# MILITARY FAMILIES IN GERMANY, 1946-1986:

## WHY THEY CAME AND WHY THEY STAY

by

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Almost immediately after the cessation of European hostilities in World War II, leaders of the US occupation force began to discuss the possibility of bringing the families of military personnel to live in occupied Germany. It would be a considerable undertaking of questionable wisdom, met by serious objections.[1]

Europe was on the brink of economic collapse, and Germany's physical devastation was so severe that many observers doubted it could ever be rebuilt. Mass starvation and epidemics were real possibilities. With extreme shortages of consumer goods and fuel, the problems of feeding and housing the civilian population seemed overwhelming.[2]

Bringing American wives and children to live under such severe conditions would hardly appear to be sensible or even feasible. It would necessarily involve providing for all their needs with regard to housing, medical care, schools, transportation, and recreational facilities—not to mention insuring their physical safety.[3]

Yet, in spite of all the factors militating against the idea, the reasons to implement such a plan proved even more compelling. The Army's official history, the *Occupation Forces in Europe Series 1945-46*, offers five different motives, but with little explanation or elaboration. The primary consideration was the improvement of troop morale. Indeed, this issue constituted one of the major headaches of occupation commanders, though it included vastly more than the commonly construed concern of simply keeping the soldiers happy.[4]

After the inherent discipline imposed by the rigors of war, the occupation soldier faced a new and entirely different situation. Fighting he understood—zeal for survival had consumed him. Occupation was something else again. Now he was part of a conquering force dealing face-to-face with yesterday's hated enemy. From this new vantage point, Germans seemed pitiful and abject, hardly suitable objects for hatred. The American soldier was more bored and restless than vengeful. The tasks of occupation did not fill his time. He had enlisted for "the duration plus six months," and he wanted nothing quite so much as to go home.

As the saying goes, the devil finds work for idle hands. Soldier misbehavior during the early postwar months is amply documented. Personal standards of behavior generally deteriorated. In this cultural and moral morass the ethical code of the soldier's hometown seemed irrelevant. The black market flourished. Crime, AWOL, and VD rates rose dramatically.[5]

In their efforts to deal with these problems, military leaders tried various strategies, including the formation of a special police force called the Constabulary, which was tasked to maintain law and order.

Another approach was to try to keep the troops occupied and to make their lives as pleasant and comfortable as possible. Every effort was made to ensure that they were well fed, well housed, and provided with a vast array of entertainment and recreational opportunities. Vacation centers were opened in the Alps and on the Riviera, and free train transportation to them was provided. Consumer goods that had been unavailable during wartime were copiously supplied at ridiculously low prices. "You never had it so good" became the occupation soldier's motto. But these were only interim measures.[6]

To "normalize" the situation, in what was expected to be a long occupation, the decision was made to form military communities with units of approximately regimental size as the nucleus. American life would be reproduced to the fullest extent possible. If the soldiers could not go home to main street, then main street, with all its stabilizing influences, would come to the soldiers. And what could be more stabilizing than the presence of wives and children?[7]

Writers about the occupation generally agree on the positive effects of this course of action. Oliver J. Frederiksen, in particular, attributed great significance to the arrival of family members. In *The American Military Occupation of Germany*, he wrote: "Within a short time after the end of the first year, a satisfactory level of discipline had been attained. The high post-war crime rate was reduced with the return of a more normal atmosphere, and especially with the arrival of dependents in the command."[8] Arguably, of course, the timing of these two events could be merely coincidental, and certainly one cannot say which corrective policies produced which specific results. However, in separate works on the subject, both General Lucius Clay and Major General Franklin M. Davis also praised the beneficial effects of the family presence in stabilizing the occupation environment.[9]

Regardless of the ultimate contribution those families made in promoting troop morale and good order, this was certainly not the only reason their coming was considered desirable and worth the effort necessary to bring it about. As noted above, the *Occupation Series* lists other motivations. A second factor was financial. The families involved would no longer have the burdensome expense of maintaining separate households.[10] Perhaps in this regard Army leaders were responding to pressure from military wives, a group of whom had organized a "Bring Back My Daddy Club" with 300 members in Toledo, Ohio. One of their complaints was that "the cost of living is way above the average $100 a month allotment checks [family] members receive . . . . It's impossible to live on that sum."[11]

