

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell House

AND/OR COMMON

Boxwood

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1/2 mile south of Middleburg on Va. 626

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Virginia

VICINITY OF Middleburg
CODE 51

COUNTY Loudoun

10
CODE 107

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

___DISTRICT

___PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

___MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

___UNOCCUPIED

___COMMERCIAL

___PARK

___STRUCTURE

___BOTH

___WORK IN PROGRESS

___EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

___ENTERTAINMENT

___RELIGIOUS

___OBJECT

___IN PROCESS

___YES: RESTRICTED

___GOVERNMENT

___SCIENTIFIC

___BEING CONSIDERED

___YES: UNRESTRICTED

___INDUSTRIAL

___TRANSPORTATION

NO

___MILITARY

___OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen C. Clark, Jr.

STREET & NUMBER

Boxwood Farm

CITY, TOWN

Middleburg

VICINITY OF

STATE

Virginia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Fauquier County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Warrenton

STATE

Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

From 1926 until 1936, the year of his death, Mitchell resided here at Boxwood, a gracious estate situated on the outskirts of Middleburg, Va., an historic town noted for its fine horses, grand estates, and fox hunts. William Swart built the main section of the spacious, 2 1/2-story, fieldstone Mitchell House in 1826, and afterward the estate passed through the hands of various owners. In 1925 Gen. Mitchell's second wife, Elizabeth, purchased the estate from Mr. and Mrs. Lewis A. Sayres and added the present southwest wing. According to biographer Isaac Don Levine, from here Mitchell continued his fight for air power, writing several books and numerous magazine and newspaper articles.⁹ He also took part in fox hunts with neighbors, rode in horse shows, and sold well-trained hunting dogs. It was while living at Boxwood that Mitchell contracted pneumonia just before his death in February 1936.

After Elizabeth Mitchell remarried, she and her second husband, Thomas B. Byrd, sold Boxwood to Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Greer in 1943. They in turn sold the estate to Mr. and Mrs. Stephen C. Clark, Jr., the current owners. In excellent condition, the estate house has not been significantly altered since the Mitchell's occupancy. There are no other extant Mitchell residences, aside from quarters that he may have occupied briefly on various military bases, and in any case he resided here longer than at any other address. Boxwood straddles the border between Loudoun and Fauquier Counties, with the main house, all the outbuildings, and most of the approximately 120 acres lying in the latter political division. Gently sloping, terraced, and attractively landscaped lawns, as well as trees and shrubs of boxwood, surround the estate residence. A low wall of uncoursed fieldstone partially encircles it, and a maroon-painted board fence surrounds the entire farm.

L-shaped in its overall plan, the southeast-facing Mitchell House is comprised of at least three sections: the original 2 1/2-story central block, a 2 1/2-story southwest wing added by the Mitchells in 1925, and a 2 1/2-story northeast wing and ell with above-ground basement added sometime before the Mitchells bought the farm. Irregularity in the basement construction results from the sloping terrain upon which the structure stands. Thick vines of boxwood cling to the house's exterior walls, which are of uncoursed fieldstone with the exception of the rear wing's mortar-covered end wall. White-painted woodwork around windows, doors, and porches attractively contrasts with the tawny-colored stone walls. Covering the 1826 portion of the structure is a bellcast, gabled, wood-shingled roof that swoops down to shelter the one-story front porch. Elsewhere the shingled roof is gabled but not bellcast. Bordering the roofline is a plain, white-painted wooden, box cornice. A fieldstone

9

Levine, Mitchell, 381-382.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES (1900-1936) 1926-1936 BUILDER/ARCHITECT William Swart, William Mitchell

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As the United States' first great air war strategist, Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell, according to biographer Alfred F. Hurley, was "the dominant figure in American aviation from 1919 until his court-martial in 1925 and his subsequent resignation from the United States Army in 1926."¹ Moreover, as Hurley also notes, "when Mitchell is considered in terms of his ideas, he emerges as one of the significant figures of the years between World Wars I and II."² He foresaw the direction of aviation development and its role in World War II and subsequent military policy; he took the lead in preparing the American people to accept the role of aeronautics in the Nation's military and diplomatic policies; and he was an important agent in the growth of U.S. naval aviation and one of the founding fathers of the U.S. Air Force.

