

Our father, Dewey A Mitchem, was born on September 8, 1926. When he joined the US Army on October 26, 1942, he claimed that his date of birth was Jan 28, 1924. Thus, when he joined the Army, he was 16 years old. Two years later, in Corsica, Italy, he wrote on the back of a photo that he was 24 years old! So, he not only kept the ruse up, he must have forgotten the date he had originally given to the Army.



Prior to joining the Army, Dad worked in the coal mines near Kimball, WV (his address at time on enlistment). He had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education and lived at home. His father was also a miner, but times were hard. His mom would go to the company store and buy food and other household items against his pay. So, Dad always said the reason he enlisted in the Army is that he got tired of never making any money.

Once enlisted, he was sent first Fort Thomas, Kentucky, then later to Aircraft Mechanic School in Seymour Johnson Field, NC. He also went to Aerial Gunnery School in Ft. Myers, Florida.

Prior to being sent to Europe, he was sent to Idaho, where he was an instructor. It was in Idaho that he met our mother, Agnes Franklin. They were married in Ely, Nevada, on October 17, 1943.



I'm not sure when these pictures were taken, but it's probable that they were taken in the United States, prior to being sent to the European theater. The names on the group photo do not appear to be in order of appearance, but rather, as each person signed them. Some are legible; some are not.





*Robert E. Welch*  
*Francis A. Mc Carver*  
*Richard W. Helms*  
*James R. Mitchell*  
*Robert A. Pierce*  
*Roland J. Woran*  
*Robert A. Smith*  
*Thomas P. Zalusky, Jr.*  
 ME ON BOTTOM  
 RIGHT  
 B-24 CREW 1943

On May 1, 1944, Dad was sent to Europe where he served as a gunner in the Army Air Corp for the next 13 months. He was sent to England first, then to Corsica, Italy.

He always said he flew 57 missions. We have no way of corroborating this (his Army file was destroyed in a warehouse fire that burned many military records). He was in the European theater, participating in the European Air Offensive in Normandy ('44), North Appennines ('44), Po Valley ('45) and the Balkans ('45). His highest level in the Army was Staff Sergeant. The pictures below were taken in Corsica, Italy. I've noted the other persons' names, when available.



1944

Dad and Clarence Gill





Friend

“Mack”

While in Europe, Dad received the following citations: European African Middle Eastern Service Medal Air Medal GO 246 Hq ed 44, Good Conduct Medal AR600-68, 1<sup>st</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal GO 47 Hq 12<sup>th</sup> AF 45, 2nd Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal GO 49 Hq 12<sup>th</sup> AF 45, 3<sup>rd</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal GO 81 Hq 12<sup>th</sup> AF 45, 4<sup>th</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal 88 Hq 12<sup>th</sup> AF 45.

Dad never said much about his war experiences. He remembered that as a gunner he could look down from the plane and see that in addition to dropping bombs on the "target," they were also dropping bombs on women and children, who he could see running in the streets.

Dad came home on June 18, 1945, and he went back to work in the coal mines in Carswell, WV. Like so many generations of coal miners, the mines paid a good income. It never occurred to him to take part in the GI Bill and go back to school. The mines had been good enough for his father, and they were good enough for him. If you would like to know more about Dad and his family, please visit our site at [www.mitchems.com](http://www.mitchems.com). We would enjoy hearing from you.





Dad and friend, William Morton (from New York).  
Taken in a graveyard in North Carolina.

