

Zweibrücken Memoirs

Mary Greene

America maintained a large presence in Europe during the cold war. A lot of it was initially in France, which had served as an allied logistics base during the conquest of Germany. France made sense. It was close enough to the Iron Curtain to support a war should one break out, but far enough back to be safe.

DeGaulle's pride would not have it. He asked the Americans to leave, and so they did. They relocated their European logistics center from Orleans to Zweibrücken, just over the border. They took over Kreuzberg Kaserne, a former Germany army base. The focus of the activity was a large IBM 360 computer. As Dan Feltham writes in *Big Blue Goes to War*, Army supply had been automated since the 1960s.

It was a good post. Army people enjoyed accompanied tours. Department of the Army civilians often "homesteaded." They grew to love this place. A fair percentage learned German; some married Germans. There were a few other hangers-on such as those of us from IBM who supported them. This is a collection of stories about this group of talented, adventuresome souls who were there during the time of America's ascendancy and Germany's resurgence. A good glimpse of life and times.

There are several recurrent themes in the book. As the installation was right on the French border, people often had to deal with border guards. Try explaining to a customs agent who asks you to open the trunk that a Corvette has no trunk. Another was the wonderful and spontaneous parties. The French being one of the three occupying powers, there was a French base in Zweibrücken. We could buy very drinkable French sparkling wine. The buildings had foot thick walls with casement windows on the inside and outside. At Christmas time every year they would put the sparkling wine on the windowsill between the two windows. At an appropriate hour the afternoon the windows would open, corks would pop, there would be a delicious spread of sausages, smoked meats and cheeses.

Another theme was the French restaurants right across the border. Every little town seemed to have a restaurant/hotel "Cheval Blanc," or white horse, offering an inexpensive table d'hote that was invariably delicious. People would trek the 10 or 15 miles to a restaurant and have wonderful dinners.

There are a number of memorable quotes. Ernie Richards noted that Perrier was not much on its own, but it was the best thing that God could have created to mix with Scotch whiskey. Perrier was cheap and plentiful, and it probably still came from the artesian well that they show in their advertisements.

One of the afterwords in the book, by Laveeda Liggins, is entitled "Women's Lib in Support Group Europe." The substance of her comments are that there was no need for women's Lib. Laveeda notes that she and Mary Green, the author of this book, succeeded on their merits. That is one of the great things about the field of programming. If you can do the work, you will get recognition. If you can't, you don't. These women were both outstanding.

A theme entirely absent from the book is the treatment of other minorities. The book includes sections by and about people who are black and gay. Mary does not find it even worth mentioning. Everybody in Zweibrücken accepted them as they were. Those were simple times, when tolerance was a virtue that one simply expected of well bred people. It need not be remarked on, and it certainly did not need to be enforced. Zweibrücken was a much more comfortable place to be than a modern university campus.

It helped that the Army had been the first major institution of the United States government to be fully integrated, by President Truman in 1948. Advancement in the Army was a function of standardized tests and evaluations. My experience in Vietnam had been that it was as colorblind as any process could be. Zweibrücken reinforced that observation. This is a group of talented people who respected each other's abilities and worked together to get the job done. And, as this book and the 40 years of reunions demonstrate, the mutual affection was deep and genuine.

Let me recount a couple of personal reunions that took place in Germany. The first was with a computer. An IBM 1401 that had been in Danang, Vietnam when that was my territory in 1969 was relocated to Kaiserslautern, Germany when I was in Zweibrücken. Even more amazing, the officer in charge turned out to be a Capt. Campbell - one of the beneficiaries of Truman's integration - who had run a supply operation when I was in Danang.

The book concludes with photographs taken over the years at reunions. For a large percentage of the people there, Zweibrücken was the defining period of their lives. This book is worth reading for an appreciation of how good it was to be an American at this point in history, and how gracious the American people truly were.