

Heilbronn am Neckar – Germany 1957-58 and later

An excerpt from the memoirs of Peter Duston

The Army made it possible for me to ski powder snow in the California Sierra's while I was at the Army Language School in Monterey and before I knew it, I was skiing powder in the German and Austrian Alps, both a long way from the small town where I grew up. Remember the theme of this memoir – the unlikely adventures of a small town boy.

Germany, October 1957, I was stopped in front of the display window of the local sport shop in Heilbronn, Germany where I had recently arrived from the states. A beautiful pair of Kastle racing skis were displayed and I was literally drooling. Growing up skiing in New England and skiing on mostly used older skis, I had dreamed of high level skis almost my entire life and here they were. I don't remember if one of the young clerks saw me out there and invited me in or whether timid me took a huge risk to go into the shop. In any case, the young female clerk was unable to talk to me – she knew no English and I, obviously, didn't know a word of German. "Warten, Bitte! Ich hole der Chef's sohn". He speaks English. I met Fritz Grimm and my life in Germany got off to a whole different direction than the usual GI life of an American soldier stationed in Germany. Fritz introduced me to his buddy Wolfried "Wolfie" Mielert and 60 years later, we are still getting together whether in Germany, Portugal, Italy, Maine, Georgia or New York State.

How did I get to Germany?

September, 1957 I was back at the ASA School at Ft. Devens, MA following Language School in California, taking a brief refresher on intercepting Russian and waiting, breathlessly for orders to? We didn't know where. Maybe Turkey, Alaska, or if we were lucky, Germany but there were no guarantees. Those with cars got us to Boston or I went home to Lynnfield, MA, an hour's drive away. We were in the Transit Company so pulled KP and Guard Duty for the regular permanent party at Devens. Guard duty was the worst because it was hard to stay awake on your midnight shift. We walked a perimeter fence around blocks of buildings. After figuring out the routine, I borrowed my mother's car for the week and during my shifts, I parked the car in an obscure spot on the perimeter at the halfway walking spot and while walking my post would catch a nap. I had an alarm clock just in case. One night, I fell soundly asleep and the alarm failed me so when the Sergeant of the Guard showed up with my replacement, they marched around the guard route in the clockwise direction and didn't find me. Ooops! Failure to stand my post was a serious dereliction of duty. Somehow, I awoke hearing calls for me in the dark and I managed to get myself back in the walk. I made some excuse about hearing noses or having to take a pee or something. Whatever, I got away with it. Devens didn't last long and when our orders came down, I was assigned to Army Security Agency Europe – Frankfurt, Germany. Boy! Did that sound more exciting than the "Rock", a barren island in the Bering Straits just across from Siberia where some of the guys were going.

We were bussed as a travel group to McGuire Air Force Base and Camp Kilmer, NJ for our flight to Germany. Billeting was at Kilmer in the "Repo Depot". We were informed that our duffle bags and bags were weight limited and they made a big deal out of weighing our stuff resulting in most of us overweight so the trash cans were filling up with stuff including army clothes. Me, being a packrat frugal kind of guy just couldn't see all that stuff going to waste so I scrounged a bunch of stuff like brand new army long underwear, sox and stuff and found a way to find the Post Office and mail it home. I wonder if I don't still have that long underwear in my winter clothing trunk. Later that day, we were marched out to a Slick Airways chartered Super Constellation for boarding. Two other guys and I were the last in line only to be pulled aside and bumped from the flight in favor of a Colonel and his family. The plane left and we were left standing on the tarmac. We were like lost boys. What do we do now? Checking back in the terminal, we were sent to the transit Air Force billets on base. Our duffle bags were on the plane so all we had were our AWOL bags (hand bags). We did get up the courage to find the mess hall. Next morning, no-one gave us any orders or even paid any attention to us so one of the three of us was from nearby and suggested that we head for NYC for the day. There were daily buses with a stop in front of the PAX terminal. With some trepidation, we headed to the city had a great time but worried that somebody would be looking for us headed back in the early evening. Back in the billets, nobody seem to care who we were or what we were doing so for the next couple of days, we headed for the city. We all had some cash as we had been given advance travel pay back at Devens. Finally on the 4th day, I was getting worried so checked in at the PAX counter about a flight to be told that we had to sign for our own flight and spend the day in the terminal as standby passengers. Later that day, we got seats and were on our way. Arriving in Frankfurt Rhein Main Air Base, we were greeted at the Army Reception Desk with a very angry NCO wanting to know where we had been. He made us believe that we had been AWOL because we had missed a troop movement – serious courts martial offense. Apparently, the Colonel or the Air Force never let Frankfurt know what happened to their three missing men. We played dumb but, of course, we were.

Frankfurt!

