

Excerpt from *Rising from Rubble...Germany Revisited*

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We entered the Autobahn south of Frankfurt and headed for Mannheim and Stuttgart. There were very few civilian trucks and no German passenger cars on the way. The traffic was mostly American military trucks. There were no gasoline stations, rest stops or road service for the public. Our gasoline would be purchased from American military depots off the highway. As we entered the mountainous area of Bavaria southeast of Stuttgart, it began to rain. With sub-freezing temperature, our windshield glazed over almost immediately. Our military Jeep did not have a defroster, and we slowed to a crawl. Holding our gloved hands against the windshield, we attempted to melt the ice. At times, the build-up required us to pull off the road and scrape it off. For an hour at a time, there was no traffic in either direction. It was eerie being alone in this foreign land.

The concrete Autobahn became very slick as the ice glaze built up. There were no road crews with sand or salt. Shifting the Jeep into four-wheel drive, we crept slowly along the lonely highway in the fading light. Descending a long mountainous grade, it crossed a suspension bridge over a valley hidden in the semi-darkness. Halfway across the icy bridge, the Jeep lost traction on all four wheels and slowly spun out of control. Fortunately, it stopped on the gravel edge of the road and we were able to move slowly. Just ahead we saw a welcome sign ... Red Cross Rest Stop ... for GI truckers and other military personnel. We carefully turned off the icy Autobahn, and drove the 200 meters through the woods to a lighted building. Two Army 2 1/2-ton trucks were parked in the lot.

The warmth of the room and the smell of hot coffee and chocolate welcomed us. We they had not eaten hot food since starting the trip. The Red Cross ladies greeted us cheerily and served hot chocolate and donuts while everyone warmed in front of the wood fire in the stone fireplace. With impassable road conditions, I asked the Red Cross staff for permission to spend the night in the building. We could see a second floor balcony, and surmised ... sleeping quarters. They refused to offer us shelter. Could these American women have thought Dorothy was a German *fräulein* and we were not married? It was a bitter pill on this bleak winter night to be turned down by American women and sent out into the storm.

They directed one of their German staff to help us find a room in the nearby village. Dorothy spoke to him in German as we started for Ober-Brucken. With the Jeep in four-wheel drive, we drove slowly through the forest down the snow and ice covered road. Soon, we arrived in a dark village outlined in our headlights. There was no visible light in what appeared to be a ghost town. The houses were shuttered for the winter night. Yet we could see smoke from the chimneys and steam rising from the stables and manure piles.

Our guide explained in German, "This is the mayor's house." We followed him

through the front yard, over and around a mound of steaming manure. He knocked on the front door. The mayor welcomed us into his warm, steamy, living room. His family was out of sight. The guide explained about our plight, and he went to an ancient telephone, hanging on the wall, and called the Gasthaus at his sister village further down the mountain ... Unter-Brucken. This was like a fairy tale to us.

“Yes, they can have a room,” he told us in German.

Dorothy thanked the mayor, and we left the warm comfort of his home for the cold darkness of the night to continue down the mountain. In ten minutes, we stopped in front of the gasthaus. Their guide went inside, and returned saying, “They will take you for the night.”

We rewarded him for his service and he disappeared in the darkness. We entered the main room of the tavern. It was a dining room and bar heated by a blazing wood fire in a huge fireplace. The proprietor coolly received us, apparently an American Officer and a German fräulein traveling together. Dorothy spoke to him in German. We were seated at a table and the male patrons eyed us suspiciously over their beer and food. We were served steaming hot plates of sausage, sauerkraut, fresh dark bread, and cups of ersatz coffee. In our cold, hungry state, it was delicious. We were grateful for the food. After the hot meal, we were escorted up a narrow stairway to a bedroom on the second floor. The large double bed had warm flannel sheets and was covered by a large goose down comforter. Big, soft pillows completed the scene. There was a pitcher of warm water sitting in a large wash bowl on the dresser for clean up. A covered “slop jar” was in the corner of the room for body waste. It was apparent that there was no heat in the room, so we quickly got into our warm pajamas, left on the socks, crawled under the covers, and snuggled together for warmth. We silently said prayers of thanksgiving for the trip, and asked for protection in this alien place. Sleep came quickly after the harrowing ride on the icy Autobahn. It wasn't until next morning, we thought about Andra, safely in our warm apartment in Frankfurt with Irmgard. She would have frozen to death in the icy cold of our Jeep.

We awakened in the early morning light and could see gently falling snow flakes outside our window. The view of the valley and the buildings was like a Brothers Grimm fairy tale. The village and mountains was covered with snow. It was a scene of great beauty, as though we had stepped into a magical land.

Washing was out of the question; the water in the pitcher on the dresser had frozen during the night. Quickly, very quickly, we dressed in the freezing air and packed our things. Descending into the dining room, we were greeted by a warm fire and good food. A hot breakfast of eggs and meat with bread prepared us for the day's journey. The cost was low and in old German currency. We had stepped backward in time to before World War II. These were proud people that had sent their sons, brothers and husbands to fight for the Third Reich. Their remote mountain village was spared direct damage, but not the casualties of the war. Before leaving these warm surroundings, we changed our plans from skiing in Bavaria to a visit to München (Munich).