Yet another motivation was more international and political in its aims. Denazification of all areas of German life was one of the more pressing tasks of the military government. By bringing American families to live in Germany, the occupation force hoped to give the Germans an opportunity to observe, and presumably be edified by, "the example of democratic American home life."[12] The extent to which this objective was achieved is debatable, and probably unprovable. The formation of self-contained military compounds precluded much close contact. But this may not have been as much of a barrier as the psychological one separating conqueror and conquered, which only time could wear down. With some exceptions, what Germans saw of American wives and children was from quite a distance, and thus would have been largely limited to

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observations about clothing, health, and general appearance. One can only wonder about the feelings of German women when confronted with the sight of stylishly clad American wives clutching the hands of their healthy, robust children.

Returning to the theme of troop morale and conduct, the official history goes on: "Problems contingent upon the extensive fraternization of troops with natives of the occupied area could be alleviated to a noticeable degree by resumption of normal family ties."[13] Fraternization was indeed a vexing problem. According to Harold Zink, former chief historian of the US High Commissioner for Germany, the problem involved widespread sexual promiscuity with German females by American soldiers from generals to privates. The incidence of venereal disease rose from 79.4 cases per thousand men to 251 cases per thousand—or one out of four—by the end of 1945.[14] An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 illegitimate children were born, prompting the Germans to say, "In the next war, just send the uniforms, you left the Army here."[15] The official policy of non-fraternization had proven utterly unenforceable, and while the Germans generally accepted the soldiers' behavior as inevitable, its occurrence in the higher ranks caused a loss of respect which had "a serious effect on the operations of military government."[16] Charges of rape were infrequent, but the behavior of US soldiers toward German women became so offensive that when American wives finally did arrive, they had to be issued armbands with American flags to identify them and thus protect them from the crude advances of the troops.[17]

The final motivation cited in the official history was probably in reality the most compelling. By promising to bring wives and families to Europe, the Army hoped to satisfy and retain "the number of specially trained men who were straining for redeployment, and were leaving the theater, mainly because of the desire to be reunited with their families."[18]

Demobilization became an emotionally charged postwar issue. As soon as the last shots were fired, pressure to bring the boys home began and steadily mounted in intensity. Military public relations efforts weren't convincing on the need for a long-term occupation force to implement the political objectives of the war. As already noted, the duration plus six months was the expectation, and war-weary Americans cared little about "waging the peace." Wives and mothers wanted husbands and sons home. And although demobilization did begin soon after hostilities ended, its pace was too slow to satisfy public demand. Congressmen were deluged with mail—to the extent of 40,000 letters per week—so the issue soon became a political one.[19]

As a consequence of these pressures, the pace of demobilization was accelerated dramatically. By December 1945, 2.5 million soldiers, or 81.4 percent of the V-E Day strength, had left the European Theater. This precipitate withdrawal had a devastating effect on the operational capability of the force.[20] By 2 December 1945, a headline in the *Stars and Stripes* announced: "American Military Government Collapsing From Deployment Drain." The article stated, "Military government in the American sector of Germany and Berlin faces complete collapse in the immediate future because of the redeployment drain which has left most detachments stripped of experienced personnel."[21]

Demobilization was based on a point system, sending individuals home rather than units, so that unit capability was reduced across the board. Replacement personnel were insufficient in number and were mostly recent recruits with little training. The new US Constabulary Force, commanded by Brigadier General Ernest N. Harmon, was hampered in its efforts to get organized by a turnover rate of over 50 percent.[22] "As late as January 1946, all units reported that because of continued personnel losses, their missions were being performed poorly or incompletely." Under these circumstances, it is

doubtful that the Army could have carried out any but the most limited military operations.[23]

On 5 January 1946, General McNarney, Commander-in-Chief, US Forces European Theater (USFET), announced an end to the point system and a slowdown in the rate of demobilization. There followed another great outcry, this time from the soldiers themselves. On 6 January, 2000 soldiers marched on "Camp Boston," near Reims, France, with a protest letter to General McNarney. Three days later, 4000 soldiers gathered in Frankfurt outside USFET Headquarters to protest the involuntary extension.[24]