They transported us to a local "repo depot" which was once a mansion in the city converted to a billet. It was next door to a convent so we were warned to behave ourselves. Our group from Devens had already been assigned to various units but I "buddied up" with a Willie Lemieux. Willie, it seems, spoke German as he had been a high school exchange student in Germany. The billet's Sergeant gave us directions to the mess hall which was several blocks away on WAC Circle. Willie, however, had other plans that included stopping at the local Gasthaus (pub). I tagged along – he spoke German and acted fully at home in the place while I was much more timid and glad to be in his company. Of course, he ordered us liter steins of beer, the staple of any German Gasthaus. I was not used to drinking so got pretty "buzzed". Willie ordered a local specialty called Gehacktes mit Ei which when it came was raw hamburger with a raw egg in the middle. Yuk! "You better eat it". Says Willie or the local people will be insulted. He was playing the "big shot and I was the sucker. I managed to eat a little with the dark bread that came with this gross dish. I learned later that it was called "Tartar" in English and a delicacy. HHMM! I don't remember if I had more than one beer but I was certainly drunk when we got back to the billets and an angry Sergeant wondering where we had been. German beer is more potent than American beer and I had never had much of that. We spent the next couple of days in and out of Gutleut Kaserne where Army Security Europe was located. Because we had missed our flight from the States and had been out of the official loop for a while, our ultimate assignments had already been filled

so like McGuire Air Base, we were delayed. That gave us a few more days at the Repo Depot Mansion and nights on the town. It was great being with Willie because he was not afraid about where we went and what we did. Frankfurt was a large city and was in the midst of the "Wirtschafts Wunder", the economic miracle created with the help of the US Marshal Plan following WWII. 1957 was only 12 years after the war that destroyed half of Frankfurt. There was still war damage. We discovered a typical German Beer hall, the Maier Gust'l with an oompah band and busty waitresses in Bavarian "dirnd'ls". It had a reputation as the rowdiest place in town and located near the Hauptbahnhof (train station). Maybe our third night at the Maier Gust'l, Willie had been hustling a particularly attractive waitress when disaster struck. I had more than my share of beer served up in 1 liter steins and was unable to make it to the men's toilets where there were Kotzen Becken (barf sinks) so I vomited all over the table and hit the waitress for good measure while Willie was just getting her telephone number. Willie was furious and dragged me out doors, propped me up against the wall and rushed back in to try and make up to the waitress for his buddy's gross behavior. By the time Willie got back out to me, I was being conned by a scam artist promising me a gorgeous blond waiting in a nearby apartment. The "key" in his hand was only 20 Marks (5 bucks). Willie dragged me away and literally chastised and harassed me the whole way back to the Kaserne. By now, we had moved from the "mansion" to Gutleut Kaserne where ASA Europe was Headquartered. We got our orders and Willie was off to Berlin which was, at that time, surrounded by the Russian Zone with limited allied access via an air route and the train from Helmstadt in the West across the Zone. Me! I was told to pack my bags, I was overdue in a place called Heilbronn, south towards Stuttgart. Because the new replacements were already there, I was put on a train solo with instructions to change trains in Heidelberg. I was frankly terrified – alone in a foreign country and ignorant of the language and culture, in fact everything.

The German Toilet Paper Story!

While changing trains in Heidelberg, I had to really use the toilet. It took me a bit to find the facilities which were down a stairs below the platform. There was an attractive woman sitting at a table by the door and I thought that I was in the wrong place. No! She waved me in and by slightly obscene sign language determined that I wanted a stall and she collected a fee for helping me. She led me to a stall which she unlocked with a giant key on a chain to her belt, waved me in and left me to "set a spell" although I realized that I didn't have much time before my train to Heilbronn. After "dumping", I realized that there was no toilet paper in the stall and I became frantic. Checking my pockets for paper, there was nothing and finally I had to knock on the wall and summon the woman attendant. She unlocked the stall door and caught me embarrassed and I felt, humiliated. With sign language I gestured for paper. She laughed and while standing there, stretched out my embarrassment, finally giving me some toilet paper. Now, let me tell you that back then with a general scarcity of products, German toilet paper was in a class by itself with texture somewhere between sandpaper and paper towel and not very absorbent. Changing trains, I was on my way to Heilbronn.

Heilbronn am Neckar was a city of about 90,000 located on the Neckar River about halfway between Heidelberg and Stuttgart. Heidelberg is an ancient town with a castle dominating the town square and a world famous university surrounded by the medieval quarter. The Neckar River divulges from the Rhein at the point. US Army European Headquarters was located there. Heidelberg as a historic location was spared the allied bombings during the war so remained as it had been for several centuries. Stuttgart was an industrial city, home to both the Porsche and Mercedes factories rebuilt after the war. Heilbronn had been heavily bombed with significant loss of life. Although only 12 years after the war

when I got there, much had been rebuilt by the resilient Heilbronners although there were still buildings and blocks in ruins.

