



Service with the 821st EAB Dreux, France C Rolland Laramore



I was drafted into the army October 16, 1953. After completing Basic training at Camp Chaffee Army Base in Chaffee, Arkansas, I received orders to report to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, for training in the 821st Combat Engineering Battalion. I was based there from December 1953 through March of 1954. Two other soldiers, Melvin Berkbuegler and Clifford Taylor, who were with me in basic training at Camp Chaffee were also ordered to report to Ft. Leonard Wood. They were the only soldiers that were stationed with me all during my tenure in the army and went with me to Dreux Air Force Base in France. We were also quartered in the same Quonset Hut in Dreux.

During the winter months at Fort Leonard Wood the temperatures, at night, can drop down to zero or below. We bivouacked out a few times at the construction sites and when we complained about the cold our Sargent would say “if you think this is cold, just wait until you get to Korea”.



In April we received orders to prepare to ship out to Korea. While we were in rank and getting our orders seventeen of us were called out to report to headquarters. I thought, not KP (kitchen police) again! As it turned out, against all odds,



our orders were to report to the Air Base, under construction, near Dreux, France and we were to be attached to a SCARWAF Unit (Special Category Army Reassigned With Air Force).

The Battalion boarded a troop train in Ft. Leonard Wood bound for St. Louis, Mo. In St. Louis we were separated from the rest of the Battalion and transported to Lambert Airport and then flown on a TWA Constellation airplane to Camp Kilmer, N.J. *As a side note; the Constellation was the flag ship for TWA Airlines, a beautiful aircraft.* From Camp Kilmer we

boarded the USS Darby and sailed to England. After a day’s layover in port we then sailed on to a port in Ostend, Belgium. From Ostend we boarded a train to Paris, France and were driven to Orlay Airforce Base outside of Paris. The majority of the soldiers, on USS Darby were Infantry and were deployed to Germany. After a couple of days at Orlay we were trucked to Dreux Air Force Base. Dreux Airforce Base was actually located about 20 miles southwest of Dreux and two miles from the village of Louvilliers.

Upon arrival at the base we were assigned to 821st EAB Co B, a SCARWAF Unit. The base actually began construction in the fall of 1952 and by the time we got there in April of 1953 the

unit had moved from tents into Quonset Huts. Each hut housed a Platoon, with our Sargent quarters partitioned off at the rear of the hut.

Company B's assignment was to construct a perimeter road around the Base. While I thought I was being sent to the Airbase to serve as an electrician, since in civilian life I was an electrical worker and a member of the Brotherhood of Independent Electrical workers, that was not to be. I was assigned to the motor pool as a dump truck driver, hauling gravel from the gravel pit about 3 miles from the base, located near the village of Brezolles. April and May are a part of the rainy season in France. While building a gravel road around



the base would have been a relatively easy task, it was everything but. The base was one big mudhole. The Company was pretty well equipped with twelve 2.5-ton dump trucks, two D8 Cats, a Letourneau Tournapull, a couple wheeled tractor dozers, and two heavy rollers, one a drum and the other a Sheep foot. The trucks and equipment were "Airforce Blue", and were on loan to the Army.



The road to the gravel pit took us through Brezolles. The streets in town were narrow with no sidewalks. There were only a few inches of space on either side of the truck and the buildings. We soon learned if you kept the mirror on the driver's side about four inches from the building you could go through without a problem. The road between Brezolles and the base was also narrow. It was easy for two little cars to pass each other but not enough room for the dump truck and a car to pass, without one getting off the

paved road. We were ordered to stay on the blacktop because if we cut ruts along the side of the road the army had to pay for it to be fixed, so we did not give way. It was a little amusing to see the car drivers shaking their fists out of the window when they were crowded off the road... probably not good for relationship though. We drivers were expected to make 6 trips to the gravel pit each day. During the rainy season this made for long days since trucks and heavy equipment could get stuck in the mud. To prevent us from getting stuck we had to back our loaded trucks to the dump site. Sometime this could be pretty far, backing over previously laid gravel to dump our load. The gravel had to be put down pretty thick, if I remember correctly 6-8" (see, Picture on page 13)so each load would advance the road less the 40 feet.