Testifying before Congress on 16 January, General Eisenhower, then Chief of Staff, explained that demobilization had to be slowed down to prevent a collapse of the Army. "Had reductions continued at the going rate," he said, "there would have been no Army left after July."[25] Explanations notwithstanding, on 23 January Ike was waylaid in the US Capitol corridors by a group of irate service wives demanding the release of their husbands. He tried to placate them, but basically he reiterated the Army's position. Speaking in Salt Lake City two weeks later, Ike again addressed the demobilization issue, mentioning as an alternative the plan, already well underway, to move wives overseas to join their husbands, giving priority to those who had been separated longest.[26]

What Ike knew but could not say was that from a strategic standpoint the entire situation was disastrous, with overtones that went far beyond irate wives and disgruntled soldiers.

In the months immediately following the war, the balance of world power was shifting radically and rapidly. Formerly dominant European powers lay exhausted and beaten, and Russia and the United States moved to fill the vacuum. The relationship between the two wartime allies was deteriorating rapidly, and the situation required a thorough and immediate shifting of gears in US foreign policy and military strategy. Unfortunately, US policy and strategy were moving in opposite directions, and State Department efforts to get tough with the Russians were being hampered by military instability. Of the 250,000 US troops remaining in Europe,[27] the vast majority were involved in occupation tasks. The only tactical unit charged with the military defense of the theater was the 1st Infantry Division with 18,000 men. Given the prevailing mood of the American public, to reverse demobilization would have required a political tour de force that would have taxed the talents of even the most astute politician. Truman would have had to denounce the Russians to a nation that still largely regarded them as an ally. This could only have exacerbated the situation, either damaging Truman's credibility, escalating the conflict, or both.[28]

Given these political realities, added to all the other motivating factors previously cited, one can readily understand that the military would be willing to provide soldiers with generous incentives to remain in Europe and in the Army. It would be absurd to contend that bringing dependents to Germany was *the* solution to any or all of the occupation problems listed above. It is important to establish, however, that the decision to do so was based upon studied military, political, and strategic considerations, not on mere whim, and that the family presence basically altered the nature of the occupation in a positive way.

Exactly who made the decision to start planning for family travel to Europe is not known, nor is the exact date of that decision. An announcement that the Army was planning family travel to Germany appeared in the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* on 7 November 1945.[29] Probably it was not so much a decision as a matter of yielding to the inevitable. It was obvious, as General Clay (soon to be USFET Commander) observed, "that military government would not obtain quality personnel willing to spend several years in Germany if it meant separation from their families."[30] Certainly the decision had been made long before the redeployment issue reached the state of soldier demonstrations. As early as 6

August 1945, the official history reports, the War Department was "prodded into action by an onslaught of anxious letters from wives of service men." The temper of the times was such that the War Department was simply compelled to respond to public pressure from military families. A Special Occupational Planning Board was formed and began the long-range planning for dependent travel and for the formation of the military communities.[31] On 27 November, just days after he succeeded General Eisenhower as CINCUSFET, General McNarney proclaimed that he would "support to the limit" plans to bring families overseas to join soldiers in the Army of Occupation.[32] This was slightly more than a month before his announcement that troops in Europe were involuntarily extended. The day before McNarney's statement, *Stars and Stripes* articles told of plans to build 102 American communities throughout the American zone which would "offer complete resources for family life . . . not only housing . . . but also necessary hospitals, commissaries, schools, and recreational establishments."[33]

The Special Occupational Planning Board soon faced a serious complication, however. Although the presence of military families in Germany would clearly be in the nation's best interest, the War Department refused to allocate funds for the construction of family housing or the establishment of dependent schools. The nation was in a postwar cost-cutting mood, and the military budget for fiscal year 1946 had been slashed. Repeated urgent requests for construction funds were denied. Only existing structures could be used, though renovation and repair were authorized. Some German military housing was available, but lack of funds would require the commandeering of German residences, of which some 81 percent had been destroyed or damaged during the war. In Stuttgart, a group of Germans staged a peaceful protest over the confiscation of their homes, but, of course, to no avail. Ultimately, housing arrangements varied a great deal from one community to the next, spanning the gamut from confiscated mansions to redesignated and refurbished troop barracks. Schools had to be financed with revenue derived from liquor sales, supplemented by a tuition fee.[34]

