

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Marine Reserves Project

Military Experiences

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FRANK MITCHESON

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK MITCHESON, JR.

INTERVIEWER: David Arms

SUBJECT: Reserve history, operations, new recruitments,
drilling of men

DATE: February 22, 1976

A: This is an interview with Master Sergeant Frank Mitcheson, Jr. for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by David Arms at the Marine Corps Reserve Center in New Castle, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1976, at approximately 2:45 in the afternoon.

Master Sergeant, could we just start this interview with you giving me a little background of your Marine Corps and your personal history?

M: I joined the Marine Corps in 1944. I went to Parris Island, and on completion of boot camp, as we learned our emblems and graduated, we started out with 125 men and we graduated 72 in platoon 601. I went to seagoing school. After graduation from sea school, I got aboard the U.S.S. Macon, which was the flagship of the Atlantic. I sailed for sixteen months. I got off of the U.S.S. Macon and got aboard the General J. C. Breckenridge. I went to Guam where they were making the sixth division for the invasion of Okinawa. I formed an easy company 22nd Marines as number seven ammo carrier on .30 caliber machine guns, water-cooled, and lights. We hit Okinawa on April Fool's Day, 1945 at 0600; the first wave went ashore. At 0620, the second wave. I was in the second wave aboard Higgins boat number 676. We hit the beach at Naha airfield and moved our way west toward Sugarload Tail.

I was stationed there with 126 points. At that time, you got discharged by point systems. I came home; I left there on October 7th on the U.S.S. Wakefield. I came into Norfolk, Pier 5, got put on a troop train,

separated, and went to the Great Lakes, and was discharged from the United States Marine Corps, on November 11, 1945, Armistice Day. I returned home and seeked employment and went to work for the Ohio Power Company as a groundman. In 1948, they evacuated a unit, started a new reserve unit in Stuebenville, Ohio. I joined in 1948 as a rifleman. From there I went to a satellite platoon in East Liverpool. We met there for two hours on a Tuesday night and you got a day's pay. The Korean War came along and I got called back with the special rifle company for three years and six months.

A: This was from Stuebenville?

M: Right. I was fortunate enough that I didn't go with the rifle company because I had a 3041 supply MOS number and I went to Quaniko, Virginia. From Quaniko, I went to Albany, Georgia. I was a thirteen staff NCO aboard in Albany, Georgia. I stayed at Albany all during the Korean War. I got discharged in 1954. I came back out and joined the reserve unit. I was back with the reserve unit again. I didn't get discharged; I was released. I went back to Stuebenville and stayed there until 1959 and then I joined a third engineer company in Youngstown, Ohio. I got transferred.

A: Did the unit move from down there?

M: No.

A: You just got transferred?

M: Right. I went to the engineers. I went into the engineers as a heavy equipment platoon sergeant and motor transport and I moved up to be the platoon commander of the heavy equipment. Then I moved back in supply and took over supply at Youngstown. Then the company was redesignated as 6th engineers and the 6th engineers was the biggest battalion in the U.S.M.C.R. There were 13,228 people in the battalion. The main company of the Italian headquarters was in South Bend, Indiana. Colonel Ramhan was the commanding officer at South Bend and Colonel Enslie was just retiring. Colonel Enslie was actually commanding office and he stepped down the XO with Colonel Ramhan who moved up and took over the battalion. We moved as battalion strength; we moved all over to Gulfport, Mississippi, when they had the hurricane Camille come in down there. We went down and helped out the Seabees at Gulfport, Mississippi. We really enjoyed that very much because the Seabee is a blood brother of the Marine. That's how we have classified it for years and it has always been that the

Seabees are great people. Hearing that from a Marine and a former Marine that has been the the 96 Seabee Battalion during World War II who has seen and helped them work hand and hand, foot and foot, and boosted mud with them, why, they are good people; we couldn't exist without them, there's no doubt about it. They are a good company.

From there, they had done away with the unit in Youngstown.

A: When was that?

M: It will be five years in September, October the 1st, officially. So in 1970 they did away with the unit. Part of the people had a choice whether to go to Akron to the K Company of the grunts which is a rifle company, or come to the service company minus headquarters battalion at New Castle, Pennsylvania. I was asked to come to New Castle as supply chief. I accepted that and did that. Before they accept you, you had to be interviewed. You went before the officers and the staff NCO's of the company. They asked you various questions such as: Why do you want to be in the unit? Why do you want to come over here? It is more or less just a formality to see if you know exactly what you are doing and whether you are a Marine or not.