Badnerhof Kaserne in Heilbronn was home of the HHC of the 507th ASA Group. The kaserne (barracks) was a WWII German barracks of a horse drawn field artillery unit, had been rebuilt during the occupation for first, a Radio Communications Intercept unit that morphed into the Army Security Agency (ASA) mission. ASA was a stepchild of the newly created National Security Agency under whose umbrella, ASA operated. ASA used Regular Army personnel to support the signals intelligence mission of ASA. Those RA staff and cadre mostly never had the Top Secret clearances that we had and never understood what we did, they just wanted to “play” Army while we resisted. In the intelligence business, we became known as NSA “rent-a-troopers” – cheap labor doing all the field intercept work that worked it’s way up to NSA in the states. Linguist’s like me, were tagged as “Monterey Mary’s” – kind of intellectual sissies, I guess. We jokingly referred to NSA as “No such agency” because it was super secret and not commonly known in the press or in public. Our mission was to provide intercepted Soviet communications intelligence up the chain enabling our military and government to hopefully predict whether the Soviets were ready to carry out their Western European invasion plan. The Code Word for the invasion would be “Red Storm Rising”. Beyond Europe, President Eisenhower had a fear of a Soviet nuclear attack so we were, literally, the “tip of the spear”, the first line of defense or as we understood, the “Cannon Fodder” during the first phase of the soviet invasion that would put the soviets and their East European allies at the Rhine River within two-three days. Our job was to listen for clues in our intercept and send upwards to higher HQ, “flash” reports. Now the fact of the matter was that except for a sudden nuclear attack, it would take a massive soviet buildup to invade the West so it could only happen at the end of their annual training cycle. New soviet recruits were brought on in the summer, assigned to their units in East Germany and the east bloc, trained all through the winter and spring and then when the Soviet forces mounted their late spring Field Training Exercise (FTX), that became the only likely window for an invasion of the west. The strategy was to start at the Ukrainian border with massed tank armies and thousands of rocket tubes and artillery, move westward in massed formations with communist bloc armies of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and most importantly East Germany joining to increase the massed formations in width and depth. Upon reaching the West German border in the open lands of the Fulda Gap in Germany, they would cross and keep going with the goal of reaching the English Channel in less that a month. NATO was so outgunned and outnumbered that the only way for the West to break up the Soviet formations was to resort to tactical (small yield field) nuclear weapons, a frightening scenario that could likely lead to all-out nuclear war.

Wolfie’s story – a German friend’s piece of my life from his memoirs: - we had other things on our minds than preventing WWIII – meeting Fritz and Wolfie and the Donnerstag Abend Klub. (The following pages are written from Wolfie’s perspective.)

Lauffen

The first couple of years in the area of Heilbronn we lived in the town of Lauffen on the river Neckar, not far from Heilbronn. I got to ride to work with a coworker in a Goggomobil, a tiny two-seater car barely big enough for me to sit in. I joined the local soccer club and got to play on the youth team. This is where I honed my soccer skills. If we won our game on Sundays, we were allowed to take a drink from the “Pokal”, a large silver chalice filled with red wine, which was passed around the long table where are the senior team sat.

After less than a year my mom found an apartment in Heilbronn, which was closer to her and my job sites. The apartment was a former storefront; it still had a display window which we covered up with curtains. My brother and I slept in two Murphy beds stacked on top of each other and hidden behind the closet doors during the day. Finally, we did not have to sleep in the same room with the girls. After a couple of more years, we moved into an apartment building around the corner, into a much nicer living arrangement.

Friends and Field hockey

In Heilbronn I made friends with my longtime buddy Fritz Grimm, the son of the owner of the large sporting goods store in the center of town. Fritz convinced me to play field hockey with him on the local team. I asked why we should not play soccer? He answered: "if you play soccer you get to travel to the next small town; if you play field hockey you get to travel on a bus to large cities far away; on top of that you travel with the girls team". That is all I needed to hear; I played field hockey from then on. Once I became good enough to play on the first team, we truly got to travel not only all over Germany, but played teams from as far-away places as Barcelona and Helsinki. One particularly memorable game happened in an Easter tournament; in the final our team played Helsinki. It ended in a draw after overtime and was hard fought. I wound up with a broken nose, courtesy of a player whose ring finger became disjointed when we clashed going for the ball. A good time with lots of beer was had afterward, and I shook his hand with his finger in a splint; he rubbed my nose playfully.

