

Prisoners of War

PRISONERS OF THE COLD WAR: *The Village of Asbach Remembers*

Over a half-century ago, we of the Class of 1945 sensed that the war against Germany and Japan might be won without our help. At the same time, we could not know that we would be the first West Point class to embark upon a new kind of war—the long struggle against communism. Such were my thoughts in the summer of 1993, when I found the opportunity to revisit the tiny village of Asbach, Germany, some 45 years after being taken there against my will as a captive of Soviet border troops.

In the fall of 1945, after the end of hostilities against Germany and Japan, we second lieutenants headed for our first overseas assignments: the peacetime occupation of those countries. As a new infantry officer, my first duty station was in the border area between the American and Soviet Zones of Germany, where sporadic rifle fire from the East soon suggested that the Russians, after only a few months of peace, had become a strange breed of “allies.”

To learn more about them, I took a course in the Russian language and

returned to that region in 1947, putting my new skills into practice as an American–Russian Liaison Officer. My small detachment of noncommissioned officers operated along the border between the German states of Hesse and Thuringia, with the task of representing Headquarters, U.S. Constabulary, located in Heidelberg, through contact in the field with liaison officers from the Soviet Eighth Guards Army, stationed in Weimar. Among our duties: responding to incidents along the border and seeking the return of AWOL U.S. soldiers and aircraft crews downed while flying in the Airlift Corridor between Frankfurt and Berlin.

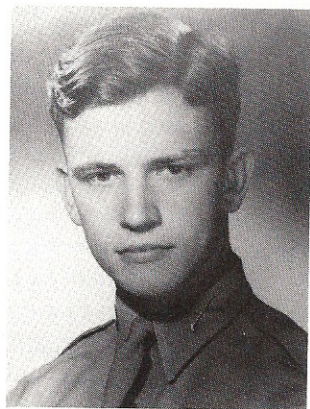
Now, four and a half decades had passed since NKVD (now KGB) forces illegally seized my unarmed liaison team near the interzonal boundary. Still vivid in my thoughts and, I mused, perhaps in mine alone, was that event, deemed unremarkable by higher authority at the time and later eclipsed by larger events of the Cold War.

With my wife and son, I drove to that desolate border region, only recently freed from the presence of Soviet troops. To my delight, I

learned that Asbach in 1993 remembered “the incident of September 1948.” Indeed, villagers Erich Meder and Georg Thomas, whom I chanced to meet, had been teenage witnesses to that event. A strange nostalgia swept over me as they recounted precise details and quickly led me to that familiar site—the meadow alongside the country road near—Asbach, several meters inside the old American Zone.

I felt like I had discovered old friends from an earlier day—these strangers who recalled watching a Soviet officer lead his soldiers across the zonal border to seize the two-man American liaison team and two West German border patrolmen. Young Meder and Thomas watched closely as the captives were marched into Asbach, taken into military headquarters, and then moved eastward toward the Soviet rear area.

Until this moment in 1993, the villagers had known nothing about our fate until I informed them that the Americans, LT Landis and SGT Peter Morosky, and their West German border police colleagues had gained their own release and returned, unharmed, to the American Zone. Delivering this message was important because it enabled me to shed light on what I believe had been a Soviet ploy. The military authorities had pointedly rejected my request to return us to the



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