Among other things, Mitchell recognized the leading role that strategic bombardment was to play in the future, and he predicted that its principal value would lie ultimately in hitting the enemy's nerve centers at the very beginning of a war. He understood that the airplane would replace the battleship as the Nation's first line of defense, and he foresaw the likelihood of a Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor 17 years before it occurred. Significantly, his impact on American military aviation did not end with his court-martial in 1925. Through numerous publications and public speeches, he continued to promote his ideas until his death in 1936.

From 1926 until 1936, the year of his death, Mitchell resided here at Boxwood, an approximately 120-acre estate that includes a spacious, well-maintained, 2 1/2-story fieldstone dwelling and several outbuildings. The Mitchells added a wing to the 100-year-old house, but subsequent owners have made no significant alterations. There are no other extant Mitchell residences, aside from quarters that he may have occupied briefly on various military bases, and in any case,

1

Alfred F. Hurley, Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power (New York, 1964), ix.

2

Ibid., x.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Chandler, Charles DeForest, and Frank P. Lahm, How Our Army Grew Wings: Airmen and Aircraft Before 1914 (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1943).
 Davis, Burke, The Billy Mitchell Affair (New York: Random House, 1967).

(continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY circa 120 acres
 UTM REFERENCES E 1,8 | 26,18,0,0 | 4,31,5,9,7,0
 A 1,8 | 26,21,8,0 | 4,31,63,6,0 B 1,8 | 26,26,2,0 | 4,31,61,2,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 C 1,8 | 26,20,6,0 | 4,31,52,8,0 D 1,8 | 26,16,1,0 | 4,31,56,0,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See last page of description)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	Virginia	CODE	51	COUNTY	Loudoun	CODE	107
STATE	Virginia	CODE	51	COUNTY	Fauquier	CODE	061

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mary Jane Gregory, Assistant Editor;
 with George R. Adams, Managing Editor

ORGANIZATION

American Association for State and Local History

DATE

March 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1400 Eighth Avenue South

TELEPHONE

615-242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

chimney rises above each end of the 1826 block; a similar interior end chimney rises from the roof of the left wing; and another is located over the rear ell.

An assortment of porches and galleries embellish the facades of the Mitchell House. Extending across the front facade of the three-bay-wide central block is a one-story, raised porch supported by four white-painted wooden posts and two pilasters. Reached from the immediate yard by a short flight of gray-painted wooden steps, the porch has a gray-painted wooden floor and a white-painted wooden balustrade. The porch is also accessible from the left side by a brick walk leading from a circular, patterned brick terrace that displays in its center an old, imbedded millstone. Recessed into the front facade of the left wing is a second-story, wrought-iron-railed gallery that extends across two of the wing's three bays. A similar gallery enhances the second-story level of the right wing's four-bay-wide front facade. A one-story, three-bay-wide, brick-floored porch--consisting of four white-painted wooden posts supporting a shed roof--extends across the rear facade of the central block. Sheltering the basement entrance located in the structure's north facade is a small, one-story, one-bay-wide porch featuring white-painted wooden posts and pilasters that bear a shed roof.

Windows display a wide variety of designs, but almost all are rectangular, have white-painted wooden frames and sills, and are protected by storm windows. Many windows are capped by a flat arch of radiating, fieldstone voussoirs. Two double, 10-light, casement windows with white-painted, wooden, louvered shutters flank the front door, which is located in the middle bay of the central block's front facade. Similar windows flank the rear door, which is situated in the center bay of the main block's rear facade. In the front facade of the southwestern wing there is a large, first-story window opening comprised of four 10-light casement windows topped by an 8-light transom. On the first-story level of the northeast side of the right wing there is a tripartite opening consisting of two double casement windows flanking a 25-light central window. Another tripartite, second-story window opening--located in the rear facade of the right wing--has two four-over-four sash windows flanking an eight-over-eight sash central window. Six shed-roofed dormers, each having three 16-light casement windows, project from the roof of the Mitchell House. Three of these dormers decorate the front slope of the roof and three project from the rear slope. The remainder of the windows are, for the most part, either double casement windows or sash windows containing either four-over-four lights or six-over-six lights.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE TWO

Front entrance to the Mitchell House is a paneled, white-painted wooden single door graced by a fanlight and recessed within a semicircularly-arched, white-painted, wooden architrave that is crowned by an arch of radiating fieldstone voussoirs. On the opposite facade of the central block, a similar, fanlighted door provides rear entry to the house. Also in the rear facade are a paneled-and-lighted single door and two sets of French double doors flanked by casement windows. All 3 rear entries lead out to brick terraces that adorn the rear lawn. The northeast side entrance to the basement is through a paneled-and-lighted single door. A similar entry under the front porch leads into the house's full basement.

