a half years in, in World War II, so by the time I got back, she was long gone. (laughs) Good way.

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[3] **U.S.** Navy PBY squadrons in the WWII Pacific that painted their Catalina flying boats flat black and attacked Japanese ships at night.

DePue: How long were you at Sand Point, then?

Mitchler: I thought at Sand Point that I was going to get transferred up to the Aleutian Islands, because Dutch Harbor and all those islands up and through that too, that was in the Thirteenth Naval District, and most of them were transferred up there. We were building up the islands, because the Japanese actually occupied Attu there at one time, and then they withdrew. We went in on an invasion and nobody was there; they snuck out on us. We weren't the powerful force at the outset of the war. I mean, we made a lot of dumb mistakes. We were a lot of hams. I'm talking about the Navy. So they didn't know just what to do.

But I enjoyed my assignment there. Now, all at once, we saw a large influx of WAVES coming on board our station and into the Thirteenth Naval District, the Women's Auxiliary Volunteer Emergency Service. And they were coming in as storekeepers, yeomen, radio operators, all this here, and they were coming in. Now they had to have a place in the—let's see, it was in photography. There was some girls in the photography. We had a photography room in the tower where they developed pictures and so forth. Then they had to have a room for the WAVES to use, just sort of a social room, rest room, or whatever it was, in the tower.

Now they fixed that room up for them. But they forgot there's a little box up in the corner of there, out in the storeroom, and all around, was connected to my central box down on the main floor. All at once I happened to hit a switch, and that's that box into the WAVES recreation room, you know, where they—I don't know—just went for lunch or whatever they did. And I'm listening to all these conversations. *Whoop*—I flick it off right away. I look around and see if anybody listens. (DePue laughs) Because this little incident that I put in—life in the Navy is funny. So I flicked it on again. My gosh, I'm hearing all these stories. Boy, I'm getting all the lowdown. I click it off. But there was one buddy that I had up in the personnel office there that I went to boot camp with. I called him down, and I said, "Come on down here. Come on down, visit me. I've got something I want you to hear." And I shared it with him. "Oh my God. We can't get caught listening in there. My God, we'd get court-martialed or something." But that was a little humor that we found out. We found out everything those girls were doing on the base, on liberty. They were all telling sea stories to each other, (laughter) and we'd flip it down there. Oh, there's a lot of fun in the Navy, and I'm sure the different branches of service.

Now, all at once, all of these WAVES came in. Out of a clear blue sky, we all got orders that maybe the next day or two days, we were to pack up our gear, report down, and we were going to get shipped out. Gee. I'm going to leave this plum of a deal? I got there in December, did I, or the early part, like January of '42? And I was there till September, fall. It was the fall of the year. And oh my gosh, they took all the yeoman, storekeepers, radio operators,

everybody out, put us on a train, and we went overnight—oh God, had a big coal-burning stove in the car that we were in. We almost froze to death. Over to Athol, Idaho. A-t-h-o-l. It's a little bit east of Spokane, Washington.

DePue: Athol, Idaho?

Mitchler: Athol, Idaho. We called it the Asshole of Creation. (laughs)

DePue: Well, you don't normally think of Navy when you're thinking of Idaho.

Mitchler: Idaho. They were building a new training center there, like Great Lakes, and yeomen and all them had to go over there to do the logistics and so forth. We went over there, and there was dust six to eight inches deep. They had these big tractors pulling these great big diggers, leveling the land, doing all this construction work, constructing a new training center. They were going to have four or five compounds where they would have training, different camps. One of them was named after Waldron, an aviation ace. I was assigned to the communications department in the general administrative office. Now, that job was around the clock. Our office was open around the clock. We kept our doors closed and locked. And we had a telegraph in there that comes over the old telegraph long strip, tear it off, paste it up. And we get all the incoming messages, outgoing messages on movements and everything. It was a restricted type of thing. I was in the communications department. We had three shifts, because we were operating around the clock. I was on that assignment for over a year. Now, augmenting that assignment, one of the things is when we would—eventually the camps got going, and when they'd graduate, we'd have to send them off to school. Now I'd have to put them on a train. That's why we were located—it was right on the Burlington train route. And so we put them on a troop train, and sent them all over the United States. They had to have senior petty officers assigned to go with them to escort them; that was one of the perks of being in the communications office, because we could take one of our fellows out and assign him on that job, so we always had one from the office out on one of those trips, taking him around. So we alternated.

DePue: What was your rank at that time?

Mitchler: I moved up to second class petty officer at that time.

DePue: Well, I'm looking at—

Mitchler: And then I moved up to first class petty office. I was all the way up to first class petty officer right fast.

DePue: I'm looking at this—

Mitchler: That's the same as a first sergeant.

DePue: —pay chart. It says, at least in today's military, that would be an E-6, which would be equivalent to a staff sergeant in the Army.

Mitchler: E-6. Staff sergeant, yeah.

DePue: So you moved up to there within two years; you were a staff sergeant.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, I moved right up. We had a Mustang, a guy that got re-called into the military, a Lieutenant Lachman. Now, he was an old Mustang. He'd been an enlisted man, chief petty officer, Asiatic duty. Every time I go in we're going to take one of these tours, you know, we'd have to go and get him to sign it. Oh, he was a great guy. I mean, officer. "Lieutenant Lachman, I've got to ask you to sign this **list**. I'm going to **take** a group of recruits to school." "Well," he says, "I'll ask you the question: Will this help win the war?" I says, "Lieutenant, it sure the hell will help win the war." (laughs) He'd laugh, you know. He says, "I'll sign it, then." If you asked for a two-day leave he'd say, "Is this going to help win the war?" you know. He was that type of a lieutenant. He'd been a Mustang over in China, and you weren't going to fool him on anything. (laughs)

DePue: When you say Mustang, what does that mean?

Mitchler: Well, he was re-called, you know. Yeah. Like our instructor at boot camp.

DePue: Okay, so you're there at Sand Point, but other than going on all these trips all over the country, I would assume that Sand Point isn't quite the liberty port that—excuse me, Athol wasn't quite the liberty port that Sand Point was.

Mitchler: Oh, no. Oh, no. Athol, Idaho had one tavern down there, one tavern. And there was a guy, Chuck Isaacson, from the state of Washington. His father and he were in the supply business for logging, chains and chainsaws and all that type of stuff, and he was a good buddy of mine. He was a storekeeper. He finally got assigned up into the Aleutian Islands from Sand Point, but he was sent over to Farragut, Idaho, the training center, like I was. He was assigned into communications. But he was in the telephone operating. He was a telephone operator. He was a storekeeper. And then he went up to the Aleutian Islands.

DePue: Well, my question here for you is, did you feel, by the time you got into 1943, maybe heading towards 1944, that the war was going to pass you by?—you were going to be stuck in the United States for the entire thing?

Mitchler: Yes. Fortunately, I didn't get into the Navy and thrown right out on a ship that I didn't know anything about; I had time to learn the Navy and protocol and chain of command. I liked the Navy. I enjoyed it. Good food, good association, good camaraderie. Oh, I fit right in. I was already thinking "I think it's a lot more fun than sitting there at the Burlington Depot down there in Aurora." And, oh, we took these tours. One time I took a tour all the way

from Farragut, Idaho, down into Miami, or Fort Lauderdale. Then I dumped them off, and I went down to Miami with a fellow that was in the postal office at Farragut, Idaho. He got transferred down, and I went down and saw him. Every time coming back, I'd always come through Chicago and I'd get a chance to come home and see my folks. You know, you always had a few days' leave in the trip, you'd work it in. Then the next guy'd go, and he'd route it around his hometown. Well, you did things like that, and in charge of a troop train.

I remember one time a little incident. I think it'd be interesting for what we're doing here, some of the things that you remember. We had a troop train followed a regular train. A regular passenger train would go, and then would come a troop train that would be behind it. Sometimes you'd have the second troop train. Now, I was on the second troop train with a load of sailors; I was taking them somewhere, and one guy got something in his eye. It was very serious. We had a corpsman on board, and he said, "It's more than I can handle." So I told him to radio ahead, call ahead—the conductor did—and have a medical doctor at the next stop. Well, what happened is the medical doctor from the Army base come out for a medical stop for the first troop train, he treated the guy, and he left, and he was on his way back to the Army base. So when we got there, we had to wait for him to get the message and come back to service us. So the train was going to be put on the siding; we were going to wait for that, the guy to come out and treat him. They did funny things back then. Now, what am I going to do, keep these guys on a train here? It's hot, and, you know, no air conditioning in those—they had like regular boxcars they put them in built as sleeper cars—for the troops.

So I saw there was sort of a tavern across the street. We always had guards at the front of each exit on the cars so the guys couldn't jump ship, you know, jump off. So I went over and talked to the owner. I said, "I've got a whole load of sailors over here. If I brought them in here, could you put guards at the door and keep them in here rather than sit on there? They're going to have to sit on there for about an hour, for an hour, an hour and a half delay." He says, "Sure, bring them over." He was real nice about it. He says, "I'll treat them."

So I said, "All right, everybody fall out and line up alongside." Well, they were just out of boot camp and I was a first class petty officer. Man, they'd snap to and snap to. I says, "Tell you what we're going to do now. We're going to go over here, and we're going to have food and drink, and you're going to have a little recreation. If I find one guy gets out of line, you're all going to be put right back on a train." You know, I was really rough to them. "Okay, start off: march." Well, they knew how to march. Boy, single file, in they went. They went in there, and this guy, he gave them beer and everything and they had a good time in there. And they all filed out and they went aboard and we took the head count. They're all there. Oh, I was their friend for life, (laughter) that whole rest of the trip.

That's the way I got along with people. You know, I wasn't rough on them. I always tried to take care of the troops, and we had a good time. That was one little incident we have. I like to tell that because it's very memorable. We took care of this guy, his eye was treated, and we went on.

DePue: I suspect the tavern owner kind of liked it too, because nobody was paying for these drinks.

Mitchler: Oh, we paid for it, but he was very generous. Oh, he was a nice guy. My gosh. Give them sandwiches on the house and everything. People were good. People were good. As you'd come by, you know, they'd wave at the troop train. Morale was good in the Navy. Well, we weren't drafted in the Navy; all had enlisted. We never had the draft till later on in the Navy. That was one thing: in the Navy, you enlisted.

DePue: Well, that's because they enlisted in the Navy so they wouldn't have to go to the Army.

Mitchler: That's right. But if any guy started to gripe, "Nobody asked you to be in the Navy. If you want to gripe, resign, go on in the Army, and then you're drafted, and then you can gripe. You enlisted. You raised your hand, didn't you?" "Yeah. Well, I guess I did. This is better than being in the Army, so what the heck?" (laughs)

DePue: But you didn't spend the whole war in Athol.

Mitchler: Oh, no. I had to volunteer to get out of there. I'd have spent more time there than I did. I volunteered for sea duty, and I asked for a cruiser.

DePue: Okay, well, let's back up just a little bit, Bob.

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: Just going through your career, up till this point, had you been on board ship much at all, rather than training?

Mitchler: No, no.

DePue: Did you know if you were going to be able to deal with seasickness and things like that?

Mitchler: No, I didn't know anything about shipboard. No, and I didn't get any shipboard training at boot camp, any post-shipboard training or… didn't have to go through that because I was a petty officer, you know. And I worked myself up. By the time I hit for sea duty, I was first class. But I did, I volunteered. I volunteered to get off of Idaho. I says, "Dammit, if the war ends or something, and, 'What did you do, Dad?' 'During the war, I was at a boot camp all my time training guys.'" (laughs)

DePue: Not just a boot camp, but the name of the boot camp.

Mitchler: Yeah. We called it the Asshole of Creation there, Athol, Idaho. But Farragut, Idaho, named after Admiral Farragut. It was good training. I worked hard there, communications. We did a lot of work there. I was proud of the work I did there. But I volunteered for sea duty, and I requested a cruiser. Now, I didn't know if that meant anything. So I was shipped back to Bremerton. I get over to Bremerton, and here's the chief in charge of the holding detail, a guy I knew from Farragut, and he was over there. "Hey, good." I says, "Fix me up with a cruiser, chief." He said, "We'll see what we can do." Well, right at that time, we were building our amphibious force. We had different sections in the Navy. We had submarine force; we had the air force, you know, with the carriers; we had minesweepers; and well, we had all the different branches, you know—demolition, this and that and the other thing. And they were building up the amphibious force; that was a separate force. You got a special patch on your shoulder if you were on the amphibious force because we had to take back all the islands that the Japanese took over in their initial thrust, and that was Nimitz's plan, and MacArthur.

DePue: But what was the mission of the amphibious force?

Mitchler: Well, to take over all the islands. The amphibious force, they were building these Kaiser ships. Build one in a week.

DePue: The Liberty ships?

Mitchler: A Liberty ship. A whole ship, one week. I mean, they were expendable. They threw them together. I mean, they were just… That's that ship you see right there, the one you got there.

DePue: Yeah, okay.

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: Nothing more than just a cargo ship.

Mitchler: That's right. The USS *Oxford*. Now, they had the APA, personnel, and AKA, which was supplies. Let's see if that's the right—oh, no, that's a minesweeper you got there.

DePue: Yeah. I got some other pictures here I can show you.

Mitchler: Well, there's one in there of my ship.

DePue: I got these off the internet.

Mitchler: Well, that's very similar to this one. Yeah, that's a YMS, air and minesweeper.

DePue: I should have written it down.

Mitchler: Well, this is the same type, this here, this cargo ship.

DePue: Okay.

Mitchler: Yeah. This says here, yeah, 218. Mine was 189. See the boats? All the boats they had on here, they'd lower those boats, and they'd come alongside. They have troops that get in here, and they go out, circle like this, and then away all boats on the invasion.

DePue: Well, tell us the difference—this is something the Navy guys love—

Mitchler: These are my two ships. This ship is like that one there.

DePue: This is something the Navy guys really emphasize when us landlubbers make the mistake of calling a ship a boat. So what's the difference?

Mitchler: Well, a boat is what you put aboard. These are boats. This is a ship.

DePue: So a ship carries boats.

Mitchler: Yeah. This is a ship. Yeah, if you call a ship a boat—it's a boat that's on board a ship, yeah. Some guys call their aircraft carrier a boat. But the proper thing—this is a ship, this is a ship, these are boats.

DePue: So the ship that you got to was what?

Mitchler: This one.

DePue: What's the name of it?

Mitchler: USS *Oxford*, APA 189. Now, all at once, the chief told me, he says, "I got to send you out here on this here with the amphibious. I got to send everybody on amphibious, send you to Astoria, Oregon." Astoria, Oregon. So I went up to Astoria, Oregon. Now, they had had a pre-commissioning detail formed down in San Diego area getting together. The crew that was going to go on these new ships they were building up, Kaiser ships, you know, throwing them together. As soon as they had one that was just about ready, then this pre-commissioning gang, as they got together all the different rates for the ship, they'd send them up, and then we'd board the ship. And I was on a pre-commissioning detail. There was only about four or five of us in the office. I never was down at the pre-commissioning detail in San Diego. I went right to Astoria. We had an ensign there, which is like a second lieutenant, and three other guys, I think. Maybe four. And then we waited for them to come up. When the ship was ready, then, we went right from there over to the ship. The first ship I got on. Now, I was sort of at a disadvantage there because I was first class, my next step was chief, and the guy down at the pre-

commissioning—down with the big group—was a first class, and of course he had the in with the commanding officer and everybody. Sao when we went about the ship, there was the opening for one chief, and he got it. I never got mad, though. I mean, he was ahead of me. He jumped me. And so he was made chief. Now, I'm aboard the ship. Now I'm froze. We only rate one chief, so I'm froze at first class.

DePue: What's the ship complement?

Mitchler: (pause) I should know that.

DePue: Just ballpark figure.

Mitchler: Oh, two, three hundred.

DePue: That many? Okay.

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we had the engineering and we had the guys that get the boats in the water and so forth, and then we have the regular quartermasters and things like that. They'd be about 150, 200, 300. But you had so many quartermasters, so many of each. So I missed out on my chief. I didn't like that, because that was my next step. I wanted to make chief petty officer. I was a going guy. I was qualified, and I liked to. I was sort of stuck. But I had charge of the executive office on board ship, and I ran that. Then we went out. Our first time we went out, we sailed out of San Francisco. Well, we commissioned the ship in Astoria, Oregon, and then we had to go out on sea trials with the whole crew, go up and down the coast, you know, run her at full speed, stop, you know, back up, go in reverse, do this, do that. And this was quite an operation. Oh, yeah, this is Astoria. That was a big fishy place. A lot of the WAVES that were there moonlighted and worked in the canning factory. They smelled like terrible. (laughs) You'd take a girl out and say, "You're working part-time in the canning factory, aren't you?" She'd say, "How can you tell?" One whiff! (laughter) Yeah. I mean, you'd pick a girl up, and you'd say, (sniff) "You work in the canning factory, don't you?"

DePue: Well, this is your first time on the ship out in the ocean.

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Did you adapt to that pretty quickly?

Mitchler: This is interesting. Yeah. Astoria, Oregon, yeah.

DePue: Yeah, we're looking at a map of the Astoria area.

Mitchler: I'm looking for one place we used to take the Liberty, leave out of Astoria. Yeah. Well, anyway. That was good. And then we went on sea trials. Now, the sea trials, you'd take a ship and you'd go up and down the coast and

they'd come to full stop, see how it works, back it up, turn it. And you got fellows aboard before the Navy accepts it. Once the Navy accepts it, then you commission it. So I'm a plankowner. Now, a plankowner is when you serve aboard a ship when it goes into commission. So I was a plankowner. You get a special certificate that you're a plankowner. And if you're like in the Navy League and you're active in there and you're at the christening, you know, you're an honorary plankowner.

But anyway, so we had our trials, and we went up and down. Went down to Long Beach, went down to San Francisco, up and down the coast, running through sea drills. General quarters. General quarters! See, the first time—I didn't know one end of the ship from the other. You know, "General quarters." I said, you know, I'm up on the bow. Got to get up there. What's the way up? Ladders go up one side and down on the other, you know, when you're going to general quarters. Don't ever try going—you go up on one side and down on the other. And what you do when you first learn the ladder is you grab hold of the top, you take one step, you slide right on down, and you're down at the bottom of the ladder, you know. You're agile like that. You learn that. General quarters. My general quarters here was always up on the bridge. I put on a headset of phones. My phones were connected to the forecastle, the fantail, port, starboard, engine room, several different damage control centers. In other words, if something would happen in combat, we get hit or something, then they'd report from damage control station number one, they'd say, "Damage control station number one, reporting to the bridge. We've got a hit down here. We've got an injured." And then I'd relay it to the officer of the deck or the captain, whoever was the officer of the deck. I says, Damage control center so-and-so reports this, or Fantail reports bogeys coming in at a certain thing or something, and I had communication. Otherwise it was all silence. Now, a lot of our invasions we'd go in, they knew I was up there. They knew me, and I knew who all these guys were, especially down in the engine room. They weren't supposed to break silence, but (makes popping sounds) real quiet, "What's happening? What's happening?" (makes popping sounds) You know, muffled. And I'd say, "Everything okay, okay. No problem." "Thanks." Well, these poor guys are down in the bowels of the ship; they don't know what the hell is happening, you know. They knew me personally, and I'd give them that little assurance, and that made them feel better. I felt real good about that. I wasn't really breaking silence or anything, violating anything on there.

DePue: When is the first time, then, that you shipped out for combat?

Mitchler: The first time we went overseas, we were in San Francisco, and we took off underneath the Golden Gate, and we knew we were going to head out. We went out in convoy. Now, this is the first time I have experience at sea. We're in convoy, all these ships. Most of them were like us, amphibious ships, naturally. And we'd make a maneuver. They'd put the flags up, what you're supposed to do. So all of them acknowledge to the lead ship what they're

going to do. You're going to make a turn to the starboard or you're going to turn to the port so many degrees. And they watch, and the head ship, up with a flag that said, "execute." And then the word would go: "Execute, execute," you know, and we'd do what the flags told us. We'd make a turn to the starboard or we'd make a turn to the port so many degrees. And that was the first time that I saw all these ships just like troops, *boom*, they'd all turn like this, go this way.

DePue: Any idea how many ships would have been in the convoy with you?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. We had maybe fifteen or so. Yeah. Then we had a practice. Then we had gunnery practice. We'd have general quarters, general quarters, general quarters. You'd go, and they'd have to get out on a gun tub forty millimeters. I never had any of that there. My duty was up on the bridge.

DePue: What was the largest gun that they had on the ship?

Mitchler: The largest what?

DePue: The largest weapon, gun?

