

## **Claud Frank Mitchell Sr.**

### **100 years of memories**

Claud Frank Mitchell Sr. has a framed shadowbox of military medals. They include: *Army Combat Infantryman Badge; Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four stars; WWII Victory Medal; Bronze Star; Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal; American Campaign medal and ribbon; Philippine Liberation Medal and ribbon; and an Army Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon.*

His large collection of framed medals, including the one that has four battle stars on it, catches the attention of anyone who sees it. Claud said the four battle stars means he was deployed in four major battles during WWII. Claud was stationed in Australia and the Philippines.

Claud Frank Mitchell Sr. was born August 21, 1920 in Oklahoma. Most of his life was spent in Duncan, Oklahoma. He married Marie Bogart in September 1942. They were married 61 years before she passed away in January 2003.

When he was 22 years old, he went into the military service, joining the United States Army. He served from October 9, 1942 until September 24, 1945. When he left for the service, Claud and Marie were expecting their first child (Claud Frank Mitchell Jr.). He did not see his son until the boy was two years old. Marie sent many pictures to Claud, which he was proud to show his friends.

Claud doesn't talk a lot about his time in the war. Claud Jr. took his dad to see a buddy from his Army days a few years ago. They reminisced of days when they survived a battle where the buddy was wounded. The friend asked Claud Sr. if he remembered carrying him out, and saving his life. Claud replied he did not remember, because at the time, even though he wasn't wounded, Claud had malaria and was very sick. One thing he remembers clearly is a battle in the South Pacific when a bullet hit his helmet during one of the battles. The Army helmets must have been pretty sturdy, because it saved him from injury.

Shortly after the battle when he saved his buddy's life, he left on a medical ship back to the United States. Claud was brought to a hospital in Longview, Texas. He was there about a year before going back to Oklahoma.

After coming back home from the service, he worked in the oil field as a rough neck most of his life and then worked for the State of Oklahoma.

Claud and his wife, Marie, had two more children, Cassie and Billye. Claud and Marie started attending Trinity Baptist Church, where they both became Christians. Claud was a deacon at Trinity Baptist over 50 years. Claud always put God first in his life, then his family. He seldom missed church - faithful on Sunday morning and night, and also made sure he and Marie were there on Wednesday night.

Claud Sr., his son, Claud Jr. and daughter-in-law, Mary, went to see a movie a few years ago. The movie, "Unbroken," was based on two men whose plane was shot down during the war. They survived and landed in the ocean. The crash survivors were in a small raft for two weeks before being rescued by the enemy. After seeing them taken as prisoners and tortured, the daughter-in-law said she could hardly watch it. The real-life veterans who the movie was based on were interviewed at the end of the film. These veterans witnessed that they had become Christians after the crash and enemy capture.

On the way out of the movie, Mary (the daughter-in-law) made the statement, "If this had been me, I would rather have died when the plane went down than gone through the beatings and torture."

Claud Sr. said, "But if those men had died then, they would not have become Christians." And then he said, "It would have been the same for me if I had perished in the war. I would not have been a Christian."

About five or six years ago, he told his children it was getting too hard for him to live in Oklahoma alone. His daughter Cassie suggested he move closer to her. He did this until 2019. He was having mobility issues with being able to walk properly and Cassie found an assisted living facility in Texas where he could live comfortably.

A great memory is a WWII honor trip. In May 2016, Claud Jr. and Claud Sr. went on a Veterans Honor Flight to Washington D.C. - the first time Claud Sr. had ever flown on a plane. They visited the war memorials. They visited Arlington Memorial Cemetery, saw the Changing of the Guards and feasted at a banquet in honor of the veterans. This was an amazing trip for father and son.

"I put a coin on Audie Murphey's grave, which is just across from the Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier," said Claud Sr. If you leave a penny, it means you visited. A nickel means that you and the deceased soldier trained at boot camp together. If you served with the soldier, you leave a dime. A quarter is very significant because it means that you were there when that soldier was killed.

The veterans were honored with applause when the Veterans Honor Group went anywhere, and at the WWII Memorial stop, a trumpet player boarded the bus and played taps in memory of all those who were lost. The trip was definitely a highlight of Claud's life.

His family was the joy of his life. They gathered together for his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday to celebrate and had hoped to have a huge 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. The COVID-19 lockdown changed the birthday plans. Claud understood that safety comes first.

Claud was happy that a few days before the lockdown of the assisted living facility occurred, the Chief and Assistant Chief both made a trip to visit him in Texas, and that a large group of his family members were present. That was a good day for everyone.

Claud celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in August 2020 on the front porch with just his son and daughter-in-law. He passed away October 14, 2020.

***Cut line:***

Claud Frank Mitchell at a celebration with family and friends, accepting a framed flag from Assistant Chief Jack Austin and Chief Gary Batton.

Photo by Judy Allen.