

# More Stories!

## Forum

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## Collector

*A Young Airman Collector in Post War Germany, Part 1*

**By Harold Ratzburg**

Once upon a time, a long, long, long, time ago, a baby (that was Me) was born on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. I grew up on that farm and it was a good place to be a kid. Even back then I was a collector and collected stuff like arrowheads, stamps, etc. As I got older, I had to participate more and more in the farm work and eventually I got tired of milking those damned cows twice a day, every day, 365 days a year. I also got tired of hauling hay in 95 degree weather and sawing wood in zero degree temperatures and so, after high school graduation, I took off for the big city of Milwaukee where I took on a job where I only had to work forty hours a week in an automobile body factory. That left much more time for collecting, especially collecting girl friends.

Along came the Korean War, (a.k.a. the Korean Police Action) and Uncle Sam's Draft started breathing down my neck. Being a live coward instead of a dead hero type, I enlisted in the US Air Force to avoid the trenches of Korea.

After Basic Training and ten months of training to be a Radar Mechanic, The Air Force, in its infinite wisdom, put me on a troop ship headed to Europe, instead of Korea. It was the beginning of a very lucky streak in my life. After a nine day voyage, seven of which I spent feeding the fishes over the ship's rail, I arrived in Germany in September, 1950. Processing through a Reple-Depot I found

that the Air Force had no openings for Radar Mechanics in Europe or the Near East. After several weeks of sweating out possible assignments to OJT (on the job training) as a cook or baker, a Military Policeman, or a clerk typist, or whatever, I found myself assigned to a USAF Intelligence Wing and was posted to the 7055 Air Intelligence Service Squadron (7055 AISS) in Ulm, Germany, as a Supply Clerk. (OJT)

The 7055 consisted of 14 enlisted men and 5 officers with about 25 German civilians working as secretaries and interviewers who would interview any displaced person, (known to us as a Source) who had been held anywhere in the Russian Zone. The idea was to get any little bit of information the interviewers could get from the Sources that might be of value to the Air Force in case hostilities broke out between Russia and the USA. Remember, the Cold War in the 1950's was a very real thing at the time. The German interviewers would write up the reports in English, our GIs would edit them, the reports would be typed up by the German secretaries, stamped as SECRET, and then forwarded to Wing HQ. It was kinda of funny that once the Secret Classification was put on the reports, no German civilian was allowed to see them again.

The "Sources" were people who had been prisoners of war or confined in forced labor camps all over Europe in the Russian Zone so, as to not alarm them with more military or other oppressive surroundings, the 7055 had its offices, interviewer rooms, and quarters for us enlisted men in three large German Villas, overlooking the Danube River. The Villas were previously owned by high level Nazi's who were displaced themselves into less comfortable quarters until they were de-Nazified.

There were no other American Units or facilities in Ulm, so we had our own kitchen, cook, and dining room in one of the Villas, and we enlisted men chipped in \$3.00 per month and hired a maid to take care of our quarters. Since we were the only American military unit in town, the AF felt that since there were no recreational facilities for us, every day a movie was shipped to the unit by rail and shown in one of the Villas.

Since we had to entertain ourselves, the AF allowed each enlisted man to have an Officers

liquor ration of four bottles of fine booze from the US Army Class Six store in a neighboring town every month. Boy, did we ever entertain ourselves. We had to dream up reasons to have a party. I remember that one of our parties was to celebrate the promotion of Steve Canyon, (a comic strip character,) to full Bird Colonel.



Our Supply section had responsibility for maintenance of the 7055s vehicles, which consisted of two WW 2 Jeeps, one CCKW truck, and two Opel Staff Cars. I had always been a Jeep nut ever since I saw them in the newsreels of WW 2, so as a future

collector- owner of a WW 2 Jeep, this was right up my ally. The two Jeeps that we drove had been modified with weather tight, sheet metal tops, with swinging doors, which were nice in the winter, but prevented me from putting the top and windshield down and tooling around town with the wind in my face as I like to do now that I have my own Jeep.

The CCKW was a long wheelbase model with a soft top that was far from weather tight. On those long trips to the supply depot in the middle of the winter I would have appreciated a solid cab with a heater. Bottom line, that meant that as an old geezer, I was able to drive collectible vehicles in my youth which I could own and appreciate in my later years. Do you see now what I meant about my lucky streak? As they say, it was a lousy job, but somebody had to do it.

The City of Ulm in the 1950s was a scene of desolation. It had suffered several small bombing raids over the time since June 1940, but the big attack came on the night of December 17, 1944, starting at 7:23 PM, when 250 British bombers of Britain's Air Marshall 'Bomber' Harris, dropped 96,646 bombs in a raid lasting 27 minutes. The bombs contained 704 tons of incendiaries and 590 tons of high explosive. The explosions were so powerful that twenty pound pavement blocks hit the top of the Ulm Cathedral bell tower which is 360 feet high.

It has always been a wonder to me how the bomber were able to actually miss the cathedral. Reconnaissance planes had dropped flares around the church to mark it before the raid, but only one bomb actually hit the cathedral and went through a wall and being a dud, it did not explode. All of the 600 people who had run to the cathedral for cover survived the raid. All buildings around the cathedral were blown up or burned out. That is pretty good bombing accuracy when you consider they were dropping the bombs from at least 4 miles above the city. Divine providence must have helped a little bit, I figure.

Over the war years, from June, 1940 till April, 1945, the city suffered from 22 air raids. Over 2100 people were killed, 1325 wounded and over 60,000 made homeless.

Conveniently, or maybe on purpose, the bombs took out most of the town where the average people lived. The area where the big shot Nazis lived in the big Villas seemed to have been saved, perhaps to give the future occupying powers (like this little old farm boy from Wisconsin) a nice place to live when the winners took over the country. Or maybe it was dumb luck, we will never know for sure.

By now you may be asking yourselves, "Hey, what has this story got to do with collecting and the 'Collectors Corner'?? The answer is, probably not much, but it does kinda explain how I got to Germany and what I found when I got there. Next month I will get into the adventures of and opportunities for a shy little ole farm boy, collecting military stuff in a strange, foreign country.

Auf Wiedersehen till next month.

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