

Headquarters 7th Weather Squadron, Heidelberg, Germany, 1980-1983

I managed to get a consecutive overseas assignment after having spent three years at 2WW headquarters on Kapaun Air Station in Kaiserslautern, Germany. The Headquarters, US Army, Europe (USAREUR) and 7WS headquarters were located on Campbell Barracks, Heidelberg, which had been a German Army casern before and during World War II. After a short wait we received government quarters right across the street from Campbell Barracks, where I worked. The housing area was called Mark Twain Village, named after the American writer who had visited Heidelberg nine times. The quarters were in an apartment building with two stairwells. Each stairwell led to six apartments. The apartments were large, had two or three bedrooms (we had three bedrooms) and each had a maid's room in the attic. The apartments were especially built for US forces in the late 1940s and early 1950s when Americans could afford maids. I could go home for lunch and we didn't need a second car.

On Campbell Barracks there also was the headquarters of the NATO ground unit, Central Army Group (CENTAG). Ramstein Air Base, besides having US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) Headquarters also had two NATO headquarters, Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AAFCE) and 4th Allied Tactical Air Force (4ATAF). Just about the time I moved to Heidelberg, 4ATAF also moved to Heidelberg. 4ATAF was the air arm associated with CENTAG and it was thought that coordination between the two headquarters would be better if they were co-located. Therefore, 4ATAF moved to Campbell Barracks.

The building 4ATAF was to move into was the building where 7WS had been housed for many years. But, since the entire building was to be renovated for 4ATAF, 7WS had to move to temporary quarters on Patton Barracks (a support facility where troops lived, the motor pool, and other support units were located) for a few months. I arrived during the middle of the temporary displacement. We were able to move back into the newly renovated facility, but instead of being confined to the basement as before, we were now relegated to the attic. That is the way it usually went: The weather people were always sort of stepchildren, being placed in facilities that were left over after everyone else had been accommodated.

NATO insisted that the entire building be secured, with only one entrance, where guards would check the access badges of authorized personnel. Because classified information was openly handled in the offices, the whole building had to be classified. This made going in and receiving deliveries cumbersome. The nice part was that no outsiders could surprise us because they had to call from the guards at the door to be escorted in.

The 4ATAF people (who were all from one of the allied air forces including Dutch, Danes, Germans, Belgians, Americans, Canadians, and maybe one or two other nationalities that I have forgotten) treated us as equals, but they had some practices that made us envious. For instance, since the holidays celebrated by the different nations didn't always coincide, they took all of the holidays off out of deference to the various nations. NATO also believed in enhancing cooperation and good working relations through frequent socializing. Each Friday afternoon at 1500 the smell of food permeated the entire building. Heavy snacks and drinks were served in the conference room on the third floor, and since warm air rises, we in the attic got more of the luscious scent than those on the lower floors.

Another nicety that NATO provided as a reward for the international cooperation occurred when 4ATAF first moved to Heidelberg. Because many of the 4ATAF staff members could not be expected to relocate their homes and families to Heidelberg right away, NATO provided a bus that brought 4ATAF people who still lived in the Ramstein area to Heidelberg in the morning and took them back again in the afternoon, roughly a one and a half hour drive each way. Of course, these roughly three

hours counted as work hours. The bus would leave Ramstein at 0730, arrived in Heidelberg at about 0900 and leave again at 1500, allowing the staff members to be in the office for six hours, one hour of which was lunch hour. Some claimed to do work while on the bus, but before the days of cell phones, lap tops, and satellite computer communications, I doubt that very much work was being done. However, the socializing got a boost. We envied the 4ATAF people, although we did not get invited to their Friday afternoon festivities, we did benefit in that some of us got to participate in their headquarters exercises, during which we were able to partake of their generous rations, and from other social events to which some of us were periodically invited.

Initially my position at 7WS was that of Technical Services Officer in which capacity I was to monitor the technical accuracy of the forecasts provided by our 12 to 16 detachments and to render technical assistance to them if necessary. This involved analyzing monthly statistics which were derived from verification data of the individual detachments and forwarding them to higher headquarters. Researching climatological data and proving statistical data for plans and contingencies were also part of the job. In addition, periodic visits to each detachment had to be made to look first hand at instructions and standard operating procedures. After about a year I was given the position of Current Operations Officer, which was a step up, when the incumbent moved up to be Operations Officer. My new position entailed a similar interaction with the detachments as that of Technical Services Officer, except more geared toward day-to-day operations rather than to the pure technical aspect.

The colonel who was commander when I arrived left for another assignment and was followed by Colonel John Taylor, a good commander and human being whom I had first met in 1963 or 1964 while I was an observer at the Heidelberg AAF and he was a second lieutenant at one of our operating locations.

