

Bombhead Mitchell – Gilbert Thomas Michael Mitchell – May 1929 to March 2016

Gilbert Thomas Michael Mitchell (aka Mike or Mitch) was born on 8 May 1929 in Eastbourne where he lived until he was about 11. He was the youngest of four children born to Albert and Lavinia Mitchell. He always used to say he was a 'surprise' baby as his older brother Jack was born in 1914, his sister Mary in 1918 and his sister Muriel in 1925.

As a boy in the war he used to watch the dogfights above the Sussex Downs but the Germans had a habit of unloading any spare bombs over Eastbourne on their way back from bombing London and his house in Astaire Avenue took a direct hit, the family all survived but lost everything they owned.

So Mike moved to Gloucestershire where his Mother's family were based. He lived in Kings Stanley, a village near Stroud and went to Marling, the local Grammar school where, by all accounts, he was more interested in rugby than studying.

Although just too young to fight in WW2 Mike joined the Royal Corp of Signals as a radio operator in November 1946 when he was 17 and then entered the 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade. He served in the 16th Independent Parachute brigade then the 216 brigade. He was involved in the Berlin airlift and always said he was in the first jeep through Checkpoint Charlie. He saw action in Palestine, Aden, Cyprus and Suez.

He married Sylvia Townsend in 1949 and their daughter Stella was born in 1950 followed by a son Christopher in 1955. On leaving the regular Army Mike returned to his trade in engineering as a instrument maker but also signed up to the serve in the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars (TA) which he left in 1977 having made the rank of sergeant major.

In the mid 1960s Mike started his own business in Stroud as a driving instructor and did that until he was in his 60s when he 'retired' and became 'white van man' - a part time delivery driver for JE Clarke Motor Factors in Stroud. He did this delivery job until he was 79.

In the last part of his life besides working part time he became a carer, firstly for his wife Sylvia who died in 2001 and then later for his 'old mucker' Trevor Portlock who was a bit older than him and had been dropped behind German lines in Greece during WW2 to send back Intel as part of SOE. He went to see Trevor twice daily doing his shopping and generally helping out with household chores and administration. They both had an interest in military history and used to spend hours taking about their own Army experiences using colourful army slang!

After Trevor died in April 2015 Mike himself became unwell and was diagnosed with a brain tumour in September 2016 after falling at home and breaking his leg. He died in a local care home Scarlet House in Stroud on March 9 2016.

Mike leaves behind his daughter Stella and son Chris, grandchildren Edward, Will, Joe, Mary, Ella and Maitiu and great grandchildren Freyja and Arthur.

Photograph to follow KW 14/05/2016