I only drove for about 4 months before I came down with a bleeding ulcer. Since there was no hospital on base, I was taken by ambulance to the Army Hospital in Orleans. The driver got lost on the way and stopped to asked directions from a local. He did not understand the word

Orleans (They pronounce it Or- lé- on), but finally he got the drift and pointed us in the direction to the hospital. A little history about the hospital in Orleans. Orleans was liberated by the US Army, from the Germans during 1944 and they built the hospital that was still in operation during the time I was a patient there. I was only 12 years old when WW-II ended but it seemed like that was a long-time, half of my lifetime, but a very short time as I look back today. I was in the hospital in Orleans for 4 weeks. I was anxious to get back to the Air Base before they wouldn't release me. Patients had to be ready for duty before they were released back them. My doctor put me on a special diet which kept me close to the base, so I was taken off driving trucks. I was then made maintenance clerk in the motor pool. While it may have been a good move keeping me on base, I'm not sure it was good for my ulcer. Being a maintenance clerk was stressful but in army terms stressful wasn't in their vocabulary...deal with it. The difficulty was in locating spare parts. When I would ask the mechanics for the part number or for a description they would say "how %\$@# would I know?" Trying to find it in the service manuals was like pulling teeth. The Sargent over the motor pool, Sgt. Miller I believe was his name, did not like for his trucks to set idle nor did he like to cannibalize from other trucks, taking them out of service, which happened all too often. Idle trucks put the road construction behind schedule, so I did the best I could and was still promoted to PFC.

With medication and sticking to a diet the ulcer healed and I didn't have any more problem with it for several more months.



Laramore and his truck



US Army Medics in Orleans in 1944



Front: left to right: Barbary (sp.), Larson, Berkbuegler and Laramore Rear: Grady, Hopi, Black, Bowman and Jeffries (?)

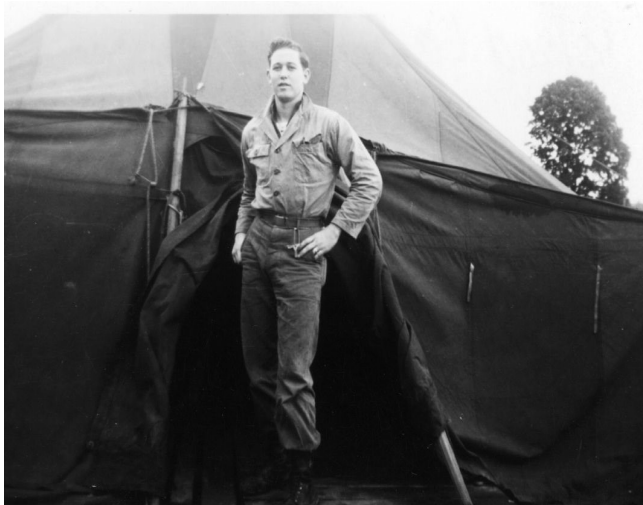
Serving in Dreux was not a lot different than working at a job, in civilian life. You had a job to perform and as long as you did it well you were pretty much left alone. There was an occasional barracks (Quonset hut) inspection unannounced but as long as your bed was made and your area clean there was no penalties. There was a roll call in the morning and then breakfast. Your platoon was expected to keep their area policed and orderly. If you did you were

pretty much left alone. There was guard duty 24/7. Normally you were free Saturday afternoon and Sunday, except when you had guard duty. We were only responsible for guarding Co. B's area and the Gravel pit. On base guard duty required you to walk, unarmed, around your post. There were two people guarding the gravel pit, when the pit was closed. You were unarmed but did not have to walk around the pit, just stay on the alert. The only time we were armed was when we were pulling equipment from Drew Air Base to another Air base: Evreux, Bardoux, or Rhein-main. The driver and his "shotgun", that is the one accompanying the driver, carried unloaded Carbine Rifles, although the public wasn't aware of it. That was Government. I assume the MP's carried loaded weapons but I never saw much of them. I made only one such trip, to Evreux. We were met by the "La Policia" to escort us through the towns. That prevented us from getting caught in streets too narrow to accommodate the tractor-trailer or from blocking oncoming traffic. It took almost a full day (daylight hours) to travel the 40+ miles. We were not allowed to operate during the night.



