

Cold War Years: US Army at Caserne Lariboisière (1950-67)

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The American period at Caserne Lariboisière lasted nearly one-quarter of a century. American GIs first arrived at the caserne in August 1944 when the 5th Infantry Division of Lt Gen George S. Patton's US Third Army liberated Fontainebleau. From 1945 to 1950, the 7762nd AGRC Depot Co was stationed at Lariboisière, one of two US Army depots of the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC). The AGRC recovered American war dead and established the World War II US cemeteries in France. In 1947, more than two-hundred US Army officers, enlisted men, and civilian employees attended courses at the caserne on how to identify remains of GIs killed on the battlefields of Europe.

On 06 November 1950, US Ambassador to France David K. E. Bruce and Alexandre Parodi (representing France) signed the document which permitted the US to establish military supply lines across France. To support NATO forces in Germany, supplies and equipment would be located at numerous US Army depots from Bordeaux through Orléans and Fontainebleau to Metz. During the initial buildup, part of Caserne Lariboisière became the US Army 504th Medical Base Depot. Medical supplies and equipment were stored in six of the Warehouse Buildings Nos. 101 to 110. The west end of the caserne was used by support units of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) and half of the east end by US European Command activities. SHAPE troop barracks were Buildings Nos. 312, 349, and 350.

US Army Units at Caserne Lariboisière (1955-1963)

33 rd Field Hospital	3 rd Ordnance Co (Direct Auto Support)
33 rd Medical Depot	275 th Signal Co (Service)
76 th Medical Det (Vet Food Inspection)	293 rd Signal Co (Service)
67 th Military Police Co	507 th Signal Co (Support)
595 th Army Postal Unit	766 th CIC Detachment

SHAPE planners believed it was unwise to locate depots close to NATO headquarters at the Château and Avon because they would be key targets if the Soviets invaded France. Therefore

in 1952, most medical supplies at Lariboisière were relocated to leased warehouses at La Roche-sur-Yon. However in May 1953, the 33rd Medical Depot was sent from Germany to Fontainebleau to restock a medical depot at Lariboisière. In 1957, most of the medical stocks were again relocated, this time to Vitry-le-François.

By the late 1950s, there were more than five-hundred GIs at Lariboisière. Post headquarters was located in Building No. 112. The US Army renovated the original buildings at Lariboisière, at a cost of nearly one-million dollars, to provide space for warehouses, offices, barracks, hospital, elementary school, gymnasium, theater, commissary, PX, and chapel. For off-duty recreation, GIs could use the gymnasium behind Building No. 100, the bowling alley in Building No. 109, or Special Services Club in Building No. 359, next to barracks in Building No. 435. Crafts shops, music listening room, and game room were on the ground floor of the club, a library with more than 3,000 books was on the second floor. The club was staffed by French employees and Special Service women, affectionately called "Doughnut Dollies" by the GIs.

In 1955, the 33rd Field Hospital replaced the 34th Station Hospital at Fontainebleau. The 33rd, a 400-bed mobile medical unit, operated a 40-bed fixed hospital in Building No. 100 at Lariboisière. Pharmacy and examination rooms were on the ground floor, rooms for female patients and a large ward for male patients on the second floor, and enlisted medical personnel lived on the third floor of the hospital. The x-ray technicians took annual chest x-rays of GIs and French employees. When deployed to the field, each platoon of the 33rd was to set up a 100-bed hospital in tents.

Three US Army signal companies were billeted at the caserne. Signal personnel maintained communications systems, operated cryptographic equipment, and deployed to the field to practice operating microwave radio equipment vans. There were more than two-hundred vans and vehicles at Fontainebleau that could be deployed to the field to set up emergency communications networks from NATO headquarters to subordinate commands. Personnel from the 275th Signal Co (Service) maintained and operated communications equipment at the Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT) underground bunker at Margival, near Soissons. From

August 1953 until June 1966, AFCENT was commanded by a French general whose headquarters were in Cour Henri IV, Château de Fontainebleau.

The Quartermaster Corps Petroleum Distribution Command, Europe (PDC), activated on 15 November 1954 at Orléans, moved to Lariboisière in September 1955. Units of the PDC delivered petroleum products in bulk (by pipeline, tank railcars and tank trucks) and in containers (by 5-gal jerry cans and 55-gal drums) to US forces in France and Germany. The PDC operated four large installations along the Donges-Metz pipeline at Donges, Melun, Vatry, and St.-Baussant, and storage depots at Niort and Pauillac. Subordinated units were the 55th Transportation Truck Co (Petroleum) at Caserne Sidi Brahim at Étain and the 543rd Engineer Co (Pipeline) located near Chinon. The nearby Melun Terminal District had four distribution-storage installations (called tank farms) on more than 500 acres. Two tanks farms were at la Ferté-Alais, one at Bouville, and one at Orgemont. At the farms, personnel of the 524th Quartermaster Co transferred gasoline from the Donges-Metz pipeline to tank railcars and 5,000 gal tank semi-trailers for delivery to units in Fontainebleau, Orléans, and Paris areas.

In March 1966, French President Charles de Gaulle invoked the principle of *ribus sic stantibus* (changed conditions) to withdraw France from SHAPE. US installations and NATO military headquarters in France would be closed. By early June 1967, all US Army units had departed from Caserne Lariboisière. More than one-thousand French civilians, who worked for the US Army in the Fontainebleau area, lost their jobs. Most of the Cold War GIs were sad to leave Fontainebleau in 1967 and to say *au revoir* to their French friends, co-workers, and neighbors. Today, they still have fond memories of Fontainebleau.