

James Rapinac – Military

Introduction:

We are posting this paper as an Article for the Month. It is a supplement to the 2007 oral interview of Jim 'Rapp' Rapinac, <http://vipclubmn.org/PeopleDocImg/RapinacFinal.pdf>.

A YEAR IN ENGLAND 7-56 TO 7-57

In 1955, I was a sophomore and playing basketball at the University of San Francisco. Then I received a draft notice and was inducted into the U.S. Army in February 1956. My 8 weeks of basic training was at Fort Ord, California, near Monterrey. After completion of basic training, I was assigned to clerk's school along with several basic training buddies. I graduated with a MOS 711.10, clerk typist, since I had taken typing in high school. My buddies graduated with a MOS 710, clerk.

We were sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for shipment to assignments in Europe. My clerk buddies were assigned to Toule Engineering Depot in France and I was assigned to the 32nd AAA Brigade, Bushey Hall, England to fill a clerk typist job. My buddies were sent to New York, then on a troop ship to France. I have kept in touch with them over the years. At the time, I did not realize how fortunate I was to be assigned to Bushey Hall!

I spent a few days in a private room in an empty barracks at Fort Dix. Then one morning a Lieutenant told me to pack up for a bus transfer to McGuire Air Force Base and a plane to Prestwick, Scotland. A MATS transport plane flew me, dependents, and other GI's to Gander, Newfoundland, where we refueled, and then on to Scotland. It was a pleasant and uneventful flight.

At Prestwick, I had a private room and the meals were great. On the third morning, I boarded a train for Watford and then took a taxi to Bushey Hall - arriving on a Sunday afternoon. After reporting to the 32nd AAA Brigade Headquarters Company duty officer I was assigned a bunk, bedding, given a 24-hour pass and told I was free until 7 AM Monday morning roll call. I spent the evening at the Green Man Pub on Watford High Street. Such was my welcome to England!

After Monday morning roll call, I met with company commander Captain Harold Hill and Top Sergeant George Graeff. After welcoming me to the Brigade, I was ordered to report to Major James Ray, Brigade S-1. Luckily, Major Ray was a graduate of the University of San Francisco and had read my 201 file. Major Ray assigned me to the Personnel Unit and said I would play basketball for the 32nd Brigade Composite team.

For the next 4 months, I assembled morning reports from the brigade artillery battalions every weekday. Then in November Major Ray called me into his office and said that the Officer Club Manager, Bill Bergstrom, was being discharged and that I would be the new club manager. Bergstrom, now deceased, was a CPA and he showed me how to do the club financials and balance the books every month. My new club duties paid me \$100.00 each month plus car mileage expenses. I was now earning over \$200.00 a month so I bought a left hand drive Morris Minor from a friend who was returning to the U.S. My Officer Club duties and Brigade basketball games kept me occupied for the rest of 1956.

63 Priory Road, Kilburn Park, London

Sam Tucciarone, Mess Hall Cook, lost 3 tenants at his Priory Road rental flat. Sam invited me and two other basketball players, Jack Fehily and Jerry Bunkers, both now deceased, to move in and share the rent starting in January 1957. Except for guard duty nights, we stayed at the flat and cleaned our hut bunk areas to pass weekly inspections. Life was great!

Established in 1980

The morning drive to Bushey Hall was about thirty minutes and in 1957, there was little traffic on Edgeware Road. Our flat had a small kitchen, bathroom, five single beds and a large garden area.

In March 1957, we won the UK base level basketball championship and were invited to the U.S. Europe basketball tournament in Bremerhaven, Germany. Out of eight teams from much larger bases, we finished fourth. All team members enjoyed a great trip.

In May 1957, Sam Tucciaroni, Jerry Bunkers, and Jack Fehily rotated to the U.S. for discharge. Basketball teammates Andy Anderson and Max Shapiro moved into the flat along with Brigade photographer Jim Blue. MORE ABOUT JIM BLUE, LATER.