Guard duty on base

Laramore on a cold windy day



Laramore on guard duty at the gravel pit
civilian traffic, which unlike the trucks were not equipped to handle the deep snows, could be an issue. Since the roads didn't have much of shoulder it made staying on the road more difficult. The winters in France were similar to the weather in my

Winter also presented another challenge, not so much the cold, we could dress for that. Snow was the bigger challenge. It became difficult to operate the trucks, especially getting in and out of dump sites. Although the trucks were all



Taylor standing in an 8-inch snow



Mears standing in a Snow Drift



home state of Missouri. Also, when the snow melted the mud returned with a vengeance.

I only spent one winter in France but we had several snows that measured over eight inches deep. Snow did not mean that you were allowed to loaf around the huts, though. There was always cleanup and maintenance work to be done. Were there snow fights? Yes, some, but I didn't see a single snowman built! The worst part about it was we still had to pull guard duty. The oil heaters in the huts did a pretty good job of keeping us warm and there were oil heaters in the tent at the gravel pit.

I certainly had no complaints about serving at Dreux Airforce base. Especially when I considered the alternative, Korea. Duty at Dreux was not all work and no play. Saturday afternoons were generally reserved for an occasional inspection and maintaining the company grounds, property and huts. Most Saturday afternoons we had free time as well as on Sundays. There was also a basketball court in one of the hangers that a few of us visited. I played basketball on my high school team. There was a Chapel on base that we were free to attend, spend time at a small PX, or if applied for beforehand get a pass to go off base. That is if you were not on the Duty Roster, to serve on guard duty or CQ (Charge of Quarters).

Transportation to Paris or other cities was not much of a challenge. Several soldiers owned cars and a few lived off base. It was common for two or more soldiers, with weekend passes, to chip in on buying the gas





Pat Wood in circle, Laramore at arrow, half hidden



*Company Commander at the mike.
Inactive Officer in the black suit*

to catch a ride into Paris. A preset time and place were set to meet for the return trip back to base. When we got to Paris, we were off to explore the city.

On one occasion the company commander organized a trip to the USO (*United Service Organization*) in Paris to take in a floor show, and have refreshment. I am not sure of the reason for the occasion. Perhaps we had accomplished some goal or were celebrating a holiday, but whatever the reason it was really appreciated by the troops.

Since I had been sitting by Patricia Wood (*pictured above*) during and following the show, we struck up a conversation. Her home was in London, England. She was in Paris working for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Pat asked me if I spoke French. The answer was “no” that I only knew a few essential phrases, necessary for some very basic communications. She then asked if I would like her to take me on a tour of Paris...of course the answer was yes! Since we were both away from our homes it was good to make a friend of the opposite sex since you were surrounded day and night by the male gender. The tour of Paris with Pat was the beginning of a friendship lasting for the rest of my tour of duty at Dreux. Pat was a lovely person, intelligent, fluent in French and a lady in every sense of the word. I began to visit Paris on weekend passes once or twice a month. We would meet and visited most of the places that tourists would visit and other places that were off the beaten paths. We would take in a few “Flicks”, go to the Follies, eat at a restaurant on the Champs-Elysees or go swimming. We both knew that the time would come when we would have to say goodbye, so we endeavored to make the most of the time we had together. When the time came to say goodbye, it was more difficult than either of us expected. This scenario was not unique to us but has been experienced over and over again by soldiers serving overseas. Over time others fill the void left by that special person but we never forget them, not even after 64 years.

Now, back to Dreux Airforce Base. What did we do on base when we were not working? Mail call was a special time when we would get letters from family and friends and most of us were fortunate to get mail on a regular basis and we were anxious to answer them. Music also was important when in the hut. We could tune into Radio Luxenberg and get music popular from the

US. We also had one person (forgot his name) that could play the guitar well and a had pretty good singing voice. Sometime we would join in. I had taken guitar lessons before joining the army and could cord some but was not too good so left most of the playing up to those that could. There were also the poker games, generally following payday. The bidding was limited to 50



Music, a poker game and clean quarters...what more could you want at your home away from home?

I mentioned previously the problems that the sea of mud caused us dump trucks drivers during the rainy seasons. The challenge for the heavy equipment operators and mechanics was greater. Since they were preparing the road bed and drainage ditches along the side of the road, they didn't have the option of staying on previously laid gravel. I didn't know any of the operators very well or the maintenance crew. The bulldozers blade and trailing scrapers were cable operated. Hydraulic equipped dozers were not available to us, but were in common use in most US construction companies back in the States. Broken cables and drum clutches were common problems. Operators were responsible for washing vehicles down after a day's work. During cold winter days getting the diesel engines started wasn't easy either. I'm glad that I was assigned to a dump truck instead of being a heavy equipment operator. The operators were subject to the Weather. While the truck drivers stayed warm in the cab of their trucks.