Mitchler: Five-inch. They had a five-inch on the fantail.

DePue: For a landlubber, the fantail means…?

Mitchler: The rear, yeah. Fantail. Yeah, you had a five-inch there. The *Dixie* had a fantail five-inch gun one time, and we had a fake—this is during the Korean War. I'm jumping ahead; I'll just put this in. When I said five-inch gun on the fantail, that's a five-inch shell, about like that. And we had a fake invasion, so we had our gun, and it was loaded, and then we pulled off. We didn't make an invasion. And so the crew on the back there: "Request permission to unload through the muzzle," rather than take the shell out, you know, like we normally would. And the captain says, "Permission granted to unload through the muzzle." Well, this was a destroyer tender, never fired, you know, in battle. (laughs) So they pointed it at North Korea and they fired. (laughter) So all the guys—you don't know what that gun crew and that gun captain thought: I fired on the North Koreans. (laughs) Well, that's all they had on there then. They had forty-millimeters just for protection of the ship from aircraft.

And I was on that ship—we stopped at Pearl Harbor, and then from Pearl Harbor we went on down, all the way down to Nouméa, New Caledonia.

DePue: Nouméa?

Mitchler: Yeah. We crossed the equator. I got initiated as a shellback.

DePue: Well, I wanted you to tell us about that as well.

Mitchler: That is an experience. That is an experience. Back then, during the war and that there, when you were initiated into the domain of the deep sea as a shellback, that was something. Those that were on there, if you were a shellback, you kept your card, and on the day of the initiation, crossing the equator, why, one of the chiefs, the old-timers, would get all decorated up like King Neptune. He'd come up through the chain locker, and he'd sit up there on the forecastle, forward part of the ship right here. And he had his queen, attendants, and all the guys to do the dirty work. And then you were called up one by one—and this was all day long—you were called up and you had to give your name and everything, and then they put you through the initiation. They had a great big round canvas bag there, sort of a hollow thing, about from here over to the far door over there, and you had to crawl through that, and that was all filled with garbage. I mean, garbage. Coffee grounds, everything they got from the mess deck, thrown in the garbage can they had in there, and you had to crawl all through that there. That was one part of the initiation. Another one is you had to kiss King Neptune's toe, and as you bent over, they give you a… All you were in was skivvies, just a pair of shorts. I mean, you didn't have anything else on. As you bent over, they had a piece of fire hose about that long, and they'd give you a slap on the rear end. I mean, it hurt. There was a chaplain—he was a Baptist chaplain down in Georgia—they had him in skivvies and hip boots, filled full of water, standing on deck; he had a big, heavy chain around his neck, and it went out, and at the end of the chain was a whistle. And they'd take that long chain, they'd put the chain out maybe ten feet. They'd say, "Chaplain, time to blow the whistle." And he'd have to walk with his boots full of water over there to get the whistle, and as he bent over to get the whistle, *wham*, he got a (laughter)—he was sort of a little well-built on the rear end anyway. Oh, man, I thought it was cruelty. Really. I mean, they went beyond what they should have done with that man. And he got all sunburned because he was light-skinned. But he'd reach over to blow the whistle. He'd have to blow the whistle, and they hit him. What you went through to be a shellback, you'll never forget, and you got a certificate then. Now, they don't do any of that now. That's—

DePue: They don't?

Mitchler: No. It's very neat. They would never do what they did then.

DePue: So they don't have any kind of a shellback—

Mitchler: Oh, there's a shellback initiation. Yeah, they pull tricks on you and things like that, but nothing as mean, as heartless as what they did then.

DePue: But as I understand, each ship would have its own little nuances to the ceremony.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. And some ships were nice about it. In some ships, they got after certain guys, you know. Of course, they all knew me as the yeoman and all,

up there in first class, and I got a few heavy whacks on the butt by the junior seamen in my office. But it was all done in fun.

DePue: What'd you think of New Caledonia once you finally got there?

Mitchler: We got down there and we anchored. Now, this is one of my first things at sea. We anchored, and at the gangway, we had a bright light, naturally, so somebody coming up the gangway wouldn't stumble. These are my first time at sea, so I'm learning things. And I go there, and that bright light, and the water is just clear. You look down. You know, the Pacific is just as clear… You look down there and see everything in the water. I look down there, and this bright light shining attracted all these different fish. My gosh, octopuses swing by, sharks would swing by, all different kinds of fish. I'm not going to go swimming in the ocean (laughter) with all those fish in there. Now, that was fascinating to me as a guy from the Midwest; I'd never seen anything like that. And that's why I say you learn things. That was one of my experiences.

You asked me what I saw at New Caledonia. That was the first time we anchored like that; we were underway most of the other time or didn't have time to goof around and get ashore. And some of the islands… look over there and see all of those red-headed natives. I don't know, they had their hair dyed red, big bushy people. They gave liberty to the crew at a couple of spots. They hit an island; you could go on the island. They'd give you two cans of beer. The beer was frozen. So you put them in your hip pocket and hope that when you opened them up they were unfrozen. My two cans when I opened them up, they were still frozen, so I never got to drink any beer. But you didn't miss that there. You had a lot of camaraderie aboard ship. I made a lot of friends aboard ship. I don't think I had any enemies aboard ship there. A couple of the guys were hard to get along with, but I never got to the point where any problem.

DePue: Do you recall roughly the date when you guys sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and headed out to first combat duty?

Mitchler: Probably '43. I'd have to go back… See, you couldn't keep any logs. You write a letter, you couldn't say everything. You'd just say, "Everything's fine. I'm doing okay, Mom," and send it. That's all you could write. You couldn't say where you were, what you're doing, nothing. Everything was censored.

DePue: Okay. Did you go to Guadalcanal, then, because I think a lot of—

Mitchler: We came up from Nouméa, Caledonia; Guadalcanal had already been hit. It had been secured. We had a practice landing of the troops that we had aboard onto the Guadalcanal Island. That was the first drill we had , after we got out there. Put the boats in the water, went through, just like we were going to invade Guadalcanal. That was the first training session overseas.

DePue: Were these Army troops you had on board?

Mitchler: Army troops, yes.

DePue: And had they been on board since you shipped out?

Mitchler: Yeah, mm-hmm.

DePue: Makes for crowded conditions.

Mitchler: Very crowded. Glad I wasn't in the Army. Well, you get the infantry, and they'd have breakfast. As soon as they finished breakfast, they'd get up and get in the line for lunch. So they were in line all the time they were on board. Then they'd have lunch and they'd get in line for dinner. I'd walk up and down the these lines, looking at the guys, talking to them, hoping that I'd see somebody from my hometown. And I did. One guy, Jimmy Clausen. He was a cheerleader at East Aurora High School. God, he only weighed about 120 pounds. Little guy. And he was going to be in the one invasion of the Philippines. I was in two major invasions. We put troops aboard at different islands that were occupied in that that weren't secured. Some of them were secured. We were shifting all around the South Pacific. But the two major invasions that we had was the Philippines at Lingayen Gulf, and Okinawa, April 1, 1942.

DePue: Yeah. When was the landing in the Philippines, do you recall? Lingayen Gulf, is that…?

Mitchler: That was after MacArthur had to come back. He landed down here in Leyte, right here. Judge Mills and I, we went back for the fiftieth anniversary of the landing at Leyte. That's down near Tacloban. We had to stay at the one island. Then they had a typhoon in Manila, so we had to stay on this one island down here. But when we invaded Lingayen Gulf, which is up here—that says Lingayen Gulf right up here.

DePue: I think it's right in here where you see all the arrows going.

Mitchler: Well, maybe. Let's see, where's Manila?

DePue: Yeah, Manila is…

Mitchler: Oh, this is Manila. Oh yeah, here you go. I'm upside down. Here's Manila. That's a beautiful seaport in here, Subic Bay, over on this side. We come up and invaded down into Lingayen Gulf, which was going to cut the Army off. We had to come in through the Mindanao Straits—this is Mindanao—through here. Yeah. Now, as we came through here, the sea was like glass. Now, I hadn't been all around the world in the Navy, and I said, "My gosh, how come the ship would go through, five feet behind the ship, it'd level off like glass?" A little bit one island here, Mindanao. And they said, "Because it's so deep. This is a very deep part of the ocean, and it's home to all the sharks. There's a lot of sharks here." Boy, I was saying prayers, like, "If you're going to sink

me, sink me someplace, but don't sink me here (laughter) in this Mindanao Straits." That was sort of the first time I was a little nervous about it, because we were talking amongst ourselves about: Wonder what it is. But coming in through here, we knew where we were going, up here. But that was the only time I was really worried about if I got hit. I didn't want to get hit in Mindanao Straits.

DePue: Well, I would think there'd be plenty of mines that the Japanese had sown in the area as well.

Mitchler: Oh, they did. We had to go through minefields, particularly coming around through Subic Bay and through here. And we landed here. That's where I put Jimmy Clausen ashore. I watched. He climbed over, full pack and everything, and I waved to him, and over he went.

DePue: Do you know what division he was in?

Mitchler: No.

DePue: What was the mood of the Army troops, knowing that they were going to combat, I would assume most of them for the first time?

Mitchler: Well, the guys were pretty serious about what's going to happen, you know. They were going into battle, yeah. They knew. And they were hardened. They were well-trained. They were good guys. At night, they wouldn't go down and sleep below; it was too dang hot. They had a bunk; they'd sleep on deck, you know. Deck was loaded with guys sleeping on the steel deck. I had a bunk down below, but aboard ship I had a little compartment that was up here, and I had a cot that I acquired and a mattress I had stowed there. It was a storeroom right up here, and that was my stateroom. I didn't sleep down; I slept there. Now, it was too hot in there because they darkened ship and closed everything down. It was hot, and I'd often take my cot and I'd set it up right in front of the forecastle here, right here; forecastle up there. But right there, I'd set my cot up next to the superstructure. Now, I had a rubber thing that if it rained, I'd pull the rubber thing over me, so let it rain. Now, if you got general quarters, I had to jump out of that cot. I'd tell one of the soldiers, "Soldier, get in my cot. Guard my cot. You can sleep in my cot till I come back." "Oh, oh, yes, sir. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." So he'd jump up; instead of laying on the steel deck, he laid in my cot. I'd go up on general quarters. It maybe lasted an hour. I'd come back down, and I says, "Okay, out." He's like, "Thanks. Hey, you going to be here tomorrow night too?" (laughter) You know, things like that. I got along with everybody. When I'd go through the chow line, I'd always try to get two, three extra apples or oranges and if the guys are standing in line or something, I'd slip them an apple, you know. They'd come by the office. We always helped each other out.

DePue: It looks like the Army hit Lingayen Gulf, the landing there in Luzon Island, on the ninth of January 1945. Does that sound right to you?

Mitchler: That would be it.

DePue: Which I would think means that you guys were sailing north from Guadalcanal area. You spent Christmas in the open ocean.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah.

DePue: You recall Christmas on the open—

Mitchler: Yeah, two Christmases out there. Before we hit Lingayen Gulf, we were doing a lot of, I said, island hopping, taking guys from this island to that island. This island would get half-captured and we had to put in more troops, so we'd pick them up here and throw them in. I didn't know where we were. I'd go up and I'd look on the chart, but then I couldn't keep any records or anything. The quartermaster would let me see where we were, but he wouldn't let me make a copy of where we were or anything. And I didn't try to. I figured, if they want secrecy, I'll just forget what I'm seeing. So we went off from this island to that island to this island to that island. Went down to Ulithi and all different places.

Now, after Lingayen, we went back, and I don't know what island we went to, but we had to regroup and get ready to go up into Okinawa.

DePue: Okay. I want to back up a little bit. Do you recall, was there anything special that was done on Christmas on ship?

Mitchler: We got a Christmas dinner. How they ever did that, I don't know. We got turkey, sweet potatoes, the whole works.

DePue: When you got to Lingayen—this is one place that sounds like you were going into hot combat that was contested—was there artillery barrage leading into that?

Mitchler: Well, we being troop ships, we wouldn't be the first ones. The heavier line ships, cruisers, destroyers, and that there, would have been in first, and it would have secured the place for landing. So we didn't see much of that.

DePue: Did you see many Japanese aircraft?

Mitchler: No. No.

DePue: Japanese submarines?

Mitchler: No. Never saw any submarines. At this particular landing here, I did not know about any kamikazes.

DePue: That was a little early for that, I think.

Mitchler: Yeah. Okinawa, we went into the landing at Okinawa, and of course the fleet was out here, and that's who they were after. The kamikazes hit the destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and everything on the perimeter. They wanted to destroy them. I only saw one plane; in the invasion of Okinawa, when he came in, we were in close, unloading, and there was a sister ship near us unloading, and a plane came down, just missed our fantail, hit the water. It happened so fast, I didn't hardly see it. But I was on the bridge. We were on the flying bridge—not under cover up on top, the one that's wide open—on Okinawa. That was quite a sight to see. A lot of firing. On this side, there was rockets. (makes noises)

DePue: Had the aircraft, the Japanese kamikaze, had it been hit by you guys, as far as you knew?

Mitchler: It didn't hit much of our units that I was with.

DePue: No, I mean, did they hit the aircraft? I mean, it missed the—

Mitchler: Oh, our ship?

DePue: Yeah.

Mitchler: No, we never fired at any that I know of, no. We practiced, you know, but we never had any coming in at us like you see in the movies. You know, here comes one coming in. No, they were not really attacking the transports like that. They were after the capital ships. That's the ones that would do the damage. Submarines probably would like to get into our convoy, but we never had any problems that I know of with submarines.

DePue: Okay. I got a little ahead of the story. You were just talking about after you dropped off the Army troops at Lingayen Gulf. Then what? Then you headed south again?

Mitchler: Yeah, we went down to a couple of different islands and got prepared for the invasion of Okinawa. That was the next one. In between Lingayen Gulf and Okinawa was Iwo Jima. I was not in the invasion at Iwo Jima, but that was in between the Philippines and Okinawa.

DePue: Okay. You picked up some troops, then, again, someplace?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Where would that have happened?

Mitchler: Just out there in the islands.

DePue: I'm sure it all kind of blurs together after a while.

Mitchler: Yeah. Well, I never paid attention to what island it was. I could go up on the bridge—I knew the quartermaster—and I would ask him where we were, and he'd show me, but the Pacific is a big place, and there's a lot of islands out there, you know? We were a troop transport, you know; we'd take all these troops on it and unload them and put some more on and take them from this island to that island. Sometimes we'd do it individually; sometimes we'd do it in a convoy of three, four ships. I sent for the history of the *Oxford*, where it went, all this, you know, and I gave it to my son. He's a geologist. I said, "Here, take a big map of the Pacific now and look on here and show where our ship went, all around here and there." He never did that for me. I hope he'll do that someday. But we were on all different islands. They were smaller islands, because we'd pick up troops and we'd dump them off at another one. It was the idea where they need reinforcements for support. Because island-hopping was the way we did it down there, and hit the major ones.

DePue: Was it always Army troops and not Marines?

Mitchler: We had some Marines aboard once, yeah. Mostly Army. Infantry, infantry.

DePue: Did you have any rough weather?

Mitchler: We were in a couple, what I'd say small storms, but aboard the transport I don't think we were in any really rough weather. When I was in the minesweeping at the end of the war, and in the Korean War, I got in some rough weather on the type of ships that I'll tell about later.

DePue: Okay. Well, let's get up to Okinawa then.

Mitchler: Okay.

DePue: Tell us about what you experienced in Okinawa.

Mitchler: The Okinawa was really one great experience.

DePue: And as I understand, the landing started about the first of April?

Mitchler: April 1, Easter Sunday, April Fools' Day. And Okinawa is actually part of Japan. Iwo Jima was owned by Japan, but it really wasn't Japanese. But this here's sort of connected onto the islands that come down to the south of Japan from Sasebo. So that actually is Japan. Now, we grouped for that invasion; took on a whole load of Army guys. I didn't know anything about Iwo Jima being hit when I was aboard the *Oxford*.

DePue: You didn't hear about that until after the war?

Mitchler: Until I'd come back, yeah. You didn't know what happened on that island. You couldn't tell about it, you couldn't write about it, so you just did your duty, did what you were told, and try to keep peace.

DePue: Well, and that was primarily a Marine operation, almost exclusively Marine operation.

Mitchler: Yeah, that was a Marine operation. Well, we had our capital ships. We had landing ships just like ours that landed them in there. Yeah. Now, the Okinawa, we started out in a big convoy. Now, usually for an hour before sunrise, we set general quarters. Everybody gets a steak-and-eggs breakfast when we're going to do an invasion. They give you steak and eggs. We went up on the flying bridge. Now, normally you're on the bridge where it's enclosed, but we went up on the top bridge, which was the flying bridge, we called it. You could see every which way. Dark—oh, gosh, it was dark. Dark as pitch as we came in for the landing; as the sun started to come up a little bit, you know, your eyes get accustomed, you can see off. And I looked in that direction—oh my gosh, the ships. I looked in that—oh my gosh, the ships. I look behind me, and there's ships. I've never seen so many ships in my life as our armada coming into Okinawa. Of course, we never went right up to the shore, see. We were just back; we put the boats in the water; away all boats. Some of the landing craft went ashore and dropped the front end. Well, we didn't do any of that. Our boats did, but our ship didn't. I looked, and I saw all those ships. Holy man. Of course, I'm new in the Navy. This is the first war I've fought. So we saw all those ships. And that was a miracle. We were in there a couple days, and then we left there. It was a successful landing. We landed all of our equipment and everything on board, and it was a successful landing invasion. They got ashore, and then the fighting really started. That was a terrible massacre on there. I revisited Okinawa with my two sons on the military historical tours. We were on there for four days, and we toured the whole thing, saw all the fighting areas and everything. The people were at the lower end there. The Japanese were coming. They didn't want to be captured; they were jumping off a cliff, committing suicide, just jumping off.

DePue: Could you understand—

Mitchler: I saw that.

DePue: —how people would do that, what would cause people to do that?

Mitchler: Oh, they taught us a lot about Okinawa when we was aboard there. They still have those military historical tours. You can go on Okinawa. Well, let's see. I don't think we can get on Okinawa again, no. No, they got us off of Okinawa. You probably could go on there as a passport, just want to go in there on business or go there as a citizen, they'll let you aboard, but you can't go there on a military tour. In fact, they won't let them on Iwo Jima this year for some reason or other. But you were on here four days and then you took one trip

down to Iwo Jima and come back, with my two boys. But when we were there, they toured us all the thing. The thing about it is that this was a fight to death. They took schoolchildren and they'd give them a message and they'd say, "Take this message over there." And the little schoolchildren would run with a message. If they know they had a message, *boom*, shoot them down. I mean, they were that desperate. They had their backs to the wall. After Okinawa, the emperor said, "Hey, we saw what you guys did at Okinawa, and you're going to do the same thing on the island. We're going to lose a lot of people; you're going to lose a lot of people. It ain't worth it."

DePue: But that's contrary to what the samurai spirit that so many of them had been raised with.

Mitchler: Well, you had the military. The military had taken over control from the emperor. In fact, the emperor, when he made this decision to do it, they were going to assassinate him. The military was so strong, and they were going to go in and assassinate Hirohito. But his message to the people—he was so powerful—if you read his message to the people—and they were geared up to fight to death, and they were. Every woman and child and capable guy, they were going to fight to death. And his message to them, "In the best interests of our ancestors and us"—they got a different—they go dynasties, you know; they're different than us. Like if Obama would say, "In the best interests of George Washington, he would think that we should do this," you know. (laughter) To hell with George Washington!

DePue: Well, we're a little bit ahead of the story. From what you had told me when we met earlier, your ship evacuated Marine casualties to Guam after Okinawa? Does that sound familiar?

Mitchler: We took a few aboard. We didn't take too many casualties. No, we got the heck out of there. We unloaded them and then got out of there. We weren't supposed to take too many casualties, no.

DePue: So what was the duty for the ship after that?

Mitchler: Ship after that? We left there and went down to Guam. Now, we'd been out there for quite a while. We'd been in the invasion of Philippines and Okinawa, and—

DePue: And by this time Guam had been liberated as well.

Mitchler: Yes. Guam was okay. We could come into Guam, Tinian, Saipan.

DePue: And from there?

Mitchler: So then we come into Guam, and we have the anchor pool. Now, the anchor pool is whenever you're going to a major port and you're going to in there, everybody gets a little envelope; you fill it out, and it had a number in it.

When they dropped the anchor, it had to be recorded in the log the exact time the anchor went down, and if you had that number, then you won the anchor pool. See, sort of a little gamble. I won the anchor pool: one hundred dollars.

