

**HISTORY PROJECT**  
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

**Bruce and Patricia Bing**

Conducted by

Al Gamauf

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**This interview is being conducted on October 24, 2006, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, Illinois. I am speaking with Pat and Bruce Bing.**

**Bruce, could you give me your date of birth and where you were born, please.**

I was born December 3, 1931, in Chicago, Illinois, at St. Luke's Hospital.  
(Pat: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, July 2, 1929, and I was born in Illinois Central Hospital.)

**Bruce, what were you doing at the time? Were you inducted? Were you drafted into the Army?**

Yes. I was a draftee into the United States Army. I was attending school at the time, and the draft notice came and there wasn't much you could do.

**What year was this?**

This was 1953. (Pat: Yes. We had been married nine months. Bruce was drafted and I was older than Bruce. I had had a year of teaching in Cleveland, Ohio, and a half-year teaching in Chicago Public Schools. So when he was drafted I continued with the Chicago Public Schools until he went to basic training. At basic training in Ft. Leonard-Wood – I actually went there each weekend and stayed with him for the weekends. My girlfriend and I – her husband was in the same position – we traveled together down to St. Louis, Missouri, stayed with our husbands, came back on Monday and went to our jobs.

**Bruce, what was basic training like?**

Basic training, I guess, was typical Army basic training. I don't think anybody that was there really wanted to be there at the time. But it was what you could survive on in the field, and any type of training with the M1 rifle, with pistols – about every bit of Army equipment that a normal soldier would be equipped with.

**And after basic training, where were you sent?**

After basic training I was sent to San Marcus Air Force Base in Texas for training in aircraft mechanics.

**Did you have any experience in aircraft mechanics?**

I had absolutely no experience in any type of mechanical training, but I had a very high interest and probably tested out very well in mechanics.

**And after that you were sent ..?**

After that I was sent to Mannheim, Germany, to Coleman Barracks – it was an Army Air Force base in Mannheim, and that's where I did my work.

**Pat, how did you enter the service?**

I also followed Bruce to San Marcus, Texas. I was very much in love and just couldn't leave him. So I went to Texas hoping to get a teaching job. They didn't need teachers. My avocation is that I'm a florist. I have a license for knowing how to do floral work, so

I worked with a floral shop in San Antonio and Austin, Texas, at the time that he was there. And I lived in a home rented with Bruce until he was transferred overseas.

**Now, had you entered the Army?**

No, at that time I was still working as a florist, as a married person hoping to get a teaching job and did not get one. I did as many odd jobs as I could.

**So when did you enter the Army – were you in the Army?**

Yes.

(Bruce continues) At Christmas, 1953, I came to Chicago, missed the boat to Germany and was then flown from somewhere on the east coast over to Frankfurt, Germany, where I landed on New Year's Eve. Which was rather interesting, because I was given a three day pass to do whatever I wanted to do. As soon as I got over to Germany and got stationed at Coleman Barracks in Mannheim, I contacted Pat and said this is too good to be true, come on over.

(Pat continues) Well at that time, after leaving Texas, I returned to my parents' home. My father owned a flower shop and I once again stepped into flowers, because I realized I needed part-time jobs. When Bruce was flown overseas to Germany, I once again became very lonely, and I said I didn't want to remain in the United States, I wanted to go with him. My parents were very much against the idea. I, being a headstrong person at the time, said no, I was going over. I was going to take whatever money I had, pay for my own fare on the Liberte Ship, the French line, and go over. So I did it! On the ship it was most unusual. I was on the ship seven days and I began to sit at a table where there were a lot of people, and I happened to be talking that I had been a teacher previously in Cleveland, Ohio and Chicago Public Schools, and this gentleman, Cal Lancaster, introduced himself to me – he and his wife. He was returning from the States. His mother had passed away and he had attended the funeral, and he was returning to Germany. He said I just happen to be going back, I'm superintendent of the USA Europe School. I said, You are the very person I'm looking to meet! He said, Strange as it may be, I'm on the same ship you are. And also, strange as it may be, I happen to need several teachers – I have some vacancies. Do you have experience? And I said, Yes, and told him of my experience. He said of course he would need authenticity to this experience, and said temporarily he would hire me if my authenticity reached him in time to assure him that I was what I said I was. Well, that's exactly what happened. I reassured me I was who I was, that I had the experience, and he said when my papers arrived he would enroll me in the Army and I would become an Army school teacher at that time and he would start me to work immediately. I arrived in Germany around the beginning of February. My papers arrived around February 14. And at that time he enrolled me and I started work. And I have the papers that you will see.

**So you did not have to go through basic training?**

No. It was not that kind of a position. When you are part of the Army and are already qualified you become a warrant officer. I didn't need basic training. I was a person, what they called a Department of Army Civilian employee. And you become a warrant

officer. But you don't go through basic training because you are a graduate of college and you are becoming a teacher.

**Did you have to wear a uniform – a military uniform?**

No. I was a civilian employee of the Army.

**Bruce, what was your daily routine like?**

Daily routine was interesting because I was living off base, which was a great privilege that they allowed me over there. Because Pat was coming over I was able to locate an apartment in a small town called Blumenau, Germany. One of the people that was rotating back to the United States had an apartment. I was able to get that apartment, and immediately I let Pat know the apartment was available we got it and we had a place to live. So I never had to live in the barracks in Germany. Our assignment, as what was left of the Army Air Force, was a very loose assignment. We did not have all the Army disciplines that would normally go along with the military.

