

My Military Career in Germany
by Donald R. Elmore
First Sergeant
U.S. Army, Retired

I enlisted in the United States Army in March 1955 and requested Radio Repair School. I attended basic training at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas and then was assigned to Fort Monmouth for Radio Repair School. After completing the Field Radio Repair Course I had a choice of assignment to either Japan or Germany and I chose Germany.

I arrived in Germany in February 1956 at Rhine Main Air Base and was assigned to the 21st Replacement Company in Frankfurt. While there I had the opportunity to take a tour of the Deutsche Rund Funk radio station and see all the equipment used for creating radio shows and the sound room with special effects. From the 21st Replacement Company I was assigned to Headquarters, 102nd signal Battalion in Karlsruhe, Germany. I was transported from the 21st Replacement Company to the Main Train Station in Frankfurt by ¾ ton truck. It was still very cold, but a nice sunny day. The main train station still had bomb damage from WWII and it was awfully cold and bleak. Riding on trains was new to me and not being able to read or speak German did not help. Finally a worker at the train station looked at my orders and told me what train to get on. In Germany you have to get on a special car, either, "Smoking" or "No Smoking". No colors anywhere around. Once the train arrived in Karlsruhe I was met at the train station in Karlsruhe by a driver and again I was taken by ¾ ton truck to Battalion Headquarters in Smiley Barracks. I spent about 10 days at Battalion Headquarters. Here at Battalion Headquarters I had my 18th birthday.

While at Battalion Headquarters I spent some time in the snack bar and PX. One of my class mates and I went to the PX. He could speak German and as we walked by one of the cash registers we heard one clerk say to another in German, "I wish these damn Americans would go home". He immediately stopped and asked the clerk why she worked for the damn Americans if she hated them so much? She was completely aghast that he could speak the language. She turned really red in the face and tried to apologize, but he stated that he would not accept the apology. I will point out that he was Polish and had been in a German concentration camp during WWII and had learned English, German, Russian and French.

Before going back to the barracks we stopped at the snack bar and sat down to a few hands of cards. He bought me a glass of beer and I sipped it for a few minutes until the glass was empty. It was German beer and very strong as compared to American beer. I was not a drinker and a few minutes later I stood up and found myself quite dizzy from the one beer.

On the walk to and from the PX and snack bar, the one thing I really noticed was how dirty the snow was. It was really black from all the soot and again there were almost no colors to be seen. The people wore dark clothes, the cars were mostly of dark colors and the buildings were drab.

One night a few of us guys were looking out the 3rd floor window to the rear of our building and noticed the Polish Labor Service Guard walking in an odd pattern. After a while it became clear what he was doing. The snow was about two feet deep and he was spelling out something in the snow. After he finished we noticed what he had written. It was, "I LIKE IKE". Remember this was 1956 and Eisenhower was President.

Once I finished processing at Battalion I was further assigned to Company "A", 102nd Signal Battalion in the 7811 Kaserne in Frankfurt, Germany. I spent about two nights at Company Headquarters and was assigned to the Melibocus Radio Relay Station just outside Bensheim, Germany. Two men from Melibocus had arrived to pick me up and take me to the site. When we left Frankfurt for Melibocus there was snow on the ground and it was very cold. I had to ride in the back of a ¾ ton truck for the 40 mile ride to Melibocus. Once we started up the mountain road the snow and ice had bent the trees over and they formed an ice tunnel up the mountain. We arrived just after dark and it was so quiet and peaceful. There was no soot and the snow was pristine white. The lights from the cities, (two small cities were visible), was very bright. There were no clouds and the night was crisp and clear. I stood at the rear of the truck for a couple of minutes just admiring the sight and silence. I felt like I had arrived in wonderland. We went into the operations building and I signed the roster. Then we went to the billets where I met the Site Chief and the rest of the men. They welcomed me like an old friend. I felt this was going to be a nice assignment.

I was shown to my bunk and lockers. I emptied my duffel bag and made my bunk. I put things in my lockers, but before I could properly display my uniforms they would have to be laundered since they had been in a duffel bag for the past 2 months. I slept really well that night. The next morning I awoke, took a shower and shaved before getting dressed. By 08:00 the cook had arrived and had breakfast on the table. We had a German woman as our cook. She was not only a good cook, but was a very nice lady. After breakfast the Site Chief escorted me to the operations building and told the day shift man, SP2 Albert W. Spangler to acquaint me with the equipment. I spent the morning learning some of the equipment and then lunch was served. The cook had prepared a lot of German food for lunch. She was a great cook. After lunch the Site Chief again took me to the operations building and explained about living conditions at the site. He explained about how the shifts worked and that we would pull a 24 hour shift. That meant doing daily chores and then pulling a 16 hour shift in the radio room with the next day off.

I had been there for a couple of months and was awarded the Microwave MOS 281.1 since the equipment was German Microwave Equipment. During the spring I was sent to Frankfurt to get my military driver's license. Later I was sent to Griesheim to get my projectionist license.

