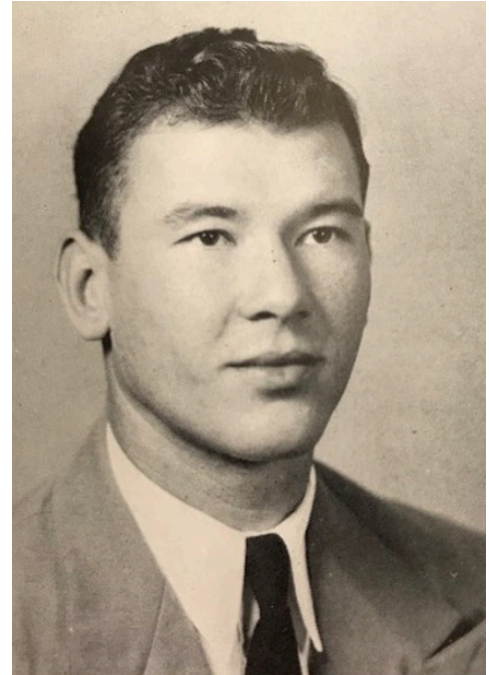


Wide and Deep

The Mississippi River near Greenville, Mississippi is nearly a mile wide and from fifty to a hundred feet deep. It was just seven miles west of the Greenville Air Force Base, home of the 3505th Pilot Training Squadron. First Lieutenant John Bunyan Mitchell was an Air Force flight instructor at Greenville in 1953.

Mitchell graduated from Clemson College with a degree in electrical engineering in August 1949. Mitchell was a transfer student, completing his final two years of school at Clemson. As the college was still a military school at the time, Mitchell was a member of the cadet corps with a senior year rank of second lieutenant. He was selected as a member of the Senior Platoon and completed Air Force ROTC summer training at Orlando Air Force Base, Florida. Mitchell, whose hometown was Saluda, was a member of the Amateur Radio Club, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, and the Lexington-Saluda Club.



After graduation, Mitchell reported for active duty with the Air Force and completed pilot training. By mid-1953, he was assigned as an instructor pilot with the 3505th at Greenville. The Greenville base had been activated in 1940 as the United States prepared for World War II. The basic phase of Army flight training was conducted at Greenville through early 1945. When the war ended, the base was used to store surplus B-17 and B-24 bombers along with C-47 cargo planes.

With the outbreak of war in Korea, Greenville once again became a training center. In April 1953, the Air Force began basic phase, single-engine flight training there.

On July 17, First Lieutenant Mitchell was assigned to instruct student pilot First Lieutenant Jacob Robinson in a T-28 Trojan training aircraft. The flight plan called for practicing the Split S. The Split S is an air combat maneuver used to disengage from combat or prevent an enemy aircraft from attacking from the rear. To execute the Split S, the pilot rolls the aircraft 180 degrees until it is upside down. The pilot then performs a half loop and exits the loop in a level attitude heading in the opposite direction.



As Robinson and Mitchell executed the maneuver, the T-28 began a rapid acceleration. The right wing apparently separated and smashed into the canopy. Lieutenant Robinson released his

safety belt and was thrown clear of the aircraft. He sighted Lieutenant Mitchell who had also bailed out and was hanging below a deployed parachute canopy. Unfortunately, their flight path had carried the two fliers over the Mississippi River. Both Robinson and Mitchell landed in the river. Robinson was rescued. Mitchell was not. Mitchell's parachute added 30 pounds to his weight. Just as the parachute had filled with air, once Mitchell hit the river, it filled with water. Acting as an anchor, the parachute pulled Mitchell under. His body was recovered near Eudora, Arkansas, about 18 miles downstream, on August 12.

John Bunyan Mitchell was survived by his parents, brother, and sister. He is buried at Saluda's Good Hope Baptist Church Cemetery.