Regardless of the lack of financial support, the Planning Board was prepared to process as many as 10,000 dependents per month, and it set a target date of 1 April 1946 for the first arrivals. In late February, sponsors were asked to submit applications for family travel as soon as possible. The response was disappointing. For whatever reasons, only 610 applications were received by late March.[35] One sergeant wrote in *Stars and Stripes*, "If USFET wonders why more officers and EM have not requested travel and quarters for dependents," they should just watch the actions of GIs on the street "who acted like supercharged wolves in OD."[36] This may have been part of the reason for the poor response. Certainly the severity of living conditions also would have been a deterrent, as well as the psychological barrier against living in a country that had been enemy territory less than a year before. In addition, bringing one's family over incurred an obligation to remain in Europe for a longer time, a commitment that some were surely not willing to make.

As the time neared for the arrival of the first families, there was a flurry of excitement and anticipation as quarters were prepared and Post Exchanges scurried to find diapers and stockings and other previously unneeded items.[37] As Franklin Davis put it:

> The imminent arrival of the families electrified the Army in Germany like nothing since V-E Day! The installations in Germany organized a tremendous support effort that had a great deal to do with stabilizing the Army in Germany, improving discipline, and bringing to Germany a dimension of America admirably suited to encourging recovery along social, behavioral, and economic lines.[38]

Certainly the military was doing everything in its power to make things pleasant and comfortable for the new arrivals. Yet, as Cynthia Lowery pointed out in a series of *Stars and Stripes* articles, there was little that

could be done to soften the emotional impact of seeing the effects of war for the first time. There was no way to shelter the arriving dependents from the sights of poverty, destruction, and defeat: the gutted buildings, the evergreen wreaths that marked the spots where people lay buried beneath the rubble, or the German children pleading for chewing gum. Nor could they avoid seeing their fellow countrymen involved in flagrant exploitation of the Germans through fraternization or black-market activities. There was a certain frontier aura to the situation. Lowery wrote, "These families are a new generation of American pioneers."[39]

Seldom, however, had pioneers received such a red-carpet welcome. When the USS *Barry* docked at the Columbus Quay in Bremerhaven on 28 April 1946, three brass bands and an assortment of VIPs welcomed the 341 wives and children on board.[40]

Although the initial response had been poor, the pace soon picked up dramatically. Within a few months there were 30,000 American family members in Germany. A Berlin correspondent noted that "shortly after their arrival our life in Germany had become a replica of American suburban life."[41] The US policy was to create American enclaves for its soldiers and officers, and to reproduce, as much as possible, the lifestyle and facilities of a stateside military installation. This was often not possible because of the use of confiscated or requisitioned German properties spread throughout a city. Still, every effort was made to keep the communities as cohesive as possible, and to provide the facilities and services to which military families were accustomed.

Since military communities tended to remain somewhat isolated from the civilian world even in the states, it was only natural for that tendency to continue and perhaps become even more pronounced overseas. For security purposes, family housing compounds were often surrounded with barbed wire—a detail certainly inconsistent with the goal of presenting examples of American family life to the German populace. Harold Zink sharply criticized this "Little America" concept because it had the effect of isolating Americans both physically and psychologically from the German community. The French employed a different policy in their occupation zone, which Zink praised. They billeted their soldiers and their military families in dispersed German homes requisitioned for that purpose. The German family was not evicted, but was moved to the basement and was required to perform domestic duties for the French family. While this may have provided opportunity for closer intercultural contacts, it must have generated bitter resentment just as well. What is more demeaning, after all—to be evicted from one's home, or to be relegated to the status of a servant in it? The French option was mentioned at one of the meetings of the Planning Board, but most likely the idea went against the ingrained American dislike for the idea of billeting troops in private homes.[42]

For better or worse, the "Little America" concept prevailed, and the frowned-upon fraternization of American GIs with German *Fräuleins* remained the most common form of social contact between the two cultures. For the newly arrived American families, a social life with other Americans was the norm, and relationships with Germans could be limited to superficial contacts with the many local nationals employed by the military government as waiters, barbers, hairdressers, secretaries, clerks, etc. Since virtually all goods and services were available on US installations, there was no compelling need to learn German, though courses were offered. Each American family, however, inevitably had at least one ongoing relationship with a German citizen on a fairly close basis. Each set of quarters was assigned a German maid, whose salary was paid by the German government, and who generally lived in "maid's quarters" somewhere on the premises. Such an arrangement must have provided countless opportunities for cultural exchange as well as warm friendships.[43]