The big blue Monster used on base to haul dirt



Some of the Equipment used by 821st EAB in building the Dreux AFB

Being a dump truck driver on the gravel pit run had its pluses, being greeted along the way by some women entrepreneurs anxious to sell those great ham and tomato (*jambob et tomate*) sandwiches, on French bread. I don't remember how many francs they cost but they were worth every franc of it. I don't think they added to my ulcer problems...they were too good! There were times when we had to wait at the gravel pit to be loaded, for a number of reasons, a breakdown or



maintenance, etc. The road leading from Brezolles to the gravel pit was not heavily traveled. There were local people that would ride by on their bicycles. Sometime they would stop and talk to the drivers. A couple of times a driver would talk one of the girls into letting him take a ride on their bicycle. A rather humorous thing happened one time when one of our drivers, Larson, from Minnesota, talked one of the girls into letting him take a ride. The bicycle he was riding had handle bar brakes, something Larson was not familiar with. There was a slight downgrade on the road which came to a T intersection. A field facing the intersection was fenced with Multiflora roses. Multiflora roses had not been imported into the US at that time. They grow thick with more thorns than other roses. As Larson came to the intersection he tried to stop and began to peddle backwards, expecting that to apply the brake, it didn't. He went into the rose bushes, fast. When he came out, he looked like he had had a tiger by the tail. Kind of funny to us but not to Larson. He picked thorns out of his fatigues and skin for a while (*The soldier on the bicycle above was not Larson nor on the gravel pit road but an off-duty soldier wearing Civies.*)

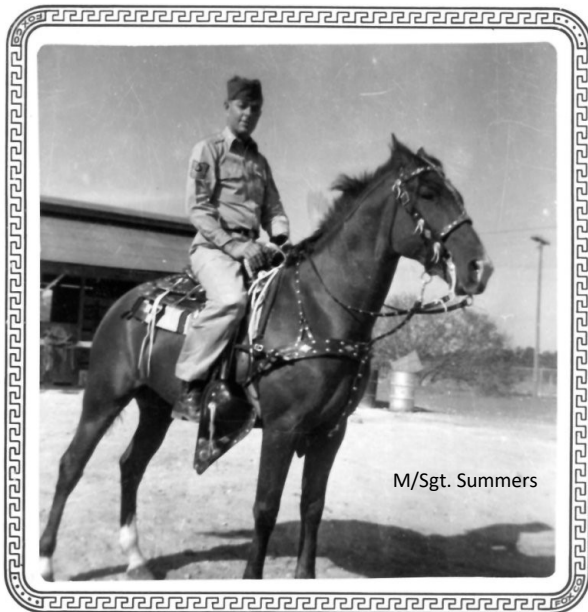


Wiesbaden, Germany - US Airforce Hospital

Sometime around the end of Spring or early Summer of 1955 my ulcers came back with a vengeance. Since our unit was attached to the Airforce it was decided that I should be sent to an Airforce Hospital. I was put on a C-47 military aircraft (milk run) and flown to the hospital in Wiesbaden, Germany. I was there for 5 weeks before being released back to 821st EAB, Dreux. As with the army hospital in Orleans you were not released until you were ready for active duty. Once again, I was anxious to get back to my base. Being in the Airforce hospital was a great improvement over the

Army hospital in Orleans. In Orleans I was in a ward with 12 other soldiers. Our nurse at the hospital in Orleans was Lieutenant Freeze. She was all nurse and out ranked all of us. At times, with patients that were feeling pretty good they can be a handful. She was quick to let them know that she was their nurse and they would follow the doctor's orders; no foolishness was tolerated. I thought she was a good nurse and she treated me well. I guess that is why I remember her name while I can't remember any of the doctor's names. In the Airforce Hospital I was put in a room with one other patient, a M/Sgt. Jack Summers. I believe he was in for a heart problem. He was still there when I was released. He and his wife lived off base and were a wonderful

couple. His wife would come to visit us and bring us cookies or some other kind of goodies. They were from Texas and Mrs. Summers gave me the pictures below. I'm not sure if they were taken



in Germany or the US.