A: You moved around quite a bit. Now, when you drilled down in Stuebenville, where did you drill down there? Was it at a center or something?

M: We were at Chariot Pekoe Street; we had a drill center down there. The government had rented a farm out by Richmond, Ohio. It was an abandoned farm; it was about 169 acres. No one had lived there for years and it was really back in the brush. We used to pull overnights. We would go out and stay all night. In the rifle company, whether there is snow on the ground, whether it's raining, whether it's snowing, or the sun is shining, you always go and stay overnight. You hold field problems and actually play war. You have aggressors against the . . . the good guys against the bad guys, just like cops and robbers. You play all night. You actually use blank ammo, flash adapters, machine guns with blank ammo in them. They have umpires from different companies and they score you. They have to tell you whether you won the war or you lost the war. It's tactical training and it's good; it's what keeps the adrenaline running.

A: What was your specific job at that time?

M: At that time, I was supply chief. But in the rifle company you always--no matter when the rifle company moves out whether you have a technical MOS or whatever it may be,

you're supply chief or whatever--when it comes time to move out for the skirmishes and you are at the overnights, you move with them. You actually take part; you are a rifleman; you are in the machine gun platoon or you are with the 3.5 rockets or whatever you have; you're assigned.

A: How often did you do this?

M: Down there, it was just about . . . we would meet twice a month down there. We were meeting for one day and sometimes two days. We did that almost every month we were in the field. Now if there was administrative work or something like that that had to be done, they kept you behind. Riflemen never stay in; the grunts always move out.

A: How did you get paid for this? You said that sometimes you drilled once, sometimes . . . Did you get paid for all the time?

M: You got paid for all the time you drill. They run you on a daily diary. The daily diary is sent to the Pav records which is now Kansas City. At that time, it used to be Philadelphia. You would receive a check when you came back to the next drill; you would get paid for the last drill. You were always running one drill behind.

A: Did you have so many scheduled drills a month?

M: Yes. You had at the beginning of the reserve program, every Tuesday night. Every Tuesday night, that was four nights a month. It was just like going to a meeting somewhere. If you were in the Lion's Club or Kiwanis, it would be the same thing.

A: How did you get paid? Did you get paid by check?

M: By government check. You never got paid in cash. The only time I ever got paid in cash in a line was when I was a regular Marine. You lined up to get paid.

A: This was sent into Philadelphia and then it came back?

M: At that time, right. Today it is Kansas City.

A: After you left Stuebenville, you went to Youngstown. Now this was an engineering company versus a rifle company?

M: Yes, quite a change.

A: What does an engineering company do for a layman like myself? What is the engineering company responsible for? What is their mission?

M: Their mission is the geographical area where they may be, not only in Mahoning County, Columbiana County, Jefferson County, but they do civic projects. They build ball fields. They do parking lots for churches, nonprofit organizations. We did a tremendous job at the Camp McKinley in Lisbon, Ohio, for the Boy Scout camp down there. We just did a tremendous job for them. We moved a lot of equipment down there. We were there from September 1st until April 1st of the next year. We actually ran those tractors and there were many Friday nights we would go in there early when it was five degrees above zero. The next day we would start our tractors up at six o'clock in the morning and let them run for an hour, just idle, before we would even move them. It was the same way with the 550 road graders, our dump trucks, our front end loaders. Our hydraulics in them would be so cold that you just had to let them run, let the pumps work and get warm before you could actually do a good job. All we did . . . we've done Hillsville. We built a rifle range out there and we moved a lot of dirt around. We just did a lot of civic projects. We were good at logging, especially the bridge platoons. We would go into a forest area and take our chain saws. If somebody wanted it cleaned out or brushed out, we would gladly go in there and do it. It was manual labor but everybody enjoyed it. We pushed mud all day and worked on the tractors all night and that is just the size of it.

A: How did eat when you were out on these expeditions?

M: We would give them cases of C Rations. Today's rations are so upgraded that quality and quantity is more. It is high protein. You enjoy them; I still like rations.