After I won the anchor pool, then we had a message come in: the ship was to go from Guam, Pearl Harbor, back to Long Beach, get reconditioned, getting ready for the big invasion—Japan. When you got to Pearl Harbor, you were to get rid of this personnel. No sense in having all this personnel on there doing nothing. Transfer them at Pearl Harbor, and we'll get them back to the States and get reassignment and get ready the ships. So I was going to get transferred to another ship. I was sort of happy that I wasn't going to go back to Long Beach and have to go through all the refitting and all that. So when we hit Pearl Harbor, I left with my hundred dollars. (laughter)

I went back on the USS *Doyle*. It was a destroyer that took me back to the States. I got to the States, and they gave me a little leave. I went home, come back to Long Beach. I got back to Long Beach; that was a reassignment place, and I was there for a short period of time. Now, my brother was in the Navy, and he was down and had an ATA 37. That was a seagoing tug. He was stationed down in San Diego and Long Beach, sort of up and down the coast. He had a 1935 Packard. So I made liberties with him, and we had a good time together. Now, that was after I came back from the minesweeping that I met him. Not at that time. I went right back, and then I went back on there, and I got reassigned at the base.

This is an interesting story I'll tell you about. He had the '35 Packard, and we were making liberty. Now, we needed gas, so I rode back to Illinois and give them the story that I'm out here on the coast in the Navy and I need some green stamps so I can buy gas. Gas was rationed. I don't know, somebody got at the rationing thing. I got a big brown envelope that was filled with green stamps. I could have had enough green [ration] stamps to supply the whole fleet. (laughter) Well, I let it be known that I got stamps. There was one place, a service station, where I traded; broadcast, I says, "Here, here's all these stamps. Give them to your customers." There was a lieutenant commander that liked to go down to the racetrack, and I gave him a lot of stamps, because he had to drive the car down to the racetrack, Surf and Turf down there, they called it. I got acquainted with him. He became a good friend.

I was there, and all at once I got word in the office, they're forming a minesweep squadron, go up and do minesweeping, and they want a yeoman in the minesweep squadron. I had a yeoman in the office that I got acquainted with, and he says, "You're going to be the guy," he says, "I can tell you right now. They're going to look down here and they're going to see you. You had experience on the APA. They're going to pick you. So you're going to get hooked." So the lieutenant commander comes up to me one time and he says,

"Hey, I want to introduce you to a captain, a Navy captain. He wants to talk to you." I says, "Oh, I know what it is." So I went into this room, and this tall, lanky guy—he must have been 6'6", skinny as a rail—he was sitting in a chair. They had a chair that sort of leaned back sort of like an Adirondack chair, whatever they call that. You know, you sort of sit back. Cloth. His knees went sort of up and down. Fryburgerhouse was his name. Fryburgerhouse. We nicknamed him Hamburger House. Nice guy. Captain.

DePue: What was his—captain?

Mitchler: He was a captain. He was sitting there. This lieutenant commander come in, and he says, "Captain, this is First Class Yeoman Mitchler. He's just been out with the amphibs and now he's back here for reassignment, and I'd like you to meet him. Mitchler, this is Captain Fryburgerhouse. He'd like to talk to you." And he looked at me. "Mitchler, are you ready to go to sea?" Now, here, I'm standing at attention, you know, like you do. I took one step back, snapped my heels together. I says, "Captain, a sailor is always ready to go to sea." But I kept a straight face. I thought he'd… (laughter) He looked up, and, What wise guy is this? And then he broke out into laughter, you know. He caught it. He was a real great guy. I didn't know if he was a hardnosed captain. You know, you had them in the Navy. They were tough, then you had the kind, and the in between. You know, you've got all kinds of leaders.

DePue: Well, I would suspect as a captain, which is a colonel in the Army, he had been in the Navy well before the war started.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Yeah. He worked his way up and…

DePue: Was he an Academy guy?

Mitchler: I don't know. I never got into that. You never questioned him on that stuff. I didn't know enough about the Navy—this is my first cruise, you know. I didn't know enough about the Navy to ever think about: is he an Academy man, or did he graduate NROTC, or how'd he get his commission? Was his father an admiral? Is he a hardnose, or is he good, a Mustang, or what? You never knew what you were going to run into.

DePue: I want to back you up a little bit, because about this time—this would have been, what, early summer of 1945?

Mitchler: Well, it's after April Fools' Day, Easter Sunday, so April, May, June… Must have been about June, something in there.

DePue: Okay. I want to ask you about your reaction to two different events that you guys certainly would have heard about. The first was FDR's death. You remember that, when Franklin Roosevelt died?

Mitchler: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, I do remember that. I heard about it from the quartermasters up there, and I went to our executive officer—I happened to meet him in the passageway. He was sort of a—nobody liked him aboard ship—very dominating, and none of the crew liked the executive officer. He was a lieutenant commander, and he wanted to make commander so he could get the gold braid on his… The captain of the ship was a commander, but we called him captain. And I met him in the passageway, and I says—I'd call him commander. You know, he's a lieutenant commander, but you call him commander. I said, "Commander, did you hear that President Roosevelt died?" "Mitchler, you're always starting rumors around here." Well, he's a cranky son of a gun. You know, give me the time of day. About ready to… You know. So I walked away from him. He didn't want to believe me. And then he found out. He never apologized or anything for… But that was his attitude, everything. He never got along with anybody.

We had a fellow on board ship—he was a lieutenant—Barclay H. Warburton III. Now, I had all the information. Barclay H. Warburton III. He listed he lives on Park Avenue, New York. That was his home address. See, I had there. His next of kin to be notified if anything happened was Mrs. Vanderbilt. He was a good-looking guy. You could tell he had class. I'd give him all my letters to censor. I said, "Censor this for me, lieutenant," and he'd be glad to do that.

DePue: The letters you sent out?

Mitchler: Yeah, sent home to my mother. I didn't write anything, keep any records. And I'd always give them to him because he was a real gentleman. This guy confined him to his quarters one time for something or other. I don't know. I thought to myself, you dumb-head, doing like that. He was a gentleman all the way. He stayed with the ship, after the ship from Guam went back to Long Beach, they refitted it, and they went out again, went up to the Philippines, and was all set for the invasion of Japan, and the war ended. And I suppose it being a transport, maybe they picked some stuff up and went home. I don't know whatever happened to them.

DePue: The other event I wanted to ask you about was hearing about victory in Europe when the Nazis surrendered. Do you remember hearing that news?

Mitchler: We didn't get in on that too much. That was in June, wasn't it, June fourth?

DePue: May. It was in May.

Mitchler: Fourth, sixth, right around my birthday. What was the date of that, June sixth or June…?

DePue: No, I think it was in May, early in May timeframe.

Mitchler: May? VJ Day[4]? Oh, no I'm thinking of VJ Day.

DePue: VE Day[5].

Mitchler: No, VE Day, yeah, that's right. VJ Day was, yeah, and then the surrender over there. No, we didn't hear a bunch about that. We heard about it, but that was…

DePue: No real reaction?

Mitchler: No, I mean—

DePue: Why, because your war was still going on?

Mitchler: Ah, we were in the middle of everything, yeah.

DePue: Well, that's interesting.

Mitchler: I mean, your mind kept pretty much to your work. You know, daily, you weren't thinking every… All day long, if you were interested in what you were doing, and keeping the ship operating, and the camaraderie, the different departments working, coordinating, you were busy. You were busy, busy, busy, busy.

DePue: Once you got reassigned to the USS *Scoter*, was it?

Mitchler: Well, that was interesting, yes. The USS *Scoter*, this ship right here. It was in the Cerritos Channel. Now, this was a small minesweeper, and—

DePue: What was the channel you said?

Mitchler: Cerritos Channel. It's right near Long Beach.

DePue: Okay, go ahead.

Mitchler: And anyway, this Captain Fryburgerhouse, after I pulled the trick on them, we got talking, he says, "We're forming a minesweep squadron, and we're going to take it out." Now, he was going to be COMRON Nine Nine, Commander Minesweeper Squadron Nine. He was going to be in command of a group of ships, a captain, because on a ship like this here, you have a lieutenant, lieutenant JG or something. You didn't have to have a full captain. And he was going out. He explained to me what we were going to do. He was a nice guy. Oh, I mean, you could talk to him like I'm talking to you. You respected the rank and everything, and he respected you, but you could talk to him, tell him personal stories, and he'd tell you one back and everything. Because he

[4] VJ Day, Victory over Japan

[5] Victory in Europe was on May 8, 1945 marking the end of WWII in Europe.

became a good friend on there. He was lucky he had me. He lucked out in having me. I was first class yet because I didn't have any billet. You got to have a billet. You know how it is in the military. So we took off on—

DePue: In other words, you had to have an assignment.

Mitchler: —the *Scoter*. I reported aboard the *Scoter* and I got aboard, I put my gear aboard. I had the '35 Packard out here. And this big black fellow came on board, and I said, "What are you?" He was going to be the cook for the commodore. He was going to be part of our staff, not aboard the ship, but on our staff. And he come aboard with some light gear, and I said, "You got all your gear aboard?" He says, "No. I got to go over. It's all over in our barracks over in Long Beach there, the holding pattern. I got to get a bus and go over and get it. I said, "Well, hell, I got a Packard out here. I'll take you over there and get your gear and help you." So we went in the Packard and I took him all over there. I didn't have any racial problems. I mean, you got along good with… The blacks, all they were were cooks, and that there. They couldn't be a radioman; they couldn't be a yeoman at all when I was in it. I mean, it was segregated. They knew it; I knew it. I'd come by the galley and I made friends with all the blacks in the galley. I'd give him a smile, and he'd go over and cut me a big piece of apple pie or something, you know. (laughter) I mean, you know, life in the Navy was good. And I was good to him. So I took time off and went over there to get this black guy's gear, help him out. Oh, he was a big black fellow. He showed me a picture of his wife. She was bigger than he was. "Oh," I says, "I bet she's nice loving." "Ohhhh man." (laughter) You know, things like that; we talked back and forth. That's the camaraderie that you had in the Navy, in your billet. I'm sure that any other services were the same way. So we picked up his gear. Now, while he's picking up his gear, I had put a little radio in the car, underneath. It was just fastened in. It was a portable type of thing that I had a radio in the car, because all '35 Packards didn't come with a radio in the car; you had to buy that extra, you know. Well, '35 Packard. This was in the '40s, so it wasn't a new one, but I put a radio in so we had a radio. And I was listening to the radio when he was in picking his gear up, and that's when I heard President Truman say, "The war has ended. Japan has given unconditional surrender." So when he came out, I says, "Good news. The war is over." "The war is over?" I says, "I just heard it on the radio."

So now we go back to the ship. I help him with his gear, get it aboard. "Officer of the deck, I'm going to go make a delivery." "Nope, nobody can go ashore. Everybody's got to stay aboard." I said, "Now, wait a minute. I got a '35 Packard there. I got to get that to my brother. I'm going to be back away." He says, "We're sailing in the morning, 0800." I said, "I know. I'm on the staff. I'm not aboard this ship. I'm with the captain." "No, can't go ashore. I got orders to keep everybody here." He's an ensign or something, new guy in the Navy. Well, I had enough salt by then in my veins, I says, "Now, wait a minute. You want trouble? You're going to be aboard this ship. I'm the

commodore's yeoman, and I'm just going to go, and I'll be back to ship in time to sail. I'm not that dumb I'm going to jump ship. Now, the commodore's going to know about this. I want to go ashore." "Well, you're not really with the ship then." So he knew right there he better find a way to get me ashore. So he says, "You're not really with the ship, you're with the captain." I said, "Yeah, that's right." "Okay," and he let me ashore. (laughs) That's the first time I'd pulled my… I thought, What was I going to do, let the Packard lay there? So I got my brother, and we went up and made a great big liberty up in LA that night. Some guy broke into my car and stole that radio. (laughter) We stayed at the…hotel that was the two towers, and they were a connecting hotel. We always stayed there. They had a big dance floor down below, and we'd go down there, my brother and I. We'd always get a table and sit down there, and they all knew us. We had a lot of fun, sailors, you know. Anyway—

DePue: Quite a night…

Mitchler: —I got back in the morning. Early morning I come aboard, before 0800, and reported aboard. We sailed at 0800. And I said goodbye to my brother, and we took off. Stopped at Pearl, transferred to the USS *Endicott*. I got a picture of that in there. That's a little larger. It's a four-stacker destroyer converted to a minesweeper, and that was our flagship. That would be our flagship from then until we returned to the States. Now, the war is over. What we had intended to have a minesweeping operation go up into Japan and sweep the mines so our troops could land. We now got an assignment to go up and sweep the mines so that we could go in peacefully. We would have the Japanese show us where the minefields are, but we would have to sweep all those mines before we could start bringing in our cargo and coming into Japan after the signing of the treaty, like they had at Tokyo Bay. They had to clear Tokyo Bay of mines and everything so that it could come in for the surrender aboard the Missouri. So this ship went from Pearl Harbor, then we transferred to the Endicott, went to Guam, to—let's see. Went to Okinawa. Went to Okinawa, into Okinawa, Subic Bay, and that's where we had all the small minesweepers. They were YMS, yard minesweepers, YMS. And they were little wooden. They manufactured those things like they did the troop ships. They had all those at Okinawa, in Buckner Bay. Subic Bay is in the Philippines. Buckner Bay.

We were in Buckner Bay for a bit, and all at once we got a typhoon warning. Well, now, a lot of these YMSs had been doing minesweeping, and they were gathering there, and a lot of them were incapable of going to sea. They were cannibalized. They needed a part over on this ship, and they'd cannibalize it from this ship, you know. And they had all these YMSs, and they were getting all ready to go up and minesweep up in Japan, because they been busy minesweeping for the invasion of Okinawa and Philippines and all the other ships. This typhoon was coming: All ships get out to sea. Get around the island, and get over to the protective side. We were able to get around there and get our *Endicott* headed out to sea, and we rode out the typhoon.

The YMS 472 was a ship that a friend of mine from Aurora, Elmer Renner, Elmer Renner—he was with Stephens–Adamson manufacturing company. He was lucky his dad was with the company, and he got to go to college after he graduated. He graduated a year behind me, 1938, but he got to go to college and he got a college degree, so he got a commission. And he was just coming into the Navy. This was his first trip. He got assigned on YMS 472. He was put out at sea from Buckner Bay and rode the typhoon out; his ship collapsed, and he got put aboard a raft, he and a couple other guys, and they were six to eight days aboard a raft. That's an interesting story.

I rode out the typhoon aboard the *Endicott*. Now, you talk about this Captain Frybergerhouse. We're up on the bridge, and I'm hanging on there. We're inside, you know. The dang thing goes down. Here's the waterline right in front of us. The damn bow comes up, you know. The bow goes down, the rudder's up in the air, the propellers are spinning. We're in a typhoon. He turned to me, and he says, "Mitchler," he says, "you ever been in one of these?" I said, "No, sir, captain, never been in one of these." (laughs) I was scared. I was really praying. After a couple of dives in there, and I kept my breath, "Captain, have you ever been in one of these?" "Sure." He says, "Don't worry. We'll ride this out. This'll be a rough ride." Heck, I don't really like a Ferris wheel, tell you the truth. A couple more. "Captain, I'm sure glad to hear you say that." (laughter) I felt relieved because he wasn't worried a bit. He says, "No," he says, "we'll ride it out. This ship is capable of doing that." See, he was an old salt. So I learned my lesson. I rode the typhoon out. Now, Elmer Renner, his ship went down. I was getting the *Aurora Beacon News*, my daily newspaper. My folks subscribed to it that it would be sent to me. Sometimes I would get fifteen, twenty issues at a time, and I'd try to sort them out by date so I could read them right. I'd read them, and after I read them, then I'd turn them over to the crew. All the crew read them. Oh, they liked to read… Headlines: Elmer Renner Lost at Sea. YMS 472 Sunk in Typhoon, Buckner Bay. So many YMSs are sunk. Hey, lost Elmer Renner. So what happens? After we get back to Buckner Bay, Captain Frybergerhouse gets orders from the headquarters: Conduct an investigation on all minesweepers. Account how they made out during the typhoon. Delay going up sweeping the mines. This is where he's lucky he had me. So we had like a court inquiry. He called a couple of the officers in; we started interviewing. We called in the captain of this YMS. "What did you do?" Everyone. Well, we went out; we rode it out; this is what we experienced. I'm taking all this down in Gregg shorthand, see, and down, all day long. Well, we had a little break. Then I have to sit up all night, type it up. I never got any sleep there. I'd type it all up in proper form and everything, turn it in. Next guy got down to 472. They were talking about 472 was sunk, and who'd they find? Well, they reported Elmer Renner and this other sailor were washed ashore. I says, "Captain, may I interrupt?" "What is it, Mitchler?" I says, "I get the *Aurora Beacon News*, and that ship was reported in headlines that it was sunk, and Elmer Renner graduated in the class of '38 from East Aurora High School, and I'm '37, and it was sunk, and Elmer Renner was lost at sea. Elmer Renner now is safe. He

was brought ashore, washed ashore?" "Yeah." "Whoa, that's interesting" and everything. So that all went into the record, and I continued writing on. They had it on all those ships. Oh, I worked my butt off.

When I got back, I told that story to Elmer. He's in Aurora yet. And every time I'd see him, I'd say "472," you know, and he'd smile. (laughter) We'd have a big joke about it. But I took the court inquiry there. And how they performed as a first class, when I was only first class billet on the staff, but aboard the *Endicott*, there was a billet for a chief yeoman. So I was with him and stayed on the staff. We went up, and we swept all the mines, all up through Japan, till May of 1946. Everybody's going home but me. I had enough time and everything, but I enjoyed the Navy. I was having good… Swept the mines in. I got to go ashore in Japan, everything, Tokyo and everything. Then we had a five-day R&R—went over to Shanghai, China, five days in R&R. And then when we got over there, he said, "Mitchler, we're going to transfer you." I said, "Uh-oh, what's up now?" "We're going to transfer you from the staff to the ship so you'll get that opening. They've got an opening for a chief petty officer yeoman. We're going to make you chief yeoman."

DePue: Finally.

Mitchler: Finally giving me my—well, I didn't care what I was over there. I got the same kicks. So I made chief. So then I board the *Endicott*, and I come back on the *Endicott*. We came back to Pearl and back to San Francisco. Now, we hit San Francisco, and I'm with a group of chiefs. That's the best rate in the Navy. It's better than being an admiral, hell. Made some good liberties. There were a couple salty chiefs on there, and we had good liberties in San Francisco. They knew spots; I knew spots by then. I was getting to like the Navy. I had no ties back home, you know, no girl I left behind and all; that's all gone. But I didn't have a college education, and I saw that if you had a college education, you could be an officer in the Navy, because I saw many guys come in as an officer just because they had a college education. So I said, What I'm going to do, I'm going to go back to the railroad, protect my seniority, and I'm going to ask for a leave and go under the GI Bill and go to Aurora University—Aurora College at the time—and get a college education. Then after I get my college education, I'm going to think about enlisting in the Reserves and then try and get back on active duty in the Navy as a LDO, limited duty officer. I had no desire to be a ship driver, be a captain of a ship, at the helm and all that, zigzag and do all that stuff. I wasn't enthused about that. But there were a lot of positions in the Navy like public affairs officer and things of that type that fit into what I would know about.

DePue: What I want—

Mitchler: And I liked that, and that was my goal after I got back. So I stayed in the Navy a while. I waited till my brother got discharged, then I took a discharge on the

coast, and he and I hooked a trailer on the back of the ’35 Packard and came back to Aurora.

DePue: Now, we’re going to pick up the next part of the story after lunch, because we’ve been at this just shy of three hours.

Mitchler: Hey, yeah.

DePue: Yeah, yeah. It’s already lunchtime here. But I do want to ask you a couple questions.

Mitchler: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember hearing about dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima?

Mitchler: Yes.

DePue: Anything particular about that? I mean, did you even know what an atomic bomb was at the time?

Mitchler: No. That happened so quick before the surrender. You see that—

DePue: Yeah, that was August sixth, August eighth was Nagasaki, and the fifteenth was the surrender.

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah. So I was back in Long Beach there waiting to go aboard this USS *Scoter*. That’s when we heard about the atomic bomb. And to tell you the truth, I didn’t really know what the atomic bomb was. They dropped an atomic bomb; it blasted Hiroshima and then hit Nagasaki and then resulted in the surrender.

DePue: Now, there’s been lots of controversy, I’m sure you’re aware—

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: —after the war about us using the atomic bomb—

Mitchler: Using—oh, yes.

DePue: What’s your view on that?