A few months after I arrived three of the men departed back to the States. Replacements soon arrived and at one point we had a total of nine men on site.

On a Sunday in May I made my first trip downtown for a night out. I was with three other men and we stopped first at the Club at the German Labor Service Kaserne. We had a couple of beers and then we headed into town. We hit a couple of bars and then ended up at Vernedig Ice Cream Café in Bensheim. There we switched to Cognac and Coke. I ended up getting pretty drunk. At one point I noticed Horace, "Smitty", Smith was missing and when I asked where he was, they pointed out he was at another table with two girls. The next thing I remember was that I had also joined Smitty and the two girls. At first I was sitting by the Blonde and the next thing I remember I was sitting by the Brunette. Around 9:00, the Site Chief who had been with us all evening said it was time to leave. At this point I have to admit that I was really drunk and I am sure that is why I do not remember what all happened that night.

When we got back to the site about all I can remember is that as I was in the kitchen eating a sandwich, all of a sudden I was sitting flat on the floor. My feet had slid out from under me and I slid down the cabinet. I did not drop my sandwich or spill my milk. A couple of the men helped me into bed. The next morning I got out of bed and went into the living room. The Site Chief took one look at me and told me to go back to bed. I did not get out of bed again until around 4:00.

This was Monday, after we had been out on Sunday. On Tuesday I was feeling much better and was able to function normally. On Wednesday the day was going pretty normal and in the afternoon one of the men asked me when I was leaving to go to town. I told him that I was not ready to go to town for at least another month. He informed me I had to go because I had a date. I was stunned. I did not remember making a date with anyone. He finally convinced me and I got ready and he drove me down town. We waited in the Stadt Park Café on the corner near the Eis Café Vernedig. My date was to be at 7:00 so that is when I entered the Café. I walked into the Café and sat down and ordered a Coke. I was not ready for any more beer or Cognac. At about ten minutes after seven two girls walked in and approached my table. They asked if they could sit. I stood up and indicated for them to sit. After looking at the two girls I immediately knew which one I had a date with. The blonde girl was around 15 years old and not too good looking. The brunette was 16 years old. I was 18 years old at the time.

We talked for quite a while and then around 9:00 they said they had to leave. I asked if I could walk them home and the one I had a date with said I could walk her part way home. During the summer we dated a few times with as many as two or three weeks between dates. By August we dated about once a week and I still had no idea where she lived. It was around September when she finally took me to her home. She led me into the small house and did not at first turn on any lights. After I was sitting she turned on the light. She apologized for the humble accommodations. I told her that this was a lot better than the houses in which I had grown up. Her parents were not home so I only stayed for about an hour and left. Things got much better and I finally met her parents. By this time I had learned quite a bit of German and I could communicate with her parents.

In the fall of 1956 they had a big celebration in Bensheim. They were celebrating the 1,000 year Marktrecht, (1,000 years of free market). The celebration went on for 10 days. The event took place in different parts of town wherever they could find room to put up all the big beer tents and picnic tables. It was very similar to an Oktoberfest. Part of the festivities was a carnival and one of the Barkers made a rude comment to my girlfriend as we passed. I stood directly in his face and he backed off. Later that night I sat in the beer tent the Barker showed up and he was drunk. My girlfriend had begged off and said she had a headache and wanted to go home. I wanted to walk her home, but she said her girlfriend would take her home. The Barker asked me where my Schatzie was and I said she had gone home. He then said in broken English I should go and get her because he wanted to f--- her. At that moment I shoved my beer stein into his face and beer went all over him as he fell backwards onto the floor. Some employees of the festival ushered him out of the tent and then asked me to leave, which I did.

During the next year we dated a lot. We even took a three day vacation to Garmisch-Partenkirchen. We stopped at one house to rent a room and the lady asked if we were married and we said no, so she said she would not rent us a room, but there was another lady that would. We had a great time in those three days.

During our dating we traveled around the area a lot finding all the dances that were being held in the various towns and villages near her home. There were many times when our cook would go with us along with her husband and many times with her beautiful niece. Her niece was nice, but she was not looking for an American husband. She danced with the men from the site, but would not date them.

It was spring time in 1957 and I had driven one of the guys to his girlfriend's house to drop her off and he said I could drive to the house because her parents did not like Americans. I parked the car just outside of town and waited for him. My girlfriend was with us and we sat in the back seat to snuggle. We had been sitting there for about 10 minutes when I got up the courage to ask her to marry me. For this question I got a great big kiss so I gathered that she meant yes.