Every now and then, we have a little problem. Four or five men going out for a civic project, leaving from here as a service company, different things, helping people out. Marines who are deceased--they got killed in Vietnam--their mothers' and fathers' call in for help. We send our people out because they are Marines and they are Marine family and we help them. Some of them are on pensions; some of them are on welfare and they don't have the money to actually do the work. We have very talented people. We have carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, steam fitters, plumbers, tractor operators. If somebody will donate the tractor, we will put the operator on. The union can't balk on this because we do have qualified . . . they are still licensed in the Marine Corps. Not only on the outside, but they are licensed in the Marine Corps.

How do these people renew their license? That's a big question. We go to summer camp. Their licenses are usually

good for two years, then we send them to a refresher course while we are down there. The 8th engineers or the 2nd engineer company down there have them rerun through a training course. They get their license renewed. These guys don't forget. Basically every man in the Marine Corps is a rifleman and he can operate it efficiently enough to kill. In fact, the Marines are the only branch of service who can operate a weapon up to a 3.5 rocket. Any man, any grunt, any man that is, even an engineer, can operate efficiently enough to kill.

A: When you were over in Youngstown, you had equipment there at the center?

M: Yes. When I first went there we had four dump trucks, three tractors--two TD18's and one TD14--a twenty-five ton base city crane with all the attachments: the drag line, the front end shovel. We had just one rubber tarred, rough terrain, highlift. It was when the Marine Corps was experimenting with them. They thought they were fine, bought them, and found out that they might have bought some junk. It wasn't long until they were phased out.

A: Who was responsible for maintaining this equipment periodically?

M: The Marines themselves, the MOS trained people. 1371 MOS is an engineer; that's an engineer MOS. 1375 was a heavy equipment mechanic; he was experienced at it. Believe it or not, these boys go to the six months training. They graduate from boot camp and go to advanced training, OJT, on-the-job training. They knock off idlers, take tracks off, pull transmissions, pull heads off of motors, take ejectors out and test them on an ejector testor. They find out whether we are getting the right thing. They do a filter spot. These boys do a good job. Then you have your inspecting instructor, what they call the INI stagg. He is a heavy equipment mechanic, heavy equipment operator, motor transport mechanic, motor transport driver. These people are INI staff people, an inspecting instructor, and they are there to inspect and instruct; that's their job.

A: The actual maintenance was conducted by the reserve people who came in for their two days a week or two days a month?

M: Right. If we had a big major overhaul, the INI would work on it and we would get some extra EIOS; that's extra EIOD's drills. Maybe we would bring three or four mechanics in for three or four days to help to put this equipment back together because we needed to keep it running for our civic projects.

A: About how many people were in that service or that

engineering company in Youngstown?

M: There were about 365 people. It was a big company.

A: Were they mostly engineers or supply people?

M: No. We were broken down into four platoons. We had headquarters platoon which takes in your supply people, your training people. That takes care of the ~~add~~men section. Then the first platoon is your heavy equipment operators, your motor transport people, your mechanics, your motor transport mechanics, and heavy junk mechanics. Heavy junk is what we call . . . that's equipment. The second platoon would possibly be a bridge platoon. They specialized in bridges; they built them out of timbers and out of trees and stuff. The third platoon could have been split up. It could have been half bridge people and half jacks and sawmill people. We set up jacks and sawmills right in the woods and they would run gasoline engines and log strippers. They would cut the logs and bring them to the mill and they would run them through. The fourth platoon could possibly have been attached to plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and various crafts.

We were very blessed. The people from Youngstown came far and near. I drove from East Liverpool, Ohio, which was about thirty-two miles from the training center. We have had them come as far away as almost Stuebenville. At that time, we had Sergeant Major Preshler who at that time was a gunnery sergeant. He drove from Greenville, Pennsylvania. Myron Bright was another one from Greenville. These people drove sixty-two, sixty-five miles because they wanted to be an engineer. We were very blessed because the people that we had were operators on the outside; our plumbers were plumbers on the outside; our electricians were electricians on the outside. We were very blessed with talent.

A: When you were attached to the engineering company, you were in supply, is that it?

M: Yes, well, not at first. I was a platoon sergeant in heavy equipment and motor transport. Then I became platoon commander of heavy equipment. The promotions came by and different people moved out. I was a 3041 at that time in my primary MOS. They moved me right back into my billet and I took over supply and became the battalion supply chief of the 6th engineers.