Mitchler: Oh, I think Truman was right. No, I support Harry Truman in his decision. I think it was best for the Japanese people. They lost a lot of people, but I think had they not dropped the atomic bomb and we had to go through with a regular invasion—and the invasion was all planned out. I mean, they had which one would go here, which one here, the landing. Japanese had five thousand kamikazes in reserve that were just waiting for the invasion force to get in close, and they were just going to send them up and sink our ships and everything. The loss that such an invasion would have by the people

themselves with bamboo sticks and everything, they'd fought to death. And I think Harry Truman, to drop that bomb, to show them that we had a weapon like that, and Hirohito, the Japanese guy, had enough strength, and he knew it, and for his people, he made the right decision.

DePue: You said you did a lot of minesweeping around the Japanese waters. Did you have a chance to see Tokyo that had been bombed out by firebombs?

Mitchler: Oh. I walked all through Hiroshima in December 1945, right after they bombed in—was it August?

DePue: That was four months, five months afterwards.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. We went in and we swept mines in there, and I actually walked in there. I got a haircut. Another sailor and I—now, this is before I was made chief. I was still a sailor. Because when I was on the minesweeper staff, I was still a sailor. But the captain knew all along, he knew what he was going to do. As soon as they got through with their squadron, then he was going to transfer me over there and give me that promotion. I felt very proud of that. But no, this other sailor and I went, and we were walking through. Now, the people were trying to get back into order, and a guy had a barbershop. I said, "Let's get a haircut."

DePue: This is a Japanese guy.

Mitchler: Yeah, Japanese. So I'm in the chair. My buddy's sitting there, and the guy's—you know, they shave your neck—he's there with the razor. And my buddy starts laughing. This Japanese guy, he stops, "Oh, oh, oh, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. No. No, no, no, no, no." He couldn't talk English, but, "Oh, no, no, no. Don't—no, I'm not going to use the razor on you." He says, "No, friends, friends. Emperor says friends." If the emperor told him—now, there's a guy completely what the emperor said. It was like Jesus Christ coming back to earth and coming up to a Christian and telling him something, kneel, and you'd kneel. That's the way, the control he had over the Japanese. And oh, no, they were wonderful. We went and we swept mines into places, went in and got talking to people.

There was one fellow there, he was an older fellow, and he had been to the United States a lot. He says, "You know what I miss most? Toast." He says, "Toast?" He says, "Yeah, a good piece of toast. You know, they had toasters over there in the United States. We haven't had anything like that over here all during the war, a toaster." So this fellow I was with, made a liberty with, he was an electrician. He says, "I'll make you one." So he made a box and ceramic stuff in there, and he put a bunch of wires, I don't know, and he had the voltage. And he made him, and we took it over to him. He said, "Now, here, you plug this in, and you hold your bread over the toaster like that, and you can make toast." He says, "You guys are all right." He could talk

good English. He says, "You guys are all right." He says, "I'm going to do something, but God, don't tell anybody that I'm doing this." And he went and he got out and he got a bunch of swords. He gets about I think it was ten or twelve swords. He says, "Here, you guys take them." He says, "We're not supposed to have these. I'm supposed to have turned these in. I don't want to get caught with them because, boy, if I get caught with them, you know, they're rough on us over here." So he gave us these swords. And so we took these swords back. Got a dozen of them. So we threw them on the bunk, says, "Okay, let's divide them up." I says, "You made the unit; you get first choice." He picked a sword, and I picked a sword. They're down in the basement. So I had about four or five swords there. They're only swords like that. They aren't too fancy of swords, but they're swords from Japan. I show them to my kids. They're not impressed. They don't…

DePue: What were the conditions you were seeing that these Japanese were living in, especially places that had been heavily bombed?

Mitchler: Bad, bad, bad, bad, bad. They were destitute. They were hungry. They were eating anything they could. They were beat. But they wouldn't quit. They were going to fight to death. You see, they talk in dynasties. They don't talk in periods and all that there. That's just one period of a dynasty. The same way with the Koreans. They're not like us. My gosh, we're a young country here, a couple hundred years old.

DePue: Now, reading the stories, I know that the Japanese people were told all kinds of horror stories about the Americans.

Mitchler: Oh, everything. Oh, they're going to cut their eyes out and…

DePue: Were they—

Mitchler: No, they didn't—

DePue: Were they resentful or disrespectful or…? No?

Mitchler: No, they were very polite. We met a lot of people over there, and they were very, very polite. Particularly when I went back in the Korean War. I was stationed in Sasebo, and when I went there, I went to a restaurant. I was a chief petty officer then. This is during the Korean War. And Elmer Grover Gentry, chief boatswain mate—he was on the USS *Franklin* when it got hit, won a Purple Heart.

DePue: What was his last name?

Mitchler: Gentry. Junior. G-e-n-t-r-y Junior. He got cancer and died. He and I saw a little Japanese restaurant and said, "Let's go in there." It was strictly Japanese. The girl waitresses couldn't talk English or nothing, and of course we talked goo-goo language, you know. They lost people in Hiroshima, family, but they

had no resentment to us. They understood and everything. And we take pictures of us sitting there on a pillow, you know, eating the Japanese food they cooked. Very friendly. To think that they would be that friendly after losing family members on Hiroshima and all that there. I also visited Nagasaki and saw the bombings structure there. That Hiroshima, that leveled that place off just completely. There was nothing other than one, two little structures, standing. I got a plate hanging on the wall in there I'll show you I got from…

DePue: Okay. I'm going to take this opportunity to push the stop button, and we'll pick this up this afternoon with part two with Korea.

Mitchler: Good. Am I doing what you want?

DePue: Absolutely, senator, absolutely. You've got a great memory. I appreciate that.

Mitchler: Yes, I have. Well, I've told these stories, you know…

DePue: (laughs) A few times over, huh?

Mitchler: Yeah, and they're—I don't exaggerate. I just try to tell the truth. Yeah.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Robert Mitchler

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Interview # 2: June 29, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, June 29, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in Oswego, Illinois this afternoon, and this is my second session with Senator Bob Mitchler. Good afternoon, Bob.

Mitchler: Yes.

DePue: We had a very interesting morning talking about your career in the Navy during World War II. Where we left off before we took a break for lunch—and thank you very much for lunch—we had gotten you home in 1946, and you had decided to go back to college on the GI Bill. So where did you go to college?

Mitchler: I went to Aurora College. My idea was that when I came back in May of '46, practically everybody was home already because they released them quick, but as I say, I swept mines over there after the war. I appreciated that time in the Navy. That was another phase. I was in the amphibious and the minesweeping, two major different types of operations. So when I came home in May of '46, most all the guys were settled by then. One guy come up, and he says, "What are you going to do, Mitch?" I said, "Well, probably go back to the railroad. When I go back there. I got the job, but I can go back tomorrow and do the same job I did when I left. I don't know just what I'm going to do." He said, "Well, get with a 5220 club." I said, "What's a 5220 club?" He said, "Well, you get twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks or something," sort of an unemployment thing. Or you could get fifty-two dollars for twenty weeks. I don't know what it was, 5220, it was. I said, "Where do you do that?" "You sign up over here. Get in line." So I went over there and I got in line so that instead of hurrying back to work, maybe I'll get this, where they give you spending money, you know. I was in line, and I said, what the

heck am I doing in this line? Bob Mitchler, you don't get in line to get a free lunch. I said, you got a job waiting for you. So I got out of the line, and I never did sign up for it. But even back then there were a lot of guys that were getting it because it was free; the government had a 5220, they called it. You know, if you come back and didn't have a job and you wanted to get settled and all that there, that was one of the big advantages after World War II.

Well, I went back to the railroad. So I sat there for a while. This is after World War II. Somebody in the office was looking for a file. Now, I had been gone for four and a half years, and I was on the second floor of the division office down there on North Broadway, and they were looking for a file. I said, "Well, that dang file's in the back storage room." And I went in the back of the room there and I found the file, I gave them the file. Now, here they were working there all the time and they didn't know where that file was. I don't recall just exactly what it was. I went back, sat at my desk, and I says, Now, Bob, you got to have a hole in your head. You've been gone for four and a half years, and you got to show them where the files are around here? (laughs) Well, they were wonderful people, though, that I worked with. I don't think there was anybody in that office that I could be critical of. They all helped each other. I wasn't too good on adding all those figures, and I was a tonnage clerk, had to add up all the tonnage of the different freight trains to send it in, to report so they'd know how they were doing. And when it came time to add up all the figures, there was an elderly lady there that worked for the railroad at for a long time. We had a great big computer thing there.[6] But boy, she could hit those keys like *boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom*. And I'd say, "Would you add these up for me?" *Boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom*, you know, and real quick. And she'd do that for me as a favor. I says, "Thank you." Otherwise, I'd have to—we didn't have adding machines or anything like you got now. We didn't have these jobs with computers and all that. So that's the way they were there. We worked for each other and helped each other out, and it was good.

I remember one time I was sitting in the corner there, and pretty hot on the second floor—no air conditioning. The middle of the summer. So I brought a small electric fan I had at home and I plugged it in. "Well, you can't do that." "What do you mean you can't do that?" "Well, you're using company electricity." A couple in the office that were nervous that maybe the superintendent would come and see me using company electricity for a fan. He says, "And pretty soon you'd think everybody will want a fan blowing by him." I mean, that's the attitude people had back then. So different today. My gosh, if you haven't got the air conditioning on, they go home, take the day off. (laughter) But anyway, those are the things that I experienced in life and has taught me to be what I am today, whether I'm on the right track or wrong

[6] At this period, probably a mechanical calculator rather than a computer.

track. I think I'm on the right track. I'm enjoying—ninety-one years old, and I'm in good health and…

DePue: You talked about your father being really nervous about your going into war. What was his reaction, then, when you came back home? Was he proud of your service?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. Very proud. He was very proud when I was in and everything. He liked it. He was proud of his two boys. Yeah, he always treated us nice. My dad never had to strike me or anything. He was a good father. He was a big man, had a big wrist on him. All he had to do was look down: "Bob." That was enough. He had a commanding voice, and I knew what he meant, and I obeyed.

DePue: So eventually you're getting to Aurora College. A about what year would you have started there?

Mitchler: 1946. '47, '48, '49, '50. Yeah, about '46. And I picked Aurora College—a lot of the local fellows were going to Aurora College.

DePue: Was that a four-year college?

Mitchler: It's now a university. Yeah, it was a four-year college. It's now Aurora University. They've enlarged it. But at the time it was a Christian college. They came up from Mendota to Aurora and organized it. Not a very big campus. Very strict in their religious beliefs. You attended chapel on Thursday; it was mandatory. However, when the no smoking—if they caught you smoking, you got expelled.

DePue: What was the denomination of the…?

Mitchler: That was the Advent Christian Church. They had an Advent Christian church in town. But they drew a lot of their students from out on the East Coast. Like ballroom dancing. One of the fellows told me, he says, "If I wrote home and told my parents I was at a dance, they'd bring me right home." Because out where they lived, if you went to a dance, it was at a roadhouse or something like that; it wasn't the type of dance halls we had back here. It was just the understanding back then. And it was no smoking, and if you got caught smoking, you would get expelled. Well, then the GIs came in, well, they changed that. They wanted the attendance of the GIs and all that for the school, so they had, "Put your cigarette out outside the building", and "No smoking in the buildings".

DePue: Did you smoke at the time?

Mitchler: I smoked in World War II from the time I was about eighteen. I wasn't a heavy smoker. I smoked because everybody smoked. Oh, I had a Ronson lighter, and I had a cigarette case that had them in it. I smoked during World

War II when you got them for a nickel a pack. But I wasn't a heavy smoker; I could quit anytime. And after I came back from World War II in 1947, I was working at the railroad yet before I went to college. And I don't know what I did. I lit up a cigarette when there was one there or something. I says, "Everybody in the office, listen. I'm going to make an announcement." Well, oh, what's Mitch up to now, you know. I think I was the only veteran in the office. (laughs) Had all these older ladies. I opened the window. I says, "I have quit smoking." And I took the pack and I threw it out the window. And I've never touched a cigarette since, except once. When a guy picked me up in Seoul to take me over to another airport—he was on one of these great big tractors that haul tanks, and he was the driver—and I was hitching a ride. I went to Seoul to go to the airport, and they moved the air flights over to Tokyo over to the other one. He was going over there, and he gave me a ride. And he says, "Hey, would you light me up?" Oh, he's on this big truck. So I put it in my mouth, and I lit him up, took one drag. That's the only other one. I sort of snuck one in. (laughs)

DePue: Well, I think that's allowed, Bob.

Mitchler: He thanked me. And I didn't think I was violating my oath. (laughter)

DePue: Okay. What did you major in in college?

Mitchler: Just business. I entered, and I never took it serious, because my thinking behind was, I got to get a college degree. Now, my father came over as an immigrant, had a limited education. If I would ever get married—I was single then and everything—if I would ever get married and have children, I would want them to have a college education, because I saw the officers were college graduates, and most of the enlisted guys were high school graduates. That was sort of the majority, you know. And I said, so I'm going to get a college education, and now is the time to do it. I got the GI Bill. Greatest thing they ever did. And so I was a little late getting into the program. So I went and I said, I'm going to get a college education.

Now, this was a challenge to me on the subjects I had to take. Algebra was my worst. Oh, gee, that was tough. But I got in. I had to take one course, the History of the English Language. Gee, I thought, oh, boy, this is going to be something. But after I got into the course, I got interested. I had a beautiful teacher. Her name was Sinden, S-i-n-d-e-n. A beautiful lady. Her husband was a photographer. Oh, they were a nice couple. And gosh, what a wonderful teacher. I just became enthused, and I learned all about the history of the English language, which I never thought I would take an interest in. And I got into another class, the Romantic Period. They give me three big red books—all these poems and things in it. I thought, oh, gosh, I got to read all that stuff? I'll never pass this course. I got reading them—Helen and I had a little apartment at the time, because we were just married, newlyweds, like—and I got reading all this stuff, and ooh, I thought that was great. Boy, I put a lot of

time reading it. And some of the courses that I never thought I'd get interested in. I really got interested in education. And I didn't get straight A's or anything like that, but I got good recognition.

During my college years, I organized the College Republican group. Dwight Eisenhower was running against Stevenson from Illinois for president at that time. And I had all the girls—

DePue: Was that in 1956?

Mitchler: '56, I guess, something in there.

DePue: So we're way ahead of the timeline by now, because you've been to Korea and back by this time.

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: Go ahead.

Mitchler: And so—well, I had one year when I came back from Korea, so this was before. This would be after. Whenever that election was. And I had all the girls—I put a notice, You're going to fix your bangs like Mamie [Eisenhower]. You got to comb your bangs to look like Mamie. We're going to take a group picture, submit it to *LIFE Magazine*, see? Well, I was the leader. Oh, man. Monday morning, all the girls, whether they were—they didn't know whether they were Democrat, Republican, or Independent—they all fix their bangs like Mamie. That's one of the historic photos of Aurora University. I sent it into the *LIFE Magazine*. I thought it might get it published. They wrote back; no, I didn't get published. I sent one to Mamie Eisenhower. Oh, she wrote a beautiful letter. I put it on the board, you know. Oh, they thought that was great. (DePue laughs) I was very active in politics back then. Yeah.

DePue: Let's drop back to when you just got into Aurora College. And you've already mentioned here, you got married during this timeframe. So tell us a little bit how that happened.

Mitchler: Well, I got back; I was single. And I did buy an automobile. The first automobile I bought back when I came back from the war was, I think, a '46 or '47 Hudson coupe. You couldn't get cars, but you could get this Hudson. It was a coupe with a little seat in the back. You could never get into it, it was so tiny. I bought that car, and then I traded that in in 1948 for a Roadmaster convertible, Buick. Yellow, red upholstered. Three thousand three dollars. Three thousand three dollars, Roadmaster Buick convertible, brand new. I made the mistake, I said, "Now, I want one with a radio." He said, "Roadmasters all come with radios." (laughter) You know. I didn't know. I bought it. So I had that.

Well, I met my wife, Helen. There was a picnic; one of the guys said we're going to have a picnic up in Batavia. And yeah, he says, "Helen Drew, you met her." I says, "Yeah." A cute little blonde. I didn't know. And he says—Richard Marty, Dick Marty, was one of my good, close buddies, and Lyla Marty. Lyla Marty was a nurse. My wife is an RN nurse from Copley Hospital, and they knew each other, and they were in the gang. And so I says, "Well, yeah," I says, "I'll take her to the picnic. But I'm going to go out and set the picnic up," because I had the afternoon off from class. "and you bring Helen, and then I'll take her home." I mean, you know, because I couldn't come into town. I was setting the picnic up at the quarry. And she did. She come home, and then I took her home, and that was my first sort of date with her. And *bing*, man, that was it. This gal was something else. So I asked her for another date. And, my gosh, I swear, where you been hiding? You know, entirely different than any of the other girls I ever met.

DePue: So what was different about Helen?

Mitchler: I don't know. There's something about her, her mannerisms and everything about her, that just clicked with me. When they say love at first sight, sort of. And it's the truth. And so I asked her again for a date, and another one, you know. And I ask her, I says, "You go with any guys, or what do you do?" Now, actually, we lived on Simms Street; she only lived about three, four blocks from where I did, and I never met her. Of course, I was gone in the Navy a lot of the time. I met her and we hit it off.

DePue: Well, my guess is she had no shortage of beaus or people who were interested.

Mitchler: Oh, no. She was going with guys. Oh, she had plenty of guys going with. She was going with one guy. So, I don't know, I took her, I says, "I'd like for you to knock off all the other guys and you go with me." She did. And, I don't know, I must have sold her on it. I don't know what… But I picked it out. It was love at first sight, and we got along, and we've been married sixty-one years now, raise a family and everything. Now—

DePue: What year did you get married? When did you get married?

Mitchler: June 16, 1950.

DePue: June sixteenth?

Mitchler: Yeah. Now, I got one more year to do at Aurora College. So we're on our wedding trip—we got married June sixteenth. I'm in the Reserves. I did swear in the Reserves and took weekly training and took the two weeks annual training and that. So we were on our honeymoon. We were driving out west. We were going to go out to my uncle's ranch and see the western states. Driving along in this yellow convertible Buick, got the radio on. Twenty-fifth of June, North Korea invades South Korea. And I turned to her, I says, "Goodbye." She says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Did you hear that? You

know I'm in the Reserves, Navy Reserves." "Yeah." I says, "I'll get recalled. We'll have to go back to war." Well, she didn't know anything about that. That wasn't in the plan at all, you know.

And so then September, I had to report up to Great Lakes and keep reporting up there every week. And September, I got my orders. I called down to her one time, I said, "I won't be home tonight." She was working as a nurse at the Dreyer Clinic. That was in the Graham Building downtown. Now it's one of the big clinics in Aurora. But I think they had eight doctors at the time. But anyway, she was an RN. So I called her. I says, "Helen, I won't be home tonight." She says, "Why?" I said, "I've got to ship out. We're leaving." I said, "Now, you knew that was coming, yeah?" So she went, told one of the doctors, who had been in World War II, Army doctor, she told him, she says, "Bob just called; he says he won't be home tonight. He's shipping out." So she always tells this story. He said, "Would you like to go home, you know, and take the rest of the day off?" She said, "Oh, no, I'll stay here and work. What am I going to do if I go home?"

So I took off. I was gone seventeen months. I got shipped out, and we got sent out to San Francisco, and off the *Heintzelman* troopship, went over to Korea. It was a long journey over to Korea. We stopped at Okinawa just briefly. We stopped at Pearl Harbor just for a quick one, just stop and then move on to Okinawa, stop there, and then up to Sasebo. Now we'll talk about the Korean War now, okay? So we got in there about four o'clock, 1600 in the afternoon—

DePue: Now, this is September or October of 1950?

Mitchler: Yeah, '50.

DePue: So at that point in time, in Korea, things are going real well for the United States. They'd broken out of the Pusan Perimeter, and—

Mitchler: No, they hadn't quite broken out. Let's see. Yes, they hit at Inchon.

DePue: That was in September.

Mitchler: Yeah. They had hit it, Inchon, in September. That was one of MacArthur's strategy. The landing at Inchon; people should read that. The *New Jersey* and the battleships and the cruisers in there. MacArthur, he called on the Navy; he says, "Will you do this?" But he says, "That's a tough landing, because the China Sea, the tide comes in and out. It's like a thirty-knot current in and out. And Pusan Harbor, when the water's in, everybody can go in, but when it starts to go out, you better get out of there or you're going to be high and dry in a half an hour."

DePue: Yeah, it's one of the worst tides in the world. I think it's like thirty-, forty feet drops as well.