Mr. Grimm senior, the father of Fritz and the owner of the sporting goods store, was also the president of the Alpine club. This club always had a fall dance. Both male and female hockey teams attended. We usually however wound up with more girls than boys, so Mr. Grimm asked us to invite more guys. We invited a couple of American GIs, stationed in Heilbronn. We had met them first on a Saturday when they came into the sporting goods store. I was hanging out with Fritz when they came into the store. Fritz was busy with a customer, so Mr. Grimm asked me to talk to the Americans since I spoke some English. They wanted to know about skiing equipment and rock-climbing equipment, something Fritz and I were also interested in. Further they wanted to get to know Germans our age to learn more about Germany and learn German; we wanted to learn more about the Americans and learn more English. We hit it off, so we invited them to meet us on Thursday evening, when we got together with other male and female friends in a café. We called it the "Donnerstag-Abend Club" or Thursday Evening Club. This started a lifelong friendship with Richard Robb and Peter Duston, who were very influential in my life. Dick and Peter were stationed in a small military base at the edge of town, the former "Badenerhof" Kaserne. We learned many years later, that they worked in Military intelligence, which of course they never told us in those days. Our new friends had a fair amount of free time, much of it spent with us on hikes, going rock climbing or skiing, or just hanging out. Occasionally, they stayed out later than allowed, so they either chanced sneaking back into the barracks through a secret hole in the wire-mesh fence or they stayed with one of us until morning, then they caught a ride with one of the married soldiers living off base.

Doomsday Clock

One interesting story I learned from Peter Duston years later, had to do with his military job of listening to the Russian army stationed in eastern Germany. The Americans were always on guard, watching for a possible Russian invasion. Peter, who speaks Russian, listened in on all the soldier's chats about all the various matters soldiers talk about. One of the things he overheard repeatedly had to do with trucks. During World War 2 starting in 1941, the US passed the Lend-Lease Act, providing US military aid to

foreign nations, including Russia. The Russians had received a large number of US-made trucks, which were still in their possession. What Peter, a car guy, heard from the Russians was daily chatter about needed truck parts for these trucks: carburetors, fuel pumps, distributors, hydraulic brake pumps, etc. That meant a large number of these vehicles were not operational and would not be anytime soon because of the lack of repair parts. The Russians would have a hard time moving their troops and equipment. It reduced the Russian threat. Peter reported this to his superior, who reported up the line all the way to US Army headquarters. Peter received a commendation and he was told he helped set the "Doomsday clock" back a couple of seconds. The Doomsday Clock is a symbol that represents the likelihood of a man-made global catastrophe. Maintained since 1947 by the members of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, the Clock is a metaphor for threats to humanity from unchecked scientific and technical advances. The Clock represents the hypothetical global catastrophe as "midnight" and the Bulletin's opinion on how close the world is to a global catastrophe as a number of "minutes" to midnight, assessed in January of each year. The main factors influencing the Clock are nuclear risk and global warming (climate change). The Bulletin's Science and Security Board also monitors new developments in the life sciences and technology that could inflict irrevocable harm to humanity. Today in 2020 the clock stand closer to midnight than ever: it is 100 seconds to midnight, not a pleasant thought.

Outdoor fun

The four of us would occasionally go skiing in the Alps at the US military ski area near Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a picturesque Bavarian town and a ski area which did not cost money for military personnel and guests to use. On the way south, we sometimes stopped in Munich for supper. The Hofbräuhaus was a favorite. We preferred the "Wirtschaft" (tavern) on the first floor, frequented by local beer drinkers and less expensive, to the upstairs where tourists or families dined. One night we decided to "rescue" the Bavarian flag which hung in an upstairs walk-out behind French glass doors on the front of the building. Peter and Richard were the lookouts, Fritz the downstairs receiver and I was tasked to rescue the flag and throw it to Fritz. The caper worked like clockwork and we did not get caught. I believe the flag is still in Peter's possession. We then drove on to the little town of Oberammergau and stayed in the workshop of a local woodcarver, the father of friends Peter had met in Munich. We slept on the wooden floor in our sleeping bags and kept the pot belly stove going throughout the night. In the morning we would set off for the ski area in Dick's trusty VW beetle, four sets of skis on the rear ski rack and four sleeping bags under the front hood. Those were wonderful and carefree days.

Several times we rock climbed in the Schwäbische Alb south of Stuttgart. The Alb, a continuation of the Jura mountains in Baden-Württemberg and Switzerland, is composed of limestone and has deep valleys with steep cliffs. Limestone is fairly brittle, so we needed to be careful when climbing, as pitons did not always hold. Pitons are metal spikes with holes for carabiners, driven into seams or holes in the climbing surface, and used as anchor points for the climbing rope attached with a carabiner. Rappelling down on a rope on the vertical cliff was fun, climbing up was more of a challenge. I remember once getting stuck on the vertical wall, with my feet far apart, not being able to go forward or back. One of those pitons and one of our guys on the other end of the rope saved me from falling off the cliff.

One summer the guys in the Badenerhof Kaserne fielded a soccer team. They were not very good but quite competitive. They arranged to play a team of one of the small towns in the area, Schwaigern. In order to have a better chance of competing, they recruited me to play on their defense. I was outfitted with one of their uniforms and I spoke no German, only English. The opposing team did not find out that I was not one of the soldiers until I slipped up and spoke a few words in German after the game, when

the teams were in the pub having a couple of beers. Big laughter by both teams and a good time was had.