Meanwhile at the site we did normal day time chores and pulled shift duty. We only had one man on shift at a time. One of the day time chores was to white wash both buildings on the outside. And then we painted the inside of both buildings. We also tilled the front yard and planted new grass. When I first arrived I noticed the men had been trying to remove a large antenna base from an old antenna. They were using a hammer and a chisel. They did a pretty good job, but it was slow going. I suggested that we build a wooden frame around the base, fill it with dirt from the woods and plant flowers. The Site Chief agreed and I acquired the lumber from the Post Engineers at Darmstadt and built the frame. I then took the $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck into the woods and filled it with dirt which I used to fill the flower bed. The flowers really did a great job of making the place look better. I also planted flowers along the fence line in front of the site.

In the fall of 1956 the Site Chief departed and he had been the Commissary agent for the site. When the new Site Chief arrived he appointed me the Commissary Agent. I had to keep records and a ledger for all the money collected.

Well, as you might know there were many days that were just kind of mundane when nothing ever happened, but one day in the spring of 1957 a group of school children came to the site and they were all excited. None of them spoke English so I asked them in German what was so exciting. They said a man had hung himself in the woods near our site. I called the local Police and told them the story. They asked me to meet them near the location and show them where the body was. The students and teacher had given me very good directions and I easily found the body. I met the Police at a junction in the road up to the site and they only had a small sedan. They got into the $\frac{3}{4}$ ton and I drove them to the site. The man, who was from Wiesbaden had taken a train to Bensheim and then walked almost three miles to where he had hanged himself. He was well dressed and had a wooden leg. He had taken off his coat and jacket and folded them neatly and placed them on the ground. He then placed his wooden leg on the clothes along with his briefcase. He placed three letters on top of the briefcase. Evidently he had already tied the rope on the branch of a tree and placed a stick of stove wood against the tree. With his wooden leg off, one can only assume he hopped to the tree and got upon the stick of stove wood, placed the rope around his neck and then kicked the stove wood away, thereby hanging himself. The Police after reading the letters told me that he did this because of financial problems.

As time went on I got married and had a son who was born in the hospital in Bensheim. I had to request an extension of my tour in the Army as well as an extension on my tour of duty in Germany. The paperwork to get married took almost 6 months and getting a visa for my wife and son took almost three months.

In June 1958 I was sent back state side and discharged from the Army at Fort Hancock, New York just outside New York City. From there I traveled to Ohio, Indiana and on to my home town of Bowling Green, Kentucky. After two months with my parents I re-enlisted and was reassigned to Fort Monmouth. Then I was assigned to Puerto Rico where I spent 32 months and was then assigned back to Fort Monmouth.

While at Fort Monmouth I tried many ways of getting reassigned back to Germany with no luck. Then in March of 1964 the Company Clerk called me and said the Army was looking for volunteers in my grade and MOS to go to Germany. He prepared the papers and I got the assignment. I went to Germany in June of 1964 and was assigned to the 22nd Signal Group in Mannheim. From there I was assigned to Co C, 68th Sig Bn in Giessen and then on to a Signal Site at Sennelager in the British zone. It was an SSB Tributary Site in support of the Artillery Detachment assigned to the NATO mission. In January 1966 after 19 months in Sennelager I was reassigned to the 510th Signal Company which was directly under the 22nd Sig Gp in Mannheim.

My assignment was at Koenigstuhl as the Site Chief of the Silk Purse Project which was the ground station for the European Airborne Command Post. In August of 1966 I was reassigned to Co C, 102nd Sig Bn at Kaiserslautern, and my duty station was still at Koenigstuhl as Site Chief of the Silk Purse Project. In the fall of 1966 I was promoted to SFC E-7.

In June 1967 I was assigned to Vietnam for a one year tour. Upon completion of my tour, as an E-7 I was authorized to request an assignment of my choice. I requested to be reassigned to Germany and the request was approved. I was again assigned to the 22nd Signal Group in Mannheim. There they assigned me to Co B, 360th Sig Bn in Giessen. Once I arrived I was informed I would be the new Operations Sergeant. In 1969 the company changed to Co D, 447th Sig Bn. In 1969, the Company Commander, his Executive Officer/ Supply Officer and the First Sergeant were all relieved of duty and reassigned. I was the only one of any rank that remained with the Company. In June of 1970 I was once again assigned to Vietnam. Upon completion of that tour I again requested I be reassigned back to Germany and the request was approved.

I again arrived at the 22nd Sig Gp in Mannheim and was assigned to Battalion Headquarters of the 447th Sig Bn in Darmstadt. For the first six months I was the Acting First Sergeant of HHD, 447th Sig Bn. Once a new man arrived to be First Sergeant I was assigned to Battalion S-3. At Battalion S-3 I was the Administrative NCO with additional duty of handling the Manpower and Equipment Survey Reports. In April of 1973 the 447th Signal Battalion was deactivated and became the 39th Signal Battalion.

In May of 1973 I was promoted to Master Sergeant and selected to be a First Sergeant. In February, 1974 I was converted to First Sergeant and assigned to the 532nd Sig Co, 39th Sig Bn in Giessen. I have now been assigned to the Giessen Company for the third time.

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Donald R. Elmore
First Sergeant
U.S. Army, Retired