(Pat continues) The very fact that I was an office, I had privileges over and above because of that fact, and because of the fact that I was married. Therefore, I requested that my husband live with me off barracks when it was possible. And they honored my request. They also honored my request that I live off-base, and not in the billets with the other personnel who were employed. Both of these things – they recognized that we were an unusual situation, and they went along with it. I told me that I had prior experience with schools – Cleveland Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools. They recognized that I was older than Bruce, and that I was needed. I spoke with Cal Lancaster, the Superintendent. I explained my position and with that he said, Pat, we will oblige you and let your husband live with you on weekends and other times.

**How were you able to get to the same town where Bruce was?**

When I spoke with Cal Lancaster, the Superintendent, I said, What schools are you superintendent of. He said, Mannheim School #1 and Mannheim School #2. I said, My husband is closest to Mannheim School #1. I knew that much. I asked what positions he had available there, and he said kindergarten. I said I was more experienced in junior high, but because I had a broad degree, and at that time I was able to teach from kindergarten through eighth grade, then also into junior high. He said, I can see from your credentials that come from the previous places that you have this ability to teach at these various grades, so I will take you into kindergarten because that's the grade that's available within your husband's barracks.

**How many children were in your class?**

I'd say about 28. I had morning and afternoon – so I had a.m. and p.m. kindergarten.

**These were children of servicemen stationed in Germany.**

Correct. And the children were, shall we say, as children will act. They would immediately come into the classroom and say, My father is a sergeant – I just want you to know who he is. And I would say, Oh, that's very nice, please be seated. (Pat chuckles)

**So these were children of officers, not just normal enlisted people.**

Yes. But some were enlisted, also.

**So they could bring their families over to Germany?**

In some cases. It depended on the work type of that particular father. If the father's work type was needed, then he could bring his family. At that time they were looking for experience from the veterans.

**What was your life like together living in Germany and you teaching school and you going to repair aircraft.**

(Bruce speaks) It was interesting. It was sort of like a 9-to-5 job. I would leave sometimes in the morning around 7:30 a.m. I think we had roll call around 8:00 in the morning, and we would then go to our individual areas wherever they were on the base. Mine happened to be in the area where the salvage shop was and the repair shop. And I would go over there and do my thing for the day, and at 4:30 p.m. the work day was over and we could leave. So it was very unlike normal Army life in that we did have the privilege of sort of a 9-to-5 job. And the only time that would be interrupted would be if there were alerts. Suddenly there was going to be an alert, and the Russian Army was besieging the east part of Germany, everybody reports to their position, take their assigned arms and meet – get ready to get on a truck and go wherever it was necessary. With the aircraft group, we were more important that we were there to service the aircraft and have them ready to fly. So we stayed back. Some of our troops would go off to the different fronts, wherever they were needed. Usually it lasted a day or two and they came back. And it was like a vacation. (Bruce chuckles)

**So you never really had to march or do any drills.**

Only in basic training. Our group was a group of technicians. There were no demands put upon us for standing specific formations, other than being there in the morning for the morning formation. At the end of the day they used to have a formation, but it got diluted and we were able to leave at a specific time.

**Exactly what was your job?**

My job was to be able to repair any of the Army light aircraft. These would be the L19's, the L17's, the H21 helicopters, and I had skills in repairing all of them. And that included rebuilding engines – whatever needed to be done.

**So, from somebody that never knew anything about engines, you learned an awful lot.**

Well, as most kids in those years, we tore apart more cars and we could put them back together. But it was more if you had the ability through your interest and then your training. And the Army training was very specific. There were ways of doing things. It was sort of like the right way, the wrong way and the Army way.

**I've heard that before.**

And the Army had a certain way of doing things. And we had the luxury, if we could find a better way to do it, to talk to our head officer who was a colonel – there were a bunch of flying warrant officers at our field – and they had a wonderful quality control. If you had worked on an aircraft and the pilot who was most likely a warrant officer would ask you if you'd worked on that aircraft and you certified that the work was done properly, he'd say, Get a parachute; we'll go find out. And it was good. Because you got some flying time in. It let you know if they were putting their life on the line, you're going to do the same thing. (chuckles)

**What was your rank?**

I had a Specialist 4 with the Army, which at that point when I went in the Army it went from the PFC's, the corporals, the sergeants, to the specialist ranks – Specialist 1, 2, 3, 4 – and different ranks that way.

**Was your rank above sergeant?**

No. I did not get that. I was a peon in the Army! No rank at all. But I had a responsibility and a technology that they had to respect, because if I said this plane is not taking off I could ground – I don't care if the captain came and said that plane is going – I could ground it. Unlikely at times, but then you would explain why you grounded an aircraft.