Family life for Americans in occupied Germany seems to have been very pleasant, indeed. Donald Goodrich, an Army major stationed in Frankfurt, described "How We Live in Germany" in the October 1946 issue of *Army Information*

*Digest*; in February 1947, *The Saturday Evening Post* described the life of an Army family in Berlin in an article entitled, "An Army Wife Lives Very Soft in Germany." Both depict spacious quarters fully furnished, including china and crystal. In the case of requisitioned housing, the furnishings were apparently requisitioned along with the house. Certain items, such as electric refrigerators, were in short supply, but prices were low, and the Berlin-based family was able to save $300 of its $525 salary. In Frankfurt in 1946 some food items, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, were hard to come by, and fresh milk was an eagerly awaited treat; but just a few months later the Berlin-based housewife could rave about the lavish displays of meats and fresh produce in the commissary. Purchases there were limited to $35 per month per family member, but that was quite adequate.[44]

Many items were rationed: liquor, cigarettes, gasoline, candy, and soap were mentioned by Major Goodrich. That was due less to actual shortages than to attempts by authorities to curtail black-market activities. Black marketeering was a pervasive problem, perhaps an inevitable result of German need and American surplus. It was extensive enough to undermine the Allied effort to control Germany's economic base. The various efforts made to end the problem—currency control books, issuance of military scrip, and the rationing of commissary items—proved largely unsuccessful, and the problem persisted until mid-1948 when German currency reform put the German economy on a sound footing and consumer goods once again began to appear on German store shelves.[45]

Meanwhile, the "cigarette economy" prevailed, and fortunes were made. In September 1945, Berlin troops received an aggregate of $1,000,000 in pay monthly. Yet the Army Post Office in that city processed $3,000,000 in money orders for the same period to be returned to the states. The problem ranged in scope from large-scale theft rings dealing in Army equipment to somewhat regular exchanges of a pound of coffee or a pack of cigarettes, the latter being regarded in an "everybody's doing it" light. The Berlin-based housewife reported without embarrassment that she was able to buy an Oriental rug for cigarettes, which had virtually become a form of currency.[46]

One controversial effort to bring this situation under control was the establishment of legal "Barter Markets," often referred to as "Kid-Glove Looting." These were government-sanctioned and controlled shops, opened in the summer of 1946, to which Americans could take cigarettes, coffee, and other food items and exchange them for Meissen china, paintings, art objects, and other luxury items which Germans, in their need, were willing to exchange for food. Commissary-purchased items could not be exchanged, so merchandise for exchange had to be sent from the states. Each item brought in by either Germans or Americans was assessed a point value, though of course it was the Americans who determined what this value was. At one time a silver coffee service was worth five pounds of coffee. Describing these activities, Martin Sommers of *The Saturday Evening Post* wrote, "I know Army wives who refused to patronize the Barter Centers even for goods they needed. They just didn't like the idea." He knew of others, however, "whose passion for collecting has produced loot that makes their billets look like warehouses."[47] In any event, Zink reported that "General Clay finally saw the inappropriateness of such official outlets," and the barter markets were closed in May 1948.[48]

Recreational opportunities for military families in occupied Germany abounded. Tour services already existed to serve the soldiers, and these were made available to family members as well. Hotels and recreational facilities at key German tourist locations were also commandeered for use by the occupation forces and their families. Elegant *Schloss Kronberg* outside Frankfurt was converted to an officers' club, and other recreational outlets included golf, hunting and fishing, movies, German concerts, and traveling USO-type shows. Not surprisingly, life in the occupied territories gained a reputation for a certain opulence.[49]

