

Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum

Educational Resources



Memorial: Texas Ranger Robert Kenneth "Bob" Mitchell

Written by TRHFM Staff

The following article has been adapted from the former website of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.

IN MEMORIAM



Capt. Robert Kenneth "Bob" Mitchell

May 17, 1934 - June 18, 2007

Texas Ranger 1967-1992

Retired Texas Ranger Captain Bob Mitchell, 73, passed away at home on June 18, 2007 after a long battle with cancer.

Bob was born May 17, 1934, in Troup, Texas, to Erby D. Mitchell and Ruth (Skillern) Mitchell. He graduated from Elkhart High School in 1952, then attended Henderson County Junior College. After college, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving in Korea. Upon returning to the states, he married Jerry Busby of Waxahachie, Texas, in August 1956 and completed his military service at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. He began his training with the Texas Department of Public Safety in April 1958 and served 35 years as a Trooper and Texas Ranger.

He served as a State Trooper for nine years in New Braunfels, Texas, prior to becoming a Texas Ranger on Dec. 1, 1967. As a Ranger, he was stationed in Tyler, Austin and Waco, where he served as Captain of Co. "F" Texas Rangers for 18 years. He retired in 1992 from the Dept. of Public Safety, but never stopped being a Ranger.

In retirement, he continued to support the interest of law enforcement and served on the Boards of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum and the Texas Ranger Association Foundation.

In 2000, he served as interim Sheriff of McLennan County for eight months and was proud of his association with the personnel of the McLennan County Sheriff's Department. He was a member of the Northside Church of Christ and the Baylor Masonic Lodge.

Survivors include his loving wife, Jerry of 50 years; daughter, Carol Mitchell Matthieson and husband, Creig, and their children Andrew and Eric of Atlanta, Ga.; grandson, John Hague of Elm Mott; son, Bobby Mitchell and wife, Kathy, and their children, Dusty and Lauren of Waco; and brother, Darwin Mitchell.

Pallbearers include Bobby Mitchell, Dusty Mitchell, John Hague, Andrew Matthieson, Eric Matthieson and John Vickery. Honorary Pallbearers include Paul Allen, Ed Burleson, Jack Dean, Glenn Elliot, Larry Lynch, Bob Prince, Larry Scott, Louis Sommer and James Wright.

Article on Capt. Robert Mitchell
from the *Texas Ranger Dispatch* magazine

Robert Kenneth Mitchell was born in Troup, Texas, on May 17, 1934. He was the eldest of four children born to E. D. and Ruth Mitchell.

When Bob was a freshman in high school, his parents moved to Palestine, Texas. He attended nearby Elkhart High School, where he graduated in 1952. He then entered Henderson County Junior College on a football scholarship and played linebacker on defense and center on offense.

At the time, the United States was in the midst of the Korean War, and after one year at Henderson, Bob decided to leave college and volunteer for the Army.

Bob arrived in Korea shortly after the war ended and was assigned to peacekeeping duties. The 8th Army had a football team as a morale booster, and Bob chosen for the team. He thoroughly enjoyed his tour, playing football all over the Far East in addition to his other duties.

Bob's tour in Korea was over in 1955. When he returned to the states he married Jerry Busby of Waxahachie, Texas. A year later he completed his military obligation and enrolled at the University of Texas. He and Jerry set up housekeeping in Austin with their daughter Carol.

Another daughter, Karen, was soon on the way. A few years later their son Bobby was born. Bob found that he couldn't afford to go to school and support a wife and children on the GI Bill. He decided, instead, to pursue his dream of a career in law enforcement.

On April 1, 1958, he became a member of the Department of Public Safety Highway Patrol. When asked who had influenced his desire to be a lawman, he said:

It was an old trooper stationed in Palestine named Lane Fuller. I had visited him several times and he kind of recruited me. I thought that was the neatest, keenest, job that a man could ever have, and I still feel that way. I served ten great years on the Highway Patrol and loved every day of it.

Bob's duty station as a Highway Patrolman was in New Braunfels. His captain was N. R. Smith, a man for whom Bob had the greatest respect.

[Captain Smith was] one of the greatest men I ever worked for. [He] was the type guy that if you did your job, you could do no wrong in his eyes. He expected you to work, but you knew you had his total support at all times. I admired him as a man and as a leader.

After nine years Bob was accepted as a Texas Ranger on December 1, 1967. He was one of the last Rangers to have the fabled Texas Ranger badge pinned on him by Colonel Homer Garrison, the legendary director of the Texas Department of Public Safety and chief of the Texas Rangers.

First Day as a Texas Ranger

Bob's first day as a Ranger was memorable. Though his duty station was Tyler, on the first day he reported in Dallas to the captain of Company "B," Bob Crowder. Bob walked into the office at 7:30 a.m. Captain Crowder ordered him and veteran Ranger Ernest Daniel to go to the small community of Groveton in Trinity County and arrest the town's only doctor.

The doctor in question was an ex-convict from Tennessee. While in the penitentiary, he had worked in the prison hospital and picked up a little medical knowledge. When he got out of prison he burglarized a doctor's office, stole his credentials, and hit the road.

