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## Blaine resident becomes Sea Cadet commander at age 74

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by Tim Hennagir  
 Life Editor

There are 11 general orders in the U.S. Navy. Blaine resident Ed Mitchell, 74, can recite them in less than five seconds from memory.

What makes Mitchell's feat impressive is the fact he's retired from another branch of military service – the U.S. Army National Guard.

Mitchell is currently helping northern Twin Cities metro area teens get a taste of the maritime traditions of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

In a recent interview, Mitchell said his 34 years as a non-commissioned officer continue serve him well in his new role teaching youth.

Specifically, Mitchell is now a lieutenant in command of the Poseidon Division that currently trains out of the American Wings Air Museum located at the Anoka County-Blai Airport (Janes Field).

The Sea Cadets are a nationwide organization that help youth realize personal success a achievement through nautical training.

They are instructed by active, reserve and retired naval personnel, senior cadets and ad volunteers who devote time to the activity.

Young men and women ages 13 to 18 years learn about the sea-going military services, community service, citizenship, discipline and teamwork.

Mitchell served 15 years in the Illinois National Guard and was discharged in 1963.

After spending several years working in New York City, he returned to Minnesota in 1971. Two years later he thought about a return to service.

"I thought I should go back and get my other five years so I could retire," he said. His next period of military service was considerably longer.

Mitchell was stationed at the Anoka National Guard Armory from 1972 to 1983.

He did a stint at the Minneapolis armory as a first sergeant then transferred to a divisor support command with the rank of sergeant major.

"I also spent six years as a guest instructor at the Minnesota Military Academy and was their lead map reading instructor," Mitchell said.

Mitchell served with the 88th Army Command at Fort Snelling as a chief training non-commissioned officer (NCO) in 1986.

He then transferred to Davenport, Iowa, as a command sergeant major and returned to

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Minnesota to finish his tour of service.

During Operation Desert Storm, Mitchell served with a personnel service company.

He helped process an number of National Guard units for overseas service.

"We processed a hospital unit down to Fort Sam Houston [Texas]. That was about 1,000 people," he said.

"We worked 22-hour days to get them done. They were all packed and ready to head to Iraq when 'Stormin' Norman' [Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf] took care of Saddam Hussein," he said.

Mitchell's official retirement date was Nov. 15, 1992.

"That's what my discharge papers read," he said.

Nevertheless, as the years rolled by, Mitchell began searching for another way to put his service to use.

That led him to volunteering with the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps at the Anoka County-Blaine Airport.

"I was just sitting at home with a ton of knowledge," Mitchell said. "It's been a pleasure and a real opportunity to take what I've learned and share it with eager young people," added "I'm learning the U.S. Navy ways, too."

Mitchell received his commission June 1 of this year without having completed officers' coursework.

"They gave me credit for my background," he said.

He replaced Lt. j.g. John Ortiz, who remains with the Poseidon Division as adjutant.

"I looked at the [Sea Cadets] instruction booklet, and some things in it are common to a services of the U.S. military," Mitchell said. "My executive officer said, 'I know your background. Here's the book. Instruct.' So, I ended up as chief instructor instead of being an escort officer."

This weekend, Mitchell will travel to Naval Station Great Lakes, the U.S Navy's headquarters command for training, in North Chicago, Ill., to attend a commander's conference. His visit will occur during Veterans Day weekend.

When he was asked for his thoughts about the federal legal holiday formerly known as Armistice Day, Nov. 11, the anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I in 1918 Mitchell thought of his American flag at home.

"It brings me great pride," he said. "It's a 15-foot flag, and it's moving 8 or 9 inches back and forth in the wind as we speak."

Mitchell said the flag is a constant reminder America's freedom is seldom free.

"You have to pay a price for it," Mitchell said. "While I've never been called to active service, I'm ready to go, even though I'm 74 years old."

Mitchell said he stood ready during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 and if called upon, would have gone to Iraq in 1991.

Mitchell also works with Minnesota Teen Challenge (MnTC), one of the state's largest residential drug and alcohol programs. "I do a lot of work with them," he said. "I think

that's what gives me my drive."

Mitchell said he wants to present a role model Sea Cadets can emulate.

"Otherwise, I might as well just sit in a rocking chair at home and watch 'Oprah.' A lot of us [who have retired from the military] would go back canes and all."

#### Sea Cadet basics

Sea Cadets are authorized by the Secretary of the Navy to wear Navy uniforms which are customized with the Naval Sea Cadet Corps insignia.

Training programs are conducted aboard U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships, various bases and other shore locations.

Cadets meet at their local unit weekly or monthly throughout the year.

A unit is structured along military lines headed by a commanding officer. Units drill at local schools, community centers or similar locations.

Local units will often participate in community events such as parades and fairs. They may also tour Navy and Coast Guard ships and shore stations.

For more information and background about the Sea Cadets, visit [www.seacadets.org](http://www.seacadets.org).

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