

# A USAREUR STORY

By Roger Heid

I was born in Stuttgart, Germany in August of 1943. Times were not good, but I did not know. In fact, I did not know anything, whatsoever. When I started to recognize what was going on around me, things in general just seemed normal to me. A few kids had fathers, some did not such as I. I was told he had gotten lost in the war, whatever that meant. That many adult men were crippled meant nothing to me. The adults kept talking about this war thing; I simply dismissed this as adult mumbo jumbo us kids needed not to be concerned about. Many buildings were in shambles. I simply accepted this to be a fact of life.

One thing I noticed, however. There was a class of population, mostly younger men who had all their limbs in place, and they were all dressed the same way, most of the time. Upon my inquiry, my mom tried to explain that these people were soldiers of an Army that had won the war and that I should stay away from them. Aha, I thought, it's this adult blabber again.

I promptly decided to ignore my Mom's advice. I thought I would be better off to find out about this by myself. To make the long story a bit shorter, I learned to make friends with these 'Enemies', totally disregarding certain comments made by the adults. I enjoyed my chewing gum, Hershey Bars and a few other items that could not be had in local stores. I figured it was the adults' own fault that they deprived themselves of such luxuries. I had no idea about 'Non-Fraternization' rules or regulations. I could care less. These enemies apparently did not care either. I suppose to them I was just a little kid that could not be blamed for anything.

The years went by; my English got better. We had relatives in a town called Oberkochen, a small town located a stretch East of Stuttgart. In early 1953, my Mom and I moved there. It is a very picturesque area, and I had always liked to visit there. The town is located in a valley surrounded by hills. One of these hills is called 'Volkmarsberg'. Us kids were told that we should not go up on top of that hill because there were 'Amis' (GIs). Oh goody. That was just what I was looking for.

By that time I turned 10 years old. Certain adult things I could understand, but only to a degree. I noticed that not many of the town folks spoke favorably about Amis and their presence on top of that hill. When three of us kids first ventured up on that hill in summer of 1952, I could understand some of the adult sentiments. The place was beautiful. There was a massive concrete tower about 75 feet high. There was also that cute log cabin. We could not get anywhere close to neither of the structures. There was a vicious dog on a long chain that succeeded in repelling any of our approach efforts.

In the meantime, some young-looking GI had emerged from inside the log cabin. He held a carbine in his hands. I noticed it had no magazine in it. He yelled something I could not understand at first. He yelled it again and it sounded like 'Hey Rex, shut up. Hush!' The dog then quit barking and retreated into some improvised dog house.

The GI a turned back to us and asked what we wanted and told us not to come any closer. I told him my name was Roger, that I lived in Stuttgart, that I'm here on vacation and that in Stuttgart I would always visit with GIs.

He smiled and asked us to come in. He served us hot chocolate and crackers and told us his name was Melvin. He mentioned that he was stationed on Kelley Barracks. I told him I knew where that was and that it was just at edge of Moehringen and that I had been there a few times. We left a couple of hours later. Melvin had let us go up on top of the tower. What a view! We carefully avoided interfering with the antennas. Before I had to go back to Stuttgart, I visited a few more times. The dog made friends with me to the point to not to raise that vicious bark when I came back again. He would wag his tail, yell just a little to get the GI's attention. The last two times I visited I was greeted by different GIs both times. They would come out of the hut asking if I were Roger and then invite me to come in.

So, I mentioned that in 1953, my Mom and I moved to Oberkochen. I did not take me long to venture up the hill again. In the meantime, the whole affair was surrounded by a 12-foot high fence with barbed wire on top. It was a circle like affair about 150 to 200 meters in diameter. On the south side was a large gate allowing vehicles like deuce'n halves, ¾ tons and jeeps to enter and exit. It was chained and pad locked. On the north side was a small gate, also chained and locked. This gate was mainly used to get to the outhouse which could not be included into the fenced in area as it was too far away. Stretching the fence line would have interfered with the public walk path. Shortly thereafter, the outhouse was re-located just inside that gate. Rex the dog was no longer on a chain. All that I had not expected.

However, I did not come unprepared. I had learned that Rex liked to chew on jelly beans. I had mooched a bagful from some MP friend on RB (Robinson Barracks). I was outside the small north gate, when Rex noticed me. He came running at me, barking up a storm. 'Hey Rex! How are ya? Hush now.' It did the trick. Rex came closer, tail wagging something fierce. By the time the GI came to the gate, he saw me feeding Rex jelly beans. The GI gasped: 'What the .... What's this? So, I told him that Rex was an old friend of mine, so I brought him some his beloved jelly beans I had gotten at the RB PX.

