

Corporal Henry Bert Mitchell

A Great American Veteran



Corporal Mitchell and Adam Slaughter

Henry Bert Mitchell was born to Alice and Hayse Mitchell in Athens, Tennessee, on Wednesday, August 13, 1924. His father was a farmer.

In 1924, the President was Calvin Coolidge, and the world was experiencing the first ever Winter Olympics. It was a great year.

Henry was never alone growing up. He had eight brothers and five sisters. They shared chores on the family farm, including cutting wood, milking cows, collecting eggs, and working the fields. When not working, Henry attended Horse Creek Mission Elementary School. Back then, school only went to the eighth grade. Henry was fortunate and completed all grades. After graduation, he continued to work the farm and do odd jobs. For fun, he, his friends, and brothers would catch a ride to Greeneville or Bristol for a picture show or to get something sweet from the malt shop. Life was good.

When Henry was around 16 or 17 years old, the world found itself in turmoil. War was brewing. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, a U.S. Naval Base in Hawaii and home to much of America's Pacific Fleet. America was now at war.

Frank, Henry's oldest brother, joined the military. Shortly thereafter in 1943, Henry (now 18) and most of his brothers found themselves standing with a draft letter in hand. They traded their overalls, tractors, rakes, and axes for military uniforms and military equipment. Life as Henry knew it would never be the same.

Six weeks after receiving his draft letter into the Army, Henry left by bus for Fort Bragg in North Carolina for 13 weeks basic training. Once training was complete, he boarded the Queen Mary for Scotland. From there, he traveled to England where he trained roughly six months preparing specifically for the operation known as D-Day. Henry was a Corporal in the U.S. army's 1st Infantry Division Known as "The Big Red One" assigned to the 7th Field Artillery Battalion. He was assigned a 105 Howitzer artillery gun. This gun required a crew of eight and weighed 2.5 tons. It was known as the workhorse of the field artillery.

Once training was complete in England, the time had come for frontline combat. On June 5, 1944, aboard an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) boat, he found himself sandwiched with two trucks, his guns, and his infantry brothers as they waited for command in the English canal for D-Day. Due to weather and tide issues, D-Day was pushed out another day. That meant waiting in the boat a day longer. Finally on the morning of June 6, 1944, it began. Henry anxiously waited his turn with the roar of the planes overhead; the explosion of bombs; the sounds of gunfire; the rush of the water; the feel of his heartbeat; anticipating the signal; waiting to storm the beach at Normandy on D-Day. What an epic battle!

More than 9,000 allied soldiers were killed or wounded within the first 24 hours. Henry remembers how the boats could not make it all the way to shore. So, when the fronts of the boats were lowered making a ramp, the trucks went first, followed by the men in their packs with water up to their chins. They had to trudge their way to the shore and up a steep hill. Once there, they set up their guns and launched their attack.

Henry reached the beach that day around 2 p.m. They slept on the beaches that night, and the next day they started their trek over to France, Belgium, Germany, North Africa, Sicily, and ended their frontline storm in Czechoslovakia. This trek lasted from June 6, 1944, to May 8, 1945. During Henry's time in war, he fought frontline in five campaigns: Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland, and Central Europe. He was a major part of battles, such as D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and V-E Day. He was paid a mere 83 cents per day.

In August 1945, the war was over, and Henry returned home to Greeneville, Tennessee. Henry decided to join the Army Reserves because he would receive \$11.00 a month. He also met a beautiful lady by the name of Irene Shaffer who became his wife in September 1950. Three days later he was called to serve in the Korean War. He served in the 1st Cavalry Division until October 1951. Henry later settled into a job in Bristol, Virginia, at Universal Molders making fiberglass. He retired in 1987.

Henry and Irene have two children, four grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren. Henry's great granddaughter, Haley Wood, is an eighth grader at Tennessee Middle School.