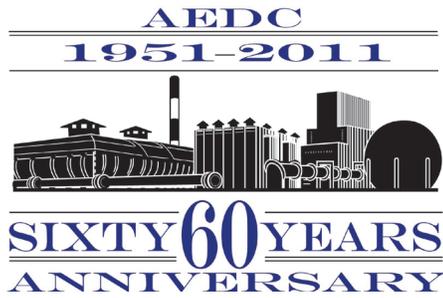


From soldier to pipefitter, retired employee has seen AEDC from all angles



By Shawn Jacobs
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When Jack Boyer arrived at Camp Forrest in 1941 with the Army, he never dreamed that his journey would take him full circle: overseas with the Army and back for a career at Arnold Engineering Development Center (AEDC).

Now the 92-year-old Manchester resident reflects on a life of satisfaction and contentment.

A native of Collinsville, Ill., Boyer said he joined the Illinois National Guard in 1940, expecting the United States would go to war because of the conflict in Europe. In March 1941, Boyer was placed in the regular Army and sent to "open up" Camp Forrest, which is now within the boundaries of Arnold AFB.

"In June of '41 there was a maneuver in this area, and they put me on detached service driving an umpire vehicle," Boyer said. "I drove a captain, and I don't know why I was on so much detached service in '41, but they made a chauffeur out of me. I spent very little time at Camp Forrest because I was on detached service so much. We did build some walks. It was so muddy when we came down here; we built wooden walks to stay out of the mud. As far as actual training now, I got very



Jack Boyer looks through an album filled with photographs from his days as a pipefitter at AEDC on May 12, 2011. (Photo by Shawn Jacobs)

little training.

"We left Camp Forrest on Aug. 4, 1941, and went to Arkansas and Louisiana for two more months on another maneuver. We finished that maneuver and went to North and South Carolina for two more months and got back to Camp Forrest on Dec. 4 [1941]."

Boyer then had to have surgery on his leg to correct a varicose vein problem. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the doctor told him he could get a medical discharge due to his leg, but Boyer declined.

"I said I got into the National Guard knowing that we were going to war," Boyer said. "I said I'd be defeating my purpose for getting in the National Guard if I got a discharge."

Boyer's unit, which became the 123rd Field Artillery, left Jan. 1, 1942, for 38 months overseas, first landing in Melbourne, Australia,

then traveling to New Caledonia, about 800 miles east of Australia.

"I was on detached services, and I chauffeured officers a whole lot and I drove trucks," he said. "One of my main jobs was to haul stuff from the main port there and deliver it to where it had to go to."

Boyer was discharged from the Army in March 1945, and he returned to Manchester and soon married his first girlfriend, Catherine, whom he had met while he was at Camp Forrest. They were married for 63 years until her death. The couple had two sons about whom Boyer speaks proudly: Milton, of Manchester, a retired operating engineer from AEDC, and Joe, of Estill Springs, who still works at the center as an operating engineer.

And it was not long before Boyer was back in the area of Camp Forrest, except this time it was called AEDC.

“In 1952 they had [some] German motors at Northern Field in the hangar, and they wanted to make sure they were dried out before they put them on the line,” Boyer said. “They went into ETF [Engine Test Facility]. I tried to get in the Electricians Local, and they wouldn’t take me in the local but they gave a work permit.

“I went out there and we worked on drying those motors out for about two weeks. Some electrician had been working out of town and he wanted to come home, so I got rolled. So I said, ‘To heck with it; I’ll get in the pipefitters.’ And I did.”

Boyer said pipefitting was not new to him, since he started doing refrigeration work in 1939. Prior to that, as a teenager, he had put in a water line across two yards to his house.

“I worked on construction out there at AEDC until 1964,” he said. “I worked all over that area, and in 1964 I went to work with ARO [Arnold Research Organization]. I really enjoyed my work, and I thought I was good at it.

“For the most part, I worked in the Model Shop. I’ve had some big jobs. I was on a pretty good size job when I retired out there.”

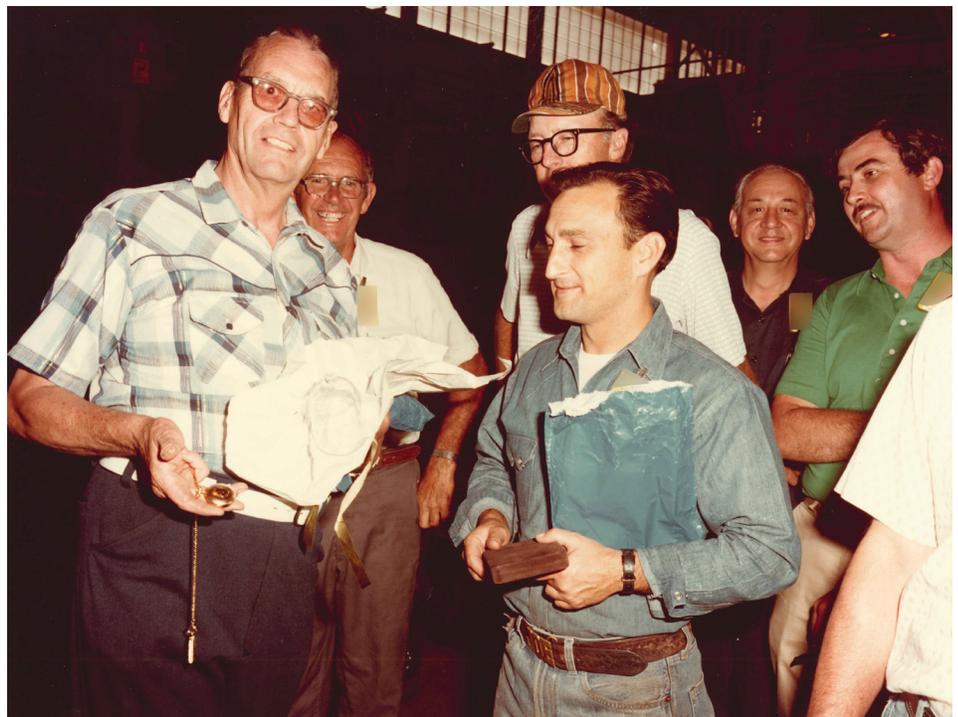
He said the base has changed dramatically since he retired in 1981. He only knows one or two people left at AEDC with whom he worked.

Boyer said he has always been good with his hands. He built his current house himself in the early 1950s but had to move it when the interstate came through. Even today he stays busy at a shop in back of his residence. Fans, battery chargers, microwave ovens, cameras – Boyer will try to fix almost anything.

“I repair lots of things in my shop out there,” he said. “I get lots of



Bower (on right) is pictured with a control panel he helped fabricate for a venturi closure in the in the J-2 test cell on Oct. 16, 1970. (Photo provided)



Bower is presented a gold watch at his retirement from AEDC’s Model Shop in 1981. (Photo provided)

things from the convenience center that’s thrown away, and I’ll repair it [and give it away]. I’ve given a lot of stuff to Goodwill.

“I’ve worked in a shop all my life. I’d hate to live without a shop. I can do just about anything in there.”

In good health, except for a back problem that can make walking

painful, Boyer looks back gratefully and contentedly at a life well-lived.

“I’ve had so many good things happen to me in my lifetime,” he said. “I’ve accomplished what a person should accomplish in his life. [I have] very few regrets, and I’ll tell you that’s a good feeling.”