



By Robert Patton

Our first glimpse of each other as a group occurred in Paris. Several arrived earlier for a tour of Normandy and then others arrived about the same time on their own arrangements. Here we were not only strangers in a foreign country but also strangers to each other. As time progressed our group grew to 28 people and by the time we departed in Vienna we had become one large family. Within a few days after returning home we began to miss each other.

Our group consisted of 4 65th veterans, Ray Callanan, Maynard Hanson, Lynn LaBarre, and myself. There were 2 sons, 5 daughters, and 5 grandchildren of 65th Inf. Div. people in our group. We were pleased to welcome Briget Dooley, daughter of Eugene J. Dooley, Hq. Co. I& R. Platoon, 260th Inf. and her 2 sons, Nicholas and Alexander. They traveled by car from their home in Italy to be with us for a major part of our tour. The largest family within our group family was that of Maynard Hanson. He was joined by his wife Ruth, son Jim & his wife Jackie, their two daughters, Jennifer and Jessica, and 2 sisters, Helen Martin, and Ethel Borchard.

Our adventures began on our first stop at Lorraine Cemetery. Robert Duijkers from the Netherlands had driven there that day with 3 of his friends to meet us. Robert adopted the gravesite of Sgt. Austin Opp, Co. G, 259th Inf., at the Margraten Cemetery in the Netherlands. Before we could recover from their gift of a beautiful cake decorated with the 65th blue Halbert, we discovered that Pfc. Frederick C. Murphy, Co. K, 259th Inf., was buried there who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. An official list was obtained of all the 65th Infantry people buried at the Lorraine Cemetery.

In Saarlautern we were blessed by having with us a local Historian, Stefan Reuter, who knew the location of the still existing fortifications of the Siegfried Line in the area. We were surprised to find present also an honorary member of the 65th Inf. Div. Assoc (1986), Victor Rau. Joining us for the day was also Bill Bullard and his wife. Bill lives in the area and is the son of Ezra E. Bullard, Co. F, 259th Inf. Very shortly we had the area Newspaper, TV, and Radio media following us on our tours of the bunkers.

After a stop at one of the wine cellars to taste the wine, we crossed the Rhine River at about the same location as we did on a pontoon bridge in Mainz 60 years ago. The following day we were able to reach Eisenach where we had the opportunity of seeing the Bach and Martin Luther Houses. The next day we attracted the news media again. Joining us for our visits to the villages in the Struth area was Eduard Fritze, author of several books on this time period in the area. The US Army Public Affairs in Germany also sent Anne Adams to be with us throughout this time. Our visit to this area at this time was very much desired by the local people in the area.

One big impression was surfacing in the short time we had been traveling in Germany. It was evident that the German people wished to show us their gratitude for the freedom they were now experiencing. Politics did not surface for discussion. They were anxious to exemplify to us this appreciation of freedom that we had provided to them 60 years ago. They could not do enough for us. Beautiful hard back coffee table type books on the area were being given to us as gifts. This trend continued at each stop all the way to Vienna, Austria where we were officially received by the Mayor in their magnificent City Hall.

In Mihla, a small village near Struth, we visited the recent memorial erected in memory of 5 of people who were KIA there on April 3, 1945. Our records show that these people were KIA in Nazza, a village nearby. There are people still living in Mihla who are witnesses to this event in Mihla. Much to our surprise we were given a GI spoon by one of the people there whose Grandmother lived in the nearby village of Hallungen. She had given it to him before she passed away. He wished to return the spoon to one of our people who left it there in his Grandmother's home. According to our records this could have been someone in the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Bn. Of the 259th Inf..

Our excitement over these receptions and ceremonies in beautiful historical reconstructed buildings continued each day. The number of people involved at each location increased and the welcome became more evident and formal. The City facility was even more magnificent than the past day. By the time we reached Regensburg and had a banquet dinner in the huge dining hall of The Park Hotel Maximilian, we were having feelings that if we had to leave for home the next day our trip had already exceeded our imagination.

There were many highlights of our tour. Too many to describe here. One lasting and significant to several of us was finding the location we paddled across the Danube River south of Regensburg. We were able to see the huge open field where several of our 65th Division people were KIA or wounded. In the early misty morning it seemed only a short time ago that we were struggling to reach the other side under great opposition. It was so very quiet, no noise of any kind. The river flowed peacefully and innocent of any past disturbance of exploding artillery shells, machine gun fire, and the assembly of many people.

Anna Rosmus, an honorary member of the 65th Div. Assoc., worked long hours for days and weeks making arrangements for our presence in Regensburg, Scharding, Passau, Linz, and Vienna. The results obtained by The Nasty Girl, as they know her in Germany, were most impressive. We had an official ceremony on the banks of the Inn River with the floating of a wreath in memory of our four 65th Division people that had drowned there in the dark. Their bodies have never been found.

We attended the first Sabbath Ceremony ever held in the history of Passau, the childhood home town of Adolph Hitler. An elaborate banquet followed in the great hall of the Passau City Hall followed by a program afterwards.

We were also very fortunate to have Lewis Kest traveling with us as a part of our group. He had been an inmate at the Mauthausen and Gunskirchen Concentration Camps. We were honored guests at the ceremony in Mauthausen on May 8 where there were over 20,000 people in attendance, including the President of Austria. The crowd and number of buses involved was almost overwhelming. The attention to our accommodations and welfare at the event was provided by the US Consulate Office in Vienna. In such a huge crowd of people, this was much appreciated.

Our appreciation is extended to Garlin Travel in Glenside, PA who made all of the tour arrangements. They made every effort to be sure we were able to accomplish our goals and objectives. Their flexibility to customize this one of a kind tour, that will in all probability never be duplicated again, was a major accomplishment that will always be appreciated by the participants.

The beautiful city of Vienna was a good place to end our tour. The reception by the Mayor at the City Hall could only be topped by the happy occasion of being treated to wine, dinner, and music in Grinzing at our last meal together as a family. Everyone returned home safely with great memories of all the events we had attended and the lasting friendships we had established with each other.