The bogus physician was passing through Groveton one day and happened to be in the local drugstore when someone brought in a child who had a bad cut on his back. The would-be physician told them he was a doctor and could stitch the cut. Several of the people in the drugstore began talking to him and expressed how much they needed a doctor in the area. He agreed to stay and open a practice. Ironically, he once treated one of Captain Mitchell's uncles, who had severely cut his hand in a farming accident.

Arriving in Groveton, the county seat, Bob and Ernest went to the sheriff's office and said they had a warrant for the doctor. "Oh no," said the sheriff. "We just had a town meeting this morning. We are so proud of him, we voted to build him a new clinic." He then proceeded to relate to Bob and Ernest the "miracle" healings the doctor had done and how he would sit up all night with the really sick in their homes.

To say that the doctor was beloved by the people in the area would be an understatement. Not only did he have a large practice, but he had also met and married a local woman and built a fine home. The sheriff added, "If ya'll go over there and arrest that man, as much as the people like him, you're going to have to shoot your way out of town." Fortunately, the sheriff overstated his opinion.

When the Rangers arrived at the doctor's office, it was full. The doctor was seeing a patient when they walked in. They called the doctor by his real name, arrested him, walked him across the street to the courthouse, arraigned him, and carried him back to Kaufman County, just outside Dallas. This was just the start of a distinguished career in the Texas Rangers.

Lone Star Steel

In the early 1970s, the president of Tyler Pipe approached Bob about a serious problem they were having at his plant. He suspected that the facility was being shorted on the scrap metal they were buying.

Tyler Pipe was purchasing its scrap from a company near Fort Worth and, naturally, the people there became the number-one suspects. Bob set up surveillance on trucks entering and leaving the plant.

He found it strange that several of the drivers would gather near the truck scales about four o'clock in the morning even though they couldn't check in for several hours. It didn't take him but a short time to figure out their scheme.

When the trucks pulled onto the scales, a man who knew how to manipulate the weights would sneak into an access passageway beneath the scale ramp and artificially inflate the weight of the loads. When the last truck in line finished, he would move a manhole cover and climb into a secret compartment under the trailer of the last truck to leave.

Getting paid two and three times for the scrap they actually sold, it's easy to see why the president of Tyler Pipe said, "It's going to break this company if we don't get something done about it." Under Bob's leadership, something was done.

With the assistance of fellow Rangers Red Arnold, Glenn Elliott, Lester Robertson, and Max Womack, a dozen of the thieves were arrested. It turned out the criminals had been doing the same thing at foundries in San Angelo, Texas, and Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, Alabama. They'd hit one company and then move on to another.

Bob Mitchell and Glenn Elliott were sent to investigate the violent Lone Star Steel Strike of 1968 and 1969. Little could Bob imagine what lay ahead of him when he got the call from Captain Bob Crowder one morning. "There's going to be a strike at Lone Star Steel in the morning. Get you some clothes so you can stay up there three or four days. Go up there and meet [Ranger] Red Arnold in the morning."

Bob and Glenn checked into a motel in nearby Daingerfield. Instead of staying for three or four days, it was to be seven months and three days before they left Lone Star, Texas.

A Dallas newspaper article described it best: "*A Strike Gone Mad.*" During those months, Bob and Glenn investigated bombings, beating, threats, shootings, and the murder of Smitty Blackburn. This was one of the most disappointing cases Bob ever worked. Bob described the case:

Smitty Blackburn was a good, little ole hard-working country family man that needed to work to feed his family. He had built a new home, and he had house payments and a new baby. He simply couldn't afford to go on strike, and he continued to work. His house was shot into at least once; [if] I recall, and I believe I'm right, three or four times. But I recall one incident because a high-powered rifle [bullet] had gone into the window, across the baby's crib, and through the wall. And then just a few nights later, Blackburn was shot and killed as he drove to work on a back road not far from the plant. Very frustrating. Glenn and I put hundreds of hours into it, [but] didn't solve it.

Captain Mitchell's stories as a Ranger could fill more than one book. During his years as a field Ranger, he worked every case imaginable. However, talent is noticed, and in 1971, he was promoted to sergeant and transferred to Austin for three years. On September 1, 1974, he was promoted again, to the captaincy of Company "F" in Waco.

His Legacy

Like his days as a field Ranger, his career as the captain of Company "F" could also fill a book. His real legacy was training men who became captains themselves. The list is long: N. W.

“Dub” Clark, Ray Coffman, Jack Dean, Jim Miller, Charlie Moore, Bob Prince, Wallace Spillar, Joe Wilie, and James Wright.

After 18 years as a Captain, Bob Mitchell retired on June 30, 1992. But his service in law enforcement did not end there. Bob was called back to duty in 2000 when the McLennan County Sheriff died in office and an interim Sheriff was needed. To no one’s surprise, he answered the call and served with great distinction.

Captain Mitchell was extremely proud of the Texas Rangers and their museum in Waco. He was just as confident of where the Texas Rangers are going:

I’ve never known a Ranger that wasn’t proud of our history and heritage. But I’m firmly convinced that the Rangers are making history today, just like they did 180 years ago. I’m extremely proud of the sharp, young Rangers we have today. I think they’re the best-trained, best-equipped Rangers in our history.

Compiled by

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