

# **LEO CHESTER ECHELE**



**USAF 1951**

## LEO CHESTER ECHELE USAF 1951



Leo Chester Echele was born 22-AUG 1929 in West Alton Missouri. He grew up on land the family rented and farmed in Portage de Sioux Missouri. His parents were John Echele (1880-1966) and Anna Poeling (1888-1968). Leo had three sisters: Ruth, Dorothy, and Olga. Leo also had two half siblings Bernadette and Clem.

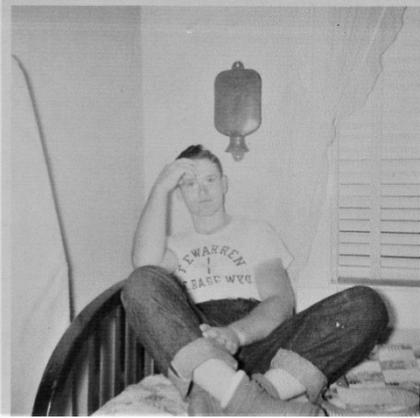
Late in 1950, Leo attempted to enlist in the U.S. Marines. He was apparently very excited or nervous during the physical exam because his blood pressure was too high. Too high to be considered for the Marines.

In January 1951, he decided to try to enlist in the Air Force. When they first took his blood pressure, it was very high. Leo couldn't believe this because he never had this problem. The physician asked him "How bad do you want to enlist?" Leo responded, "Real bad." His blood pressure was retaken and was within normal range. Leo was able to enlist in the Air Force on 8-JAN 1951. His civilian job was listed as Carpenter, Diermann Construction Company in St. Charles.

Leo was stationed at Francis E. Warren Air Force base outside Cheyenne Wyoming from January 1951 until his honorable discharge on 11-DEC 1951. *Editor's note: Francis E. Warren AFB has the distinction of being the oldest military facility in the Air Force, having begun as a frontier fort of the US Army, originally Fort D. A. Russell. The base grew dramatically during the Korean War. Today, F.E. Warren Air Force Base is a strategic missile base which operates and maintains intercontinental ballistic missiles.*



Leo was originally training to be an electrician when he entered the service. In May 1951 he went to the base physician because he wasn't feeling well. The doctor advised him to go directly to the base hospital. He was diagnosed with Rheumatic fever. He was in the



*Leo while in the hospital.*

hospital until 22-JUL 1951. Leo remembered getting frequent shots, with large needles in the backside! He said, "patients enjoyed having wheelchair races in the halls. Nurses did not approve and took the pajama bottoms of patients found guilty of racing."

The Catholic Chaplain on the base visited Leo in the hospital one and Leo asked if the priest would pick up his mail. He hadn't received any letters while in the hospital. Turns out, Leo was listed as AWOL (Absent without official leave, but without intent to desert). His immediate supervisors had

not been notified he was in the hospital.

When he was released in good health, he was assigned to work as a kitchen helper. His DD214 lists his assignment as Food Service Attendant 62010 Headquarters Company 3450th Technical Training Wing.



*Leo on Kitchen duty*

In December of 1951, Leo Chester Echele was awarded an Honorable Discharge due to a family hardship. His father was in poor health and suffered a setback while Leo was away. He returned to Portege de Sioux to manage and care for the farm. Even though he didn't serve very long, Leo had a lot of fond memories of his time in the Air Force.

Leo married Jeanette M. Ell (1929-2011) in 1959 and had four children: Robert, Elaine, Allen Echele, and Diane. Leo and Jeanette later lived in St. Charles MO.

Leo was a successful businessman. He operated Diermann, Echele & Hayden Drywall, later L.E. Drywall, for 34 years. Leo belonged for many years to St. Cletus Parish. He was also a member of the Knights of Columbus, American Legion Post 319. He was Committee Chairman for Boy Scouts Troop 969 and served as the Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department in Portage des Sioux.

He was involved in his children's activities like scouts, baseball and softball, bowling. Leo enjoyed hunting and fishing. Leo was a member of the National Rifle Association and Ducks Unlimited. Leo loved building bird houses, exploding banks, and his whirly birds. He loved "shooting the breeze" and reminiscing with family and friends. He was a "regular" at Donut King and Bob Evans. He was eager to help someone in need. He made

sure the widowed ladies on his street had their grass mowed and trimmed and that snow was shoveled in the winter. Most of all, Leo loved spending time with his family.

Leo died 10-AUG 2021 at the age of 91. He and his wife Jeanette are buried together at St. Charles Memorial Gardens in St. Charles MO.