Mitchler: MacArthur said, "No, I'm going to call in the Navy." And the Navy says, "Well, do you really think…?" He says, "The Navy never let me down yet." (laughs) That's one of his words. He had confidence. So the *New Jersey* was shelling, and the carriers, and making some strikes. And they made the landing, which cut off the supply line, which made the South—the North Koreans, they advanced so fast down to Pusan—they had the Pusan Perimeter down there—and forced the people—oh, they were just living in the hills on cardboard boxes and things. And they pushed him down there to the Pusan Perimeter. When he made the landing, that cut off all their supplies; they could see they were in trouble, and their troops went into disarray. Then, of course, they broke through and advanced back and pushed them back up again and came down, got South Korea, and then advanced north. Now, my landing about 1600 in Sasebo Bay, which was the big port there for our ships…

Let me go back. Why did the United States get into the Korean War? When North Korea attacked South Korea, it was a surprise attack. They'd been going to different ideologies. South Korea wanted to be a democracy; North Korea wanted to be a communist-influenced type of state, and so the two were divided in ideologies. To win it over the north, which was sort of superior in military and industrial and everything up north, whereas the breadbasket was in the South Korea. And they attacked, and they had no problem in capturing Seoul quickly. I think they got a hold of Seoul—it was just in the paper the other day how fast they took Seoul.

DePue: Yeah, within the first week or so.

Mitchler: And come down. Well, they went to the United Nations, South Korea did. And they went to the United Nations and to the Security Council and asked for help. Now, China and Russia did not vote, as I recall, but the United Nations Security Council voted that the United Nations members should come to the aid of South Korea. Dean Acheson, who was the Secretary of State under Truman, brought that message from the delegate to the United Nations: "Mr. President, the United Nations asked that member nations come to the—and help South Korea." So Harry Truman ordered his Navy, you got an Army, appointed MacArthur, "You're commander of the forces. You come to the aid of South Korea." So that's why we entered the Korean War. And he went to Congress and got approval of Congress. Congress voted for it, because the United Nations had asked us and requested it. So there was formed a United Nations Blockading and Escort Force, CTF 95—Commander Task Force 95. Admiral Allan E. Smith, Naval Academy grad, was commander of the United Nations Blockading and Escort Force. Thirteen navies. The first United Nations action since its formation after World War II. He set up his staff on the USS *Dixie*, AD-14.

DePue: AD meaning?

Mitchler: AD—that's a destroyer tender. That's a big ship in which destroyers nest. You know, they park alongside of it, maybe eight, ten of them at a time. Destroyers can go aboard a destroyer tender and have an operation for appendicitis and get eyeglasses fixed, their teeth fixed. They can get anything down, anything you repair, you need on a destroyer; a destroyer tender can do that out in the Far East. And we have all these destroyer tenders all over to take care of our destroyers, like the mother ship, so they can nest all the ships alongside. So the USS *Dixie*. And that's where he had his CTF 95 embarked on the USS *Dixie* as a tenant.

Well, we got in there at 1600, and everybody had chow, secure for the night. Eight hundred, they had posted the colors, you know, aboard the ship, the Union Jack and everything, issue the orders, you know, "All hands turn to."

DePue: The Union Jack?

Mitchler: On the front of the ship, bow of the ship.

DePue: But I thought this was a U.S. ship.

Mitchler: Well, I'm on the—what was I on then? (pause) I got transferred over to another ship after we hit the… I was on the *Heintzelman* when I got over there. Let me think what I was on there, because I know it was right after they did their "All hands turn to," and that was the first thing. And it was the first after they got the ship going, the first thing, "Chief Mitchler, lay down to the administrative office." That was the first thing that came that morning, the next morning after I landed. So I reported down there. They says, "You're to report immediately over to the USS *Dixie*, Admiral Allan E. Smith." What the hell is this now? I know it's coming off something new. So I get my gear and everything, get aboard a whaleboat and go over to the *Dixie*, come aboard and report aboard. So the chief over there met me, chief yeoman: "Boy, am I glad to see you! Oh my God," he says, "Admiral pulled me off of a destroyer, my ship. I'm on a destroyer out here. He pulled me off here. I'm on this staff here. Oh, he's a mean son of a gun. Oh man, oh man." He was cussing them up and down, everybody was scared to death of him, and this, that, and the other thing. And I said, my gosh, what have I gotten myself into here? He says, "You're my relief. Boy am I glad to see you. Good luck, God bless you, and…" (laughter) Oh my God, what a welcome over there, you know, after I'd been with a minesweep squadron, like Captain Frybergerhouse and the officer is beautiful, you know. Navy—I love it, I want to be part of it. (laughs) You know, I'm in a bag of worms. What's happening here?

So they showed me the office where we had about fourteen in the office there. I was the leading petty officer; I was to take over there, and I had some sailors in there, yeomen. I went in there and I got my bunk in chief's quarters, got squared away. He says, "You got to go up to the radio shack. The

admiral's up there. He gets a report from up in North Korea on the west coast there of Korea where they got all the islands—up in the north part of Korea, on the west side there—got all those islands up there, and the minesweepers are sweeping so we can get in there.

So I come into this room, and there's the admiral sitting down there, straight-faced, Allan E. Smith. All the officers around, commanders, captains, chief of staff, and everybody. So I sit down. I'm supposed to take down what comes over the radio. They're all listening and they're all making reports to the captain on what's happening. They have the evening report on minesweeping. And so the evening report is in. The radio's crackling, you know, as radios do. It isn't clear like your television here. And they started going. What the hell? I don't even know what they're doing, what they're talking about. They're talking about "In cigarette, we went this way, Lucky Strike, we went this way, Old Gold, we got that about halfway swept," and they're reporting on all these channels they got. Old Gold, Lucky Strike, Chesterfield. Hell, what am I into over here? So I'm writing all this stuff down, and I type it up, just about what I can write down. Nobody talks to anybody. Everybody's standing there like this. The admiral's quiet. Then in the morning, same thing I had to do. In the meantime, I'm meeting the guys in my office that I'm going to be in charge of.

I've got to run all these guys. Then at night. I did that to two days. Nobody introduced me to anybody. I went down, and I talked to the guys in the office and met the guys in the chief's quarters where I was berthed and slept and ate. Chiefs always got separate quarters on the ship, you know, and the separate mess. Chiefs have the best mess on the ship, better than the officers. They got the commissary guy there, and we chip in and we got everything, good bunks and everything.

Finally we're sitting there. The admiral looked at me—now, this is about the second or third day I'm doing this. Now, I don't butt in. I know, keep your mouth shut. You're only a chief, you know, got commanders and captains around here. He said, "What's your name?" He looked at me. I says, "Mitchler. I'm chief yeoman. I just reported aboard, sir." "You do a good job." That's all he said. Whatever I typed up, you know, I could take anything down they wanted, and I typed it up. I didn't know what the hell I wrote up. Lucky Strike this way and that way—all Greek to me. But that was his first words that he said. "You do a good job." And that's all he said the rest of the time.

I got to meet him, and I was with him over there—well, I was over in Korea before I went up to Panmunjom. I was in a long time. His officers were all scared to death of him. Boy, he'd throw things at them and test them out on things. I don't know. I'd go in his office—you know, I have to take dictation and stuff—and have a cup of coffee. I mean, he was the nicest man. He told me about his sons. "Sons, they can't make decisions. A guy's got to learn to

make a decision." He's an Annapolis graduate. He said, "My two boys, they can't make decisions. Mitchler, you make decisions." He said, "I'm watching you. You make decisions." (laughs) He liked me. The officers all knew that he liked me, too, and that was bad because they didn't like me then, some of them. (laughs)

DePue: What was the specific mission for this task force, then?

Mitchler: Well, our mission was to blockade and escort all ships on both coasts of Korea, keep the sea lanes open all around—

DePue: That's a huge job.

Mitchler: —all around Korea. All the way up to North Korea, including all the way up the Yalu River, all the way up in the China Sea. You know Korea. And we had thirteen navies to do that. We had the British, Australian, we had two from Siam—I'll tell a story about that. It was a rather unique command. I was really elated. My boss was the admiral. I was the admiral's writer. Always carried a pencil right here in my cap, over my ear, and a notebook in my back pocket, a little notebooks I take notes down.

DePue: Well, being a writer and being a stenographer, at least in my mind, that's two different things. You say you're—

Mitchler: Well, they call them the admiral's writer, but…

DePue: Did you draft messages and letters and speeches and things like that?

Mitchler: Not so much speeches. We had a public affairs officer that did some of that, a lieutenant. And we had a lieutenant that was sort of in charge of the organization. And we had operations officers. We had a regular staff. We had a chief of staff, a full captain.

DePue: Did you have some foreign service officers on his staff as well?

Mitchler: Not on his staff there, but we operated with foreign officers. He'd have foreign officers come aboard from the different ships, and he'd go over and visit. Yeah, we had thirteen navies, all under one command, the United Nations Blockading and Escort Force. Some of them were over there, small navies. British had them over there, good. We had everything there. We had aircraft carriers; we had cruisers. We had the New Jersey, the Missouri. Now, the *Dixie* then the *Prairie* and then the *Piedmont*. Those were three destroyer tenders. And each of those, we transferred as soon as the *Dixie* had six months' duty, then they went back to the States. They only stayed over six months. We transferred the flag, our staff and everything, over to the *Prairie*, and we're on the *Prairie* for six months. And then the *Prairie*, when it got its six months done, it went back to the States and was relieved by the…

DePue: *Piedmont*?

Mitchler: The *Piedmont*. The *Piedmont*. Now, I didn't go back, but I transferred three different ships. The last six months of the *Dixie*, a full six months on the *Prairie*, and then over to the *Piedmont*. I was transferred off before the *Piedmont* had its six months.

DePue: Bob, this might be a good point to interrupt you here and ask you about Navy mentality and the kind of ship you were on. Because I would think being on a destroyer tender would be one thing, but some of the young, cocky guys, young officers especially, would want to be on something like a destroyer, or maybe, better yet, on a cruiser or a battleship. And then you've got the folks who are on the aircraft carrier who probably really tried to lord it over everybody else. Is that the case?

Mitchler: No, I don't think so, because the tenders, they had experts on their, machinist mates, electricians, and all the different trades, radiomen and all them, that knew their stuff, because they had to repair equipment for the destroyers. No matter what they brought on board, they'd say, "Hey, this isn't working. Fix it. Give me a replacement till you get it fixed, you know." No matter what it was, any destroyer could come aboard. A guy's sick or something, no matter, appendicitis, no matter what it is, they could do that aboard those tenders. Oh, they could do anything, make anything. That was good duty. And good food. Oh, the food service was—I mean, you were living like a king.

DePue: Was there status connected with being on the flag officer's ship?

Mitchler: Yeah, to a certain extent. I mean, they respected me in chiefs' mess. By that time I was a little seasoned. I had a couple of hash marks. And being that I liked the Navy—some guys that are in the Navy, they don't like it any day, like the Army; they hate every day they get up in the morning, you know. But to me, my seventeen months over there, I enjoyed every bit of it. I didn't enjoy not being with my new bride. She wrote me a letter every day; I wrote her a letter every day; they were numbered, and we have those.

DePue: Later on, I need to have you read a couple of those into the entry. You weren't getting those every day, though, I would assume. When would you get the letters?

Mitchler: Well, sometimes I'd get ten of them at a time; sometimes I'd get one. You know, if I was out on a mission, which I'll tell you that the admiral liked to go up to see what was action. So we were berthed aboard the *Dixie*, *Prairie*, and the *Piedmont*. But he would say, hey, we're going to board the *Philippine Sea* aircraft carrier, do some operations. We're going to go board the *New Jersey*. We're going to go board the *Toledo*. We're going to go board this destroyer. We're going to go over to Chin Hai Naval Academy. He's going to present some medals. Well now here, you know, I'm a Reserve officer, or rather a

chief petty officer. And we went down there to Chin Hai, and they had all the ships came into the harbor, passed in review of everybody, and the Marines. They all had a regular show with a band and everything. They all lined up, and then he had all these medals. And I had all the medals, and we're coming down the deal there and he'd turn around and I'd hand him the medal to present to this guy. And I did a good job. I enjoyed it. I liked what I was doing. Gee, this was wonderful, with an admiral. I mean, here we're out presenting medals in Chin Hai, the Naval Academy. This was the naval academy of Korea, the ROK, Republic of Korea, Navy, you know. And I got a good friend, Hye Su Park. He was a graduate of the academy, lives here. God, he comes to my place here. We have a lot of fun together. We were over in Korea together, one of our revisits, and I made a lot of friends. So we had a big thing down there in Pusan, and the admiral liked that. I got along good. We had staff that worked like that, and then after, we presented the medals. They had a big lawn party and everything, and everybody got up and sang songs from their country, you know. I didn't. I sort of sit back quiet. I'm still an enlisted man, I'm a chief yeoman, but I didn't—the officers had their fun, but we were invited. We had our public relations guy there. He was a photographer and that, and he was good. All the shots he'd take, he'd give to me. I got them someplace. I don't know where they are. But I got stacks of different 8x10s of different things that we went to over there.

DePue: During this timeframe, were you traveling on both sides of the Korean Peninsula?

Mitchler: Oh, yes.

DePue: Both the China Sea and the Sea of Japan?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we went up and down.

DePue: Do you recall the mood on ship, and the admiral's mood maybe especially, when you got to November and then December of 1950, when the Chinese had entered the war and the American Army and the Marines were just reeling back. It was looking very, very grim, and McArthur even at that time was wondering if they were going to be able to stop the tide.

Mitchler: Well, we had full control of the seas. I remember one time they detected something off one of the coasts. A destroyer thought he spotted a submarine. He did it once for sure, so he's making passes over this object, and he came back to the admiral. You know, he had there. And oh my gosh, we had an alert. We had to have general quarters early in the morning. My gosh, we thought we were really in trouble there or something. And he told his staff, "I want an evaluation from all of my staff on what this is all about." Oh, and they came back with all kinds of reports. And the admiral shaking his head. "Why don't they look and find out what ships are sunk around there? Don't they know that there's a ship that got sunk there? And they think it's a submarine

down there. That's just a ship that was sunk during World War II down there, and they're making passes over it and they think they got a submarine down there and they got them trapped." He told me this, he said, "But don't you tell anybody." You know me. (laughs) I can be sworn to secrecy. And, oh, he was mad as heck at his staff because they were all trying to figure out what the submarine was about and everything. It's interesting to see the—that was my first chance I got with leadership and how they try to figure things out. I don't know you had more experience in that probably than I had. But that was an incident.

Now, one of the incidents—Wonsan Harbor—you know Wonsan Harbor. It's up in North Korea. Wonsan Harbor's like Chesapeake Bay, the best I can say, a recreation area. It's an inlet, opens up, and they got all the beautiful beaches; that's where they all come for recreation. They got a racetrack there and everything. Now, we swept a channel in there so that we could get ships in Wonsan Harbor. Now, they didn't know if we were going to have an invasion in North Korea and cut them off like we did at Inchon or something like that. And we transferred our flag from one of the destroyer tenders to the USS *Manchester*—CL-83, I think—light cruiser. Light cruiser.

DePue: Was this about October of 1950?

Mitchler: Yeah, something in there. We went in Wonsan Harbor—I was aboard the ship. Part of our staff would go aboard there. Part of our staff went aboard on the USS *Manchester*. And we were in there with the USS *Saint Paul*, also. The two cruisers. I think the *Saint Paul* is a heavy cruiser. I'm trying to think. But the two in there. We had destroyers in there. We were shelling around the clock, hitting the shore batteries. They had caves, you know. They'd pull out a gun out of a cave and shoot at us, and then they'd duck back in again. We'd see where the fire came from, and then we'd level off and try to annihilate that area. I'd go up on the bridge and watch all this stuff. I didn't have any shooting or anything; I was sort of a spectator to all this. Our staff would work up the orders that the admiral wanted, how to do all this. At one time, we learned that they were bivouacking in the racetrack area about ten thousand Army. They thought we were really going to make an invasion, and they brought in secretly and bivouacked them in the racetrack area.

DePue: Would this have been North Koreans at the time?

Mitchler: This is in North Korea. So the admiral devised a plot. We had all kinds. We had YMSs, destroyers, minesweepers, all kinds of ship in there, and at ten o'clock one morning, all ships were to train their guns and fire, the best they could, try to hit the racetrack. We knew where the racetrack is, and they'd have to figure out what elevation and everything—destroyers and the two cruisers we had in there—and fire everything you got for ten minutes. Ten o'clock in the morning for ten minutes. Very secretly. Now, of course, our staff worked out all that. So I had an eight-millimeter camera. Now, you

didn't have the type of cameras they got today. I was on the bridge; I couldn't go on the forecastle because they were firing their guns. I knew right at ten o'clock they were going to open up. Right as soon as it hit ten o'clock, everything in the port—they had their guns trained—*boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom*, for ten minutes. I think we wiped out ten thousand guys that we got a report back in ten minutes.

DePue: Wow. I'm trying to—

Mitchler: I don't know. I've never seen a report on that anywhere to confirm what I just told you, but what I told you is true. The admiral says it worked out, and I listened to him, but I have never read any report in the history books about it. Well the siege of Wonsan: we were in there longer than any civil war sieges, had a port siege. We were making history.

DePue: That's why I was wanting to establish when this particular incident would have occurred. You can correct me if I get this wrong, but, you know, Inchon landing, and then after that, the UN forces get to the thirty-eighth parallel. And I know that the decision was made to keep driving north into North Korea. And sometime—I believe it was October, maybe into early November—there was an amphibious landing, I believe, of some South Korean troops and the Seventh Infantry Division at Wonsan. And the Marines—no, maybe it was the Marines there and the Seventh landed up at Hungnam, which was farther north. So they had moved north, and then they went all the way up close to the Yalu River, and that was late November—

Mitchler: That's correct.

DePue: —Thanksgiving, November, when the Chinese came in massive forces. Was it before, while the American and the UN forces were moving north, that you guys were at Wonsan?

Mitchler: I think they were before. I think it must have been before, because that was all North Korean territory at the time. They thought we were going to make an invasion.

DePue: Right. That's what it sounded like when you were talking about it.

Mitchler: Yeah. So that was a big incident we had in Wonsan Harbor. The other things, our ships would go when our staff were aboard them; we would go up and down. Now, the east coast of Korea, as you know, comes down into the water like that.

DePue: Very steep.

Mitchler: Very steep. And you go out the hundred-fathom curve just off shore a little way. And a battleship can come right in close. The *New Jersey* can fire twenty miles and hit a target. At sea, ten miles is as far as you can see. You can fire

ten miles farther than you can see the horizon. And the *New Jersey* didn't have to go in that close to shore—and it wouldn't, because then you could fire out and hit it from the shore. So it would stay out far enough. But many times, the Army would be pinned down on some hill and they'd ask for air power, air power strike, certain air. *New Jersey* had come in. "What are your coordinates? Give us your coordinates. Who's talking?" "*New Jersey*." They give the New Jersey the coordinates. They're fifteen miles or ten miles offshore. You can't even see them. "Where are you?" And they'd give them the coordinates, and they'd lob a sixteen-inch shell—bingo. And he says, Make a certain correction. Bingo. They wiped the whole unit out. I mean, that's what they were doing up and down the coast, the battleship. Beautiful.

DePue: How impressive was it, then, to see—you talked about this as well, I think, when you went into Okinawa—this massive fleet that you had. How impressive was it to see that kind of American force and firepower assembled in one place?

Mitchler: Oh, that was great. Yeah. That was great. Of course, by the end of World War II, the United States had those four battleships, and we put them back in service. We had the *New Jersey* out there and the *Missouri*. And the admiral, he wanted to go aboard all of those. I know I transferred one time from—we were on the *Philippine Sea*, and an interesting thing there… See, I had a lot of free times because I was the admiral's writer there. My staff that was on board, they did all the typing up of the orders and everything going on. I had a leading petty officer there, and I had more time to get around. And when the pilots had come back from an air strike—maybe they dropped napalm on it—he'd come in there and here's a convoy of North Koreans, they come in with napalm and just drop that napalm on the whole convoy and come back. Well, now, picture yourself as the pilot. He'd land his plane back on the *Philippine Sea*, the one we were on. He'd come down and they'd immediately take him out and, "Come on, go to the radio room; we want to question you." And he'd come in, and the best I can describe it, it's like a quarterback and all that there right in the middle of a tough football game. He's sweaty and he's all that there, and the coach, "Come here." And he comes off the field and he comes to the coach, you know, he's panting, he's shook up, he's sweating and everything, and the coach calmly asks him a question about different things. And then we'd interrogate these guys, and I'd be in the radio room there listening. I had never experienced that. I'd listen to these guys. "Yeah," he said, "we dropped napalm in, and we wiped that out," and they'd give the report on their strike. I had a lot of action like that I listened to. Now, after we were on the *Philippine Sea* for a while, the aircraft carrier, and learned all that stuff, then we transferred by the boatswain chair down to a destroyer at sea. The admiral wanted to go aboard a destroyer.

