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### Oral History Interview: C. T. Mitchell

C. T. Mitchell

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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE JULY 14, 1988

C.T. Mitchell  
(Signature - Interviewee)

635 SOUTH TERRACE  
(Address)  
HUNTINGTON W. VA. 25705

DATE JULY 14, 1988

[Signature]  
(Signature - Witness)

SOCIETY OF YEAGER SCHOLARS

Tape ]8

AN INTERVIEW WITH: C. T. Mitchell

CONDUCTED BY: Michele Shank

TRANSCRIBED AND TYPED BY: Michele Shank

MUH-YS-]8

MS: Testing 1, 2, 3. Testing 1, 2, 3. This is a mic check, 2, 4, 6, 8.

This is one in a series of interviews on the society of Yeager Scholars. My name is Michele Shank and with me today is C.T. Mitchell, who is the Director of University Relations here at Marshall University. Okay, C.T., we're ready. Okay, tell me uh, when were you born?

CM: I was born October 29, 1932, in uh, Williamson, West Virginia.

MS: Okay, so you've been a West Virginia boy from the beginning huh....[chuckle]

CM: Everyday.

MS: Everyday [laughter]. Okay, and uh, your family, did they uh, stay in Williamson or how long...where did you grow up?

CM: I grew up in Williamson (did you?) uh, I graduated from high school there and uh, in 1949 at the ripe old age of sixteen and uh, entered Marshall University that fall, still sixteen.

MS: My goodness! Wasn't that...that's considered young isn't it? Was that considered young...did you get double promoted?

CM: No, I got bored with study hall, so I took extra classes (did you?) in junior high and high school, so by 49 I had accumulated enough credits and got out of there.

MS: Well, what was your major at Marshall?

CM: Journalism.

MS: Was it? And you were probably the youngest journalism student or were they others as young as you?

CM: Oh, I don't think there was any that young uh, there was an interesting situation because the last of the World War II

to work for the Huntington Advertiser as copy editor uh, worked up to assistant city editor, city editor, executive city editor and news editor before ultimately leaving there in the fall of 1972 to come to Marshall University as Director of Informational Services (uh-huh).

MS: And why did you chose to uh, make that move when you were so close to the top at uh, at the Huntington Newspaper did....was there any reason for that?

CM: Essentially for 17 to 19 years in the uh, newspaper business I was a city editor and uh, literally chained to a desk (uhm) and uh, you think of newspaper work as being very exciting and glamorous uh, and about 5% of the time it is uh, the other 95% can get pretty boring [laughing] especially if you're chained to a desk, so, uh, when the opportunity came, to uh, change careers and uh, go to work for Marshall University, I jumped at it.

MS: Good. And your family...you married and have children?

CM: Uh, I'm in my second marriage now (umh) uh, I was first married in September of 1954, had two children in that marriage, was divorced in June 1981, remarried in October 1982. My present wife, Jane, also had been divorced and the time of our marriage I was fortunate enough to inherit a six year old son (great!) who now is 12 (oh, that's wonderful).

MS: So, is he going to be a writer? [laughter]

CM: Well, right now he's trying to be a baseball player [both laughs] (great!).

MS: Okay. So, really as far.... you've had journalism background all your life, so really this is your 2nd-3rd job besides the service we could say. [laughs]

veterans were still here and uh, we lived in the same residence hall and uh, paled around alot together, so [laughter] I got a rather liberal education [more laughter] at a rather young age. [both laughs]

MS: Sounds like it. Okay, you didn't find any problems being a young student here at Marshall?

CM: No, I had a wonderful time.

MS: Did you [laughter]...okay, tell me a little bit about your degree. You got a degree then from Marshall in Journalism?

CM: Yes, I got my degree in Journalism in 1953 uh, came back in the mid-60s in the Master's program in Journalism and uh, and uh, received my Master's degree from Marshall in 1970, August.

MS: Mmm, uh, did you study under Page Pitt?

CM: I was fortunate enough study under Page Pitt (mmm-huh).