The front door opens into a large foyer that occupies the first floor of the central block. Architectural features and furnishings of the foyer are indicative of the decoration exhibited in many rooms throughout the house: polished oak flooring enhanced by oriental carpets; white-painted plaster ceilings with denticulated cornices; painted plaster walls with wooden wainscoting and baseboards; and handsome oil paintings depicting horses and riding scenes. Along the right wall of the foyer a two-flight, open-well, open-string staircase with ornamental white-painted wooden brackets, white-painted wooden balusters, and an oak railing rises to connect with the upstairs hall. An enclosed stairway near the center of the right wing provides additional passage between the stories. Against the left wall of the foyer is a fireplace that displays a white-painted wooden, shouldered architrave. Adjacent to the fireplace a paneled wooden door flanked by pilasters bearing an entablature leads into the drawing room that occupies the left wing added by the Mitchells in 1925. Here, four, white-painted, denticulated wooden beams traverse the ceiling. Against the left end wall is a fireplace with an authentic early American, pine mantel, which the Mitchells installed. In the drawing room's rear wall is a set of French double doors flanked by casement windows.

From the right wall of the foyer a single door leads into the dining room, which also has in its rear wall a set of French double doors flanked by casement windows. Entered from the right wall of the dining room is a combination kitchen-and-pantry and a back stairway. A second door in the dining room's right wall leads to a corridor that runs almost the entire length of the rear ell's left wall. Doors opening from the right side of the corridor provide access to a library and a bathroom. At the far end of the corridor is a bedroom.

Upstairs, a combination hall-and-sitting room occupies the second floor of the central block. From this hall an enclosed stairway ascends

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE three

to the attic, now used for storage. Also from the hall, a corridor leads into the 1926 left wing and gives access to a bedroom, a dressing room, a bathroom, and the Mitchell master bedroom and adjacent dressing room. The sleeping room features another fireplace with authentic, pine, early American mantel. In the bedroom's front wall, two 18-light French doors open onto the wing's second-floor gallery. Like the left wing, the right is also accessible from the central upstairs hall via a corridor. The wing contains two bedrooms. As with the left wing, two French doors lead from the front room onto the gallery. Several servants' rooms occupy the second floor of the rear ell and are accessible from the wing area by a long corridor.

Outbuildings. All outbuildings on the approximately 120-acre Boxwood estate are included in the nomination. Except for a small, rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, white-painted, frame library-study erected by the present owners immediately rear of the main house's left wing, all outbuildings have fieldstone foundations, yellow stuccoed walls, black-painted trim, and gable roofs (except the greenhouse, which has a hip roof). These structures include: a 1 1/2-story caretaker's house situated south of the estate house near the front drive; a large L-shaped stable at the north end of the cluster of farm buildings; a 2 1/2-story guesthouse immediately south of the stable; a small one-story barn positioned at the extreme western edge of the cluster; and a small greenhouse, a wellhouse, and a butler's cottage situated between the estate house and the guesthouse. Other than the library-study, the butler's cottage is the only one of these buildings added since the Mitchell occupancy. The whole is surrounded by a maroon-painted board fence.

Boundary Justification. The boundary includes the original Mitchell estate of approximately 120 acres (mostly pasture), the main house, and all the present outbuildings, all but two of which were extant during the Mitchell occupancy. The whole is surrounded by a maroon-painted board fence.

