

Growing Up in Frankfurt Am Main, [West] Germany 1962-1968

My family lived in Frankfurt Am Main (then West) Germany during the years 1962 through 1968. During those years, my family traveled widely throughout Europe on the excellent autobahn, autoroutes and autostrada highway road networks. Flying down the autobahn at 180 kilometers per hour enabled a family to cover a lot of distance! This put France, Italy, Sicily, even Yugoslavia and Albania – and Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Portugal -- all within driving distance! And our family did it. We also spent summers in Scotland with my cousins on my mother's side. Before WWII she was a Scottish lassie hailing from Glasgow, and all her family remained for the most part in Glasgow and Aberdeen. I remain close friends with my cousins, and we see each other from time to time for joyful family occasions such as the weddings of our children.

One of the indelible experiences of growing up in Cold War-era Germany was the US military presence. My sisters and I attended Frankfurt International School (FIS) in Oberursel, a town about forty minutes by car north of Frankfurt in the Taunus Mountains. FIS was (and remains) a wonderful school. My older sisters switched from FIS to the FAHS, the Frankfurt American High School (the high school for American high-school age citizens, primarily children of armed services personnel in the area). This school was located on the IG Farben Building campus in the city of Frankfurt. (The IG Farben Building is now Goethe University, an esteemed university).

(The US Army base called Camp King was just down the road from the Frankfurt International School. None of us knew that at the time, but during the war, the camp was a German Luftstlag [German POW camp] specifically for Allied airmen who had been shot down over Germany. None of us knew that our own Scottish uncle had spent time there being interrogated after being shot down during the August 1943 raid against the V1 rocket plant at Peenemünde on the Baltic Sea in Northern Germany... FIS students used to go to Camp King to use their athletic facilities and for track and field...)

The IG Farben Building has a complex, dark, and interesting history. Before and during WWII, this domineering, brooding complex of buildings served as corporate HQ for the IG Farben chemical complex. (One of IG Farben's most nefarious products was Zyklon B, the poison gas used in Holocaust gas chambers.) It is said that General Eisenhower directed the US Army Air Force and the Royal Air Force to NOT bomb the IG Farben complex, as it was intended by Ike that his staff would use this facility after the war as the HQ for Supreme Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). (Given the realities of bombing accuracy in WWII, which was characterized by a bombing aiming circular error probability of between two to five miles from the aiming point [depending on who you ask], it seems highly unlikely that these apocryphal orders could actually have been obeyed – if they were in fact ever issued!)

As it happened, we lived near the IG Farben Building; both our Schumann Strasse and Frauenstein Platz residences were close to the complex. It was indeed the center of the US military presence in Frankfurt, and Lt. General Creighton Abrams was in command. SHAEF switched names to USAREUR sometime after the war, and USAREUR was located for a time in the imposing, brooding IG Farben structures. In any case, during the time we lived on Schumann Strasse, there was a blasted, burned, blackened hulk of a church in the square just across from the row house where we lived. (My guess is that it was set alight by a combination of high explosives and incendiary devices). And it was NOT FAR at all from the IG Farben

building, in fact just over half a mile per Google Maps! (This church has since been beautifully rebuilt and is a center for interfaith reconciliation and bridge building. Indeed a wonderful fate for this formerly-destroyed, blackened hulk! <http://www.christus-immanuel.de/>)

It was at our apartment on Schumann Strasse that I remember watching President Kennedy's famous "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech on television, a speech in which he passionately expressed the steadfast and determined solidarity of the American people with the people of Western Germany in the face of Soviet aggression. The entire neighborhood reverberated with wild cheers in support of our President at this time. I shall never forget that...

The IG Farben building complex included the Teen Club, where the American servicemen and women's teenagers would congregate. The Interfaith Chapel was near there as well. One of the buildings served as our Cub Scout meeting room. And the same location was also used for the Boy Scout troop. These units were in the Transatlantic Council. The IG Farben building grounds also included the Idle Hour movie theater, where current American films were shown. I remember seeing the movies *In Harms Way* and *The Green Berets* at the Idle Hour with a young George Takei, and of course John Wayne – and also seeing several of the James Bond movies there also. And the American response the film *Our Man Flint!*

The Frankfurt American High School was located on the campus as well. The reflecting pools at the back of the IG Farben building were used by kids to sail their model sailboats. Armed Services personnel and their families were billeted at Platen Strasse which was close by. We kids used to sojourn to Platen Strasse on Halloween; many American servicemen's families all grouped together in a residential area meant close proximity, which meant a lot of candy in a short period of time!

And it was at the IG Farben building that I witnessed the 21-gun salute to slain President Kennedy. Seven 105mm howitzers each delivered three volleys in honor of and in memory of our slain President Kennedy. [<http://www.stripes.com/news/usareur-pays-final-tribute-to-kennedy-1.57014>]

I remember reading the Army Code of Conduct in the lower level of the Chapel. I would stop and read the Code of Conduct panels which were up on the hallway wall every time I was down there for Sunday school and for Scouting events. In my mind this Code of Conduct was woven together with the Boy Scout Oath, Law and Slogan. The pictures of soldiers under stressful situations (drawn from WWII, Korean War and Vietnam War scenarios) which accompanied the text (included below) have stayed with me ...all these many years.

1. I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.
2. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist.
3. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and to aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.
4. If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.

5. When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.

6. I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.[<http://www.usmc1.us/marine-code-of-conduct>]

In 1967 our US Army synagogue congregation held the Passover Seder, led by the Jewish Chaplain, in the grand ballroom of the IG Farben Building. I did not fully grasp at that time the full extent of the astounding significance of that convocation, in that place.

Other memories include seeing a B58 Hustler strategic bomber screeching in at tree-top level, perhaps on a deep penetration raid training exercise. It was headed west. I have no idea where it was going, but presumably it had taken off from Rhein Main Air Base to the south. I also remember as a ten-year old in 1966 going to the movies at the American Army hospital. All of us kids observed very somberly some of the first casualties from the Vietnam War who were recuperating there. They were bandaged and looked so forlorn and miserable, missing limbs. Blood seeped through some of the white bandages. I was deeply upset seeing those young men, because they looked only slightly older than the boys my sixteen-year old sisters were dating. And in fact, they were (biologically at least) only a couple of years older than those boys... (Today I would say to them, "Thank you and God bless you for your service. Stand down, we have the watch. Get well soon, and return to your family"). My recollections also reach back to Armed Forces Day at Rhein Main Air Base. Our Cub Scout pack and Boy Scout troop would always make several trips there each year, and definitely would during Armed Forces Day. I always enjoyed clambering all over the 175mm "Long Tom" howitzer self-propelled gun carriage, running around and through the C130 transport aircraft and Chinook helicopters, and I thought the F100 Super Sabre jet fighter was the most beautiful, sleekest aircraft ever made... The 'Deuce and a half' (2 ½ ton cargo truck) was the biggest truck that I ever did see, and I imagined being behind the wheel driving it! I also got gently but firmly yanked up and out of an M60 tank, because I was inside there innocently taking photos with my Kodak Instamatic 102, inside the turret.

I reserve the right to return to this posting with any further recollections, and thank you and greatly appreciate your forbearance in the matter of this essay of memories!

Gary Lehman