In contrast, if there was one area where the "You never had it so good" motto did not apply, it was in the early dependent schools. Since the reeducation of German youth according to democratic principles had such a high priority in the denazification programs, German school buildings and supplies could not be requisitioned for use by American students. A couple of the early teachers, recruited from universities in the states, described primitive conditions and meager supplies when interviewed some years later. Gay Long was an early art instructor who recalled going to an old airplane dump near Frankfurt to scrounge for art supplies. "There," she said, "we would cut off bits of leather, wood, and metal for use in our craft class." She also remembered commuting in open jeeps and sleeping in cold rooms. Rex Gleason taught high school mathematics in the bedroom of a German house, with no textbooks and only a four-foot-square painted blackboard. He "had the kids bring wrapping paper to school, on which they could take notes and do their assignments." Initially, there were only five high schools; some students, because of the distances involved, were required to board. Gleason was also the supervisor of an austere dormitory furnished with Army cots, wooden boxes for tables, and one bathtub for 26 students. One of the school buses used to transport the commuting students "had been used to haul concentration camp victims during the war . . . . It had no windows. You entered from a door in the back and sat in the darkness until you reached the school."[50] Inevitably conditions did improve; government funding was made available in fiscal year 1948, and soon the tuition fee was dropped.[51]

From the outset, American families were allowed to transport their private automobiles to Germany, and surplus government vehicles were also available for purchase. Travel within the US zone was unrestricted and the gasoline ration was generous. Within the zone, US military personnel and their families could also ride free on German trains. Travel to other parts of Europe, and even to the other zones of Germany, was somewhat complicated, however, by requirements for orders, passes, and such.[52]

Travel into the countryside would inevitably bring the Americans into closer contact with the unpleasant realities that surrounded them. In an oral history interview conducted years later, Major General Nelson Lynde told of one such trip:

> I recall All Saint's Day in 1946, Mrs. Lynde and I were driving to Paris, and we passed through a little German town up on the Cologne plains. I can't remember the name of it, but it had been heavily shelled. Everything was just rubble. The bulldozers had come in and pushed the rubble back to open the streets. Then there were the dead. The smell from the bodies of hundreds of dead people is something that you can never forget. These bodies had been buried in the rubble. The Germans would come and put candles where their houses had been. It was really a gruesome thing.[53]

The sensitivity of American family members to the plight of the German people varied greatly. Active patronage of the barter markets indicates that some had no qualms about profiting from the misfortune of others. On the other hand, *Stars and Stripes* reporter Reyburn Pollock noted that "soon after the first boatload of dependents walked down the gang plank into occupied Germany, it became apparent that American families could not live among a people in dire need without wanting to help."[54] And dire need there was. Preventing starvation among the local population was one of the toughest challenges of the occupation force, and at one point early in 1947 the German daily food ration had to be limited to 1040 calories per day. Coal and electricity were also strictly rationed, and there were serious shortages of clothing, shoes, domestic equipment, and medical supplies as well.

To their credit, American women throughout Germany became deeply involved in the relief effort, employing various fund-raising techniques and managing large-scale charitable projects. One of the most successful methods was to contact friends,

church groups, or civic organizations in the states and solicit their help in adopting an orphanage, a hospital, or perhaps a whole town. Conferences were held where ideas and lessons learned about various projects could be shared and efforts could be coordinated. The women learned ways to ensure that charitable donations did not find their way into the black market, and they often visited German homes to deliver whatever items were needed. Christmas season issues of the *Stars and Stripes* abounded with articles about parties given for German orphans, hospital patients, and the like. Later in the occupation, Mrs. Bernice Barner was instrumental in finding sponsors for well over a hundred displaced persons, thus enabling them to emigrate to the United States.[55] General Clay wrote that "not enough has been said about the part played by our American women and children in Germany, and too much of what was said was devoted to the few who lived lavishly in the midst of poverty."[56]

This would tend to negate the contention that the presence of family members had little if any impact on the German population. Depending on the circumstances, one German might remember being propositioned by a GI on the street or seeing a well-dressed American woman carrying an armload of bargains home from the barter centers, but another might remember from his childhood that an American soldier's wife gave him the first pair of shoes he'd ever owned.