MS: Well, people who do say that you know, say its wonderful to have studied under him. I was wondering if you were one of his (most inspirational) boys (teacher) that's great. So, where did you go from...from there? Did you (uh...) get a job in journalism somewhere?

CM: Yes, in...I went to work for the Williamson Daily News uh, in uh, June of 1953, couple days after graduation from Marshall. I was the sports editor and obituary writer [laughter] (small combination there) small newspaper [laughter]...stayed at uh, well 8 months later I was promoted to city editor of the Williamson Daily News, which was the number two news room spot uh, left for a couple of years for service in the U.S. Army primarily in Hidelburg, Germany, returned in 1956, the fall of 1956, remained there until August of 19 and 60, when I came to Huntington, went

CM: Yes, I guess that's it. (great)

MS: Alright. So, when you came to Marshall, what did they tell you your job was going to be; what was your job description?

CM: Oh, essentially to uh, to prepare news releases uh, oversee publications and that sort of thing. As I indicated, the job was called Director of Informational Services at that time and there was a problem with that in that uh, we got a lot of telephone calls uh, where people want to know other people's telephone numbers uh, they thought we were the information department [MS laughs] in that aspect for the telephone company. Uh, after Dr. Hayes became the President uh, they decided to change the position to Director of University Relations and uh, so that's what it is.

MS: But, essentially its the same position (essentially so the). Has your duties widened any?

CM: The responsibilities change from time to time (uhm) uh, and again this is the determined pretty much by whoever happens to be in the presidents office and what the administrative style may be (uhm).

MS: Well, with Marshall University being a state educational facility uh, does that affect your press releases, do you have to deal with what happens in Charleston, do they come to you for the Presidents response, and how do your respond to what happens at the state level? [noise on tape made reply inaudible]

CM: Okay, very often something will happen at the State Capital that uh, inspires the reporters to seek a reaction (uh-huh) from the Marshall campus, most often from the president from the president and uh, we of course take those telephone calls and uh, in every case possible, and provide them with

a response (uh-huh) and uh, and in the event he's not present or can't be reached why uh, we might refer them to another individual in the administration (uh-huh).

MS: But, usually the response then will come directly from that individual or is this something where you confer and prepare a release.

CM: It...it depends on the situation.

MS: Okay, uh, the different publications and the different information that goes out about the university, how many students that we have and uh, what our courses are...is...is this part of your department too, or is that part of another department?

CM: We try to tell everything we can about Marshall University not only to the external public but, uh, to the people who live and work here (umh) and uh, in fact, uh, we generate in excess of 500 news releases a year and this does not include the telephone interviews, the uh, television camera visits or the radio reporters who bring their tape recorders along and uh, so indeed we stay pretty busy; there's an awful lot happening at Marshall University and it has such a profound impact on not only on Huntington, but on the entire region that uh, an awful lot of stories to tell and probably the greatest frustration is I can look out and say there's 10,0090 stories out there and I can do two of them today [laughter] (Yeah, right, right).

MS: Okay, um, to get to the Yeager Scholar program, um, Joe Hunnicutt, when did you first meet Joe?

CM: Gee, I can't remember, it's been a long, long time ago uh, (was it prior to him coming to the university?) oh, yes, uh, Joe, well, of course was uh, an alumnus at the time I met



him. Uh, in fact, he was a member of the same fraternity that I was a member of and I'm sure of I must have met him at an athletic event of some kind, years ago. I really got to know him fairly well after I took the job here and of course, Joe was....been a frequent visitor to the campus and from time to time....has suggestions for the administration. On occasion, I have been involved in those discussions with him, but uh, I guess I really got to know him after the idea for the Yeager Scholars was proposed by him (umh).

MS: When did you first hear about uh, a scholarship program, regardless of the name, but that there was going to be something....something was going to happen here?