**Now Pat, you were an officer.**

Yes. I was a school teacher. We had parent-teacher meetings, and I was in charge of them. The parents – the fathers of course being officers, some of them being sergeants, some of them up to a colonel – they would come to the parent-teacher conferences and I would speak to them about their child and the progress their child was making. We also had different projects that we would put on with the students so that the parents could see the progress the child was making. I also worked with the teachers and the other principals of the school itself – not only Mannheim #1, but Mannheim #2. And we formed what you might call a teachers' group where we would put on – shall I use the word, plays – performances to the parents to show them, with their students, different things that we were doing in the classroom. So when the father and the mother – the officers – came to see what they were doing, we in turn would show them: “Kindergarten class come out, let's show them what we're doing now.” Then first grade, second grade and so on. I was kind of the coordinator of that because I had been a recreational director and we did a lot of marching with the students. The parents liked to see their little child marching as they had done in basic training, so the children learned the basic steps of marching and tumbling and things of that nature for the PTA meetings that we would be doing – as they do within the States. And they seemed to enjoy that very much. Also report cards – I didn't bring a report card with me tonight, I'm sorry I didn't – we did have report cards for the parents that showed them that we were doing things that would be applicable to the States, so when they returned with their child to the States their child would be able to fit into the curriculum immediately, no matter what State they were going into, because most States, though they seem to differ from a southern education to a northern education, to a Los Angeles, California type to an eastern state – they seem to

differ to the person who is not aware of it, but for reality sake the curriculum of the United States for children was basically very similar.

### **Were the children taught German in class?**

Yes. It was most interesting. May I quickly say that in Kindergarten – I’m very surprised at this – the teacher would come in, in the morning, for thirty minutes. She said to me in the beginning, “I have been given permission that you may leave for coffee if you wish, and I will be with the children; I am a certified teacher.” And I said, “Well, to help you maintain discipline, and also I am very interested in what you are going to do with the children, may I stay?”

### **Now, was this an American teacher?**

No, it was a German teacher. She said, Yes, you can say. I said I would sit in the back and I wouldn’t interrupt her teaching. She said, “*Gute*.” So with that the students were sitting there very quietly – we had good discipline – and she immediately looked at them and said: “*Guten morgen, kinder*.” And she used her fingers to get them to come back to her. And she repeated again, “*Guten morgen, kinder*.” And they came back, “*Guten morgen, kinder*.” And then she in turn began to use her hands. She never once spoke any English, though she spoke English very well. She used her fingers as a way of showing what she wanted them to do. She would point to them and say, “*Kinder*.” And then she would point to herself and use the word for teacher. *Schullehrer*, by the way, is the word for teacher – *schul* meaning school and *lehrer* mean learn – so she was a *schullehrer*. She’d say, *ich bin* – meaning I am – She would say, “*Ich bin schullehrer*,” And then she would say, “*Sie sind*,” meaning ‘you are,’ “*kinder*.” And she would repeat them perhaps a whole twenty minutes on just that one sentence with them repeating. And she would continue pointing out that she was the *schullehrer* and they were the *kinder*. And that took up perhaps the whole morning. The next morning she would come in, and she would always bring something with her. Sometimes she’d bring one pencil. And she would explain, “*Das ist bleistift*.” She would continue with the *bleistift*, and she would show how she would sharpen it, how she would use it. She’d show *ein bleistift, zwei bleistift*, and she would then have them repeat what she had said. She went through many different things within the classroom – opening windows, closing windows, opening doors, closing doors. And at the end of the year the children had learned a basic amount of German that they would carry on – opening doors, closing doors, using pencils, saying good morning and good bye – basic things of conversational language – and they were only kindergarteners! I thoroughly enjoyed the years that I worked with her, and I think she enjoyed talking with me afterwards as we compared how she taught German students later on in the day – she didn’t just teach my class, but she taught German students later in the day. And then she would always compare how she taught the older students of the Mannheim School – she didn’t just teach my kindergarten class, she taught the older students. She went on to say that she used a similar form, but much accelerated and how the students worked with it.

### **Tell me a little bit about where you were living.**

(Bruce speaks) We lived in a little town called Blumenau. This was about one or two kilometers from the barracks, and it was easily commutable either walking or Pat could drive me in the morning. But normally she was preparing what she was doing, so she'd go off to the Mannheim School. I would walk off down the road to the concern. There were other GI's living there at the time, and we created a rather close relationship with most of the other GI's who lived in the town, but that wasn't good enough. Pat and I really wanted to get to know the people. There was a *schutzenhaus*, and this was a shooting club. In these years they could not use regular powder driven cartridges, so it was an air rifle club. And we decided we would join the *schutzenhaus*, and we got to know the German folks in town and it was very, very interesting because we were pretty well accepted. We didn't come there and say, "Hey, we're Americans." We came there to say we're here, let's be friends and let me learn from you. And we had some wonderful times there, wonderful parties there, and when we left, the fire chief from Kaffertal gave us a beer mug that must have stood, oh, probably about half a meter high. And all that night we passed that mug around. And if it was empty and handed to you empty, you had to fill it with something. That was interesting (chuckles), because there were things we drank that night you wouldn't believe.