Expo 58, the Brussels World's Fair

A World's Fair was a big deal, so we decided to visit. Again, the trusty VW bug was our mode of transportation. Overnight we four slept in a couple of Army pup tents pitched on the edge at a rest area on the Autobahn. The fair was exciting, especially the 60-foot tall Atomium, and the replica of the Russian satellite Sputnik in the Russian pavilion, which mysteriously disappeared, and the Russians accused the US of stealing it. In Brussels proper we got to see the famous statue Manneken Pis, depicting a little boy peeing into the base of a fountain. The cute little bronze statue dates from 1618 and symbolizes the free spirit and sense of humor of the people of Brussels.

Giving blood

During the time in Heilbronn I was recruited to give blood to the Red Cross at the local hospital. Giving blood meant one hour paid time off from your job, 15 Deutschmarks from the Red Cross, and a sandwich and a glass of orange juice or red wine to replenish the liquid in your body. My blood type was desirable, and I went to give blood every eight weeks. The extra money came in handy and paid time off from work was also nice. And yes, I chose the red wine.

Dancing school

Going to dancing school and learning how to properly dance was a rite of passage. Tanzschule Wolff it's located in the center of the city on the first floor of a five-story building. It had a large practice room and a small café with a bar. Herr Wolff and Fräulein Wahl were the teachers. We learned dances like the fox trot, English waltz, tango, Viennese waltz and even the rumba and cha-cha-cha. On Sunday there was practice dancing and the bar was open and served rum and Coke and other alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks. We invited our American friends and they were leading because they brought the newest American records Music by Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Frank Sinatra, Doris Day and many others. And there we learned the jitterbug and other crazy American dances. We thought we were very cool. Once the course was completed, we had our final dance at a local dancehall. The girls wore fancy dresses and the boys wore dark suits, white shirts and ties. It reminds me now of a high school prom. I was chosen to make a little speech and present a gift from the group to the teachers. This meant I got to dance with Fräulein Wahl; the dance was a Viennese waltz and she held onto me like a vice. It seemed like the longest dance of my life.

Going abroad

I had always wanted to get an education in a foreign country to learn more English and get an advanced degree. I also wanted to get away from the German military draft for which I was just the right age. I told myself "one war is enough!" I applied for visas in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as they seemed the best English-speaking countries to go to. It is here I have my American buddy, Dick Robb and his parents to thank for facilitating my immigration visa to the United States where Dick, Peter and I have remained fast "kammeraden" for over 60 years.

[Back to Peter's story:](#)

Was a Soviet invasion of Western Europe actually a possibility?

The fear kept our national defense budget bloated, it kept huge numbers of American forces in Germany as it fueled the “military-industrial complex”, as Eisenhower called it. We in Heilbronn, however, got hints that perhaps an invasion wasn’t very likely. When I first arrived, I was assigned to the intelligence analysis section as I missed my field assignment as an intercept radio operator. Because I was young and “green”, I was assigned to a desk with a huge pile of intercept transcripts and told to “scrub” the transcripts for any intelligence overlooked during the initial analysis. They were mostly fragments of radio communications between Russian soldiers and as I discovered they were discussing keeping their trucks going referring to Studebaker, Ford and GMC lend lease trucks given to the Russians during WWII. It didn’t take me too long to figure out that the Soviets were relying on our old trucks for their main ground transport. I checked out the capabilities of their ZIZ 5 standard truck to determine that it was far inferior to our “deuce and a half’s”. I asked for the actual intercept tapes and listening to hours of conversations between Russian soldiers and truck mechanics to determine that they were cannibalizing trucks to get parts to keep other trucks going. Mostly illiterate soldiers from the non-Russian “republics” would try and read nomenclature plates on distributors, starters and generators in English which these soldiers didn’t know so the part requests were very garbled. Eventually, I reported to my old section chief – a crusty Warrant Officer that the Russians were relying on our old trucks to support their supply effort and that these trucks were in short supply and unreliable. He said that they certainly were aware that the Russians still had a lot of our WWII trucks. In any case, a while later, he called me in to say that headquarters decided to form a task force to research the issue – I, of course, being a green soldier was not asked to participate. Later, he called me in to tell me that the conclusions of the task force established my premise that the Soviet Army was severely handicapped in their transport capability and that my idea moved the “invasion clock” back a few minutes.

My main job as an analyst was to track the Order of Battle (OOB) of Soviet units. We tried to identify their combat capabilities at all times assessing numbers of vehicles running or “dead-lined” as non-running. I had big charts on the wall with the data and status. It was all Top Secret codeword. Soviet trucks were unreliable and their battle tanks were getting stuck in the mud or dead-lined for repairs and/or parts. Besides, according to an intelligence report we had access to, the East German Army was not allowed any ammunition by the Russians who were afraid that the East Germans would use it against the Russians. WWII pending was, perhaps not the threat our government hyped?