CM: Joe appeared before a meeting of the presidents' cabinet. That must have been uh, some time in 1984, because of course, Dale Nitzschke was the president and he outlined this idea for uh, the program for outstanding students in the academic area, which might be compared to the uh, the type of uf, benefits you find for star athletes and I'll have to tell you that uh, I loved the idea but being familiar with the financial difficulties we have always lived under at Marshall University, I was quite skeptical about it. (umh) However uh, as I recall Dr. Nitzschke appointed David Gillmore who then was working with him. [pause] Me and Boz Johnson to develop some ideas along this line and indeed we did, we went back to him. Of course, Joe remained actively involved and uh, over a period of time uh, it developed into the Yeager Scholars and uh, I'm very happy that my skepticism was ill-founded. [both laughs]

MS: Well, there has to be a skeptic to make this thing work.  
Well your committee that was formed with Mr. Gillmore and so forth, how did you get started?

CM: Actually you know, uh....

MS: Was it more of a rap session in the beginning?

CM: More, more of that and uh, we just explored various ideas. We didn't keep minutes and my memory is such that I really couldn't be too specific about it (umh), uh, I'm trying to think we had some sort of name we gave it [both speaking] (the A-Team) that was it. I think that was maybe Boz's suggestion and uh, at least we knew what we were talking about when we discussed it [laughter] (umh) uh, Yeager's uh, much more appropriate.

MS: Well, when did you hear that Chuck Yeager was going to be involved in the program or were you a part of finding Chuck Yeager and...

CM: I was not a part of it, I was aware of it and uh, [pause] Joe, I think it was Joe, it may have been Nitzschke; at least one of them arranged for Nitzschke and Hunnicutt to meet with Yeager, and I think it took place uh, on a trip from the airport to Winfield or Lincoln County, or some place (uhm-hmm) but uh, that just made the program, I mean it gave us a public hero with whom we could identify and uh...

MS: Do you think that was essential to the program success, was to have a name recognition person?

CM: Maybe not essential, but very, very desirable and uh, it does give you that instant name recognition. It projects during uh, quality achievement and uh, I think it's just fantastic.

MS: Okay, so after we get Chuck Yeager, then what happens? Did they come to you and say, arrange this press conference, arrange that press conference [laughter]. That's when you started really working, right?

CM: Well, yeah (or was it on the whole idea that you started working?) [pause] Huh, no, I was involved along with other people and uh, helping develop the idea (umh) I threw out some suggestions, I'm sure, along the way but uh, you know, Joe was the driving force behind this (right) and uh...

MS: What were some of your suggestions, C.T.?

CM: Oh, gee, I don't know [MS laughs].

MS: But they were good ones! [more laughter]

CM: No doubt (since the whole program's so good) Probably all [reply inaudible]. Uh...I was....

MS: What about selling the program, C.T.? Uh...were you instrumental in deciding uh, how it was going to be sold or was that...was that...did that mainly come out of the Lexington...

CM: Uh, I think it may, a lot of it may have come out of Lexington uh,.....As you know, we managed to stay extremely busy in this office and uh, when Joe announced that uh, he had a public relations firm in Lexington to arrange for the news conference in Washington, and to uh, prepare the initial news release, the brochures or what have you, (mmh) uh....I have to confess I had some mixed emotions about it. Number one, I really didn't have time to do it (mmm-hmm) and number two I (you wanted to do it) I wanted to do it and I felt it was part of my job, but uh....I did get involved with Greg King, to some extent on it and we worked things out, so. In fact, it uh, probably was well that we had that

additional resource to promote this program. I liked to think we could have done it, but we would have...would had to dropped a lot of other projects in order to get it done (mmm-hmm) either that or double the staff [both laughing]. (which that would have been hard to do!) Which isn't likely to happen.

MS: How much staff do you have here, C.T.? In this department.

CM: Well, in the news area, we have uh, myself, uh, Vic Hamilton, who's the news editor and uh, handles a lot of the day-to-day releases as well as publication of our campus newslater. We have Beverly McCoy, who is uh, medical school information officer, we have a photograher and a secretary. Occasionally we have a student assistant to help with filing. (oh, okay)

MS: Do any of the journalism students....are they allowed to come in and do stories for you or do they mainly work on the school newspaper?

CM: Primarily they devote their time to the school newspaper. I, quite honestly, do not encourage a volunteer because it takes more time to train them and this is probably a bad attitude but.....