(Pat talks) I'd like to finish that story out. At the end of the night most people were, shall we say, very generous to each other because of the amount of what they had drank from the mug which Bruce is speaking about. So the gentleman who owned the mug turned to me and said that he would like me to have the mug as a memorabilia because we were leaving to go back to the States. I, of course, said I didn't want to take his mug. It was beautiful. And to this day I still have it. Let me tell you that story. So, he forced it upon me. And finally, because I didn't want to hurt his feelings, I accepted. In the morning I went back to the *schutzenhaus*, and it just so happened that his wife was working there. She was a server, a waitress. And I said I had this beautiful mug that her husband had given to me last evening, and I felt that I do not want to accept it because it was too beautiful. It really is. And I feel obliged that I wanted to return it. I said we had enjoyed the last evening so much and thank you. She said, "Oh, no! My husband wants you to have it to take back to America to remember us. We want you to use it and drink out of it and think of us." I was overwhelmed. I accepted because I recognized she really wanted us to. So we took it back to America. And to this day, in 2006, we still have that mug. We corresponded many times. I sent her little things from America as a token of letting her know that we appreciated the mug and sent her pictures of us. And to this very day in 2006 I still have it.

### **Now, you eventually moved into a house there?**

(Bruce speaks) We actually lived on the second floor of a home. Frau Mohr owned the home, and we rented the second floor of the home from her, and it was interesting because it was, I guess you'd call it a two-room apartment. And if you wanted to take a shower, you had to let Frau Mohr know that you wanted to take a shower, because the water heater was coal fired. And they had this eirer coal [egg shaped pieces], that was about probably about 2" in diameter pressed coal, that they would put in and heat the water for when you wanted to shower.



(Pat speaks) We had a half-bath upstairs, which was a sink and a toilet. But the shower that Bruce is speaking of was downstairs in her apartment. And so when we would want to have a shower we would go downstairs and knock on the door and let her know. And I can recall her saying, “Baden?” Again, “Nein.” “Americanish baden zu viel. Too much baden, baden, baden.” And I said, “We baden every day.” She’d say, “Nein, nein, nein. Zu viel, Zu viel. Too much. Too much.” And finally Bruce and I became embarrassed that we were bathing every day. So we went to the school, and the school would allow you to bathe within the showers of the swimming area for a fifty-Phenning (Bruce interjects) It’s half a mark – about twelve cents. (Pat continues) We would take our towels and things we needed for bathing and go over to the school as much as we could so we wouldn’t embarrass Frau Mohr. And then she would say, “Baden?” And I’d say, “Nein. School baden.” And she’d say, “Oh, yah; okay, yah.” And so we would bathe sometimes in her bathroom, and sometimes in the school because we were embarrassed to bathe in her flat.

### **So you had a kitchen and bedroom?**

(Bruce speaks) A very small kitchen – like a double hot plate. Which made it a little difficult, but Pat was very creative.

(Pat speaks) We had a living room, a bedroom that was very cold. When it was cold we slept in the living room on the couch – it opened up. But when it was temperate in the spring and the fall we slept in the bedroom – there was no heat in the bedroom. The living room had a pot-belly stove. And the kitchen took the heat from the pot-belly stove in the living room. Can I tell you one very humorous story. We only had an ice box – a box with ice. It dripped all over. I didn’t like that at all. So I went to the store. And I recognized that they were selling electric refrigerators. I was delighted. Now this was a very small refrigerator. It was only about the size of what you would call a college refrigerator today. It had two shelves. I explained to Frau Mohr that I was going to purchase one of these. And she said, “Zu viel kosten.” And I said, “Nein. Ich haben zu viel electric refrigerator.” I’ll pay for it. It’s for cold food. So finally I explained to her that I really wanted to do this. She said okay. She would be disgusted at the fact that I wasn’t using her ice box. Finally the refrigerator was delivered and I showed it to her. And I said I would take the top shelf and she could have the bottom shelf. Well, she immediately liked that bottom shelf. And she said, “Danke, danke.” So the next day I came home and looked in the refrigerator, and she had tripe on a plate smelling up the whole refrigerator. It was the inside of a cow, as you know. I said, “What’s that.” She said, “[beef, beef].” And I said, “Nein, nein. Machen in papier.” You have to wrap your things in paper. So, with that I went to the commissary, which is the American grocery store, and purchased waxed paper. In those days we didn’t have plastic wrap. So purchased waxed paper and I gave her a box of it and said, “Machen all the food in this waxed paper. And then you can put it in the bottom shelf. Otherwise it’s going to smell.” And she said, “Yah.” And she became very disgusted with me. So this went on for maybe a week or two. And it happened to be the month of December. So at that time we exchanged Christmas gifts. And purchased her some things I thought she would

enjoy from the commissary – nylon hose, cigarettes for Herr Mohr, and things of that nature which she ordinarily wouldn't have. And she, in turn, made me some doilies and pot holders that she had made which I still have today. And she wrapped them in waxed paper!

(Bruce speaks) (all laugh) We didn't know whether that was rubbing it in, or whether she thought it were a decorative paper.

### **Did you go to town much?**

(Bruce speaks) Oh, we went into town all the time. We thoroughly enjoyed town. We tried to actually assimilate into the German community. We found a tailor shop. I had a jacket made, pants made. So I sort of fit into the style of the German clothing. Pat acquired some clothing. We really had a superb time. There was a little tavern about half a mile from our house. And we would go there, and the shooting club, which was the *schutzenhaus*, they would have parties once or twice a month. And we got acquainted with the folks in the town, picked up enough German where we could communicate with the people, and just thoroughly assimilated into the neighborhood.

