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**Captain Bob Mitchell**  
**May 17, 1934 - June 18, 2007**  
by Robert Nieman

Robert Kenneth Mitchell was born in Troup, Texas, on May 17, 1934. He is the son of E. D. and Ruth Mitchell. He has two brothers, Darwin and Wayne, and a sister, Wanda. His youngest brother Jimmy passed away many years ago.

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. He was a linebacker on defense and a center on offense. At the time, the United States was in the midst of the Korean War, and after one year at Henderson, Bob left college and entered the Army.

By the time Bob got to Korea, the war was over. The 8th Army had a football team, and Bob was fortunate enough to be chosen. He thoroughly enjoyed his tour playing football all over the Far East.

In 1955, Bob's tour in Korea was over, and he was stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. After he returned to the states, he also married Jerry Busby of Waxahachie. A year later, 1956, Bob had satisfied his military obligation and was discharged. He and Jerry set up housekeeping in Austin, and Bob enrolled at the University of Texas. By this time, Bob and Jerry had a daughter named Carol and another one, Karen, was on the way. A few years later their son Bobby was born. Fortunately for the Texas Rangers and the people of Texas, Bob couldn't afford to go to school and also support a wife and two children on the GI Bill.

Several retired Rangers have said that they were only looking for a job when they got into law enforcement. Not Bob Mitchell. He wanted to be a lawman. On April 1, 1958, he became a member of the Department of Public Safety's Highway Patrol. When asked who had been a major influence for his desire to be a law officer, 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.* [This author has never found a Texas Ranger who isn't as proud of his Highway Patrol days as he is of his Ranger days.]

Bob's only duty station as a Highway Patrolman was in New Braunfels. His only captain was N. R. Smith, a man for whom Bob has nothing but the greatest respect. Speaking of Captain Smith, Bob says:

*[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.*

As with all Rangers, a whole book could be written of the Highway Patrol days, but this is a Texas Ranger magazine. On December 1, 1967, Bob Mitchell was one of the last Rangers to have the fabled Texas Ranger *cinco peso* badge pinned on him by Colonel Homer Garrison, the legendary director of the Texas Department of Public Safety and chief of the Texas Rangers. Colonel Garrison died shortly thereafter.

Bob's first day as a Ranger was quite memorable. Though his duty station would be Tyler, on the first day he reported in Dallas to the captain of Company B, Bob Crowder, the future Hall of Famer. 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.

It seems that the doctor 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, the first thing he did was burglarize a doctor's office, steal all his credentials, and hit the road. He 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 wouldbe 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 one of the greatest careers in the history of this glorious organization. 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, one man who knew how to manipulate the weights would be sent into the hole below the scale ramp. He would double or more the weigh tickets. When the last truck finished, he would move a manhole cover and climb into a secret compartment that was rigged 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 did the major investigations of the deadly Lone Star Steel Strike in 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 little ole 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 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 seven months and three days before they checked out of that motel.

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 describes 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 highpowered 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. His days in the field were numbered, however. In 1971, he promoted to sergeant and was stationed in Austin. He stayed there for three years. On September 1, 1974, he promoted again, this time to the captaincy of Company "F" in Waco. Like his days as a field Ranger, his career as the captain of Company "F" could also fill a book. Not having the space to list all his accomplishments as a captain, the best way to describe those years is to mention the men he trained who became captains themselves. The list is long: (alphabetically) N. W. "Dub" Clark, Ray Coffman, Jack Dean, Jim Miller, Charlie Moore, Bob Prince, Wallace Spillar, Joe Wilie, and James Wright.

As with all things, Bob Mitchell's career came to an end. On June 30, 1992, the captain's captain retired.

However, after a career that would have been the envy of almost any Ranger, Bob was called back to duty in 2000. The Sheriff of McLennan County (Waco) had died and there was only one man to fill the office until the

upcoming election—Bob Mitchell. To no one's surprise, he more than answered the call.

Captain Mitchell is extremely proud of the Texas Rangers and his years with the elite organization. He is just as confident of where they 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.*