Boundary Description. As indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Virginia, Middleburg Quad., 1968, and (2) AASLH Sketch Map, March 1976], a line beginning at the intersection of Va. 705 and Va. 626 and running north-northeast approximately 3,100 feet along the left right-of-way of Va. 626 to a point indicated by a major extension of the estate's board fence toward the west; thence west-northwest about 1,700 feet along the maroon-painted board fence that marks the northern border of the estate to an unnumbered road that extends southward from U.S. 50; thence southward about 2,000 feet along the left edge

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE four

of this curving, unnumbered road to a point on the estate fence-line immediately southeast of a residence that sits near the end of the road; thence continuing south-southwest along the estate's board fence about 1,450 feet to an unmarked point where the fence turns left at a right angle in a grove of trees; thence southeastward about 1,750 feet along the fence to the starting point.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

he resided here longer than at any other address. Because he wrote many of his works on air power here and because his leisure activities here were reminiscent of his youth, Boxwood is a most appropriate property for a NHL honoring Mitchell.

Biography

"Billy" Mitchell was born December 29, 1879, in Nice, France, where his parents John and Harriet Mitchell were temporarily residing. His grandfather Alexander Mitchell was a Scottish immigrant turned millionaire-banker and was active in Democratic politics. Mitchell's father was a philanthropist who eventually became a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin. When William Mitchell was 3, his family moved from France back to "Meadowmere," their estate near Milwaukee, where John Mitchell began raising horses. Here young William developed his lifelong love for horsemanship and hunting. He received a broad liberal education both at home and in school. He attended a private school in Milwaukee then spent 6 years at Racine College, a Wisconsin prep school. When John Mitchell was elected to the Senate William transferred to the Columbian Preparatory School in Washington, D.C., and in 1895 he entered the college division of that school, which is now George Washington University.

When war broke out with Spain in 1898, 18-year-old Mitchell left college to enlist as a private in a Wisconsin volunteer regiment and within 3 weeks he became a 2d lieutenant in a Florida-based Volunteer Signal Corps. In 1899 his regiment served with the army of occupation in Cuba and he was transferred that autumn to the Philippines, where the native population was resisting U.S. annexation. Mitchell served in the struggle against rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo, won distinction as a signal officer with Gen. Arthur MacArthur's division, and was appointed 1st lieutenant in the Signal Corps in 1901. Mitchell's next assignment was in Alaska, where he helped establish a telegraphic communications system. Upon his return to the States, he became, at age 24, the youngest captain in the Army.

In 1903 Mitchell met and married Caroline Stoddard, the daughter of wealthy family friends from Rochester, N.Y. Shortly thereafter he received an assignment at Fort Leavenworth, Kans., where he served as commander of the Signal Company attached to the post. It was at this time that he developed a keen interest in aviation. Mitchell began experimenting with communications devices such as the kite balloon, and came in contact with the progress being made on dirigibles.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

After Leavenworth, Mitchell spent 2 years in the Philippines preparing reconnaissance reports of Japanese activities on neighboring islands. His dispatches reflected his prescient belief that war with Japan was inevitable and that the Philippines were consequently in great danger.

In March 1912 Mitchell's experience coupled with his engaging personality and family influence earned him the distinction of becoming the youngest officer selected to serve on the Army's General Staff in Washington. At that time he was aware of the great progress being made in aeronautics overseas, but he still considered aviation essentially a reconnaissance device--just another element of the Signal Corps. He even asserted that creation of a separate branch for aviation would retard its development as a method of reconnaissance. Thus, when some members of the Signal Corps Aeronautical Division claimed they could make better progress through a separate organization, Mitchell supported the 1914 Congressional decision to leave aeronautics in the Signal Corps.

That year, however, World War I broke out in Europe and Mitchell utilized the opportunity to study the new technical and mechanized methods of warfare. After reading intelligence reports from Europe, he became convinced that aviation had vast military potentialities, and when he finished his General Staff assignment in 1916 he entered the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. Quickly promoted to the rank of major, he began in earnest the task of building up Army aviation, stating that airplanes would be useful for offensive action against enemy submarines and ships as well as for reconnaissance. Says historian Carroll V. Glines, Mitchell "had suddenly become the chief [U.S.] exponent of air power and the accepted spokesman for the Aviation Service."³ Since one of his goals was to accelerate the training of good pilots, Mitchell himself began pilot training in 1916 at the Curtiss Aviation School in Newport News, Va., and soon became an excellent pilot.

In March 1917 Mitchell was sent to Europe as an aeronautical observer, and 2 weeks after his arrival in Paris the United States declared war on Germany. Eagerly, though with little authority, Mitchell set up an unofficial aviation office and began to make plans for developing an American expeditionary air force. At the front he studied

3

Carroll V. Glines, Jr., The Compact History of the United States Air Force (New York, 1963), 107.