DePue: You'd better say what the boatswain's chair is. I think I know what it is, but—

Mitchler: You know what it is. The boatswain's chair is a wire basket, and you sit in it, and you're in like a wire basket, and it's hooked up to a line that's then thrown over and hooked onto a ship next to it. The two ships are in there, and the waves are coming in between. That's the way they transfer mail bags, food, ammunition, a lot of things like that, and they transfer humans like that. So the admiral says, "We're going to go over there." Well, I don't like to go on a Ferris wheel to tell you the truth, (laughter) but we get on there. I told the guy, "Here, take that eight-millimeter camera. You got to film this." And he did. He filmed me. So I have a picture of me going over to the bow of the destroyer. And the destroyer's going like this, you know. And that was an interesting thing. I love the Navy. Hey—

DePue: Gosh, I think you've probably told us that about twenty times so far in the interview, so I'm definitely getting that impression.

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: Do you remember, though, the mood on ship, especially the mood that the admiral had, when the Chinese came in in such massive numbers, and it really looked very bad for the UN forces?

Mitchler: That was a big thing. MacArthur got—

DePue: It wasn't too much longer after that that he got relieved.

Mitchler: When was that? He got fired in December, wasn't it?

DePue: No. It was more like March, I think.

Mitchler: March? (pause)

DePue: And Ridgway came in.

Mitchler: Well, I got—

DePue: Well, here's what you're thinking of. General Walton Walker—

Mitchler: Walker, yeah.

DePue: —died in a Jeep accident in December, and Ridgway came in and replaced him, and then several months later, MacArthur was relieved and Ridgway got—

Mitchler: Ridgway took over—

DePue: —promoted up to taking over UN command.

Mitchler: He always had two grenades on his… See, what I got to know later on—I'll tell you about when I was at Panmunjom for the talks. I got to know these fellows.

DePue: But anyway, the mood that you saw during all that very difficult time.

Mitchler: Well, we were winning over there. We were in full control. We had to keep all these navies in line. That's it. You know, some of these small navies, they… (laughs)

DePue: When you say "we," you mean the Navy was doing…?

Mitchler: Well, our command. We were in charge of the UN Blockading Escort Force. The admiral was in charge of all these ships.

DePue: But it was anything but winning on land with what they experienced in December and January. They were getting their butts kicked, to put it bluntly.

Mitchler: Well, when the Chinese came in, they drove them all the way up to the Yalu River. The big thing was that MacArthur wanted to go over and knock off all their supplies. Not necessarily men, but supplies, on the other side of the Yalu River. Truman said no. He was negotiating with Russia. He had to talk to Russia, you know. And Russia said, no, they didn't want him to go above the Yalu River. MacArthur got a controversy; Truman was the president, and MacArthur was just a five-star general, I guess. And anyway, he won. And then after that, he got relieved, and then Ridgway was in command. Then they came with the offensive from the Chinese when they came over the Yalu River in force. We got a good hearing on that. The Chinese came over. There'd be ten of them, as an example, in a group: one rifle, and they had a bag hanging down there, had five notches in it, five little areas of rice, five days' ration, then you had to live off the land. You were thrown into battle. Your idea was to go as far south as you could go, the Chinese from the Yalu River down. Blowing bugles, hitting tin cans and everything, making noise, yelling. This is what the Army told me. And they're coming down. And just overwhelming number of army. Shoot the guy down with a rifle, another guy would pick it up. Finally the tenth guy would get the rifle and you'd have nine dead, but they made advances. Then they came down the Chosin Reservoir—

DePue: Which is the Marines' area.

Mitchler: Marines and the Army, down to Hungnam. The Army was evacuated at Hungnam, and the Marines, and then they blew up the port of Hungnam so they couldn't use that.

DePue: Did you participate in the evacuation at Hungnam?

Mitchler: No, I wasn't up in all that. I gave movie lectures. When I returned from Korea, which I'll tell you a little about later, but I gave about sixty lectures

with a chart similar to what you saw here, all up through northern Illinois here. I was finishing my last year in college. I had one year to go. And in the afternoon, I'd take off. I'd go to Rockford; I'd go to all these different Chamber of Commerce meetings. I put up the chart, and I'd lecture them, and I'd give them what the Korean was about. Then a guy would ask me, "Is there water around Korea?" I mean, we used to get all the questions, you know, because the people back home, you know, it's like Afghanistan. How many really know Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, about what's over there? Who are these people? You know.

DePue: What did you guys think about MacArthur being relieved?

Mitchler: Well, Truman's the president, commander in chief. I'm a military man, partially, you know, as much as I am, but MacArthur overstepped his authority. There was no love between Truman and MacArthur because MacArthur was a possible candidate for presidency.

DePue: Do you know what Admiral Smith thought about the whole thing? He was kind of his peer.

Mitchler: Oh, at the time, he didn't enter into anything that I would know about. I think all the troops over there followed the orders when MacArthur was relieved and Ridgway put in. They followed Ridgway. When I get into Panmunjom, my duty there, then I'll tell you some other interesting stories about that, about the top brass that I was associated with.

DePue: I wanted to ask you, though, while we were still on this part of your experiences, tell us about the nature of the multi-national Navy. You mentioned you had a story about Siam as an example of that.

Mitchler: Yeah. We had all different navies in there. We had a chief's club over on the beach in Sasebo there. I liked to go over there and just get off the ship, you know, after you're on there a while, get over there and have a beer and talk to the guys. You'd meet these Aussies and you'd meet other guys. And I says, "You still have that grog on your ship, you know? We get a cup of joe," named after the secretary of the Navy there, when he stopped all booze on board the ship, Josephus Daniels. Josephus Daniels. He was secretary of the Navy, and he abolished all drinking aboard Navy ships. So sailors, they say, "Let's have a cup of joe," named after Josephus Daniels, and that was a cup of coffee.

DePue: This would be well before your time.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, that was way back. I asked this leading chief from over there, one of the British ships, "Still got that grog?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, we pass it out." He says, "It tastes like heck. I get it, but I don't drink the dang stuff." I said, "You got to fix me up with some. I never tasted that. You know, I heard about it." He said, "I'll bring you a bottle." So I invited him over to the chiefs' mess. I

said, "Come on over and have mess on our ship," when we were in Sasebo, because we had a nice chiefs' mess. Oh, gosh. Fried chicken every night after the movies and everything. So he come aboard, and he brought a bottle. And I tasted it, and, "Ooh, I can see why you don't like it." (laughs) But at the time, back in the Navy, they drank that as a laxative, you know, to keep open, and there was a reason for that. So we met different navies.

Now, up on the east coast, we had two ships from Siam over there. One commanding officer was a prince, and he drank a lot. Now, he was operating with our ships, maybe another destroyer or something, and then operating during the day, just daylight. Now, the destroyer wanted to go up to Songjin way up north and do some bombing at night. We worked twenty-four hours around the clock, you know. Navy ship. We got different shifts. So the ship is working twenty-four hours a day. At nighttime it doesn't go over in a cove and everybody go to sleep and wake up. I mean, the ship is operating, shooting and firing, twenty-four hours a day, up and down the coast. We told him, "Now, look. You're up in Korea here. Now, you're here. Now, we're going to go up there. Now, you go out for one hour," or forty-five minutes, I don't know what it is, "and then you turn around and you come back for one hour. You go out for an hour, back, and you just keep right here, and you just keep going like this all night long, right here, if you can do that. Yeah, you can do that. Now, we'll come back and pick you up in the morning and we'll go on." Well, he had too much to drink—I don't know what the heck it was—and he ran his ship aground, and we had to get it off. We got it off and everything. Well, we had to have a court of inquiry on that.

DePue: Was that running aground in North Korea?

Mitchler: Yeah. We got him off okay. We got him backed off; we got him off. So the admiral had to have a report on this. So we got to go over to the… The admiral didn't go over. A lieutenant commander on the admiral's staff, who I knew very well, was in charge of going over there. So we got on our dress blues. While we were over there, we always wore just khakis and open shirt. We never wore a tie even on shore, if we wanted to go ashore. So we got in a whaleboat and went over to the Siamese ship. We held this inquiry. I took a Bible along and all the stuff, and we conducted. You know, Captain Naii—how do you spell Naii? N-a-i-i or something like that—he as a captain in the Siamese Navy there. He was sort of representing the Siamese. Talked good English. Smart, you know. But he was Siamese.

So we had the Holy Bible. But of course, they're Buddhists. And they had this Buddha, and when one of their sailors would come in, (makes noises) and the sailor, (makes noise), and he'd point to the Buddha. And he'd get down and he'd swear to Buddha that everything was the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help me Buddha. Well, that was like swearing on the Bible, see? And so we took down everything on here on that ship.

Now, their galley, they just had dirt floor, you know. I mean, they cooked their rice and everything like—and they didn't have all the facilities like we do on their ships. That was interesting to me, to be aboard a Siamese ship like that. I'm in my dress blues and everything. So we went over there several times and interviewed. And I took it all in shorthand. I had to type it up, a formal report and everything. I could do all that stuff.

And one time we were coming back. I think it was the *Piedmont*. It was either the *Piedmont* or the *Prairie*. It might have been the *Prairie*, because the *Dixie* left when this happened. We're coming back, and we're in a whaleboat, and he says, "My God, the ship's underway!" And it was just moving, just moving slow. I don't know whether it was going to go to another place in the harbor or take off. I said, "We got to get aboard the ship." And so we came along the ship and says, "Hey!" And of course, the chiefs up there knew, and the officers, yeah, these are the two fellows we sent over on the ship. My gosh, we got to bring them aboard. So on the forecastle of the ship, they dropped this ladder down like that, you know, ring ladder, for us to come up. But here I'm in dress blues, you know, all dressed up. I didn't have the Bible because I gave the Bible to Captain Naii. I says, "Would you like the Bible"—going back—"as a sort of a souvenir?" because we got another Bible on the ship. He says, "I've read the Bible." He says, "You know, if you read the Bible and read about Confucius and all this here, they might have been the same guy." You know, (laughs) oh, he was very intelligent. I said, "But you like the Bible?" Well, he kept the Bible. I'm glad he did, because that was one less thing I had to carry. I had my clipboard and briefcase, and trying to, in dress blues, climb up that little ladder all the way up the front part of the ship up to the deck. And all my chiefs are up there, "Come on, Mitch! You can do it. Come on, Mitch, you can do it," (laughter) razzing me, you know. I said, "You blankety blank!" But we loved the Navy. We did it. We come up. The lieutenant commander, he was a big wide rear-end guy. He had a tougher time getting up than I did. I was in pretty good shape back then, and I got up. But we were aboard that vessel for that hearing. That was an experience I had aboard a foreign ship that we had.

DePue: I'd imagine you ran across more British navy than any other one of the foreign services.

Mitchler: Probably so. We had Turkish, Australian. The Aussies were over there. You know, the Aussies don't like the English, and they didn't have much to say about the English. I'd invite some of the guys over on our mess, you know, courtesy—I'd meet them at the club and I'd say, "Come on over and have mess." They liked to come aboard and show them around. We were nice to each other, make friends, you know.

DePue: You say you had Turkish ships as well?

Mitchler: Yeah. We had thirteen different ships, navies.

DePue: I'm sure you're aware that on land, the Turks have this fierce reputation as fighters on land. How about their navy?

Mitchler: I don't know too much about the Turkish navy. They were given some assignments, patrol. Some of them never fired a shot or did anything like that, you know.

DePue: But you'd heard about the Turks' ground forces?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. Terrible Turks, yeah. Well, the Aussies were pretty rough in fighting, I understand.

DePue: Did you have any South Korean ships?

Mitchler: Yes. Oh, yeah.

DePue: How did they perform?

Mitchler: Very well. Very well. Yeah. And we had some South Korean sailors come aboard some of our ships when we were operating.

DePue: That complemented your crew, that were part of your crew?

Mitchler: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They'd come aboard just as training from the Chin Hai Academy. I'd sit down and talk to them, you know, talk to them about this is—they couldn't get over how many railroads we had in the United States. They just had one railroad in Korea, you know.

DePue: From Seoul to Pusan, maybe?

Mitchler: Well, we got the, like, Santa Fe, the Burlington, you know, Atchison. So he said, "You got all kinds of railroads over there. We only have one." Different things like that. And they'd talk. They're very strict in their academy, very strict.

DePue: Was Admiral Smith there the entire time you were doing this job?

Mitchler: No, he got relieved by Admiral George C. Dyer. George C. Dyer was a submariner.

DePue: Now, "relieved" might suggest to some people that he was relieved for cause, but he was just rotated?

Mitchler: Oh, no. No, he got rotated. Yeah, yeah. It was a rotation. Now, before he left, it was interesting. Of course, I being his writer, all these things he did, I had to be there to write it down, write it up, and everything. He wanted to award some medals to all of his people. Of course, he was getting relieved. I guess

he got—what's above the Legion of Merit? Distinguished Cross or something?

DePue: Distinguished Service Cross? Well, I don't know what it would be in the Navy.

Mitchler: I don't know. Well, anyway, the Legion of Merit above. But he was nice about this. He says, "I want my staff to be rewarded." So he sat down and he wrote a letter up to the Seventh Fleet, C. Turner Joy, vice admiral. Rear Admiral Arleigh A. Burke was chief of staff to Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, Seventh Fleet. We were under the Seventh Fleet. We were a task force. And he wrote up and listed all the medals that he wanted to give out. Not to be naive, but he had me in there. He was going to give me the Legion of Merit or something. I said, "Admiral, don't…" "Oh, you do a good job." He liked me. "You make decisions" and everything. I got along good with him. Most the guys were scared to death of him, even to the end. They were scared of him. I point these things out because this is what they want to know. And it dwindled down. I finally wound up with a Navy Commendation Medal with a V—

DePue: For valor.

Mitchler: My combat service, yeah. And it went up to the Seventh Fleet, and Admiral Burke wrote back. He said, "*You* are being relieved. You are the one that gets the medal now. When they are relieved, then they get the medal. But as long as they're still out here, they still have to perform. They're not going to get a medal before they complete their tour out here." He said, "Well, maybe everybody will forget what they did." He was really fighting for his men. I admired Admiral Smith for that. They were his officers. He wanted his officers to get different things. I think Captain Kael did wind up getting the Legion of Merit. I've got a record of that someplace. I've kept it. I don't know where it is.

DePue: Well, tell me about Admiral Dyer.

Mitchler: Admiral Dyer was a very different admiral than Admiral Smith. I don't think he ever knew who I was. He was a submariner. I did not know he was a submariner. And it's my fault; I should have looked up his history. I knew he was an Academy man—I could tell by his ring, you know, ring knockers. But I don't know. I was busy. I really never got into thinking about those things at the time. You know, I worked for him, I did my orders, and I was busy twenty-four hours a day, and I never thought about that. Because had I known that he was a submariner, I would have said, "Well, did you know Slade Cutter? I happen to come from the same town that Slade Cutter come from," and I might have struck up a friendly conversation with him. But he was very aloof. He wasn't warm to me like Admiral Smith was.

DePue: But Admiral Smith doesn't sound like he was warm to most of the other officers that served with him.

Mitchler: He scared the hell out of them.

DePue: Did Dyer bring the awe, the same awe, to the other people?

Mitchler: Dyer was more friendly with them, more friendly with them. I know the chief of staff was a captain, and my ears were always listening and my eyes peeled, and I knew that he was trying to help him to make flag rank, trying to get him to do something to get him up to flag rank. He was a captain, and get him up to rear admiral, one star, you know. I'd hear all this stuff. That's all right. That's the way the Navy operates. But Admiral Dyer was a very great admiral. After I got back and acted in the Navy League, I got into the headquarters of the Navy down there where they have the museum, and they have the naval history, like we're doing. Paul Stillwell has it there. And I stopped in there, and I asked him, I said, "Do you have anything on Admiral George C. Dyer?" "Oh, George Dyer? He comes in here dang near every day of the week. He comes in here. He likes to go back and read all the histories and everything." I says, "Really? My gosh." I give him my card; I says, "Tell him Bob Mitchler dropped in. Maybe he'll remember me." And I guess he's got a couple of oral history books written. I have never asked for them. I should write to him and get them; I'd learn more about him. But I'm trying to tell some things how we did it in the Navy and life was in the Navy. It was interesting.

DePue: And that's why we do the interviews with people like you, from the perspective of just the average sailor out there doing this.

Mitchler: Yeah. But I admire George Dyer. He gave me a lot of letters, personal letters, and I typed them up, and had a lot of his personal affairs. I know he had some repairs on his house and different things, and he had problems just like everybody else does. But I really didn't know much about his biog. They never put that out.

DePue: What can you tell me about the end of the time that you're on this task force, working for the admirals as their writers? Maybe to put it a different way: can you take me through the process where you were appointed to work at Panmunjom?

Mitchler: Oh. That came out of a clear blue sky. I don't know what came through, a message or something, that they had three taking down the testimony at the conference whenever they'd meet. They were going to meet at the hospital ship *Jutlandia* after they hit the stalemate and they weren't going to advance and they were driven down and they hit an imaginary line across Korea, and they says, You don't go above it, and you don't come down below it, and they said in France, word was out that there's a possibility that North Korea will

talk about a truce. Hearing that, that sparked the deal, and the United Nations and everything got together, and they were suggested to have the meeting on the hospital ship *Jutlandia*, which was off the coast of Korea.

DePue: What nationality ship was that?

Mitchler: That was a Swedish, I think, or up there.

DePue: That sounds right.

Mitchler: Yeah. *Jutlandia*. Well, right away, the North Koreans objected: "No, we don't want to have it aboard a ship, no. We want to have it at Kaesong," K-a-e-s-o-n-g. So we said, "Okay, we'll have it at Kaesong."

DePue: Which at the time was a few miles behind the front lines.

Mitchler: Yeah, it was up in North Korea there. So they were going to have it at Kaesong. Now, they set up certain rules. You know, they're going to come together now—

DePue: And this one was going on in the summer of 1951.

Mitchler: Now, I wasn't aboard then, but Lieutenant Reo Hood,—he was a chief yeoman one time, got promoted up into the officer ranks, career Navy fellow, was a lieutenant—he was the flag lieutenant on our staff. When they needed somebody up for the peace talks, they took him off the staff of the UN Blockading Escort Force, took him up to Panmunjom to the United Nations Military Armistice Negotiations Commission.

DePue: Okay.

Mitchler: And that was at Kaesong. Now, he was at Kaesong when we held our first meeting. Now the first meeting that they held—I was not there at this, so what I'm telling you is what was reported—they had a table, and I think General Nam Il, I think—

DePue: That's right.

Mitchler: Was that right, Nam Il?

DePue: North Korean general.

Mitchler: I'm just picking these off my head. I'm surprised at my age I can do that yet. I think he was thirty-six years old. Young. Straight as an arrow. You know, top. Admiral C. Turner Joy, three-star admiral, commander, Seventh Fleet, Naval Academy grad, just about ready to call it quits. So they come in on one side to sit down, Admiral Nil on the other side. He had a straight chair over there, straight chairs, and they had a sofa. That's where Admiral Joy was to sit. And

he sat in the sofa, and it didn't have any springs in it. He sat in it, and he went down like this. (DePue laughs) He just kept a straight face, just sat there like this. And Nam Il, he sits up there like a ruling guy. And all this was told me. Reo Hood was there. And he sits like this. He never flinched. He said, "Well, now I think the talks should begin, and we should officially have it opened, that you're representing North Korea and the Chinese and I'm representing the United Nations Command." Nam Il says, "Yes, we open up." "All right. Now, we should schedule our first formal meeting for tomorrow. What time do we want to have that?" "Ten o'clock." "So we'll have it at ten o'clock." "Good." "I make a motion we adjourn till tomorrow." Well, they adjourned. And he got up. The next time he had a decent seat. But that's the way they did. You know, they had that attitude to belittle the opponent. That was a very disgrace. But he sweated out right through.