Footnote: Fast forward 35 years to 1992. I represented the Army in an exchange program with the Bundeswehr in Ansbach and got a tour of former East Germany. The mined death strip was still there as contractors were clearing the millions of mines from the Cold War. The story of how I was rehabilitated and eventually retired as an MI Officer is elsewhere in this memoir. By the way, on one of the weekends when the Germans weren’t training, they assigned me a staff car and driver who drove me back to Heilbronn and parked in front of the very sports store that launched my German adventure with Fritz and Wolfie. The clerks and Fritz all came out on the sidewalk and were amazed that the lowly soldier who first drooled over skis in the window was returning as a “big shot”. Also ironic!!

We worked shifts either 6 days on and 3 off or weekday as I recall so we had lots of time to explore Germany. I was without transportation so relied on my buddies. Dick Robb and Dennis Breton both had cars and as we shared hiking and skiing interests, it was a natural match. Dennis’ wife Dru was over there and they lived “on the economy” – off base. That came in handy when we got caught off-post after curfew. Dennis had clearance to drive on and off base nights because of the night shift crew. He

would stuff us in the trunk of his car and drive past the MP's on the gate. Hop-la! We got in. Another buddy, Paul B. Jones from California was a "trust-fund" guy with greater assets than most of us. He bought a brand new MGA roadster and totaled it on Jaeger Haus hill behind the barracks. Next he bought something else but got rid of that for a used classy Mercedes 180 cabriolet. He managed to hold onto that vehicle from 1958 to late 1959 when he and I travelled in it if we had money for gas after being discharged in Europe in the summer of 1959.

Our off-duty and social life in Heilbronn was much more interesting than our official military duties. Those Kastle Racing Skis in the display window of Sporthaus Saeman opened up an amazing world of adventure and learning. Fritz and Wolfie introduced us to their friends. We were invited into the Donnerstag Abend Klub or maybe we organized it. Whatever, the Thursday Evening Club met at a local café for conversation over soft drinks. The Germans had very little money and we GI's or "Ami's" were well paid even as low ranked soldiers although many of us squandered our pay on women and beer. The two or three local "GI" Bars – the Texas and the Metropol among them were quick to take our money. The Donnerstag Abend Klub was our better influence to keep us mostly "respectable". Haha! We had transportation which the Germans did not so Dick Robb's VW got us lots of places as we explored the region. We learned to rock climb at the Felsen Garten and climbed in other places as well. See the photo of me, Wolf and Dick with the ever present wine bottle in the Felsen Garten. Germans have many wonderful "Fests" – Beer Fest, Wein Fest, Volksfest, Fasching, Oktober Fest, all complete with large tents, halls, oompah bands, food and liter mugs of beer or glasses of wine for the Wein Fest. We attended all we could and had a great time. It was at the Heilbronn Volks Fest that I met Frigga Christoph of the Girl in the White Bikini.

Skiing was a huge influence in our off-duty lives for several of us. I had met Art Clark and Dennis Breton, former ski racers for the University of Maine. Art was a single soldier, Dennis was married and lived "off-post" with his wife Dru. Theirs was another "respectable" refuge from the Army. I spotted a notice in the Army news announcing a ski race to be held in the German Alps above Garmisch. The US Army operated a recreation center with several hotels and a ski area in Garmisch, a quaint village nestled at the foot of the Zugspitz, Germany's highest mountain at 10,000 feet. The race was to be held on the "Plat" – the Zugspitz glacier at about 8,000 feet reached by a mountain train to the Schneefernerhaus hotel perched on a precipitous side of the mountain overlooking the glacier. Getting off the train in the hotel basement, we could do a Tuckerman Ravine headwall run from the hotel to the Plat. Some years later, there was a landslide over the hotel from the Zugspitz summit that killed several on the deck, it was that steep. Art and I stayed in the Green Arrow Army Hotel, took the mountain train and entered the race. We placed and were awarded engraved silver shot glasses. The day was fabulous for us skiers used to New England hard pack skiing and much lower mountains. Besides, there was zither music, beer and yummy German food on the decks of those mountain hotels and huts. We were on a high that came crashing down when we returned to base. We had been gone 3 days without a proper pass. It was our break but we were not allowed to be further away than 30 miles from base (Garmisch was 180 miles) AND had to be on-base nightly for bed check. Usually, especially on weekends, nobody checked and our buddies covered for us. We were caught and there was talk of courts martial for AWOL. Oops. I don't know who thought of it but our Colonel was a fanatic about his unit's sports teams and had a large trophy cabinet outside his office that he showed off to his Colonel bussies when they visited. In any case, when quizzed by the race organizers who we were, we made up a Ski Team name – the 507th Ski Bums. I checked in with the Colonel's clerk to make an appointment to "present" our trophies on behalf of the Ski Team. Well, let me tell you, the Colonel was so excited to be the only one of his Colonel buddies to have a ski team, that any idea of courts martial disappeared. He practically "drooled" accepted our cups. How can he help the team? We explained that training was 3 hours away and would