In any event, the pleasant routine of American life in occupied Germany was soon to be irrevocably altered by deteriorating relations with the Russians. In the early months of 1948, the tensions that eventually culminated in the Berlin blockade were beginning to mount, and the Department of the Army seriously considered putting an end to dependent travel to Europe and gradually withdrawing families not only from Berlin but from the entire US zone. General Clay adamantly opposed the idea. His position was that while such a course of action might be advisable from a purely military point of view, its political repercussions could only damage American credibility with the European population and thus play right into the hands of the Russians. He conceived of the struggle as primarily a political one, and he felt strongly that the time had come to forswear any policies or actions that might even hint at acquiescence to Russian aggressiveness. "We have lost Czechoslovakia," he said, "Norway is threatened. We retreat from Berlin. When Berlin falls, western Germany will be next. If we mean . . . to hold Europe against Communism, we must not budge."[57] Apparently Clay read the situation correctly. When the Americans failed to be intimidated, the Russian-controlled newspapers in Berlin began to print a barrage of articles designed to convince the Germans that the Western powers were, in fact, leaving. They claimed that the evacuation had already begun, that trucks had been seen loading government equipment and household goods for the trek west, and that US insistence that the Western powers were there to stay was only a smoke screen.[58]

While General Clay remained firmly opposed to evacuating families, he made it clear that military families who felt uncomfortable about the situation were free to leave, at government expense, and he favored the gradual replacement of families with bachelor officers and NCOs. He did stipulate, however, that if a serviceman wanted to remove his family from the city, he would have to accept a transfer and go with them.[59] Clay himself lived in Berlin, and he and his wife remained there, except for official travel visits, throughout the blockade.

By 24 April, Clay reported that out of 2500 dependents, 72 had asked to leave the city, and he stressed that anyone who felt "isolated or nervous" ought to go home.[60] Apparently his assessment that "our people are calm and continuing their everyday life normally" was accurate.[61] *Stars and Stripes* reported repeatedly, well after the blockade was underway, that American families were living comfortably and felt they had little to fear.[62] If Clay's position appears to be somewhat calloused, it must be said in his defense that he was operating on the lofty

principle that service to one's country is a responsibility incumbent upon all citizens, not limited to those who wear a uniform. There is little to indicate that those families felt otherwise.

At any rate, Clay's position prevailed. About 1000 family members remained in the surrounded city throughout the blockade. In contrast, less than a month after the blockade began, the 5600 displaced persons residing in the city were evacuated to conserve food. Those who remained endured shortages of supplies, curtailed transportation, and limited hours of electricity. The use of private automobiles was virtually eliminated by a gasoline ration of only five gallons per month. Street lighting was reduced by 75 percent. There was danger of a typhoid epidemic caused by a lack of fuel for processing sewage. At no time, however, did Americans suffer the same privation as the German populace.[63]

Even though the Americans in Berlin may not have experienced great physical need, surely the emotional and psychological aspects of their situation were trying. Brigadier General Frank Howley served as Commandant of the Berlin Sector during the blockade, and his wife Edith and their four small children remained there with him. Several times "the Russians reported that Edith had become panic stricken and was leaving." The Howleys were subjected to continual harassment by the Russians, and General Howley dedicated his memoir *Berlin Command* to his wife and children, "who took the daily insults, threats, and privation of the Communists . . . and to all the wives who stood by their men." Howley vividly described the propaganda "war of nerves" directed by the Russians against the Berliners and the American inhabitants of the city. Russian troops maneuvered within sight of the population. Soviet radio broadcasts told of riots in the city, predicted a lack of infant formula and imminent water shortages, and more ominously foretold that "when the Russians took over Berlin, American families would be held in concentration camps 'for further disposition.' "[64]

General Clay's somewhat different recounting of life in occupied Berlin consistently emphasized the positive, for example, the visit of the Bob Hope troupe to entertain at Christmastime. In summing up, Clay said, "I do not believe that our families were ever as content as during the blockade when they felt themselves part of the effort of the Western democracies."[65]

The blockade established a dramatic precedent for the strategic use of military dependents as instruments of US foreign policy. It is a legacy which has endured. In the ensuing years, fraternization, demobilization, and all the initial reasons for bringing family members to Germany have been all but forgotten. But from that day to this, not only in Berlin but throughout West Germany, Army families have continued to be regarded as part of that "effort of the Western democracies." As the Cold War became a grimly acknowledged reality, the mission of US forces in Germany changed from military government and occupation to the defense of Western Europe against possible Soviet attack. In the emergent NATO alliance, the retention of military families in Europe took on increased political significance. Their presence came to be seen as a "day-to-day manifestation of the determination of the U.S. to stand fast with our NATO allies."[66] Essentially, the role played by the few families in blockaded Berlin was extended to military families throughout the command. They demonstrated a solidarity with the local population against a common foe, and a determination not to be intimidated.