(Pat speaks) I remember one time. We thought we were doing so well to put on this, shall we say, facsimile of being German – Bruce having the German suit, and I dressing as much as I could as a German woman. And we thought we had learned German so well. But we went to a restaurant, and we tried to not speak English at all and just speak in German. Finally the waiter turned to me and said, "Would you please speak English. I'm not understanding your German at all." (all chuckles) I had ordered three bowls of soup!

### **Bruce, did you wear lederhosen?**

No. Didn't quite go that far. But I had the felt hat, and I had the suit coat which was sort of a velvet-like material. Actually, without opening our mouths we probably could have assimilated into the neighborhood very well.

(Pat speaks) We had been living there for that much time. And I having a salary, and Bruce also have a salary, we were able to travel quite extensively. We traveled all the way down to Italy as far as Capri and Rome. We spent many days down there, as much as Bruce had vacation for. (Bruce speaks) Any time I could get leave. (Pat continues) And being off in the summers, of course ...

### **Oh that's correct, you were a teacher.**

(Pat continues) And I received also a lot of the holidays off. So I was able to travel myself. We went to Heidelberg many times; Paris, France; London, England. We traveled all over as much as we could in our little Isetta. And then we purchased a Volkswagen automobile – the Isetta wasn't the only car we had. (Bruce speaks) We needed more room. (Pat speaks) We did have the opportunity to do a lot of traveling and Frau Mohr when we were coming back. She'd say, "Go, go, go." It was her way of

trying to learn English through us, and we were trying to learn German through her. I think it was interesting that I had studied Latin for four years, and so when Herr Mohr and I would sit down at the table I was just learning how to speak German, and he, in turn, was just learning how to speak English. And finally I told them I learned how to speak Latin, having attended a parochial school. He said, "Oh. Let us speak in Latin." And I never realized that I would literally be using Latin as a spoken language with him. And that's how he and I utilized the language to interweave the English and German.

**Did you dine with them frequently?**

Oh, yes, frequently. We would share American food and German food. (Bruce speaks) We would go down to their place. They'd come up to ours. We would share meals. We became very close. And that closeness lasted probably about ten years after we got out of Germany.

**What's your favorite German dish?**

(Bruce speaks) There are so many of them. Probably the Bratwurst for a quick lunch. Or the wiener schnitzels, the kartoffelsalats – the potato salads. We assimilated very well into the community. And my heritage being German, of course, my grandmother gave me a lot of experience in German foods. And we made this a very educational thing for this. (Pat speaks) One morning I went down to take a shower. It was early morning, and I smelled this wonderful smell emitting from the kitchen. And Frau Mohr was in their stirring this big pot. She was going round and round. And I thought surely it was preserves of some sort. And I turned and said, "Frau Mohr, das so goot. Was dat?" And she said, "Vine." And I said, "Vine? Vine morgen?" "Yah, vine morgen." "It preserves nein." She said "It preserves to drink." And with that she gave me a glass of wine in the morning before I'm going to school to teach! And I said, Bissel, meaning a small amount. She said, "Nein, nein. Grow" And she gets this large glass out for me before breakfast (laughs). I wasn't so sure what I taught that morning! (Bruce speaks) What ended up is that she was making kirschwasser, which is a cherry brandy of a sort. From then on we had all the cherry brandy we wanted. (Pat speaks) One of the hardest things was to say "no" to Frau Mohr or Herr Mohr. When you would try to say no it would seem to hurt her feelings. So you had to accept whatever they were going to do for you.

**I'm assuming you got to go to Berlin.**

(Bruce speaks) Oh, yes.

**What was Berlin like in those days?**

(Bruce speaks) Berlin was devastated, still, in those years. I would say rather than rebuilding, they sort of cleaned it up. And we had the privilege, of course, to go into east Germany and see what was over there. And there was this façade that the Russians had the Germans build there. But as you walked around the backs of the buildings, these were hollow shells. It was just right along the wall were these buildings that looked very

elaborate. But nobody lived in them. And you'd go around the back and they were empty.

### **What was the purpose of that?**

(Bruce speaks) Showmanship. The Russians wanted to let the Germans know that they were doing something that the Americans – they tried to degrade whatever we did. And they couldn't believe how the rest of Germany was doing so well. Because where we were at, at the time we left, there were very, very few signs that there was ever a war over there. Most of it was rebuilt, and in very, very good condition.

### **What did you think the mood of the people were in Berlin?**

(Bruce speaks) Berlin was a city of business, the commerce center. I would say it was a very unrealistic area. Berlin was too much American, too much military, and the people who were there worked for the military. You got into the smaller towns and you found out that we were not the favorites. They weren't too happy with us. But I think we proved our relationships, wouldn't you say, Pat?

(Pat speaks) Yes, I would say. Many times you would be in a drug store or a grocery store, and you would ask a question and if they liked you or not – they would immediately form an opinion – and they would try to trick you into either taking too much money from you for the amount of goods you were purchasing, or they would try to distract you if you were asking directions to go a way that you shouldn't have to go. They were tricking you frequently. Some people liked you, some people didn't. We were clever enough, and had had enough opportunity to recognize who did like you and who didn't like you. And I would say, "Nein. Sprechen sie again." And they would know, then, that I recognized that they were not speaking correctly and they would tell me the correct thing. I think it's just like when you get into a taxi here in Chicago, you sit in the taxi and you tell the taxi driver where you want to go. And then you immediately say, I know Chicago, I live in Chicago, I'll tell you how to go. And then immediately he knows and recognizes that you know where you're going. Frequently I would get into a car in Germany and I would say I know the city. Well, I didn't know the city at all but I would pretend. You had to put on a showmanship or façade to get what you wanted. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. One time I went into a restaurant and, not recognizing it, I ordered something from the top of the menu thinking it would be the appetizer, from the middle the entre and the end the dessert. And the waiter turned to me and asked if I really wanted three bowls of soup (all chuckle).