Now, there came through a request that they had to have a replacement for a yeoman that was going back to the States. I just met him briefly. He uses a stenotype rather than a Gregg. I use Gregg shorthand. He uses a stenotype like they do at the court reporting. He was going back to the States, and they had to get a relief for him. So they sent out—and I saw it come through. Well, I was getting a little tired down there doing the same thing. You know, you don't want to be in a job in the Navy too long; you want to move, move, move, move, move, so it gives experience. You don't want to do the same thing over and over again. Like some guys sit on shore duty all during the war. I got a friend who, gosh, he was stationed out in Kansas in the Army. God, he went all the way up—I think he made major—stayed in one camp the whole dang war in Kansas, and went all the way up to be a major (laughs) from a second lieutenant. You know, I wouldn't have wanted that, come back home—

DePue: That's a great place to spend the war but a lousy place if you want to make rank after the war.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. So I put in, and I said, "I'd like that request." Now, I had George C. Dyer at the time, Admiral; he approved it, and I got my gear together. Now, this is a new experience for me. So I got in my dress blues. I'm going to report to the United Nations Military Armistice Negotiations at Panmunjom. Now, they moved from Kaesong up to Panmunjom by now.

DePue: Well, actually, it was a little bit south. It's closer to the actual front lines, where Panmunjom was.

Mitchler: Yeah, and that was an apple orchard they had there. And the tanks and all that, commands, were down here, and they'd go up and get on the line up there and hold the line. So I go down there and went out Sasebo Harbor, boarded a PBY, and it flew me up to Tokyo, and spent one night—God, I just had temporary quarters, and I remember it was colder than hell.

DePue: They flew you up to Tokyo, or you mean Seoul?

Mitchler: No, Tokyo. I went up Tokyo, and then over to Seoul. Yeah, then flew over to Seoul. I don't know how my orders were, as I recall, but I spent one night in Tokyo. And then I went over to Seoul, and at Seoul, got a jeep, went up to there, and reported in. I was very formal. I was in dress blues and white scarf and everything, you know, formal. My God, they looked and saw me and they laughed like hell. "Get out of those glad rags here." I said, "Well, I didn't know. I was reporting to the command. I didn't know what it was." Well, they had tents and everything. "Geez, we got to get you some gear." So they measured me up and sent a phone call over to Tokyo. They had couriers that brought stuff to Tokyo over to Seoul, up to Panmunjom, every day. The guy spent a night at Panmunjom then and go back, take stuff back to Tokyo, back and forth, every day. Every day they'd bring newspapers and what have you over. Now, if you wanted a case of Scotch, you'd call over and say, "I'd like to have a case of Scotch brought over." "Okay." So they get a case of Scotch. You might have a colonel in the Air Force bringing you over a case of Scotch. Because when they came into Korea, they got exempt from income tax for that month, see? (laughs) So colonels even liked to come over there so they could say they were at Panmunjom, you know, went over there. They didn't tell them they were carrying a case of Scotch for who knows who. But they were going back. Now, the smart guys would come over the last day of the month, stay overnight, and go back on the first day of the month. They'd get two months for one trip.

DePue: Two months of what, some pay or…?

Mitchler: No, exemption from income tax.

DePue: Oh.

Mitchler: See, you were in the war zone. If you were in Japan, you weren't in the war zone. You had to be up there. That's why they took the *Dixie* out once a month. Once a month they'd take the *Dixie* underway and it would go up into the war zone and turn around, make a U-turn, and come back to Sasebo. So everybody on a ship would get exempt from income tax. They'd do that sort of on the end of the month so they'd be there overnight in the two days, and that way you're only two days on one trip. (laughter) Well, the Navy knew how to do it.

DePue: What was your initial impression of Panmunjom when you got there?

Mitchler: Well, when I got there, of course, I saw Lieutenant Hood; he smoked cigars, so I had a box of cigars I gave to him. I said, "Lieutenant, I know you smoke cigars." "Oh," he says, "that's great." I says, "I didn't know that you could get cigars." All he had to do was call over to Tokyo and they'd bring him any kind of cigar he wanted, you know. I thought things were very rationed up at

the front. I didn't know that. I even brought a couple boxes of candy. They all laughed at me.

So they called over there and they outfitted me. I got bib overalls, the heavy stuff, just like the Army would have out there in subzero weather—boots, socks, long underwear, helmet, you know, and parka, everything. Hey, it was cold, five below zero. Slept in a tent. After I was up there, I said, "What the hell did I ever volunteer for this for?"

DePue: Almost felt like you were in the Army, didn't you?

Mitchler: That was it. Oh my God, I got a cot. Put down newspapers first, then you put down a wool blanket, then you put down your sleeping bag, then you put wool blankets over the sleeping bag, then you climb in the sleeping bag, and you're pretty warm. You get too dang warm. Then you got to pull the zipper down so you can breathe, get some fresh air. You get a little of that fresh air, and pretty soon your nose gets cold. You fall asleep, and then you got to zip the bag up again. I never had that experience like the poor soldiers. Geez. I felt for them.

DePue: What was it like, then, actually going to the talks themselves? And I want you to really elaborate on this, because I'm fascinated by the whole process?

Mitchler: Going up there?

DePue: Yeah, actually doing the job of…

Mitchler: Oh. Well, they didn't meet every day. This wasn't an everyday session that you had.

DePue: And you were there from November till January of '52?

Mitchler: Yeah. I spent Christmas there.

DePue: So the talks had been going on for two, three months by the time you got there?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, the way the talks would go on, we had our apple orchard is where we called it, where we had a generator and everything set up, so we had electricity and what have you. We had good food. We kept warm. And we had a shower that when a guy gets a shower water heated, he'd come over, hey, got hot water. You'd run the middle of the day, 2:30 in the afternoon, take a shower, you know, quick. I really respected the Army guys who had to fight in Korea, like Pork Chop Hill and that. God. Chosin Reservoir. Geez, my hat's off to those guys, the Marines. And then some of them had it easy, but geez, some of them on those hills, that was bloody. We lost a lot of guys, a lot of men on that.

Don't know if I got a… There's an envelope I had printed up when I was state commander of the Korean War Veterans. I was the second state commander. A guy down in Danville organized it; he was the first commander of the Korean War Veterans in Illinois State, and I worked with him. I was working for the Department of Veterans Affairs at the time, right after I retired from the Senate, and then I was the second. Then from Riverside—he was an Army fellow—the third state commander. Then they organized and got a charter and got formally organized as they are now; they're Korean War Veterans Association. So I was very active in the Korean War Veterans Association back then.

Getting back to Panmunjom—we'd go up to where they met, and there was a big tent. No permanent quarters. There was a big tent, and it was sort of up on a little slope, and a roadway came through—North Korea, South Korea, sort of the dividing line. And there was a little house there with that thatched roof. Yeah, right there. When we had a hearing, North and South were going to meet, then a lot of newsmen would come down, from North Korea, South Korea. Oh, *Time* magazines and all these guys. They would assemble out in what we called the neutral zone, see. Well, they'd be all together. North, South journalists, they'd talk to each other, and—

DePue: Russian journalists there as well?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, everybody. Everybody. Oh, there was a whole big crowd of them. We would come in, and we would go into a smaller tent here, and they'd go into a smaller tent there. Then if it was eleven o'clock, at eleven o'clock we'd go into the big tent, and they had a table. We'd sit in the back, and three of us would take down. One guy was a lieutenant commander, was taking down a lot of stuff.

DePue: Okay, this is a long rectangular table?

Mitchler: Just a straight table.

DePue: And you've got UN forces on one side and Communist on the other.

Mitchler: Communist on the other. Chinese and the North Koreans.

DePue: You were their stenographer. The only language you knew was English, right?

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: So were the talks all in English?

Mitchler: Well, they were interpreted and they would be repeated, yes, and then we'd write it down. Now, the reason we had three there: we wanted to make sure it was accurate. When we got back, I'd write mine up and they'd write theirs up and we'd compare them and put them together, make sure we had the correct

what was said. Then that was sent to Washington. All right. How they sent it, I don't know, but it was sent to Washington. And we would sit, and we would wait until Washington gave a reply. Because after they met, maybe they were making an offer on something and it would come, then that would go to Washington, and then we'd tell them, "Hey, we got a reply. We're going to have a meeting then." "Okay, let's set up a meeting for next Thursday," and they'd set up a meeting for next Thursday. Then we'd come in, and then our side would give the reply. Then they'd say, "Okay, we'll take it back and think it over and give you a reply." It wasn't really sitting down and going to argue it out legitimately like you would at a union coming to a company's table to argue it out.

So we had a lot of down time in the camp, doing nothing, just sitting there doing nothing. So I had a fellow named Charlie Suhr, Charles Suhr in my college, Aurora College. He was a Korean, and his family was in Seoul. They had another chief there. I said, "You know what? We got all this downtime, and we aren't going to hear anything for a couple of days. What do you say we get a jeep and go down to Seoul and see this family of this classmate I got over there?" We had a lot of time for that stuff, a lot of downtime. They weren't doing anything there. It wasn't an everyday meeting, you know. And good. So we sent a message over to Tokyo.

It was Christmastime, just before Christmas. I said, "Send over so much dollars' worth of toys." When they come over, then we pay them, you know. Everybody trusted everybody in the Navy. You know, money—what's money? (laughs) If you had a candy bar, you'd better hide it because somebody would steal it; you'd lay a twenty-dollar bill down there and they wouldn't touch it. (laughter) And so we got all these toys. I went to the cook at the commissary there and I said, "I'm going down into Seoul. That other chief and I were going to take a Jeep, and I got a bunch of toys for a family that I hope to find. You got any spare food around here that I might take down to the people?" He said, "I know what you want." Well, of course, ham, we got in great big containers like that, you know, beef, all types of stuff. So we loaded the back end of a jeep with all that food and toys and everything and covered it up with a blanket, and he and I went down to Seoul. That wasn't too far from Panmunjom.

So we went to the military police. I said, "I'm from Panmunjom. I'm delivering some material here to this address, these people here. Do you know where that is in Seoul?" "How in the heck do I know where that is in Seoul?" One of them ran off. I said, "All right, I don't expect you to know. Don't you work with the Korean military police?" "Yeah." "Would you call the Korean military police here so we can talk to him, because he'll know?" "Oh, I guess he would." So they called the Korean military police. "You know where this place is?" "Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's up near…" Of course, Seoul was all bombed out. It had been going back and forth two, three times, you know.

So we got in the jeep and followed him, and he took me up, and we got to the home of this college student of mine. His father was a teacher. The whole area was all bombed out, the battered troops going through there. They came to the door; they were in just rag clothes. Now, he's going to a Christian school over in Aurora, you know. I told you how strict they were. And so I introduced myself. "Charles Suhr." They understood that. I finally got to him, and he didn't talk any English, but you can make them understand, "Aurora University"—Aurora College at the time—and I told him what we had. "I'm at Panmunjom talks"—well, he understood that. "We bring gifts, Christmas." And he looked. Tears! God, I get emotional myself. Tears come down their eye. They got on their knees; they prayed. Oh, (laughs) I get very emotional. And so we unloaded all the toys, we unloaded all these cans of beef, ham, all the food that we had. I know we had a whole jeep rear end loaded. And all had to say a prayer and everything, shook hands, hugged each other, then we left.

After I got back to school, saw Charlie, he told me the whole story, how they shared that with all the people in the area. Everybody came; all the kids had toys and everything. That was a big moment. I never did get back on my eight tours to go up and revisit him. I often wonder why I never took time to do that.

DePue: I want to ask you more about what that experience was like, sitting in those talks and taking down the notes and listening to the kind of things that were coming up. Now, I believe at that time, the talks were really bogged down over the exchange of prisoners. Does that sound familiar?

Mitchler: They changed the what?

DePue: Exchanging prisoners back and forth.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. Well, they talked about—it was the idea of what was to be decided, how North and South Korea was going to be divided. They were intense on dividing North and South Korea, going back to same way they had. The idea was it was a thirty-eighth parallel, nobody could see that, whereas if you drew a line along a river, a stream, a hill, even though it was crooked, you'd know that was a line, and then you could fortify on either side like they got today. That's what they were trying to reach. And it was very difficult to communicate and come to either side and admit that that's what they wanted to do. Now, naturally, we were not really in favor of having a North and South Korea, but I think they were more or less continuing with the North and South Korea.

Now, one of the incidents in there, while this was going on, General Van Fleet, he was down there, Ridgway, and his orders were to hold the line. That is, they had an imaginary line drawn. Here's the line. You stay above there; we'll stay above there. And he told him to hold the line. Admiral Van Fleet came in there one day, into the compound, Panmunjom, cussing a blue

streak. Oh, he was really… He says, "You got me out there, and you give me an order to hold the line. I can't hold the line! I got fighting men. These guys are tense." He says, "You can't hold the line. I got to send them out on a mission at night. Go over there and see how many you can kill. Go over here and see how many you can kill, and then get back without getting killed. You know, you got to give them something to do. You can't just sit there and hold the line. The first thing you know, they'll be playing poker, and you know how troops go, military men. You got to keep them busy. You got to keep them busy; you can't let them sit around." Oh, he was furious. And of course, the admiral knew what he was talking about and everything, but that's what they were ordered to do.

Later on, our Korean War Veterans had a reunion in Washington. We went over to the Korean Embassy or something—I forget what building it was—and we had a little luncheon over there. The Koreans hosted us. And Van Fleet was there. He was in a wheelchair. He was pretty frail at the time. But he came. He came to the luncheon, honored guest, but he was in a wheelchair, and of course everybody greeting him. Some of the guys served with him, you know, and they… So I interrupted and I went up. I says, "General," and I gave him my name. Of course, he didn't remember who I was. I said, "I remember you. I was at Panmunjom, and I remember you coming in, and you were pretty hostile to everybody about you had an order to hold the line. Do you remember that order to hold?" He sort of straightened up. And I says, "And boy, you told them you couldn't hold the line; you had to either…" He sat up straight like this. Before, he was sort of huddled like this. Straight like this. He doubled his fist, and he says, "My men were always taught to go forward!" (laughter) All these guys standing around, you know. Well, you're a military guy. You can imagine a general, you know… He come to life. He straightened up, put his head up: "My men were always taught to go"—and he had that fist—"forward!" And he got down in that position. He says, "Thank you," and he says, "I remember."

DePue: It was probably the highlight of the night for him.

Mitchler: For him, yeah, that somebody would remember him like that. Generals are like everybody else; they're wonderful people.

DePue: How about the generals on the opposite side of the table? You mentioned Nam Il.

Mitchler: Well, that Nam Il was a straight—oh, he was egotistical. Yeah, they all are. They're like they won the war. Now, how do you want to settle it, you know? Very, very conceited, domineering. Whereas our negotiators were negotiating in good faith. After all, they were only negotiating as negotiators for the United Nations and the United States of America, their president. They were very orderly and decent, and they would always try to imitate us. If we

showed up at Panmunjom wearing those bear-type of hats, you know, that come down and covered—

DePue: With the flaps for your ears?

Mitchler: —then the next day they had them on when they come. We flew in in a helicopter one time. Admiral Leahy or something, he was a new admiral, that come in in a helicopter instead of coming up in jeeps. That was the first time they flew in in a helicopter. Now, I don't know if they had a helicopter that they could come in, but they were very upset that he come out in a helicopter. They accused him of trying to show off, you know, at the conference table. "Why you come in a helicopter? You're trying to make you're more important than us or something?" Oh, all these silly little arguments, like a bunch of kids arguing, like a husband and wife in a fight over a paycheck or something.

They weren't negotiating in good faith, which resulted in me going to Admiral C. Turner Joy. I went in one time to him and said, "Admiral, can I ask you a question, discuss something?" "Yes, sure, come on in, chief." Oh, he was a wonderful man. I told him that I'd just gotten married June sixteenth, and September I'd got over here. I says, "I love the Navy. I'm enjoying every bit of it over here. Worked with Admiral Smith and Admiral Dyer down there, and I volunteered to come up here for experience, but this isn't what I thought I'd get. I'm sitting around here. You know, if we went up there every day, I would like it, but we don't do nothing. I'm doing nothing here." I says, "I got a new bride at home." And he says, "Mitchler, you go home. Go write your orders up. You get back there with that woman. We aren't going to do anything here. This thing's going to go on and on and on and on. I appreciate your coming." Now, here's a three-star admiral talking just like a father, you know, and a kind gentleman. He says, "You go home. You go home. We'll get along." And so I didn't even talk to Rear Admiral Burke because I didn't know that Rear Admiral Arleigh Burke was going to be chief of naval operations, you know, run around about eighty admirals. You know, that was the revolt of the admirals when they made him from a rear admiral all the way up, full admiral, and got into chief of naval operations. I don't know if you've ever read about that incident.

DePue: Well, I know the Navy liked tradition and they like structure, and something like that happened, and I can imagine where those generals—

Mitchler: Oh, yeah, that was the revolt of the admirals for a while. But Arleigh Burke was a great admiral. He was dedicated heart and soul. Never had any children; he and his wife were both dedicated to the Navy. He was a great admiral. I think he served three tours as CNO.

I bid farewell to all the guys, and I went home. Left Panmunjom, went back to Sasebo and back, got a flight out of Seoul. Let's see, how did I go back? I made one trip after I was in Panmunjom down to Sasebo for a reason.

There was some down time. Because I went aboard the ship. I come aboard the ship, and I was all dressed in that battle gear, you know, like I was up in the frozen north. Gosh, all the chiefs, "Hey, can you get me some of that, get me an outfit like that? (DePue laughs) You know, smuggle one down? You know how to do it, Mitch. Get one to send down here." (laughter) Oh, we had a lot of fun in the Navy. I said, "No, I can't do that." I made one trip back like that, and then I flew out of Seoul and I flew into Seattle.

DePue: Well, before you get all the way back to the United States, I want you to do a little bit of comparison for us. You were in Japanese cities immediately after the Second World War. You saw Hiroshima, you saw Tokyo, some other places, and now you saw Seoul right after Seoul had been fought over two or three times. How would you compare those two cities, the Japanese cities versus what you saw in Korea? Pretty much the same?

Mitchler: You mean right after World War II, how the Japanese cities looked? Well, the Japanese cities were pretty well destroyed. Most every city got hit by the B-29s coming out of Tinian and Saipan. Those long-range bombers, the B-29s, they did everything from dropping leaflets to firebombs to big bombs, little bombs, firebombs. Everything they dropped on the cities. Now, the Han River runs through Seoul. There was one bridge over the Han River in Seoul before the Korean War. Before the Korean War started, people were living in thatched hutched buildings. The heat coming under the floor, you know, the heat from one end. It was strictly Korean style, because up to that time, they were just starting to modernize, after the end of World War II, because the Japanese kept them all down. They never had any modern buildings or anything like that. And so if you saw Seoul at that time during the Korean War, you saw an ancient type of Korea, where those—what do you call them, the Y things they put on their back?

DePue: The Y frames that they—

Mitchler: Yeah, Y frames, carry things. You'd have the Y frame on the back, could lean over and carry a big load. And you'd see them going around like that all the time. You don't see that anymore over there now. They might on a display over in one area; they have a community with the old homes how they were, so the schoolchildren can see how Korea used to be. That's outside of Seoul. That's what my grandchildren will see when they go over there.

DePue: Korean Folk Village?

Mitchler: Yeah, Korean Folk Village.

DePue: I've been there.

Mitchler: You've been there? Yeah. Very interesting.

DePue: Fascinating place.

Mitchler: It shows you the whole thing, how they lived over there. Today, the Han River coming through Seoul, on either side of the Han River, they've got banks for recreation. Buildings and everything go back. Then they slope up, then they have interstate highway, and they have high-rises. Where they had one bridge at the start of the Korean War, I think they have thirty-some bridges today. They got a bridge, *boom, boom, boom, boom,* so people can cross.

DePue: I want you to reflect on the differences and the similarities between the Japanese people and the Korean people.

Mitchler: They're two different people. And they make shake hands and get along all right, but I still think that the Japanese look down on the Koreans and the Koreans don't like the Japanese because they occupied them ever since for thirty years there following World War I until they were liberated. They have high respect for the United States.

DePue: The Koreans do?

Mitchler: The Koreans do, yeah. South Koreans, yes. They thank us. Even over here, they thank us. I mean, they understand what… If I'm a Korean veteran, I run into a Korean, they say thank you. I don't know how the Japanese really feel toward us. They're very cordial. Any of the shopkeepers or any of the contacts that I had with Japanese when I was in Sasebo or up in Tokyo, you know, always very polite. I think that's just their nature, to be polite. Very intelligent people. I like the Japanese people. I went over to one of the factories—for example, I met a fellow named Charlie…let's see, what—Frank. Frank Say. He was a Chinese, came into Sasebo, Japan, and he had a stand where he was selling all kinds of trinkets to the sailors. I got acquainted with him, and I said, "Frank, don't waste your time on these trinkets if you want to make some money. You buy a popcorn machine." He said, "Popcorn machine?" I says, "Yes. Here in Sasebo." They come down to the dock here. This is where all the whaleboats come in bringing the sailors in on liberty, 1600 in the afternoon, in the evening, and they take them back. They come here, and they have to walk up this road all the way. It was quite a walk till you got up to where you started getting in the business district of Sasebo where the merchants set up all the trinkets that the guys would buy—everything, you know, under the sun. I shipped a lot of it. I got boxes down there that I shipped to Helen that we've never, ever opened. I really do. I told her, "Don't open these till I get home, and we'll open them together." We've been so busy in the sixty-one years we're married here, I've never opened them. One time I went down and started opening them up and saw all the stuff in there, and… I don't know, that'll be a surprise to somebody someday.