107

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

the Allied units, perceiving the markedly changing role of aviation and especially the rapid evolution of the fighter plane. Through further flight training at Le Bourget Airport near Paris, Mitchell received from French airmen his first lessons in a theory of aerial warfare that went far beyond mere reconnaissance. Air power was used to seek out the enemy wherever he could be found. Also in France Mitchell met Gen. Hugh Trenchard, the commander of the British Royal Flying Corps who was recognized as Europe's leading pioneer of strategic aviation. Trenchard's thesis, briefly, was that air power could and should be used offensively and would one day become much more crucial than sea power in military strategy. This notion had a profound influence on Mitchell's own thinking.

In 1917 Mitchell played a leading role in launching the huge World War I American aircraft production program. He presented a detailed plan to French Premier Alexander Ribot proposing the creation of an American air force to assist the allies. Impressed with Mitchell's data, Ribot cabled President Wilson, suggesting the development of a large aviation program. This "Ribot Cable" served as the basis for a \$640 million aircraft production program in the United States. In executing the program, however, the authorities in Washington still clung to the old ideas about air power, giving a much greater priority to reconnaissance aircraft than either Mitchell or the French had intended.

When Gen. John J. Pershing arrived in Paris with his American Expeditionary Forces staff in June 1917, Mitchell, recently promoted to lieutenant colonel, was the senior flyer in France. Accordingly, Pershing named him aviation officer of the AEF. In this capacity Mitchell constantly reminded General Pershing of the urgent necessity for more "strategic" aviation. Pershing proposed Mitchell's ideas to a board of officers, which included Mitchell himself, and requested from them a complete aviation project for the U.S. Army in France. Thus, largely at Mitchell's urging Pershing created the Air Service of the AEF as early as June 1917; but a full year passed before President Wilson ordered the complete separation of the Air Service from the Signal Corps. That autumn Mitchell's career continued its rapid advance with his promotion to full colonel and subsequently to commander of the Air Service. By spring 1918 the first U.S.-trained airplane squadrons were arriving at the front. With Mitchell directing aerial combat, the Air Service of the AEF compiled an impressive record. Mitchell himself earned distinction as the first American Army aviator to cross enemy lines and the first to be decorated.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE four

Mitchell's ideas were twice put to the test in the autumn of 1918 during the AEF's two major battles of the war--St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne. St. Mihiel saw the war's greatest air effort and its largest concentration of aircraft. Acting as coordinator of the aerial effort, Mitchell used 1,481 planes to successfully gain air superiority over the German air forces. In the Meuse-Argonne campaign Mitchell amassed a large force of French and American planes and struck behind enemy lines, effectively disrupting a German counterattack. Afterward Mitchell handed General Pershing a bold plan for the large-scale strategic bombardment of Germany, but the Armistice came before the idea could be tried out. Nevertheless, Mitchell's experiences and successes during World War I became the basis for his views on the organization of tactical or strategic aviation, and at the same time his colorful personality and brilliant wartime record brought him personal popularity and prestige.

Upon his return to the United States in 1919 Mitchell was named Assistant Chief of the Air Service. He now determined to change traditional American military policy by conveying his vision for aviation's future to his fellow officers and to civilian officials as well. He realized that technology had shattered the old framework of American military policy, and he was convinced that America could no longer rely on geographic isolation for defense. Accordingly he advocated a national defense structure overhaul that would place aeronautics on an equal basis with the Army and Navy. Indeed, the major theme of his aviation program was that aerial warfare now ranked with naval and ground warfare in importance.

In Washington, however, the attitude towards air power was one of indifference or derision, and in the interval between world wars Mitchell's theories became snarled in controversy and technical difficulties. By the advent of President Warren G. Harding, the Air Service that Mitchell had helped to build was rapidly disintegrating. According to biographer Isaac Don Levine, the struggle for air power was waged against a background of the post-war retreat to normalcy, financial retrenchment, disarmament, wishful pacifism, and indifference. In one camp were the visionary political leaders, progressive industrialists, and prophetic airmen; in the other camp were skeptical officeholders and the entrenched bureaucracy of conservatives in the Army and Navy Departments who could not endure the prospect of a new, rival service.⁴

4

Isaac Don Levine, Mitchell: Pioneer of Air Power (New York, 1943), 173.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE five

Army and Navy leaders built an impressive case against Mitchell's ideas, contending that aviation was incapable of deciding the outcome of a war. Against these odds Mitchell continued to expound his belief that future military operations on land and sea could not proceed without an effective air force operating independently of the Army and Navy.