A: As supply chief over there, what was your job? What were you responsible for?

M: Say that the equipment people or the rich people . . . say

that we needed to order something or something had to be bought or purchased right away like filters and stuff for tractors which we didn't stock, that's an open . . . that's a BPA, a contract with the people. I think you are very familiar with that.

A: BPA is a what?

M: Blanket Purchase Order. You set it up yearly with the people. You would go down there and get what you need, sign it, bring it back, and they send you a bill every month. This has to be authorized by the district. In other words, you just don't go out and get a BPA; this is authorized by district.

I had the armory; I had all the weapons and three armors. I was in charge of weapons. I also took care of all the douche gear which is 782 gear; that's your packs, your sleeping bags, your shovels, your mess kits, your canteens, and everything. We had to keep the stock replenished because we used it a lot and it wore out. That's what we call WOIF, wore our normal service. When this happens, you have to send in a document on a BZ9 and request disposal and they send it to the nearest disposal plant. They have to authorize this; sometimes if you send too much in you have an investigation and they come down and look at it. Actually it's wore out and it's there; you have the item. It's item for item; that's run on a CMR. They hold you tight, which I think you are very well familiar with. Some supply chiefs get away with a little more than others.

A: Where does the money come from to buy all of this stuff?

M: We appropriate a year ahead and possibly project three years. They like for us to do that in a budget. We try to guess--it is a guessing game--and program and project what we think we are going to need for the next year and the following year and the year ahead. Only they don't hold you to the next two years. But that year that you budget . . . Like we are in 1976 now, our 1977 budget is in and they have approved it. We can't change our budget. We budget so much for motor transport, so much for dispersing, so much for photo which includes film, developing, processing, so much for reproduction for paper. We try to project what we are going to do for other companies in Erie, Pennsylvania, Akron, people in Pittsburgh, and people who need help. We try to project in supply what we are going to need as far as clothing, for example. We project that we feel that we are going to survey their clothes this next year. We went in for \$4,800 just to survey clothes for the men and that's really a bare minimum because we are out to almost nothing. We used to have \$6,000 here to play with. In a quarter, we would lose . . . I've lost \$650 because

I didn't need to use it, so we just lost it. They take it off or you. If you don't use the money that is appropriated for that quarter, you lose it. I would rather lose it, instead of wasting it.

A: Who do you submit the budget that you make up to? Where does it go?

M: We submit that to Lieutenant Leet in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who is fiscal officer. He has a staff there who breaks it down and goes over it and if they approve it, fine; if they disapprove it, he calls you on the phone. If it's just a pen change, he'll tell you to make a pen change. If he doesn't approve what you think you are going to need for that budget for that year, he'll harass you until he gets it where he wants it. He is very, very thorough. He's a second lieutenant and he's very upgraded on fiscal.

A: So he is a supply type of . . .

M: Yes, fiscal supply.

A: Is he a reserve?

M: Oh, no, he's a regular officer. He's a regular officer in the United States Marine Corps.

A: You have been in the Marine Corps Reserve basically since 1948?

M: Right.

A: Why did you join the reserve?

M: Oh, there are so many things. You hear the old stories from the old-timers saying they hear the drums beat and when the drums beat they get in line and sign up again. I feel this way: I like my country. Everybody calls us weekend warriors; call us whatever you like, but when the bugle blows and it is time to line up, we will be there. The Marines are a proud bunch of people. You have to be a Marine in order to enjoy it and to know the system. Nowadays it is a new breed, an altogether different people. All they can think about is, "When am I going to get out?" Vietnam War was strong and they didn't want to go to the actual service so the college boys chose the easy way out and came into the reserve program. Well, us old-timers who manned the reserve program beforehand, way before they were even born . . . It was good and it's getting tougher now. There is more paper work and everything. I feel that I want to serve my country as far as I can. I'm fifty years old in May, so I think I've done real well.

