

Interviewed by Judy Allen March 15, 2024 at the home of his sister, Joetta McIntyre. Photos taken of him and brother Leon, and old pics.

John Labor of Pittsburg – Army Veteran

Army veteran John Labor of Pittsburg, Oklahoma served in the 3rd Army, 76th Battery. He was drafted in 1969 and served until November of 1971.

Labor married Linda Lewis two weeks prior to being drafted. She passed away December of 2023.

John Labor's brother, Leon, was already in Vietnam when he entered service. "At that time, only one brother could be in the war zone, so I was sent to Germany," said John Labor. His job was an assistant gunner. "We mostly did guard duty," he said. Labor said he worked a month at a time as guard at a nuclear site and then rotated.

His basic training was at Fort Polk, Louisiana and Advanced Individual Training was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was then sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey and transferred to Germany.

"The outfit I was in was spit and polish. Everything had to be shined," he said. His memories of service include the people he worked with – a special friend was Jim Moser of California. They still exchange Christmas cards.

Labor said in Germany, cows were worked similar to the way horses were used in Oklahoma. He said he saw a lot of little birds at Johnston Island, like the ones featured on cuckoo clocks. "It was a little bitty bird and could holler just like the clock. There were also big rabbits – the biggest I ever saw," he remembered.

"While at Fort Sill, there were BIVOUACs at night. Most of the guys were from New York and other places in the East." Labor talked about some having guard duty while others slept. "One of the guys from back East came running into the tent and asked what we could hear," said Labor. "I told him it was just coyotes, but another guy from Mississippi said 'Tell the truth! It is wild Indians hiding and they are wanting to come scalp us.' The Eastern guy wouldn't go back out because he was too scared. I don't know if he ever learned the truth. They thought it was still like the old west in Oklahoma and Texas," said Labor.

The most difficult part of the military for Labor was being away from home. "It was just a job. The ones who had a hard time didn't like the work. If you went and did your job, didn't make waves, (it was ok)."

Sometimes Labor would get a three-day pass and travel across Europe. He saw England, France and Spain. "You could get on a train and go just about anywhere you wanted to go," he said. He was interested in the cultures of the different places.

"Being in the military teaches a lot things, and makes you grow up. It teaches you to take care of yourself, get independent," said Labor. Even though he recommends a stint in the military, he added, "I don't want any kids to go to war – war is not good for anyone."

His discharge from Germany was back to Fort Dix, where the soldiers had a mandatory Thanksgiving dinner, then loaded on a plane to Dallas. He rode a bus to Kiowa, Oklahoma, near his home.

"When I got home, I worked in construction, then worked at the base as an equipment operator. I spent 32 years there (at the Savannah ammunition depot and base)."

Labor attended college classes at Wilburton on the GI Bill. He said the classes were mostly basics, machine shop, welding, and mechanics. "I drew \$360 a month to go to school," he said,

explaining it made financial sense to go to college. "I worked during the day and went to school at night."

He said he was a good horseman, having spent much of his life breaking horses, including a lot from Texas. He still gardens, and his brother has taken over the horses.

Labor is known as an honest man with a good heart.

Important inventions he has seen in his lifetime include cell phones. "Used to be there were only ten phones in town and now everybody has one in their pocket!"

Labor advises future generations, "Get a good education – work hard and don't be lazy. Education and hard work will get you ahead in life!"