need time off and travel funds. He couldn't pay us but we could get Administrative Leave and he ordered the Mess Sergeant to provide us with all the Army "C" Rations we wanted. We stored cases and cases of them in Dennis Breton's storage unit and traded them for German food when we were on the road. They contained cigarettes and some of the cans were popular with the Germans – peanut butter, fruit cocktail among other. We also didn't smoke so we traded cartons of cheap cigarettes bought with our ration cards. We bought them for a buck and sold them to taxi drivers dealers for 10 – tidy black market profit that kept us "on the road". Cigarettes were very expensive in Germany and of poorer quality than Lucky Strikes. The Army had a day ski room in the basement of the Schneefernerhaus with a disabled German war veteran running it. We became friends with Tony and conned him into letting us stay overnight in our sleeping bags. We were always trying to stretch our pay and focus on how much skiing we could pull off. We also discovered the Natur Freunde (Friends of Nature) hiking club. They had a bunk room hostel in that same hotel basement next to the train turn around. Problem always was "conning" our way. We were not members and we were "GI's" – often not welcome. Respectable families did not want their children associating with us. We even rented a single room on occasion in the hotel and snuck our buddies up the back stairs next to the rocky cliff to fill the room and full they were. The rooms were tiny, barely wide enough for a single bed. More than once, we escaped as the hotel staff was hunting us down to throw us out. Climbing out the window, there was a tiny plank ledge between the back of the hotel and the cliff. Our other challenge staying up there was getting beer. In the hotel, it was "export" and expensive except for the "Stamm Tisch". The Stamm Table was for the help in a room next to the kitchen with cheap local beer. With our buddy Tony's help, we smoozed our way in there, probably enabled with the exchange of some cigarettes. On our way either way to Heilbronn, we often stopped in Oberammergau – a quaint village just a few miles from Garmisch. Through Dick Robb's buddy Dick Renzetti's girl friend back in Heilbronn, we got to meet the Seeboeck family. Franz Seeboeck was the village upholsterer and wife Anni, daughter Gerti and son Friedel all welcomed us into their humble cottage. Franz's workshop was attached and we often "camped on the floor in our faithful Army sleeping bags. We brought them food from the Army Commissary, one of their favorites being peanut butter which did not exist in Germany and if it did would be very expensive. I'm sure that we brought cigarettes as well. After my overseas discharge in the summer of '59, Paul Jones and I stopped in several times on our way hiking and climbing in the Alps. Even a couple of years later when I returned to Germany with my pregnant wife, Martha, we visited and again in the summer of 1970 when Martha and I and our three kids got stranded there in a flood while visiting Anni and Franz. I am sorry to have lost touch with the family. The same with the Schenck family of Munich.

The 507th was an amazing assembly of highly intelligent soldiers. It has been said that the various branch security agencies contained the largest number and concentration of high IQ individuals ever gathered by any previous military units. As I have said before, we had Top Secret codeword clearances from NSA which I lost in the fall of 1958 for drunken incidences in Heilbronn. One night, I was intercepted by the German Polizei riding a stolen motorcycles in a "black out" with a pocket full of film stolen from a vending machine outside a photo shop. I had never driven a motorcycle in my life and had no idea where I got it and how. Being arrested by the German Police is not a pleasant experience – they had me crammed on the floor of a VW Beetle "cruiser" with a boot on my neck and was roughly handled being dragged (I was so drunk, I was having trouble standing up much less walking) into the police station and tossed in a cell. My Company Commander had to bail me out and I was immediately restricted to post and work pending courts martial charges. To make things worse, I snuck off post a few days later more than once climbing over the perimeter fence to go drinking with my friends ? or somewhere AND got caught climbing back in. Opps, more trouble and my buddy. LT. Stewart, Captain of our Ski Team got really angry with me and dropped his defense. The Germans turned jurisdiction over to the Army JAG and I received a Special Courts Martial for an array of charges any one of which would

have got me stockade (jail) time or a bad discharge. However, I was enabled by my section chief and even my Battalion Commander, a crusty old Major who served as a character witness in my trial so I got off with a restriction and fine BUT lost my clearance and was transferred out of the ASA. My transfer from Heilbronn to Mannheim is covered in the Girl in the White Bikini story. Frigga and I moved at the same time to Mannheim.

