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Article: "Eufaulian made ultimate sacrifice"

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He would likely be a great-grandfather by now-an old man who could look back over a life filled with family and accomplishments.

But 60 years ago, a Japanese bullet stopped a 23-year-old life filled with promise. In the memories of his wartime buddies, friends and family, 1st Lt. Jule Carnes Mitchell Jr. remains forever young.

For most who travel the road between Pittsview and Glennville, 1st Lt. Jule Carnes Mitchell Jr. is only a name on a sign. But the same man who was instrumental in having the road named in the Russell County native's honor wants to preserve Jule's memory as a real person who never got to live his life because he was willing to do his duty. Since Jule had no children to carry on his memory, second cousin David Yoakley Mitchell of Atlanta has taken up the mantle. David's grandfather, Russell Flewellen Mitchell, and Jule's father, Jule Carnes Mitchell Sr., were brothers. David, 31, grew up in Rome, Ga., hearing about Jule. In his family there was always a "weird sense of reverence" surrounding Jules as well as a pre-occupation of what might have been had he lived.

"He was a mythical figure," David said. "A number of hopes and dreams were pinned on him." When David's father died when David was 23, he saw a number of dualities in his own life and Jule's. Knowing that families tend to saint someone when they're dead, he felt "a great desire to explore and know more" about Jule. "So many of these people become part of nostalgia," David said. "They lose their identity." During seven years of research, David has come to know Jule as a real person. To mark the 60th anniversary of his death, July 15, he wants others to know as well.

A Eufaula High School graduate and Auburn University student, Jules joined the Army Air Corps in 1942.

By early 1945, he was a first lieutenant with the 47th Fighter Squadron. Based on Iwo Jima, he helped make history during the April 7 raid on mainland Japan. It was the first time American P-51 Mustangs, single engine fighter planes responsible for protecting the B-29 Bombers, had flown over Japan. At almost nine hours round trip, these missions from Iwo Jima to Japan were the longest single-engine combat missions of World War II.

Jule had no way of knowing a mission three months after the successful April 7 mission would be his last.

Flying in low July 15, or "flying on the deck" as it was known, during a combat raid, Jule

was the lead element pilot in one of four groups made up of four planes when Japanese anti-aircraft fire found its mark on Jule's Mustang near Kowa Airfield. According to eyewitness accounts, including that of fellow pilot Sam Jones who died in 2000, Jule's plane began to dip when it was hit in the fuselage and rolled seven times after impact. David believes Jule died instantly. It was only 30 days before World War II ended. The plane rolled out to sea and when Jule's body washed ashore something unusual happened.

"For some reason, he was given a Shinto (respectable Japanese burial) at Kowa Airfield," David said.

Four years later, in 1949, Army officials learned there was an American pilot buried at the airfield. The remains were exhumed and taken to Pittsview, where he was laid to rest beside his parents, who never recovered from the loss of their son.

Jule's mother was quoted as saying, "I don't even have a fingernail to bury."

Jule's father had only lived a short time after Jule's death and his mother, overwhelmed by grief, took her own life.

Through David's research, he was able to dispel a family myth that it was actually a Japanese body that was buried in Jule's grave. There was concern about the possibility that Jule could have been captured and tortured. The family preferred to believe his body had been lost instead. "It was easier for them to believe his body had been obliterated, rather than contemplate a more sinister end," David said.

While getting to know some of Jule's wartime buddies, David has learned stories of his wartime years that have made him even more real. David invited some of Jule's fellow pilots to Eufaula earlier this year. They came from Missouri, North Carolina, Florida and California. While here they met some of Jule's other relatives including Mac and Dot Mitchell, Lily Moorner and Maj. Logan B. Mitchell as well as Jule's friends, Young Johnston and Dr. Billy Moorner. "They had a very Southern experience," David said. The group also visited Jule's grave in Pittsview and observed a moment of silence in his honor.

Jule was an accomplished golfer who made a lot of money during the war years off golf bets. But one of David's favorite stories about Jule was told by Robert J. Kriss of St. Louis. After the April 7 raid, Kriss said the pilots made Hooch Pooch, a concoction of medicinal alcohol, beer and sugar. After drinking and wrestling, Kriss said Jule walked back to his quonset hut wearing nothing but his shoes and socks. David also learned that when the pilots would pick up empty planes on Saipan to fly back to Iwo Jima, they would fill them with beanie weenies and beer.

David is fortunate to have the diary Jule kept while on Iwo Jima. Describing the diary as reflective, David said it includes accounts of the occasional attacks when Japanese kamikazes would sneak in the camp and slit pilots' throats. He also talks about one of his friends John "Bones" Scanlon, who was shot down over Japan, beaten repeatedly and eventually lynched. "It was a real-life day-to-day horror," David said.

David is deeply indebted to those who have helped him during his research about his

cousin. Those people include Mac and Dot Mitchell, Robert Feaser, Relfe Pruitt, the Lily and Billy Moorner, Young Johnston, Wilford and Ernest Davis, Maj. Logan Mitchell and Niamh Barry Mitchell as well as the late Baron Shacklette and Robert Flewelen.

Although most would be quick to label Jule a hero, David sees him more as a man who was simply doing his duty.

"He didn't want to die," David said. "He had his whole life ahead of him. He was doing his duty."

David inherited a painting Jule's parents had painted after his death, and it holds a place of honor in his home. "It's a very reassuring presence," he said.

Although David has no children, when he does, the memory of Jule will be passed on. "I'm better able to understand my responsibility to family because of Jule's responsibility and ultimate sacrifice for country," David said. "We spend all this time trying to define ourselves as Americans and through Jule and others, it's already been done."

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