After the GI had managed to overcome his puzzlement, he went back to the cabin to get a key chain. He then opened the lock and let me in. I told him I was Roger and that I had visited here a few times during the previous summer. I also told him that I had recently moved from Stuttgart to Oberkochen and that it was my intention to visit here quite frequently. 'Well, Roger, so be it. My name is Fred, come on in.'

It turned out that he was SSG Fred Palmer, native of Maryland. He had recently been transferred to Stuttgart after he had seen combat in Korea. My Mom and I became good friends with him.

This Station had a 110 Volt electric line coming in. The water was hauled in using Jerry Tanks from a garden faucet on the property of a local family named Maier. Apparently, they sympathized with Americans. Their teenage daughter was also an occasional visitor; so was her older brother.

The concrete tower had a small building attached. Inside were several generators being used whenever the grid line was down for whatever reason. Sometimes it was deliberately sabotaged by some political die hards, so it is said. I don't know if there ever was any evidence to this. There was also a telephone land line connected to the German telephone system

When I first started to visit there, there was usually only one man on duty. He would usually be relieved almost on a daily basis, typically around 10 am. I got the impression they were also

quartered somewhere in Aalen, the county seat, about 10 clicks from the Station. I was never at that Aalen location; I don't know anything about that.

The cabin originally had a porch on the north side. Sometime during early 1955, if I remember correctly, this porch was enclosed, thusly forming an additional room. It was furnished with four wall lockers, two double bunks and a couple of foot lockers. In the other room, a stove and a refrigerator was added. Things became quite luxurious considering it was just a small outpost. Occasional trips to local stores supplemented the C-Ration diet. I wound up with a lot of these cans and containers, except the cigarettes and matches.

During my summer vacation in 1955, I slept over a few times. I felt like I was one of the team. I recall one of the guys was Tony Murr, a native of Bavaria, Germany. There was never an issue made of this. One of the crew, a native of Minneapolis, told me that Anton Murr was a Bavarian. Big Deal, I thought. So, I am a Swabian. Big Deal. I felt more like an American.

Shortly before Christmas 1955, I remember meeting Corporal Tom Cadell, Don Coffman and another feller whose name I cannot recall as I write this. They gave me a pile of comic books, mostly Mickey Mouse and Sad Sack. I got such a kick out of these as I recall. I had them for years. We had a great time.

My last visit at the Oberkochen 34<sup>th</sup> Sig BN Relay Station took place in late summer of 1958 as I was transferred to a different school not located near US Army Bases. When I returned to Oberkochen in 1960, the relay station had been abandoned by the US Army. The property was returned to the local German administration. I never went there again until many years later.

In 1966, I moved to Heidenheim, a city about 16 clicks south of Oberkochen. There I found this beer joint that was frequented by GIs. I became good friends with members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sig BN stationed on Wiley Barracks in Neu-Ulm. These friends assisted me in my move to the US. I managed to obtain a permanent immigration visa. On Dec 4, 1967 I landed on home soil on La Guardia airport NYC. From there I went on to Madison, WI which I immediately declared to be my home. It still is. I had the chance to visit three ex-members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sig BN.

In January 1973, I took on US Citizenship. In February 1974, after a divorce, I felt the urge to do my patriotic chores after all. The draft lottery system had passed me over for some miraculous reasons. So, I arrived at the reception station on Ft Jackson S.C. Then I went on to USAMPS on Ft Gordon GA. By the end of July 74, I arrived at Kelley Barracks in Germany, assigned to the 110<sup>th</sup> MP Plt. The 34<sup>th</sup> Sig Bn was also there. I stayed on Kelly until late November 1981. I declined E6 stripes as it would have necessitated a 90-day extension. No way, I had a job waiting for me. I ETS'd and went back to Madison, WI, my home of record.

During my hitch, I visited the location on top of Volkmarsberg. That was in 1976. Now there was a sign at the access road barring all vehicle traffic except forestry service vehicles. My Mercedes did not resemble such a vehicle. It was late at night; the traffic sign was yanked out of the ground and thrown into the ditch. I could always say that I never saw such a sign. Ha! Ha! On top, I saw something I did not like that much. There was a bright a bright moon. The fence, the outhouse, the antennae, the fuel dump, the 2 1/2 ton, the jeep and 3/4 ton were all but gone. Something was missing. I prefer to remember the place the way it was during my 6-year tenure of visits. The beer and Coca Cola signs on the cabin looked ridiculous. I closed my eyes to recall the old images, turned around to get into my car and left. Maybe I should have obeyed the traffic sign.

# USARMYGERMANY.COM

So, there you have it. This is my story in a very condensed form.

