

Charles R. (Russ) Sage
416th Fighter-Bomber Squadron
Chambley Air Base France
November 1954 to May 1956



In June of 1953, after completing a six month course in Electronic Fundamentals and a four month maintenance course in Airborne All-weather Radar and Lead Computing Optical Gun-Sights at Lowery AFB in Denver Colorado, I was assigned to the 434th FBS at George AFB near Victorville, Ca. The 434th was scheduled to deploy to South Korea but the truce was signed in July of 1953. So those of us that had not been overseas were reassigned to the 416th FBS which was also at George AFB. Several others from the 434th that had been to Korea volunteered to be reassigned to the 416th also. The 21st FBW had just recently been equipped with F-86F's which had much simpler radar than the all weather radar I had learned to operate and maintain in school at Lowery AFB. Since the radar and gun-sight was a part of the armament system on the F-86, I worked for the Armament Officer, Capt. McCartney.

In October of 1953 I Married my wife Pat, Our first son Charles Jr. (Chuck) was born in July of 1954 at Norton AFB. We lived in San Bernardino at that time and I commuted to George AFB.

Our long journey to Chambley began the day after Thanksgiving 1954 when we boarded a train on the tracks at George AFB bound for the Port of Houston, TX. The aircraft, pilots, and in route maintenance crews would depart later in mid December on what was called "Operation High-Flight". Two days later with our duffel bags on our shoulder WWII style, we trooped on board the Liberty Ship USN Gen Le Roy Eltinge. We were at sea for about 17 days. Three of those days we were locked below decks during a storm in the north Atlantic. Finally we arrived in port at La Palice, France. After spending another night on board ship while the cargo was being unloaded, we boarded a train for Metz, which took another two days. From there we were loaded on to 6X6's and trucked to an Air Base near Toul-Rosaire, in northeastern France. We were sent there because the Base at Chambley was not completed yet. The Air Base at Toul had just been recently completed and since it was mid December the place was a muddy mess. As you can imagine it was a very bizarre Christmas that year, but we made the best of it as G.I.'s always do. Our aircraft were still in route and in fact did not arrive until March, so we had absolutely nothing to do till then. Until then we got up to two hours of calisthenics every morning. It was a welcome sight to see the airplanes land in March so we could finally go to work. We moved to our final destination, Chambley, in April of 1955.

Once we got everything up and running and became operational again the three Squadrons deployed to Wheelus Field near Tripoli, Libya periodically for gunnery practice. I was selected to be on the 21st FBW Gunnery Team which was made up of members and aircraft of all three squadrons. Capt. McCartney was the team OIC. After several practice meets, the Team deployed to Wheelus field for the USAF European Theater competition in August of 1955. The 21st Team won the USAFE competition which meant that we would get to go to

Nellis AFB in Las Vegas for the USAF World Wide competition. Members of the 21st FBW always kept a positive attitude no matter how daunting the task seemed. I think it was that can-do team spirit and dedication to professionalism that lead us to victory in the 100+ degree heat of the Libyan Desert. The Commanding General of Ninth Air force had just received a new C-54 and he loaned it and the crew to the team to fly us to Nellis. We flew from Chambley to Wendover Nevada (with several stops in between of course) in early September. We found the range there unusable, so from there we went to China Lake, Ca to practice until the competition at Nellis in early October. Our team took second place. Training Command took first place. Looking back, it was a great experience and adventure. I left Chambley in May 1956 for the States and discharge, as my four year enlistment was up.

Once I became a civilian I, of course, had to get a real job. They were looking for Aircraft Electronic Technicians at McClellan AFB. near Sacramento, Ca where I lived at the time. So I took a job there (just temporarily you understand till something better comes along, I told my self). Imagine my surprise when they put me to work on the same equipment I worked on in the Air Force, I loved it. So, 31 years later in 1987 I retired from there as the EF-111A Logistics Program Manager. In the mean time Pat and I had three more boys, Mike, Bob and Mark. After retiring from McClellan I went to work for Rockwell Aerospace Co. as a Senior Logistics Engineer on the F-111 Pacer Strike Program. I retired again in 1995 and we moved to our present home here at Lake Cushman in Hoodspport, WA. I have been volunteering here as a member and Chairman of the Architect Control Committee for our Home Owners Association for the past 11 years.