(Bruce speaks) But we had a wonderful opportunity, basically from 4:30 on Friday afternoon until 8:30 on Monday morning, where we were free to go anywhere we wanted. And we did put a lot of mileage on our cars over there. And we go to see as much of Germany as we could. Our ultimate travels, we got down as far as Rome and Malfi.

**Was it easy access into the east Berlin – the eastern zone? The tape ended and you were talking about east Berlin and your experience going there. Want to expound a little bit on that?**

(Bruce speaks) I think that the interesting about east Berlin, of course it was in the Russian zone, you had to have all kinds of clearance from the Russian military for U.S. military personnel to go to Berlin. And there was one way of getting into east Berlin, and that was through the Berlin corridor, which a military train was run, and the train of course was run by the American army. And to go there you had to get passage on this train. And Pat and I took one of our leaves to go to Berlin, which we had to go through the corridor, into Berlin proper and, being military personnel, we had free reign to go over into east Germany. It was sort of devastating, because Berlin was a major metropolis, and east Berlin was very crude.

(Pat speaks) We had sleeping quarters on this train. And we had the opportunity of paying for them, and, as I said before, we had enough money that we could purchase sleeping quarters on the train. We were asleep one night, traveling, and when we had gone from the western section of Germany into the eastern section I was not aware of it because we were asleep. All of a sudden someone rapped on the door on the little roomette that we had and said, "Passport control," in a very loud, authoritative kind of voice. (Bruce adds) Mean. (Pat continues) I was frightened and he opened the door. I, of course, was in my nightgown and I wanted to get my robe. He said, "Nein, nein. Passport." So he didn't even give me the opportunity to grab my robe. I began to search in my purse for my passport, and he said, "Schnell, schnell!" -- Do it quicker. So I obtained the passport and showed it to him. He said, "Yah, Americanish." He seemed disgusted that we were Americans and we had this release form to go there. And he banged the door and we were once again able to return to sleep. I would say I was frightened every minute that we passed into the eastern corridor. I guarded my passport and my forms that I needed to show with every bit of life that I had. I kept them on my body. I even pinned them into my clothing because I was afraid I would lose them or someone would grab them from me. Even to this day, believe it or not, I keep my passport with me. I don't know what it is – I sometimes have been schooled to carry my passport with me. I don't know why, I just do. Once you learn to do something ...

**When you went into east Berlin did you wear your uniform?**

(Bruce speaks) I was in civilian clothes in east Berlin. I had to wear a uniform getting on the train and getting off the train – I had to be in uniform. But once we checked into the hotel we got into civilian clothes. And to go over into east Berlin it was just a matter of going through checkpoint Charlie and showing your clearance papers. You could not go into east Berlin in a U.S. Army uniform. You had to go over in civilian clothes.

**Was there a difference between the way the people were in east Berlin compared to Berlin?**

(Bruce speaks) Yes, in fact I would say your story, Pat – remember the little old lady?

(Pat speaks) Oh. Bruce is referring to a little lady – the people sometimes were very frightened of us, sometimes there were very apologetic to us, sometimes they were very against us; they would be very sarcastic and brush us aside. So there were many forms of personalities that were shown. The story that I think is interesting is when we were on the streets one day, shopping – and this is in the eastern corridor of Berlin – and this elderly lady came to me with a shawl around her head. She pulled the sleeve of my coat and said, “Sie Americanish?” And I said, “Yah, *Americanish*.” And she asked “Do you go to church?” speaking in her broken German-English. And I said, “Yes, I go to church.” She asked what I did, and I said I’m a *schullehrer* for *kinder* in Mannheim. And immediately her eyes lit up. And she said, “*Schullehrer Americanish Mannheim? Yah, yah.*” She asked if we were going back to America. I said we were. She said I am old and I have this cross. And with that she brought this cross from her bosom or inner parts of her garments a beautiful cross that had been handcarved. She said I am old and I am dying, and I cannot go to a church. And I want this cross to go back to a church. She said, if you promise to go to an American church and take this cross with you and remember my name, I will give it to you. Well, I was astounded. I didn’t know what to say. I said I was an American, I do go to church, I will be going back to America. She said, take this, remember my name and that you are praying for me. And I agreed to her that I would, after much conversation. And to this day I have this cross. It is a very beautiful cross. It is about 4” long, about 2” wide, and it is sterling silver. (Bruce speaks) It’s hand carved. (Pat continues) I had it appraised by Sotheby’s. They took a look at it and gave me a value of it at being higher than I ever anticipated. I would never sell it. (Bruce speaks) They said it was a unique art piece. (Pat continues) It is something I will keep in my possession as long as I live, and pass on to my child, my daughter. I will never forget the lady.