At the same time that Mitchell was spreading his aerial doctrine, he was also the main Air Service force for continued technical achievement. He strove to equip the service with new bombers and dirigibles, and he initiated development of the first airways system in the United States. According to biographer Hurley, Mitchell was neither a scientist nor an aeronautical engineer; rather he was the very embodiment of the tactical user of the engineer's product. As a result of his broad contact with technical developments, Mitchell's ideas and "predictions on aviation's future had a technical soundness which took him out of the class of a mere commentator on aeronautics."⁵

Despite all his efforts, by 1921 it was apparent to Mitchell that he had lost his campaign within the Government to convince military and civilian officials that his ideas were truly sound. The aviation industry was nearly at a standstill, and Mitchell's own finances were in danger of depletion. Mitchell clearly needed new tactics for forcing America to "wake up" and see the urgent necessity for development of air power, so he turned to the public and began advocating the cause of aviation in speeches, magazine and newspaper articles; he testified in congressional and executive hearings on aviation; and he publicized his and his airmen's flying stunts. In the midst of this publicity campaign, Mitchell began to emphasize the contribution that he felt aviation could make to U.S. defense rather than to offensive military operations. This emphasis was in part a response to the isolationist and pacifist trend of the time. In playing up the airplane's future role in national defense Mitchell challenged the traditional role of the Navy, and when he proclaimed that the airplane had made the battleship obsolete, he sparked one of the most bitter controversies in the history of American military affairs.

Insisting that a failure in aerial defense would mean attacks on major U.S. cities, Mitchell now petitioned the Government for permission to hold an Air Service-sponsored bombing test. His efforts were rewarded in the outcome of such experiments in 1921. In widely publicized tests off the Virginia coast, Mitchell's bombers sank the captured ex-German battleship Ostfriesland within 21 minutes, then repeated the feat with the

⁵Hurley, Billy Mitchell, 54.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE six

obsolete American battleship Alabama. Mitchell had successfully demonstrated that the airplane was a weapon capable of effectively carrying war to the heart of the enemy over both land and sea. These accomplishments brought Mitchell worldwide attention and continue to rank, says historian Glines, as "one of the milestones in this country's struggle for air power."⁶

Mitchell's views now enjoyed wider acceptance, but still they were jealously challenged by Navy and War Department factions that clamored for Secretary of War John W. Weeks to remove Mitchell from his post as Assistant Chief of the Air Service. Disillusioned by his failure to influence legislation favorable to his program, Mitchell grew more vociferous in his criticism of opponents. Weeks remained unwilling to remove the general from his post, but Mitchell's immediate supervisor, Gen. Mason Patrick, found it increasingly difficult to temper Mitchell's impatience and to shelter him from discipline and reprimands from above. Then, just at the height of the Ostfriesland success, Mitchell's marriage of 16 years collapsed, resulting in a separation from his wife Caroline and their three children. Because personal problems and the strain of duty in Washington were beginning to exhaust Mitchell and because Patrick wanted to keep the aviator out of further difficulty in the Capital, Mitchell was sent on tours of inspection to Europe (1921-22) and the Pacific (1923-24).

During these years Mitchell both strengthened his own convictions about aviation's potentialities and made significant contributions to the tactical and doctrinal growth of the Air Service. After studying European aeronautical progress Mitchell returned to the United States and in 1923 wrote a manual on bombardment to be distributed privately within the Air Service. The manual described how to carry out a total war in the air. Noting the devastating "moral effect" that direct aerial attacks would have on major cities, Mitchell prophetically suggested that this type of warfare might actually shorten the duration of future wars.

Divorced from his first wife in 1922, Mitchell married Michigan socialite Elizabeth Trumbull in October 1923. Shortly afterward, he departed for the Pacific to study America's defense system in that region. He found the network inadequate, especially as far as Japan was concerned. In the report that he filed upon his return, Mitchell concluded that a war between the United States and Japan was inevitable and that the Pacific Islands would be crucial Japanese objectives because of their

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Glines, Compact History of the United States Air Force, 114.