MS: No, it's not a bad attitude. Uh....the Yeager design of the book and the airplane, did that come from King's office or did that mainly.....

CM: To my knowledge it originated with Greg King. I think it was a great logo.

MS: Okay.

CM: I wish we could change the color theme of it, so it uh, would fit in more compatibly with the uh, Marshall logo.

MS: Mmm-hmm, the green. And the logo...the Yeager logo is really basically blue, black and silver. Alright. I want

to know, in these meetings you had with Joe and with Dale, uh, was there any time that you felt doubt or uncomfortable that the money would be raised? What part did you play in the selling of the project to others who would have a financial uh....

CM: I helped in preparation with some of the materials, of course, did an awful lot of news releases about the uh, Yeager program, and of course every time we got a contribution, particularly the significant contributions, why we disseminated the information. Uh, when we got the really big ones, why I was deeply involved in setting up the uh, luncheons and the invitations and the nine yards, so uh....

MS: Did you leave anybody out? [laughter] You know that's always the fear of a public relations person.

CM: Undoubtedly [laughter].

MS: Well, when you first met Yeager, what were your feelings about him? Do you remember the first time you met him?

CM: Well, I first met Yeager when he came here to be the commencement speaker and uh, I stand in awe of the man, you know, I've read about him for years (mmm-hmm) and uh, when I was working for the advertiser, the news editor of the Advertiser, John Brown, uh, had been writing about Yeager, ever since uh, he broke the sound barrier if not before. Every time Yeager got a new assignment, or uh, did anything, why, John Brown always managed to call him and write a story for the advertiser, so....I became a hero worshipper of Yeager many years ago. Even today, I virtually speechless when I'm in the presence of the man. I just think he's uh, he is a hero. I wish we had more people like him.

MS: Well, in some of his constituents that uh, his friends, and his flying friends, they all say there's no one like Chuck Yeager, so he..he really gets a pat on the back by people who...we would think would be as wonderful as he is. So, he must be a man's man in that aspect.

CM: A big admirer of pioneer's, people who do things most of us ever have the nerve or the wherewithall to do. Uh, most of us are content just to carve our little niche in society and collect our paychecks, raise our families and go about our business. My greatest heroes are the people who explored Anartica around the turn of this past century, who tried to reach the South Pole with nothing but a few sleds and dogs and men who'd uh, men who died trying. Uh, Chuck Yeager's that type of person. He went where nobody had ever gone before. And he put his life on the line to do it.

MS: Is he easy to work with, as far as the what he's done for the university?

CM: Uh....from what I've observed, he is. I've not had the occasion to work with him directly, uh, Joe and Nitzschke are primary contacts with Yeager, to some extent the people in our library, now that we have the Yeager collection, but uh....

MS: Did you prepare the press release on the Yeager collection?

CM: Oh, yeah, with great joy. [laughter] And uh, but uh, it seems to me that everything we've asked of him, uh, within reason, he's done it. (mmmh) I'm just very, very pleased that Chuck Yeager and Marshall University are affiliated.

MS: Do you plan to stay at Marshall University, C.T.? I mean, is this your little niche? I know you're happy here but...

CM: I'm very happy here and as long as Marshall will have me, I'll probably be here.

MS: Is there...do you have a book, in [inaudible] somewhere, like a lot of newspaper people do that they want to write?

CM: Uh...there at least two or three but uh, unless I can get around to retiring, I don't think I'm going to have time to do 'em.

MS: Well, I appreciate this interview and uh, if there's anything I haven't asked you that I should about the Yeager program, any input that you've had or any personal feelings that you have that you'd like to express on this tape?

CM: I...I'd like to say, for the record, that had Dale Nitzschke not been President of Marshall University, there would be no Yeager program. You had to have a man who was willing to take a gamble in order to make tremendous progress and uh, there are very few of those around. But I'm convinced that uh, if we had somebody else as president, we would not have the Yeager program as it is today.

MS: Mmm-hmm. Okay. (be sure you play that back to Dale!) I will. [laughter] Thank you.

End of interview