**In your travels around Europe at that time did you see much devastation from the war? Were there still things like that or was it built up?**

(Bruce speaks) I would say if you went into Berlin, Berlin was very damaged. Most of Mannheim was pretty well damaged. There were areas of Mannheim that were repaired, partial repairs of buildings where people were living. Some of our favorite restaurants were in areas that you could look across and see partially destroyed buildings. I would say most of the major cities you would find a lot of damage. Berlin was very, very damaged.

(Pat speaks) I would say Cologne was the city I saw most damaged.

**Wasn’t that fire-bombed – Cologne?**

(Pat speaks) It was just devastated. People were living in boxes – wooden boxes they had obtained from the Americans. Trucks or parts of airplanes had been sent, and they took the boxes. They made places to live. As a comparison today, when you travel down I75, shall we say, on the way to Northport, Florida and parts of that nature. You’ll pass by FEMA trailers by the hundreds. I see them every time I drive along the road. It

reminds me of the, shall we say, temporary type of housing that I witnessed when we were in Germany living in Mannheim near Cologne and Heidelberg.

**Were most of the people employed – the German people?**

(Bruce speaks) I would say anybody who had skills that were employable were employed. I don't think there was any unemployment to speak of, unless they chose to be unemployed, because the American military employed an awful lot of German people at this point in time. It was, I would say, as much employment as the folks could ask for.

**Was the Berlin wall up at this time?**

The Berlin wall was not up at this time. All that was there was a wire mesh, barbed wire fencing. And you had to go through Checkpoint Charlie to get into east Berlin. Probably sometime after we left, the Berlin wall started to be constructed.

**Did you ever go further than east Berlin, like into Poland?**

No. We went down to Italy and all over France. Every weekend we had free, and as far as we could get in a weekend we went. I would say we saw probably in the Mannheim area, anywhere within 200km in all directions, which included going into France.

**So if you were to travel you would take the train?**

We drove the car and put a lot of miles.

**Sometimes I forget how close the countries are.**

They are very close. At Mannheim we were within probably about an hour and a half ride of France. So we were very close.

(Pat speaks) We put a lot of miles on the Volkswagen. We traveled a lot in the Isetta, but the Volkswagen was a more comfortable car. We have many funny stories we could tell about.

**How many years did you spend over there?**

(Bruce speaks) We spent a little less than two years. I had a two-year enlistment, and my training took maybe six months of that. So maybe about a year and a half we were over there.

**And when you came home, you (Pat) came home also.**

(Pat speaks) Yes. We both came home on the Maurice Rose [military] ship.

**So you quit your teaching job and said you needed to go home with your husband.**

(Bruce speaks) Well, I think the superintendent knew she would be rotating at that time.

(Pat speaks) Yes. At the time Bruce was discharged in May. I had to complete my school year, so Bruce stayed over until my school year was completed in June. And at that time my contract was ended and I let him know I was going to complete my contract, end it at that time and return to the States. When I returned I had many opportunities. I could have gone back into the Chicago Public Schools, which I had left, because I had been a teacher there and had passed the certification to be a Chicago Public School teacher. But at that time I chose to live in a suburb of Chicago. A lot had happened. We had wanted to buy a house in Chicago, so we decided to move to Mattson and I started in the Park Forest Schools, which are very close to Argonne National Laboratory. I was familiar with Argonne, knew the type of parents and students that would be working out of there, and wanted to work with that kind of a student, having been a teacher.

(Bruce speaks) We got to know a lot of people at Argonne, too.

**How long did it take you to come back from Germany?**

(Pat speaks) Seven days on the ship. I think it was funny. I being an officer, I was living with ten other women in the part of the ship that was up on the second part of the ship. Some of them were German girls who had married American soldiers, and some were American women just as myself. But there were ten of them. Two of them were pregnant. So it was humorous, we ten girls, and we would sit at the table – they had tables of ten; seemed like that was the best number they could work with – and we sat at the table and ate our meals. And then we were given two hours a day to be with our spouses. So they would ring a bell on the ship, and at that time you could go down and be in a lounge where your husband would come up. And you (Bruce) were living in the lower area of the ship.

(Bruce speaks) I was living in the steerage class down there. But I had nothing else to do. I was through with the Army, and they had no control over me at that point. So I sort of wandered around the ship, looked out at the water (chuckles), this slow moving ship.

**So it was a long time (chuckles).**

This was rather crude transportation.

(Pat speaks) Well, we girls would sit in our room and talk as girls do. And as soon as the bell would ring and you could go down and see your husband, we'd all dash down into the lounge. Everybody would be kissing their husband. But the two hours that we had. Bruce told me frequently there would be a large bowl of fruit – apples, oranges and bananas – sitting out for the personnel. We did not have that opportunity. So frequently he would bring me an orange or apple. (Bruce speaks) I'd bring her a doggy bag. (chuckles) (Pat speaks) I would ask, what did you bring me today, and he would give



me a piece of fruit. We were given a meal that was a very minor meal. We didn't have the fruit that he did. And so he would bring me the fruit and it was almost funny. I was delighted to receive the fruit.

(Bruce speaks) We took our discharge when we got to our final discharge in New York. Of course I was released by then, so I just showed my papers and we were through. And we provided our own transportation back to Chicago.