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value as strategic air bases. Large-scale reinforcement of the Air Service in the Hawaiian Islands was Mitchell's chief hope for protection of the area. Significantly, Mitchell made these predictions 17 years prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Back in Washington by 1924, Mitchell again sought official acceptance for his views. This time his publicity campaign resulted in the end of his military career. Although Secretary of War Weeks had previously ordered Mitchell to submit for War Department clearance any article he was writing for publication, Mitchell sidestepped the order and sent to various popular magazines a series of articles stressing the value of strategic bombardment and air power. And in 1925, testifying before the Julian Lampert Committee appointed by Congress to investigate the aviation industry, Mitchell attacked the War and Navy Departments for "muzzling" the airmen. As a result, Weeks refused to reappoint Mitchell when his term as Assistant Chief of the Air Service expired in April 1925. Instead, Weeks demoted him to his permanent rank of colonel and transferred him to a minor assignment at Fort Sam Houston, Tex.

In Texas Mitchell continued his publicity campaign by writing his polemic book Winged Defense. In it he struck at the conservatism of those in the Government and the military who opposed a stronger air arm. Then in September 1925, two aviation disasters shocked the nation. First a Navy seaplane en route to Hawaii disappeared in the Pacific. Then the Navy dirigible Shenandoah crashed over Ohio. On September 5, 1925, Mitchell released to the press a nine-page statement in which he vehemently blamed the two tragedies on "the incompetency, criminal negligence, and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense by the Navy and War Departments."⁷ Within two weeks Mitchell was summoned to Washington to appear before a court-martial.

Before that got underway, however, Coolidge acted to allay public criticism of the administration by appointing a board to investigate Mitchell's assertions and to consider ways to develop aeronautics for the public good. Headed by statesman Dwight Morrow and consisting of eminent civilians and retired military leaders, the board recommended patient study of all phases of aviation; designation of assistant secretaries of War, Navy, and Commerce for air; establishment of a Bureau of Civil Aviation; and renaming the "Air Service" the "Air Corps" to give it more prestige. These recommendations proved helpful both to the administration and to Mitchell's wishes for American air development. In fact, the Morrow report led to a series of actions that added up to the United States' "first broad aeronautical policy." But the directive also de-

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Quoted in Hurley, Billy Mitchell, 101.

112

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clared a department of national defense unnecessary.

Meanwhile, with assistance from the press, Mitchell built his trial into a sensation and attempted to exploit it as a sounding board for his ideas. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of the court-martial, which lasted from October 25 to December 17, his superiors found him guilty and sentenced him to a 5-year suspension from duty without pay. Seeing no other recourse, Mitchell resigned from the Army on February 1, 1926. Retiring to Boxwood, his estate in northern Virginia, Mitchell established himself as a gentleman farmer and horse breeder. But he continued to wage his battle for air power by issuing a stream of provocative magazine and newspaper articles and by lecturing to public and private audiences. The constant theme of these articles and lectures was, as always, the need for more air power and the creation of a Department of Defense with coequal standing for the Nation's land, sea, and air forces. He also warned direly about German militarism and Japanese imperialism. According to historian Hurley, "the chief effect of Mitchell's [post-court-martial] work may well have been, in the long run, to begin the preparation of the millions of Americans who read his articles [or heard him speak] to accept both a potential relationship between foreign policy and air power, as well as a kind of warfare such as they had never known nor would have countenanced before."⁸

When Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed the Presidency in 1933, Mitchell hoped that the new administration would take a more favorable attitude toward his views, particularly in regard to a Department of National Defense. But this was not to be. The Roosevelt administration neglected to carry out the revitalization of national defense policy that Mitchell had forfeited his career in advocating. Nevertheless, time would prove Mitchell right. On September 18, 1947, the U.S. Air Force was established as a separate service on an equal plane with the Army and the Navy. Then in 1949 the Army, Navy, and Air Force were unified under a single Department of Defense.

In January 1936 Mitchell became ill with influenza complicated by heart trouble. In February he was flown from Boxwood to a New York hospital, where he died of a coronary occlusion on February 17, 1936.

