

BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Public Relations, P.O. Box 830060
Tuskegee, AL 36083

LITTLETON PURNELL MITCHELL



Enlisted Service No.: 32243241

Commissioned Officer Service No.: Unknown

Littleton Purnell Mitchell was a self-described rabble-rouser and a leader of the NAACP in his home state of Delaware and the region for more than 30 years. Born in Milford, DE on November 26, 1918, Mitchell's association with the NAACP began in his early years in Milford when his mother made him go to the group's meetings.

As a possible result of that exposure, at just seven years of age Littleton experienced an incident in which he exhibited a feistiness that would drive his future efforts in fighting for civil rights. While playing a game of marbles with friends in a driveway the mayor of the city drove up and shouted a nasty racial epithet at them and ordered them to get out of the way. Mitchell provided an account about the incident in a 1997 interview for the book *A History of African Americans of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore*. "I went over, got a brick and said, 'You say that again and I'll throw this through your windshield.' Of course, I thought I was standing there with my boys in back of me. And I said, 'I dare you to say that again. Say it again and I'll throw this right through your windshield.' He didn't say anything, he said, 'Get out the way.' Then I said, 'Just say it one more time.' I just happened to look around and there was nobody back there. And he said, 'Well, I said get the hell out the way.' I took the brick, threw it right through his windshield and took off."

In the interview Mitchell said that luckily nothing further occurred, but years later the mayor told him, "I have never forgotten you. You threw that brick through my windshield. I guess I deserved that for what I said."

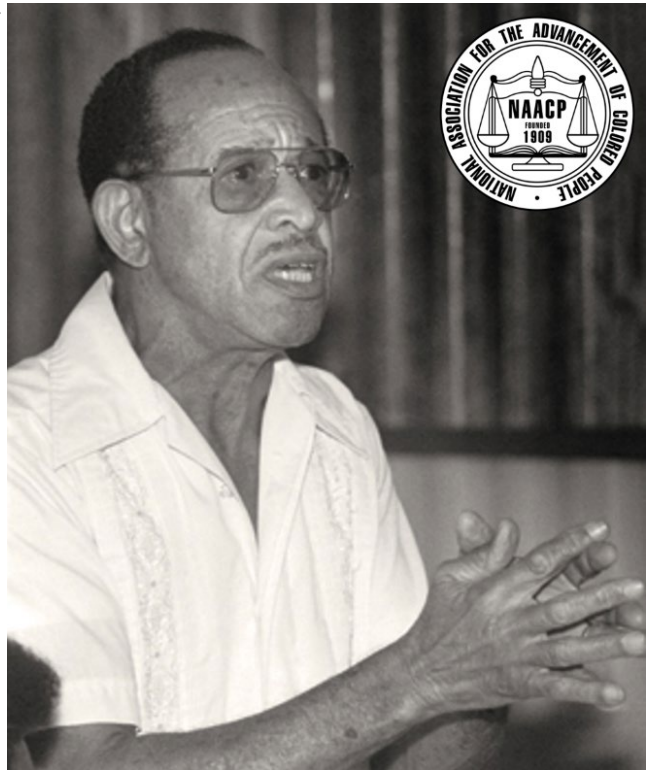
Mitchell lived in Milford and attended school through the eighth grade. With no further local educational opportunities available he moved to the city of Wilmington where he graduated from Howard High School, the state's only high school for African Americans. Upon graduation, he spent two years at West Chester State College, PA on a track scholarship before joining the army at Fort Dix, NJ, on February 27, 1942.

Sometime after his enlistment he was sent to Tuskegee, AL where he witnessed the building of Tuskegee Army Air Field in 1941. From his assignment to the 889th Single Engine Flying Training Squadron he became an instructor on the Link Trainer, which was the basic aircraft simulator for student pilots of the day. He trained for this role in facilities and schools in New York and Chanute Field, IL, as well as the Base Instrument Command Flying School in Texas. He then returned to Tuskegee and carried out pilot training responsibilities until he was discharged from military service in February 1946.

Motivated by his fellow Tuskegee Airmen, Mitchell completed his studies at West Chester State to earn a degree from which he started an extensive career in psychiatric treatment of children. Mitchell started working at the Governor Bacon Health Center in Delaware City in 1948 where he was eventually the first black teacher of white

children at the facility until his retirement in 1984.

However, he was best known for his leadership as president of Delaware's NAACP during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. In that period Mitchell worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in an effort that resulted in the elimination of segregation in Delaware's hospitals; led a series of demonstrations that resulted in the desegregation of hotels in Delaware; organized efforts that ended segregation in theaters in Wilmington; led an effort that eliminated segregation at a local golf course; forced a cemetery to allow blacks to purchase burial lots; and participated in litigation which resulted in a court's striking down a discriminatory innkeeper's law.



Mitchell's efforts also compelled integration of Delaware's volunteer fire companies, and he fought to eliminate discriminatory practices in the criminal justice system.

Mitchell's work to eliminate employment discrimination included protesting a telephone company's policy of refusing to hire blacks in any capacity and forcing the Delaware State Police to hire black officers.

Mitchell served on the Brown v. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission which was established by Congress in 2001. The commission was created to encourage the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in Brown.

Littleton P. Mitchell joined the "Lonely Eagles Chapter" on July 6, 2009, at 90 years old.