June and July of 1957

In June, Colonel Massello, 32nd AAA Brigade Commander, announced that the Brigade would be deactivated in July. I was ordered to close the Officers Club and transfer beer and liquor inventories to the Air Force at South Ruislip. Personnel with less than 6 months of remaining duty would be transferred to the ZI, Zone Interior, in the U.S. Those with more than 6 months of remaining duty would be transferred to the 34th AAA Brigade in Mannheim, Germany. I sent my resume to Captain Chester Smith, Benjamin Franklin Officers Club, in Mannheim-Kafertal, Germany.

The 32nd AAA Brigade was deactivated in July with an honor guard parade, speeches, and the casing of the American and Brigade colors. I was in the honor guard and it was a historic occasion.

Jim Blue and I packed up our belongings and put them in my Morris Minor along with a case of beer. After a final tour of Bushey Hall, we headed for Dover and the car ferry to Calais, France. From there we drove to Paris and toured the city for three days. There was little traffic on French highways and our next stop was Toule, France, to visit with my clerk school friends. Toule was a dismal place and I was thankful for my time at Bushey Hall.

We then crossed the border into West Germany and drove to Schweibush Gmund to visit my aunt and uncle, Colonel and Mrs. W. A. MacCormac, Commander, 35th Field Artillery. Jim Blue was impressed!!! After a three-day stay with great food and drink, we drove to Mannheim and reported in to the 34th AAA Brigade headquarters at Sullivan Barracks, Kafertal. The next day Jim Blue was assigned as the Brigade photographer and I was ordered to report to the Benjamin Franklin Officers Club as the club manager. Another miracle and good fortune!

My new club was a very large facility with a club officer, Capt. Smith, and three managers--MSGT Robby Robinson, SFC Bill Cyphers, and me, PFC Rapinac. We had 25 German employees, served three meals a day, operated two full bars, a band on weekends, and bingo on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I was paid \$125.00 a month plus quarters and rations. My meals and drinks at the club were free! My final 6 months of army service were very good and very profitable. I would have re-listed if they had a Club Manager MOS but the Army did not.

In October after getting a passport, I visited my grandparent's family in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, a communist country, now Croatia. Meeting my relatives was an emotional experience since I was the first American Rapinac to visit them. We still keep in touch. I spent Thanksgiving and Christmas with my uncle and aunt in Schweibush Gmund. In January 1958, I received my discharge and travel orders. I sold my faithful Morris Minor to a German at a nice profit. On departure day, I bid a tearful goodbye to the staff and employees of the Benjamin Franklin Officers Club and took a sleeper train to Bremerhaven where I boarded the USS Buckner for the ocean trip to New York and another train trip to my final discharge at Ft. Sheridan, IL. I HAD A GREAT AND PROFITABLE 2 YEAR ARMY CAREER!!!!!!!!!!!!

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JIM BLUE

Several years ago, I re-read "A Bridge Too Far", the book about the Allied paratroop invasion of Holland in September 1944. The British and American forces took a beating from the Germans. In the book, there is a story about a James Blue who lied about his age and joined the Army at 16. He became a paratrooper and jumped into Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. In September 1944, Blue jumped into Holland as part of the 82nd Airborne Division and survived.

I remembered that Blue was from South Carolina so I got his phone number. A lady answered and my throat went dry. "Is Jim there?" I asked. She asked who I was, and I told her of our friendship at Bushey Hall and Germany. Mrs. James Blue confirmed that this was the same Jim Blue who had left the Army in 1945; but had later re-enlisted and served at Bushey Hall. I had found Jim Blue who in all the time we were together never mentioned his service in World War II. What a silent hero. Then Mrs. Blue said, "Unfortunately, Jim died 2 weeks ago." I uttered my sympathies and said a sad and tearful goodbye to her.

Epilogue

Rapinac, James; Gold Canyon AZ passed away unexpectedly on 23 January 2016. Rapp was a VIP Club member and a prolific article contributor to our IT Legacy anthology. His 25⁺-year career ranged from being a PERT analyst on the CP-667 development to Vice President of Technical Services Division, then VP of Sperry Defense Systems marketing. Our condolences to his wife, Judy.