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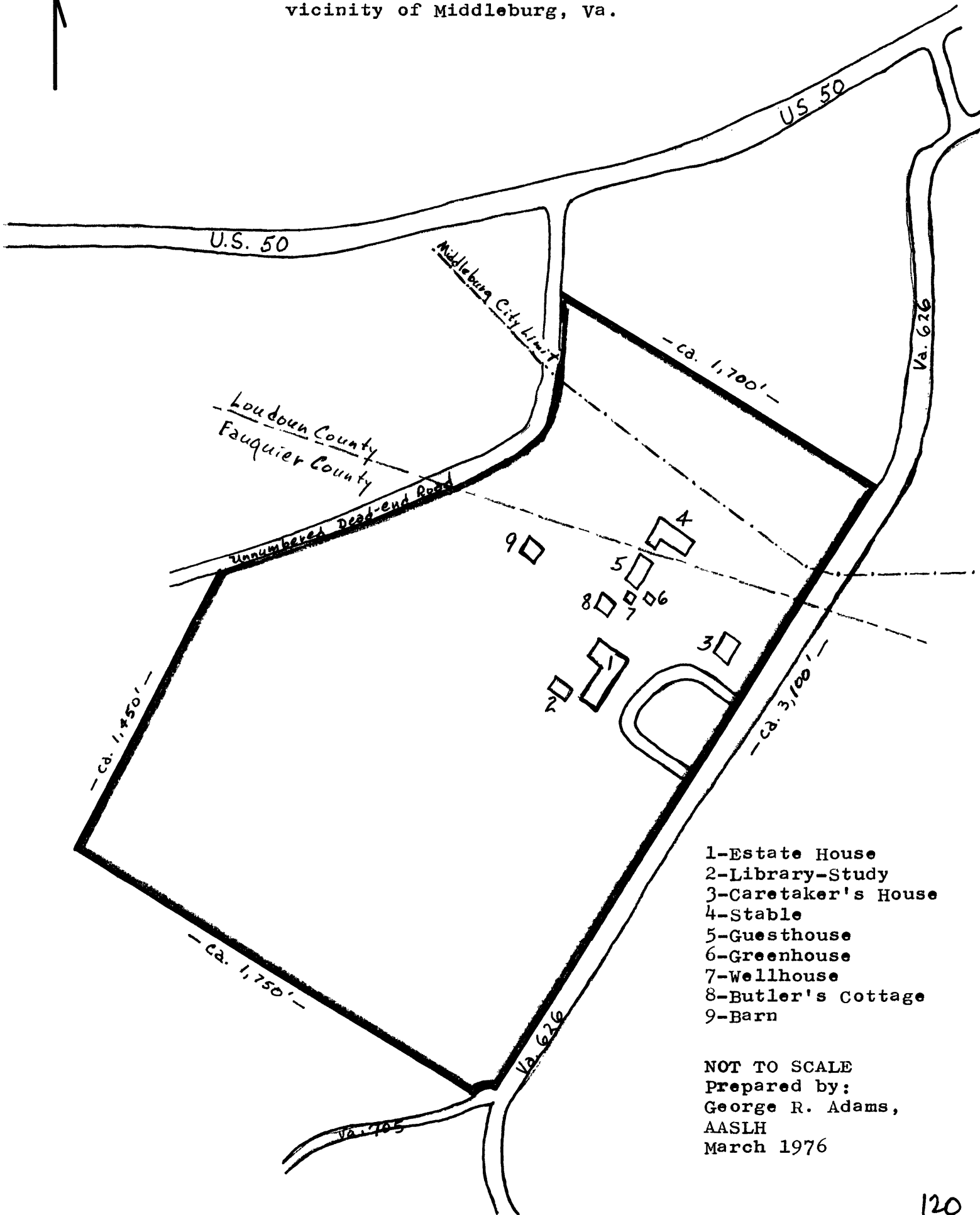
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CONTINUATION SHEET Mitchell House ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE one

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Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell House
vicinity of Middleburg, Va.



- 1-Estate House
- 2-Library-Study
- 3-Caretaker's House
- 4-Stable
- 5-Guesthouse
- 6-Greenhouse
- 7-Wellhouse
- 8-Butler's Cottage
- 9-Barn

NOT TO SCALE
Prepared by:
George R. Adams,
AASLH
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