As I was transferring, orders came down from Corps HQ accepting my appeal and setting aside the findings of guilty in my courts martial and restored all my rights and privileges EXCEPT my clearance so I still had to transfer to the Anti-aircraft artillery in the name of the 3rd Gun Bn (Skysweeper) where I was assigned as a supply clerk. While ASA was a unit with high concentration of highly intelligent individuals, the Air Artillery was not. Without sounding too racist, the unit had gone to Europe prior to the Korean War as a black segregated unit. Partially desegregated after Korea, the unit was manned by the largest concentration of African-Americans I had ever encountered. ASA was very elitist and therefore white, the same with Language School. The 3rd Gun Bn. was an obsolete unit and slated for deactivation so it's NCO's and Officers were in dead-end assignments. Even as just a high school graduate, I didn't fit in. Thanks goodness, I met Ernest Arvesen who like me, was "dumped" at 3rd Gun from a cushy job as the secretary to the local JAG. I can't remember what Ernie did to warrant the transfer. In any case, we became great buddies and I have him to thank for getting me out or keeping me out of "tricky situations". He became a banker after the army and practiced on me, managing my pay. I had gotten in the bad habit since I hated the 3rd Gun Bn to go on the town and blow my months pay in a week and then be totally broke. Ernie started holding my pay for me and budgeting it out. Every chance I got, I would take the train back to Heilbronn to see my Donnerstag Abend Klub friends or to go with them skiing in Oberammergau and Garmisch. All that cost money. I did create a job selling cast-off Army stuff to a local thrift shop (US Waren) by volunteering to drive the Post trash truck and pick out the good stuff before the Germans at the dump picked it over. Ernie, like me, had made some German student friends who he introduced me to. They lived in Heppenheim and we hung out with them on a regular basis. Horst had graduated from the original Waldorf School which we visited – a fascinating program developed by a Swiss philosopher named Rudolf Steiner. Years later during our Hippie days in Downeast Maine, we enrolled the kids in a parent-run Waldorf School. In Michaelstadt, our favorite Gasthaus offered homemade wurst and Kaese mit Musik (Cheese with Music) – a warm homemade brie on dark bread with salt and pepper – delicious! Heppenheim was a quaint relic from the Middle Ages in the Odenwald – a wonderful dark woodsy forested area. We also had another buddy who was a conservatory graduate in opera. Arthur Childs did not fit in but as the Chaplain's aid, he was safe in the chapel most of the time. We called ourselves the three musketeers. Arthur had a serious German girlfriend named Doris, so serious that they got married. They fixed me up with Barbara, Doris' sister who was my girlfriend for a while but got mad at me while we were out in a "Jeder kann mit" bar. LKM offered activities that everyone could join in like a hula hoop competition and the like. Barbara mushed a paper of mustard in my face, called me a male chauvinist pig for something I said? and stormed out. Art and I were invited to the family house for Christmas eve but Barbara wouldn't talk to me. I was friends with the Christoph family in Mannheim – read the Girl in the White Bikini. I spent considerable free time with them and when my overseas discharge went through, we celebrated my last night in the Active Army in their apartment only to be arrested the next day when I returned to Sullivan Barracks to pick up my gear and meet PB Jones, my old buddy from Heilbronn who was out of the Army and picking me up for our European adventure. The Battalion Executive Officer took a strong dislike of me – something about a "screw-up" soldier although my boss, SFC Johnson gave me high marks for my job. He had me under armed guard in the mess hall washing mess gear brought in from the "field". It was potential Soviet invasion time and all our troops were maneuvering in our "alert" areas waiting for WWII. Later that day, the Battalion mail clerk who was a buddy of mine showed up to pick up the mail,

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realized my predicament and mimeo'd a copy of my orders that had been prepared days before. I flashed those to my guard and told him that I was walking out and if he shot me, he would have no defense since the orders said that I was off active duty at 0001 that morning. He didn't stop me and I walked out the main gate past the MP's who thought that I was a German motorpool worker and hollered "See ya, Comrade" – what they called the German works. I was wearing fatigue pants and t-shirt all covered in grease from the kitchen. Jonesy was waiting outside the gate with his Mercedes convertible. We headed to the nearest Gasthaus to celebrate. The next day, I went back to the barracks to get my stuff and was blocked at the gate and told that I was not welcome. I'm sure that the Major was not happy with my escape. It took me a couple of days to complain to the JAG for them to allow my on base under guard for maybe 45 minutes to pack my stuff. They owed me my final pay which I needed to survive. That took a couple more days then PB and I headed to Heilbronn to meet up with our Donnerstag Abend Club friends there.

In the years since, I have been back to Heilbronn many times, first with my first wife and our three young children, and finally to reunions of the Donnerstag Abend Klub with my present wife. We watched the Badenerhof being demolished and the eco-friendly housing development being build that is on the site today. Old Bandenerhof – WWI and WWII as a German horse drawn artillery unit and then a Top Secret Communications Base of the Army Security Agency. Auf Wiedersehn!

