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transit nürnberg 4: USA!

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Introduction

15 million U.S. servicemen and civilian employees together with their families have passed through Germany since 1945. Probably the most prominent among them was Elvis Presley, who served here with the 1st Medium Tank Battalion, 3rd Armored Division for two years from March 1958 until March 1960. During maneuvers of his unit on the training grounds, he honored nearby Grafenwöhr with an improvised private performance.

More than for the rest of West Germany, the outcome of World War II created special relationships between Nuremberg and the USA. Undeniably, the choice of the city as the location for the International Military Tribunal was a symbolic act after Nuremberg had hosted the Nazi party rallies and attached its name indelibly to the most infamous racial laws ever written. Consequently, for almost 50 years Americans belonged to Nuremberg's everyday life as troopers or staff of the military court and the local military government. Even in the final phase of the U.S. Army's presence in Nuremberg (1991), 2,400 military and civilian personnel lived within the city limits.

Another living bond between Nuremberg and the USA is the Jewish families who had to leave the city because of the Nazi persecution, and their offspring. Of 2,539 refugees

officially registered by 1940, 1,030 immigrated to the United States.

With this 4th issue of our publication series *transit nürnberg*, the most ambitious not only because of its bilingualism, we try to trace and save what remained of these points of contact, on both sides, beyond the official brouhaha.

For all who participated in this project, and maybe also for the reader of the book, it was an exploratory journey into the past and present, raising questions about individual experiences and stereotypes. For instance, though Germans allegedly live in a *post-American era*, the three letters *USA* still elicit special emotions and associations, even with a generation who, for the most part, had little firsthand experience with the American influence. The editor, on the other hand, was exposed to the ear-opening programs of AFN Nuremberg and Rock concerts at the ill-famed *Hemmerleinhalle* in Neunkirchen am Brand, and had run-ins with American boys who taught him valuable practical lessons about toxic substances - and made him think about the putative virtues of his surroundings.

These are the stories of Americans and Germans whose professional, incidental, romantic, transient or enduring encounters with each other left impressions on their lives, plus information about the common history of the two countries and the current state of their mutual relations.

The editor wants to express his gratitude to the following people who are not named in the book as authors or interviewees but contributed to it crucially by their input, work or inspiration (in alphabetical order):

Otto Böhm, Timo Bullemer, Bill Capers, Sarah Dowden, Arlene Dryer, John Elliott, Mike Friedman, Jerry Gordon, Ann Grösch, Frank Harris, Ivor Jeffreys, Walter Jessberger, Deborah Katz, Ulrike Kettner, Dwight Krueger, Ray Lebowitz, Alex Leder, Mike Lemons, Dave Norem, Benjamin Panzella, Karin Rönspies, Justus Maria Rohde and Alexandra Usher.

He wishes that the result of our joint endeavor will live up to that essential quality formulated for eternity by Groucho Marx:

Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.

Gerhard Jochem

Tom Spahr: *I hear that song and it all comes back:* 1971/72 with the 17th Field Artillery Regiment in Nuremberg and Grafenwöhr

My name is Tom Spahr and I was born and raised in Chehalis, WA. I still live in the home my mom and dad built in 1962. Of the five boys our parents raised, I was the one, along with my wife and two children, that could best benefit by holding down the home front after Mom and Dad passed.

On December 17, 1970, I received a letter from the draft board. It was the proverbial *Greetings from the President of the United States*. I was to report to the induction center in Seattle, WA, on January 27, 1971. I was drafted.

Vietnam was winding down some, but I knew the possibility was there that I might follow two of my brothers that had served in Nam. So I partied and got prepared for basic training. After the induction process I was put on a bus and driven to Ft. Lewis in Washington State. Two months of basic training led to two months of advanced individual training at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. I was trained in the art of everything artillery. Nearing graduation day, we heard

through the grapevine that the previous graduating class was shipped off to Vietnam. Our graduating class didn't know what to think. Was it rumor or truth?

Graduation day at Ft. Sill brought happiness at completing our courses and trepidation of forthcoming orders. Graduation was in the afternoon at Ft. Sill and after the ceremony we were given our *Special Orders* for the next duty destination. If you were headed for San Francisco, you could count on Vietnam. If you were directed to Ft. Dix, New Jersey, it's Europe. Mine said: *Reassigned to: US Army Overseas Replacement Station, Ft. Dix, New Jersey.* My MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) was 82C20, which meant I was an Artillery Surveyor. But my orders also stated four words that were music to my ears: *19 days delay en route.* I was going home!!!

After my leave I boarded a plane to Ft. Dix. I still had no idea where I was headed. After three days of *hurry up and wait* at Ft. Dix, I was bussed to JFK International in New York City. That flight took me to Frankfurt am Main. From there I was bussed to Stuttgart.

Outside of basic training, there I made my first experience with *guard duty*: What trouble can someone get into with an M-16 with no bullets at 3:00 AM? I hear some rustling in the bushes next to my post. It's dark. I shout out, *Who goes there?* or whatever we were instructed to say. Nothing ... silence. I take my rifle (don't call it a gun - that's another story, see below) and point the barrel toward the noise. I hit something soft and alive. I scurry back to my post. The next day I am told there are many hedgehogs populating the area. Mystery solved.

The mentioned difference between a rifle and a gun we learned as follows: In basic training if you called your rifle a gun, the drill instructor would put you up in front of the squad and have you repeat numerous times the following phrase: *This is my rifle* - holding your rifle over your head in your left hand - *and this is my gun*. - grabbing your genitals with your right hand - *This is for fighting* - again holding your rifle in your left hand pumping it up and down - *and this is for fun*. - continuing to grab your genitals with your right hand. So if you called your rifle a gun you'd be up in front of the squad shouting out (until the drill instructor stopped you): *This is my rifle and this is my gun. This is for fighting and this is for fun.* It got the point across, and not many made the mistake thereafter.

After another couple of days in Stuttgart, I finally got my orders to report to the Headquarter Battery 3rd of the 17th Field Artillery located in Merrell Barracks in Nuremberg, Germany. That was July 1971.

The first thing I remember of Merrell Barracks was the craters in the front of the building from shelling during WWII. That was my first realization of the history that is Nuremberg. I remember discussions of the Nuremberg Trials, but I never paid much attention. And sorry to say for me - I never visited the Palace of Justice during my term.

I spent the first few days investigating Merrell: library, NCO club, PX, lunch room, racquetball court, darkroom, chapel, Special Weapons Section.

Lunch room: One incident was rather revolting. It was a Saturday afternoon. I had slept in and didn't eat breakfast. So when lunchtime arrived I was very hungry. After eating the main course I was looking forward to dessert and the cake squares I'd spotted while in line. I got a plate of cake with some cold milk, sat down at my table, took my fork to cut the cake and - the frosting, in mass, moves. I took my fork and lifted the frosting off the chocolate cake and there is - a wad of human hair, much like you can find sometimes in the drain of a bathtub or shower. Long silent pause ... […]