I said, "You get a popcorn machine and you set it up here on this road. Now, the secret is, you can't start popping the popcorn at four o'clock when the sailors are coming, because you can't pop it fast enough when they buy it. You start at ten o'clock in the morning, and you start popping popcorn and put

them in boxes. See? And then you put the boxes in your air, keep it warm and everything, warm popcorn. And when the sailors come, every sailor will buy a box of popcorn, and you'll sell the sailors all kinds of popcorn. Well, I got transferred up to Panmunjom before I saw him do that. But I came back to the States, and he located in Oakland, California. One time when I was out there, I went out to see he and his family, and he says, "You know what? I got that popcorn machine, and I did just like you said. I set it up about halfway up there where all the sailors walked. Five, six thousand sailors walk up and down there sometimes on a weekend when they get their weekend liberty, five hundred, six hundred a day, you know. I did what you told me: start at ten o'clock in the morning." See, they listen. They listen, and they follow instructions. "Start at ten o'clock in the morning, start it popping." He said, "I didn't have any popcorn left when the sailors got liberty. All the Japanese, they start smelling that popcorn, and all the Japanese, they'd come out of the hills, down, and they bought all my popcorn before four o'clock. I was all sold out (laughter) before the sailors even came. The Japanese bought my popcorn. Every day I'd start at ten o'clock in the morning, and all the Japanese would come by. By two, three o'clock, I was all out of popcorn; I had to go get more popcorn." (laughs) He says they'd buy it as fast as they could make it.

DePue: Made a good living popping popcorn, then.

Mitchler: Oh, yeah. He was a great guy.

DePue: Okay. So we got you coming back to the United States. I want you to tell as much as you can, getting back to the States and then finally getting back to see Helen.

Mitchler: Yeah, this is interesting. When I landed in Seattle, Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith was Commander, Thirteenth Naval District, that was headquartered in Seattle. So the first thing I did, I went to downtown where he had his headquarters, and I paid respects to Allan E. Smith. Knocked on the door. He said, "Chief, come in here. Have a cup of coffee." (laughter) So we had a cup of coffee. "Did he ever get those mines swept up there on the west side there? You know, that was one of his big projects, get all those mines swept up there. I mean, up Chesterfield and Cigarette this and that." I laughed. I says, "I guess they did, Admiral. I never had any more much to do on that. I didn't get in on that too much." I said, "You'll have to ask Captain Kael or one of those there about what it was." But he wanted to know all about it and wanted to know about Panmunjom. He just talked like you and I are talking here. He was a regular fellow. I told him, "Yeah, I'm going back to my wife now." "Good." He says, "Going to go for dinner. Where are you staying?" I said, "Well, I'm going to stay here a couple days till I get squared away. I got some things being shipped out. Actually, over in Japan I bought two collapsible bicycles. They turned into a package, and I'm waiting for them to come in, and then I'm going to ship them on ahead of me." I bought two bicycles. You can put them in the trunk of your car, and you open them up, and they're bicycles you

can pedal around. I said, "I'm going to wait for those. They should be in here tomorrow or the next day." Now, he still had his cook with him that he had over in Sasebo, a Filipino. So he said, "Go up to the house there and see" so-and-so. I forget what his name is. So I went out to where the admiral lived, and I saw him. "Oh, how you doing?" He was a chief commissary guy. So we had a visit. I told him about these bikes. He said, "I'll take care of it. I'll get them all packed for you." So he did that for me. He said, "You give them to me. I'll pack them for you and get them shipped." I mean, that's the way we did things in the Navy. I mean, everybody got along good. That's why I like the Navy. You know, play it fair and square, and life is so interesting. And you'd come back, and so the admiral the next day, he says, "Come on, I'll take you to the club; we'll have dinner." So he took me to the club and we had lunch at noon. He wanted to know all about things that were happening after he left and so on. He was a fine gentleman. If I'd have stayed in the Navy, I would have probably run into him again. But I made a lot of friends in the Navy, and I enjoyed it. I probably come out with a different attitude than a lot. (laughs)

DePue: Were you planning at that time, though, to get out of the Navy?

Mitchler: Well, at that time, I had one more year to complete in college. But I took a discharge, yes. I took a discharge from the Navy, my second discharge, and then I came back. I flew in to Midway Airport. Now, Midway Airport, when I returned in 1952, you parked your car and you went to the fence line, and the plane landed, and you come down the ramp and you come over to the fence line and you met whoever you were going to meet. It didn't have anything like it had. They built up Midway Airport, see? And my wife was there, and she had the yellow convertible, and she was dolled up. I told my family, "Now, I'm going to come home. I just want Helen to meet me, not the whole family. We'll come home and meet the whole family. I want Helen to meet me, get a room down there at the Hilton, and Helen and I will go back in our car and go down to the Hilton and spend the night at the Hilton and see if we know each other." (laughter)

She was standing there waiting for me, just as we planned in the letters. And I come down off the ramp. I wore my uniform then. I thought I better wear my uniform, look like a sailor. I'd been discharged then, but I wore it. So we went to the Hilton, stayed at the Hilton that night, and talked and talked, you know, had dinner at the Hilton. Ran into one of my college friends. He was having dinner at the Hilton that night a couple tables away. He said, "Mitch, you're home!" I says, "Yeah, I just come in. I just met Helen. We're home here the first night. I'll be danged." We were in the same class. He was studying to be an accountant. He always wore his tie—he never put it through the knot, you know, just wear the tie and loop it over, straight down. He died, he laid in his casket, and that's the way his tie was, just hung over. That was his trademark.

DePue: Hmm, that's interesting.

Mitchler: He was a guy I ran into there when I had dinner at the Chicago Hilton with Helen. So we came home then, and we had the same little apartment that we had when I left. I went back to the university, completed my senior year, graduated, got a diploma. Again went back to work at the railroad just after I graduated, because they gave me a leave of absence from the railroad to go to school, and so I didn't want to cut it off. I wanted to go back at least for a couple of days. But then I said, "Now, I'm not going to stay in the office here. I want to see if there's something in the general office." After all, I'd had experience in management. I wasn't just going to be a clerk. I wanted to try something else. I got a college education now. So my first job in the general office was with labor relations. I wanted to see what that was. Well, that was a fizzle. That was a big joke. That wasn't for me. I was there a short time, and then I moved up to the passenger traffic that would deal with passengers. I thought I might like that. Because that was my only really job I had in civilian life, was the railroad, and had been with them since September 1937. Then the airlines come through with the jets, and I told them there, "You're not going to have any passenger traffic anymore with the Zephyrs and all them. Everybody's going to fly jets. Take you four hours to get to the coast from Chicago. It'll take you two days to get there on a train." So I give them my resignation. I just went out, and I took a sales job with a small paper box company, just to get away.

DePue: What happened to the idea that you're going to get a Reserve commission in the Navy?

Mitchler: Well, this was part of our marital situation. I didn't re-enlist in the Reserves. I said, "No, I don't know if I'm going to do that, because sure as the dickens, I'll get called up again, and I don't want to do that twice to Helen. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." And I said, "I don't know if I'm going to do that."

DePue: Was Helen telling you that she didn't want anything to do with Navy life?

Mitchler: No, no. Helen was very supportive of whatever I would want to do. She was a wonderful gal. Never complained about the seventeen months that we were separated. Beautiful lady and wife, and with our friends and everything. We had a lot of friends, a lot of friends, and she had a lot of friends to be entertained with, and her work as a nurse. Everything worked out beautiful. I came back, and we continued our life together. And then it was shortly after I graduated, and I was commuting to Chicago, this property became available that we're in now, today.

DePue: This is—

Mitchler: And we were renting an apartment.

DePue: Were you taking the train to Chicago every day?

Mitchler: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Because that's a long trip from Aurora.

Mitchler: Yeah, that's an hour trip—an hour in and an hour back. I figured that I was a slave for three hours a day. An hour in, an hour back, and all day long. You know, you go in, I'd get to Union Station, walk across the street to 547 Jackson Boulevard, where the Burlington headquarters was, go up to the thirteenth floor, go to my desk, sit there all day long, get through, come down, walk across the street, get on a train, and come home. From the time I left in the morning till the time I got home, I was a zombie. Now, people will do that. Not me. I told you about my experiences. You can't keep the boy back on the farm after he's seen Paree, you know. (laughs) No, that wasn't for me, so I gave them a resignation. Oh, they couldn't understand how, oh, seventeen years with the railroad, how you could resign. You've got a job the rest of your life. I said, "That's not what I wanted in life just is a job. " You know, if it's a boring job. I don't know how they commute like this. Some people commute for thirty, forty years, you know, and they love it. They think it's the greatest thing in the world. Read the newspaper.

DePue: How did you end up buying this piece of property, then?

Mitchler: Next door was—Helen's mother's sister was living there. She married a Piatowski. There were two homes over there, two houses; Elmer Piatowski and his father. Before I went to Korea, after we got married, they told us about the property next door. There was ten acres right next door that was just cattle ground, and the people here, two spinster ladies and a bachelor brother. Two school teachers. He sort of did farming. They lived here, three of them. When he wanted to smoke, he had to go down in the basement, and I see where he scratched his match on the chimney down there. They wanted to sell that ten acres they had next door, and she told us about that.

We came down and looked at it, but I got one year of college yet, you know, and if I buy ten acres of land, what am I going to do with it? You know, I don't know anything about building a house and that there. So I wasn't interested. And then the land was sold. After I graduated, she called, she says, you know, they want to sell this. The one girl died and the brother died, and the lady living here—she was only in her early seventies, seventy-three, -four, something like that—she was here all alone, and she didn't like that. Didn't have the buildings. She was going to build an addition onto a cousin who lived up in Elgin; she was going to have a little room built on there. She was very happy to do that and then wanted to get rid of this. So we bought this old house. You don't see the trees and everything like this like it is today. I mean, you were out in the boonies.

DePue: But a house with eight acres, sitting on eight acres?

Mitchler: Yeah.

DePue: How old was the house at that time?

Mitchler: Well, it was built in 1870, this house. We managed to swing a deal, so we moved here and accepted the challenge. (laughter) I'd commute. Helen would drive in in the Buick, and then she'd drive to work, and she'd pick me up at 6:30, and we'd try to hurry to get to a restaurant in Aurora, because restaurants didn't stay open like they do today, back then. The times have changed. There was nothing to eat down here. We didn't have anything. Here, you were in the boonies. And so we put up with that for a while. Then we purchased this property, and we struggled. We've had a happy life down here.

DePue: Well, I think this is probably a good point for us to break for today. I got a couple more questions for you, but they're very general in nature. And tomorrow, then, we're going to talk about getting into politics and getting into state politics in the '60s and '70s. The questions I want to ask you about today, though, is just reflect on your service during World War II and Korea. In both cases, do you think the sacrifices you made, the sacrifices the United States made, were justified? Were these the right wars to fight?

Mitchler: Yes, they were. I think World War II was perpetrated by the Japanese. Now, the Pacific War—I was all in the Pacific—I had nothing to do with the Atlantic. The Atlantic over there, the Britain, all the D-Day and all that stuff, I had nothing to do with that. In fact, I never got to Norfolk till I joined the Navy League, and one time we had to go out there to commission a ship. I told them that was my first time I got to Norfolk. And they says, "You'd never been to Norfolk, and you had ten years in the Navy?" They couldn't understand that. No. But the two were different. I understood. I learned what Japan was thinking, and if I was with Japanese, I understand what they were thinking, about why they wanted to control the Pacific Rim. They wanted that Pacific Rim all the way out, well, as far as Guam and around Saipan there, that Pacific Rim. I don't think the Japanese, that Hirohito actually wanted to control the United States. But when you stop and think about the Dutch East Indies down there, all the oil, what we have down in the Dutch East Indies, was owned by the Dutch, the British, and all these foreign countries—oil, minerals—all taking out, and the Japanese having nothing. They don't have any oil; they don't have any minerals. They don't have any of that stuff. They have to depend on getting it from China, buying it down there. They had to buy it from the Dutch and that. And I can see where the Japanese, if they wanted to grow at all, they had to expand. And looking down there, why do these people from Europe come way down here and take all our riches? Those belong to us, and we should control and work for the Philippines and China and all that. And they wanted to be the controlling nation out there. So I see that was an entirely different perspective than over in Europe—Hitler with his

super race and all that. That was terrible. How they ever let him get away with that, I don't know. Mankind was—how they ever let him build up an army and all that there, with white supremacy and killing off all the Jews and all the indigent people, millions of people.

DePue: How about the Korean War? Was the reason we were fighting in Korea as clear to you as the reasons for World War II?

Mitchler: Of course, after the end of World War II, Korea was liberated from Japan. Korea was one Korea since 1920 all the way up until the end of World War II. It was one piece; it wasn't the North and South. And it was controlled by the Japanese. Now, how they controlled it—they owned the fishing plants. The Koreans were forced to go out and do the fishing. They bring the fish in. They'd process the fish, and the Japanese would sell it and make the market. They had to only go to speak Japanese, and they were very hostile to them. And they're very negative to them in that way, the same way the Japanese to the Filipinos. So at the end of World War II—now, I don't know who the minds were behind that—but they liberated Korea. Now, Russia came in the last few days, I think five days into World War II.

DePue: Yeah, I think these are decisions that were made at Potsdam, where you divide Korea north and south and recognize that Russia's right there.

Mitchler: Yeah. I can't speak for facts. I don't want anything recorded that I said this wrong. But the agreement was that they have a North and South Korea, which was a big mistake.

DePue: But was there any doubt in your mind that you were in Korea for the right reasons?

Mitchler: Well, I was in the Korea at the request of the United Nations. And at that time, Harry Truman announced about the United Nations being formed when I was out in San Francisco in the Navy, coming back from World War II, that they organized a United Nations. And I says, "That makes sense. Anything as United Nations—we're together, so we'll never have another war." And it didn't work out that way.

DePue: But that was reason enough for you to think, Well, I'm not wasting my time over here in Korea?

Mitchler: Oh, I thought, being with the draft and everything, I could see that there was war in World War II, yes.

DePue: Okay. I think I'm going to know the answer to this question, but did serving in the Navy all these years make you into a different person?

Mitchler: Oh, I think it made me a better person. I think the military life, the discipline, the opportunity to have authority, to advance myself, to meet challenges…

Like the mere challenge to be recalled; sent over to Sasebo, Japan; sent over to a ship; thrown in as the admiral's writer, you know. I didn't know that much about the Navy at that level, you know. Experiencing that and be able to conform and all that there, I think I did very well. I'm proud of myself that I feel I accomplished; I got rewarded for it with commendations and so forth, and earned thirteen medals and decorations, and… (laughs)

DePue: Are you proud of your service, then?

Mitchler: Oh, very proud. I'm highly with the Navy. In fact, I was very active in the Navy League of the United States. I was president of the Aurora chapter; I was president of the State of Illinois Navy League; Great Lakes Region—Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois. I was a national director since '82. After ten years they made me a national director emeritus. I served on national committees and so forth. I put a lot of time into the Navy League, attending national conventions in support of the Navy. Not only the Navy, the Coast Guard and the Marine Corps and the Merchant Marine, sea services. I also am a member of the Association of the United States Army, Marine Corps Foundation, and Marine Corps League, and all those. I get all the magazines. Coast Guard.

I've been very active, because my legislative career, as I will get into, focused very strongly on the military. Then after I retired from the Illinois State Senate, I spent ten years with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs in an appointment by Governor Thompson to legislative and military affairs liaison with the governor. And I worked right in there. I didn't want a job with an office in Chicago, Springfield. I wanted to operate out of my home as I did all the time I was a senator. I never had a Senate office; I just operated out of my home. My wife might be called as a secretary, answer the phone when I'm not there, take the message. And I told that the Governor Thompson when he said, "I'm going to put you in Veterans Affairs, and you just work with all the veteran organizations, anything in Veterans Affairs, bring to the House, to the Senate, bring to my office. You're sort of a field guy out—everything."

DePue: Here's the last lesson for today, then, Bob. For the last twenty, thirty years, when American citizens think about these things, World War II in American minds means one thing, and Korea means something else entirely. The rap is that Korea is kind of overlooked and forgotten now. Any thoughts about that? Does that bother you, for example?

Mitchler: No, it doesn't bother me because I understand the situation. When I came back from Korea, one of the times when I was out visiting Admiral Smith, he said, "Hey, I'm going to give a lecture tonight on Korea over in"—I don't know where it was. It was a big hall. He said, "Come on. See if what I say is right." (laughs) You know, you asking me? So I went there, and he had a big chart of Korea come down, you know, and he was there pointing out, and he was describing everything about what we were doing there.

And that's what gave me the impetus when I came back. There was a fellow named Red Wood. He was a steel salesman. He was a president of the Rotary Club. Earl "Red" Wood. And he was in our American Legion. He was our chaplain. He wrote to me when I was over there, and he says, "Bob, when you come back, will you tell us about Korea to the Rotary Club? I'm president, and you got to tell us about it." I said, "Sure." So I got home like on a Friday. He calls me. He says, "Bob, I want you talk to the Rotary Club Monday." (laughter) I says, "Come on, Red. Get off my back. I just got home. I'm not going to…" "Noon." Oh, he says, "At noon Monday." I said, "I can't do that." He says, "Yeah, I got to have you Monday. I don't have somebody." Oh, he was a wonderful friend. I said, "Okay, I'll do that." So I got a hold of Gene Adams, who has a sign painter, and I says, "Gene, here's a picture of Korea. Will you make a chart, just quick, draw sort of a chart of Korea that I can put on a stand so I can show people what Korea looks like?" I didn't have a nice one like I got today. And he says, "Sure." So he quickly made me one over the weekend, and I pinned it up on a frame he made for me. He did frames and pictures and all different signs for all companies in that. He was a good sign painter. So he made me—it was a homemade-looking thing.

So I went to the Rotary Club. Now, the Rotary Club in Aurora was composed of all the presidents, vice presidents, of all these manufacturing districts that I told you about that we had. So I get up there, and—(knocking) Hello.

DePue: We got a visitor here.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we took just a very quick break because you had some company come. We only have about a minute or two to go, and you were talking about speaking at this Rotary group.

Mitchler: Oh, yes, and then he called me. And so my friend Gene Adams made a map of Korea real quick that I could bring. It was a very homemade thing. So I got up at the Rotary Club, and geez, I'm just back. I'm sort of nervous of the whole thing, because I look out there and I see all these exec—most of them were World War I guys, you know, and I'm going to tell them about Korea. So I started talking about Korea. I had just heard this lecture of Admiral Allan E. Smith that he gave, and it was in my mind. It was a perfect lecture on what Korea was all about, so I sort of in my mind just told it out. I'd been there; I could relate to it. And I looked down, and I had the attention of every one of those execs. They were listening to me. Now, normally, you know, an executive of a company is going to listen to some guy if he just (unintelligible)…he goes … And I says, Bob, keep going. Keep telling them. And I related, as I'm relating on this here, just from my memory, of exactly what's going on. And it was so interesting to those exec, I made a friend with everyone in the room reporting on Korea. The first time they ever had

anybody tell them exactly what the hell was going on in Korea. Because people would come back, "Is there water around Korea?" They'd ask the most silliest questions. And I thought everybody knew everything about Korea from the news media, but you don't.

People don't know today about Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya. They don't know any of those countries, just what they see in the news. They don't take time to go and really know what it's about. And these young guys coming back, they're over there for six months; they don't know what it's all about. They don't get to see everything. They get to see this, the chow line is back and forth, and they don't really get an experience.

DePue: Like the guys in the engine room don't know what's happening till you tell them.

Mitchler: That's right. And it's a different world that we live in, you know.

DePue: Well, we're going to finish up today, and we'll pick this up tomorrow. And it's been a lot of fun, Bob.

Mitchler: Yeah.

(end of interview #2)

For the interview about Senator Mitchler's time in the Illinois legislature, see the ALPL Oral History series on *Illinois Governance – Jim Edgar, Governor*