My doctor in Wiesbaden, after his examinations, told me "Soldier, you will have to give up alcohol" Sir; I don't drink alcohol, "You will have to give up smoking"; Sir, I don't smoke, "you will have to stop worrying"; Sir, if I'm worrying, I don't know what it's about. "Well, stop doing whatever it is that's' causing your ulcers". Yes Sir. "If you come back, we will have to operate on you". I didn't say so but I wasn't about to go back. Once again with medication I didn't have any more problems while over there. *(Note: Seven years later I did have an operation that required the removal of two thirds of my stomach. A deformity in my stomach allowed acid to be retained in a pouch at the bottom of my stomach, producing the ulcers. I haven't had an ulcer or stomach problems of any significant since.)*

After being released from the hospital I had a couple days before reporting to the 821st. I visited a cousin whose husband was a Sargent in the Army in Frankford. I returned to the base after a couple of days by catching a flight on another C-47. After getting back to base the motor pool dispatcher was rotating back to the States and I was named the new dispatcher. As far as I was concerned that was the best job on the base. In the mornings I logged the vehicles out and throughout the day I would find vehicles to fill requests form non-com an officer, including some Airforce personnel. At the end of the day I



logged them back in or made sure they were accounted for. Since the dispatcher was the only one who knew where the vehicles were and what was available and when, they were treated with a lot of respect. Of course, my superiors could look at the log book but I never remember them doing it.

One Airforce pilot offered to take me up for a flight on his jet fighter. I declined the offer, saying; “not on your life could you get me into one of those things”. There were two F-84 Thunder-jets on the base at that time. He just laughed. We “Ground-pounders” called the jet pilots “Stove-pipe jockeys”.

The two jets in the picture above were on Druex Airbase and were posted online by Bill Kaufman. I believe he was there after I rotated back to the US. I never saw either of the two F-84's when I was there carrying external fuel tanks. He also stated that they were not allowed to fly out of Druex but he mentioned that they were equipped with reconnaissance gear. That could have been the reason or the ban put into effect after I left but whatever the reason, I saw the ones stationed at Dreux when I was there, during 1955, take off and land. I assume they were flying to one of the other airbases in France and returning, authorized or not.

There were no guard gates on base while I was there, as shone in a pictured posted later by Bill Kaufman. There was a little structure at the main gate, to provide shelter for the guard. He was not from the 821st and I don't remember if he was army or air-force.

Construction of the road went pretty well with 821st EAB, Co. B during the summer of 1955 and our project was coming to a close. Most of the soldiers in my platoon were draftees and our tour of duty was coming to an end. On Oct around the 6th of the month most of those that came over with me received their orders to ship out to the US, to be separated from the army (Back then you were not discharged but put on an inactive duty list). Due to a clerical error somewhere along the line my orders didn't come through. Ten days later I finally got my shipping orders and repacked my duffle bag. I was driven to the train station in Paris where I was met by Pat. We had our last lunch together and I boarded the train for Frankford, Germany. We promised to write each other when I got back home in Missouri and we did, for a while. Memories fade with time and distance and the writing begin to slow and then stopped.





My niece Cindy & sister Sceleste



Sister's Lillian, Sceleste & Rachel

I boarded the train for Frankford, Germany and caught a civilian flight to Newark, NJ where I caught a cab to Camp Kilmer. There I was given my separation papers and caught a flight on Delta Airlines to St. Louis Missouri. What a feeling when I step off the plane at Lambert Airport in St. Louis, MO (now St. Louis International Airport) and was met on the tarmac by three of my sisters.

End of my story line. All the military records for that time were destroyed in a fire in the Archives in St. Louis, so I am unable to verify some of the dates but if not correct to the day they are very close. If any of my buddy's can correct some of the names on the photographs, I will be happy to correct them or if they can add to those that I have forgotten it will be appreciated. My memory after 64 years can be kind of foggy at times, but I have really enjoyed this trip down memory lane. Below are some pictures that I could not fit into the scenario.



Names missing



Melvin Berkbuegler and a small car - Renault



Jeffery (?)



Laramore & Command Vehicle - Gravel Pit



Dump Trucks – Toeing the Line



Dump Truck on Gravel Bed



Brother-in-laws and nephew meeting me at the Airport in St. Louis



Cindy Siegel's picture that prompted me to write my memoirs