(Pat speaks) I think it was funny. Let's go back to the beginning of the two years when I told my father that I was going to go to meet my husband in Europe. He was very disappointed that I wasn't going to stay home with he and my mom. Finally he said, all right, if you're going to go and you've never been to Europe before, I'm going to take you. So, therefore, he purchased a Pullman roomette – my father and myself – you understand that airplanes were not that; many people did not travel on airplanes in those days. And we traveled by train to New York. And he bid me goodbye in New York, and I got on the Liberte ship. Coming home, he in turn said, "Well, you're not coming home into America without my meeting you." So, once again, he met us and we drove at that time back to Chicago.

### **Have you ever been back to Germany?**

(Bruce speaks) Oh, yes. We have been back to Germany, back to the same area that we were in during the military. Unfortunately none of the folks are probably still living, but we were right in the town where we lived.

### **Did it look the same?**

Things don't change much.

### **Was the house still there?**

The house was still there. Heidelberg, well we got to Heidelberg – this was the town, well, our Saturday's were spent in Heidelberg. I thought, where did the streetcars go? The tracks were gone. Right down main street. (Pat speaks) This was just two years ago. (Bruce continues) So I asked around and they said they moved them over about a half a mile. So we found out where the *strassenbahn* was. But it was unique, because I'm going down the street and you could see all the cobblestones, but there are two rows of in-lined cobblestones and that was where the tracks were. So we did get that.

### **So it sounds like you had a wonderful experience in the Army.**

It was a very favorable experience, but it is an experience that you can make or break yourself. It was very educational. We said we were going to get the most out of it that we could. We were going to travel as much as we could. Every opportunity to take leave time we traveled.

(Pat speaks) One of the things I think that was interesting, Bruce had a good friend. Jack was Bruce's good friend. And he had a girlfriend who was a schoolteacher. He wanted to bring her over to Germany. We would talk, and he say his girlfriend was a schoolteacher, but he didn't know how to get her over there. And I explained to him that we had vacancies in the school where I was teaching for a particular position that, if she had the qualifications she could come over and apply to Superintendent Lancaster whom I knew, and I could introduce her and she could get a position. She, in turn, did come over. She did have the qualifications. She was a licensed, certified teacher as I had been. She produced her certification and license. At that time she and Jack were not married. They wanted to get married, and they wanted to live as we were living – she being then a warrant officer as I was, and her husband then being the same position as my husband, a specialist 3. So I, in turn, said what you needed to do was to get married. And that way you would find more freedom, because you and your husband can be American citizens, you being an officer and he being a specialist 3. Well, I think it was interesting that she didn't know where to get married and how to go about arranging a reception and the church and so forth. And I, having lived in Germany about a year, was becoming, I thought, pretty proficient. I didn't do badly. (Bruce speaks) You had a lot of moxie. (Pat continues) So I arranged for her to be married in the American civilian church by an American chaplain. We also arranged for her to be married by a German minister within a German church. This was necessary because you needed the two types of certification. (Bruce speaks) In Germany they would not recognize an American military marriage. So you had to get a civil marriage. (Pat continues) When it came time to have a reception she did not know where to have a reception. I said, "Let's do it up right. I'm going to see if we can get the castle – the Heidelberg Castle – to be a place that you can be married in with the American chaplain coming there, and in turn let's see if we can rent part of the German castle for a reception." She said, "Oh, Pat, we can't do that!" I said, "Let's give it a try. Why not?" (Bruce speaks) With Pat working on it, it was going to happen! (Pat continues) I'm the kind of person that I don't say "no." If I think it's a good idea I'm going to give it a try. So we did. And we had the whole castle. We rented the chapel first of all, for the ceremony. And we brought the American minister there. And he put on the ceremony for many of the civilian and Army personnel that would come. And then we had the reception right in the castle. And we rented the castle. I went into a German flower shop and told them I was going to make the wedding bouquets, because, of course, I am a florist. And I said I wanted to make an American bouquet for my friend. And he said what do you want to do. I said let me use your flower shop for just 30 minutes, and I'm going to make an American bouquet that looks like an American bouquet. Because he was going to offer me something that looked like a funeral arrangement. And I wanted her to have a sweetheart bouquet with a little bit of doily around the edges. And so, being not only a schoolteacher, but crafty and also a florist, I put together the bouquets for she and the bridesmaids with the little doilies around the back and cardboard to hold them. I procured daisies and lavender – purple lavender – is what she wanted. She didn't want the heavy roses that were often used for the German weddings. She wanted something simpler. It just so happened that she got married on the night that they had fireworks at the castle. (Bruce speaks) Yes. They had an illumination of the castle. (Pat continues) I did not plan it this way. (Bruce speaks) We didn't know this, but a couple of times a year they shoot off fireworks. This was the

siege of the castle reenacted. (Pat continues) So it just so-happened that the time that we were toasting all the fireworks went off. We arranged for dancing. I got the band from the *schutzenhaus* for the wedding. And we got wine from the commissary that would be cheaper – American wine. We had as many Germans and Americans as we could afford to have. And when we were all dancing, all of the castle was illuminated with these beautiful fireworks. And I said, we hired these for your wedding. She thought for a few seconds that we did, but we finally set her straight. But she was amazed that we accomplished as much as we did with her budget.

**Well, Pat and Bruce, thank you very much for your time. It was a pleasure meeting you and talking with you.**

(Bruce speaks) Hopefully this gives another side to life in the Army.