During the three years at 7WS headquarters I started thinking about my future and that of my family. We had been in Germany for more than five years and had become accustomed to living in Germany. Since we had moved to Heidelberg we had been accepted into a circle of friends who either were old friends of my wife or whom we had met through her sister. Another factor that influenced my thinking was that the higher in rank I rose in the Air Force, the less I enjoyed the work. I had decided to stay in Air Weather Service because I liked working in the weather station and to be around flying activities. The headquarters jobs were purely administrative and not very creative. I didn't like to go on visits to detachments and to have to chastise people for their performance, or lack thereof.

I retired from the US Air Force on 31 October 1983 with 22 years, 7 months, and 16 days of service.

At the time of my retirement from the US Air Force I wrote the following, mainly to myself:

As the crow flies, it is roughly one mile from Detachment 3, 7th Weather Squadron on the Heidelberg Army Airfield to Headquarters, 7th Weather Squadron at Campbell Barracks, Heidelberg, Germany. In the early 1960's the squadron headquarters seemed a long way from Detachment 3. As it turned out in my case, it was a considerable distance. When I arrived at Headquarters 7th Weather Squadron in 1980, it had been almost 16 years since I had left the detachment at the Heidelberg Army Airfield. In that sense it was the longest mile I ever traveled. Because I will be leaving Air Weather Service soon, I am tempted to do some reminiscing about what has happened to the US Air Force, Air Weather Service, and me during the last 20-odd years.

It is hard to believe that 22 years, 7 months, and 16 days will have gone by since that dreary late winter morning in 1961 on which I took the train from New London to New Haven, Connecticut, to take the

oath of enlistment in the US Air Force. At the time it only seemed to be the start of another adventure, I didn't dream that that enlistment ceremony would be the start of a rewarding career in blue for me. Visions of becoming a fighter pilot, Steve Canyon-style, danced in my head as I began my first four years in the Air Force. Those visions were quickly and rudely dispelled by the realities of basic training. The Aviation Cadet training area (although also on Lackland Air Force Base and still operating) was not "...just a hop, skip, and jump from basic training..." as the recruiter had indicated to me! There were only two ways to leave basic training: Wash out or graduate. "Hopping, skipping or jumping" over to become an aviation cadet was not one of the choices. But, as it turned out later, not getting into flying was not such a bad deal after all. By pure coincidence I was assigned to go to weather observer technical school after basic training. My first permanent station was overseas in Heidelberg, Germany, at Detachment 3, 7th Weather Squadron, at the Heidelberg Army Airfield.

A lot has happened since that day in 1961, not only to me, but to the Air Force and Air Weather Service as well. Most of the changes were good, some of them not so good. Some changes were reversed again as time went by or when new requirements became known. It has often been said that the world moves in cycles, and in a sense, so does the Air Force and Air Weather Service. In some respects I am reminded of a non-stop movie that plays over and over and the viewer leaves when the part that he or she has already seen comes up again.

Here are some examples. In the early 1960's Air Weather Service had a lot of Representative Observation Sites (ROS). But, because of money and manpower constraints, many, if not most, of the ROS were eliminated. Lately we have been seeing more and more ROS being reestablished. Also, in the early 1960's the Air Force made a big splash with the 5BX physical fitness program that was modified and largely abandoned. Lately, another physical fitness program that strikes me as being destined to go the same way as the 5BX has been publicized. Then we eliminated a lot of units here and there and some squadrons and wings. Some of my last actions at 7th Weather Squadron involved preparations for reactivating some of the units closed earlier. I understand that times, requirements, and the availability of resources change - nevertheless, this is where I came in.

Not all the innovations we have seen in the last 20 years have been transient. Some very good and lasting programs were initiated. One was the Airman Education and Commissioning Program, of which a lot of us availed ourselves. Also, there were the many improvements made in the living conditions and benefits for junior airmen and their families. No one wants to see those changes reversed. Then there were the many improvements in the quality, style, and ease of maintenance of the uniforms. How many remember the old 1505's? Or even the bush jacket, the pith helmet, and shorts?

But all the good programs in the world don't make a system work, people make it work. That is where Air Weather Service always seemed to have been very fortunate - with its people. Sometimes I wonder where they are now and what they're doing, those comrades from earlier assignments, especially from that first permanent assignment to Detachment 3, 7th Weather Squadron. Where are you Bob Holland, Brian "Abe" Severin, Harry "Honeybear" Podhora, Willy Stoddard, Doug Atkinson. Some have left Air Weather Service and some have left the Air Force. Others such as Roger Seyfert and John Taylor, whom I knew briefly then, are still around.

So, as my Air Weather Service career comes to a close, I look back with only fond memories. I started my career at the Heidelberg Army Airfield and I'm ending it at Headquarters, 7th Weather Squadron, barely a mile from where I started. But while traveling that mile, Air Weather Service and the US Air Force have been good to me. They have made me what I am, given me all that I have. They took a college dropout and gave him the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree, a commission, two master's degrees, and best of all, some lasting friendships and fond memories.

Now it is time to move on and to say "so long" to Air Weather Service and the US Air Force. It is a dreary October day in 1983, almost like the day in March 1961. It is a good time to remember...