- A: You have got almost about thirty years in? How long do you think the Marine Corps will let you stay?
- M: They say I can only stay until I'm fifty-five. I don't know what comes first, fifty years old or thirty years good service. Speculating here, I would say this I could possibly stay until I'm fifty-five; I have a good record. I'm hard, but I'm straight and fair and I treat everybody the same. So I have a good reputation for this and I believe in being squared away. This new hair style, I'm not too much for that. But I'm an old Marine.
- A: How does your family feel about this Marine?
- M: My wife Sam--I nicknamed her that since the Korean War-- has been a Marine almost twenty-seven years with me. When I say that I mean she has lived in the Marine Corps for twenty-seven years. My daughter who is twenty-two is proud. My son will be eighteen and he doesn't want anything to do with the Marine Corps. He's been a Marine for almost eighteen years and so he has had a home course. He knows what it is to live by the rules and strict regulations. He is a fine boy. He has been accepted to four colleges to be a lawyer. I want him to serve his country, and he will serve his country, but it is up to him which service he wants to. I would rather he be a Marine.
- A: Do you see a big change in the Marine Corps Reserve since you joined in 1946?
- M: Yes, there has been an awful change. We went into the new Marine Corps as they called it. The hair style is longer; there are more people now who can call or write their congressman . . . politics is involved in this thing, in the military service, which I don't think it should be. Yes, if it's a crisis or it's critical and really needs looking into, yes. This has changed so much that it is hard for us old-timers to get used to this. I'm not only talking just for me; there are quite a few of us here: Sergeant Major Pressler, Sergeant Cramer, Sergeant Pickett, First Sergeant Bright. To us old-timers, it is hard for us to adjust to the new. Today these boys think that they are working an 8:00 to 4:30 job, and all they are missing is a union or they would have it.
- A: Do you see this affecting the country as a whole?
- M: A statement that I would make would be my opinion. I don't believe some of the ways . . . Getting back to the politicians or the way that the country is run and the way that they cut our money for each year, with the Navy, you know, they probably cut \$20,000 or \$30,000 of their

budget and operation capital. They cut 11.2 million dollars out of the Marine Corps budget this year and we are all going to suffer for this. Everyone is going to suffer; it's going to be even tighter. We have to tighten our belts. I don't think that this new breed affects the country; they try, but I think there is a turnaround. We are getting boys now who are volunteering and we are getting prouder service people. When you start getting proud service people lining up to get back in the service that served during this new breed, there is a reason for it. They come in; their hair is shorter than probably what it was when they got out. They come aboard and look real fine. I think that there is a turning point and I think we are in it now. I think in the next two years you are going to see a big, heavy upgrade in the military. I think the reserves will get stronger and your regular force will go down. That's what I look for and I think that is where it is going to be.

- A: There are a couple of questions I still have left about you moving around. In regards to serving at these areas, would there have been an active duty staff, that INI staff as you call it, in the drilling reserves? Did you find any friction between the two? Were there any hard feelings or was it all one Marine Corps?
- M: Most of the time it was all one, hard Marine Corps and everyone worked breast-to-breast, chest-to-chest, or however you want to put it. Then there are times again when there is a little friction between the counterpart, or the INI staff don't like some of the reserves. But after they are with us for awhile and they see what kind of people they are working with and the breed of the people that they are actually dealing with, they change; they do 180 degrees. They say to other regular station, "You don't know what the reserves are all about until you are with them. They are real good people and they are ready. They are a ready force to move." I believe that the Marine Reserves are ready to move. If they had to call on us, I believe that we could do that job, get it done, and get back home. That's what happened during the Korean War, they called the reserves.
- A: When you go away on your two week training or something like that to another station or something, did you find that the Marine Corps as a whole wasn't ready to accept the reserves? Did you have a hard time getting along with them on your two weeks training?
- M: No. We have found that any place where we have ever gone the people have been very acceptable and vigorous to have us there. Many statements were made, "Boy, if we could just get our guys to work like your guys." Although we

are only there for fifteen days, the guys worked long, strenuous hours. No, I feel that the regulars don't look down at you. There may be a few, but the few that look at us . . . there are more good that outweigh the bad.

A: Is there anything, my friend, that I haven't asked you that you would like to bring out?

M: I would like to say that the Marine Corps is whole now and if anybody is really interested in doing the job . . . the little posters you see "We are looking for a few good men." That covers a lot of ground. We are looking for a few good men because the Marine Corps is not going to put up with this harassment. The only thing we are interested in in a man is that on the left pocket he is wearing the USMC on his pocket. There is an anchor and a globe with a big eagle setting on it. That's what we are interested in. Is he going to stand truthful and tall in the uniform that he wears as being a Marine? They have a tradition to uphold.

END OF INTERVIEW