When tensions mounted in the later Berlin Crisis of 1960-61, evacuation of all American noncombatants in Germany was once again considered. Their personal safety was a prime consideration, of course, but the contemplated evacuation was also intended as a clear sign to the Russians that the United States meant business and was prepared to fight if necessary. Evacuation has retained that implication, and it is now an acknowledged step in the escalation process.

Today, the presence of military families in Germany continues to speak volumes to US allies and potential foes alike. If anyone doubts this, let him consider how difficult it would be to remove those families without

convincing NATO that we are deserting it, or the Soviets that we are preparing for war.

**NOTES**

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2. Walter Laqueur, *Europe Since Hitler*, revised ed., (New York: Penguin, 1982), pp. 14-19, 24-25.
3. Clay, p. 70; *Shipment of Dependents*, pp. 4-5.
4. *Shipment of Dependents*, pp. 1-2.
5. Franklin M. Davis, Jr., *Come as a Conqueror: The United States Army's Occupation of Germany 1945-49* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), ch. 6, pp. 93-103, and 112-29; Oliver J. Frederiksen, Historical Division, Headquarters, United States Army Europe, *The American Military Occupation of Germany: 1945-53* (Darmstadt, West Germany: The Stars and Stripes, 1953), p. 99.
6. Davis, pp. 138-39, 166-67; Frederiksen, p. 102.
7. Davis, pp. 188-90; Frederiksen, p. 121.
8. Frederiksen, p. 111.
9. Clay, p. 70; Davis, pp. 189, 191.
10. *Shipment of Dependents*, p. 2.
11. *Stars and Stripes*, 12 November 1945.
12. *Shipment of Dependents*, p. 2.
13. Ibid.
14. Davis, p. 171; Frederiksen, p. 109; Harold K. Zink, *The United States in Germany, 1944-55* (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1957), pp. 134, 137.
15. Davis, p. 117.
16. Zink, p. 138.
17. Carroll Binder, *Minneapolis Tribune*, rpt. in *Reader's Digest*, 49 (July 1946), 51.
18. *Shipment of Dependents*, p. 2.
19. Davis, pp. 126-28; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Interim Years: World War II to January 1950," in *American Foreign Defense Policy in Perspective*, ed. Raymond G. O'Connor (New York: John Wiley, 1965), pp. 298-300.
20. Frederiksen, pp. 46, 47.
21. *Stars and Stripes*, 2 December 1945.
22. Huntington, p. 298-300; Frederiksen, p. 50; Ernest N. Harmon, "After Action Report as Commander of the U.S. Constabulary," Box 3, Ernest Harmon Papers, Archives, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.
23. Frederiksen, p. 50.
24. *Stars and Stripes*, 6, 7, and 10 January 1946.
25. *Stars and Stripes*, 17 January 1946.
26. *Stars and Stripes*, 24 January, 20 February 1946.
27. This figure was changing constantly. It eventually bottomed out at 135,000 by 1 July 1947.
28. Huntington, pp. 298-300; Laqueur, p. 19; Frederiksen, p. 50; *Stars and Stripes*, 21 March 1948.
29. *New York Herald Tribune* (Paris edition), 7 November 1945.
30. Clay, p. 71.
31. *Shipment of Dependents*, p. 3.
32. *Stars and Stripes*, 28 November 1945.
33. *Stars and Stripes*, 27 November 1945.
34. *Shipment of Dependents*, pp. 20-22, 57-58, 70-71; Laqueur, p. 16; Davis, p. 192.
35. *Stars and Stripes*, 24 February, 5 and 10 March 1946.
36. *Stars and Stripes*, 3 April 1946; Davis, p. 192.
37. *Stars and Stripes*, 14 and 24 April 1946; Davis, pp. 191-92.
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39. *Shipment of Dependents*, p. 88; *Stars and Stripes*, 14 and 18 April 1946.
40. *Stars and Stripes*, 24 and 28 April 1946; Davis, p. 193.
41. Clay, p. 71.
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56. Clay, p. 72.
57. Ibid., pp. 358, 360.
58. Clay, p. 358; *Stars and Stripes*, 20 April 1948.
59. *Stars and Stripes*, 25 April 1948; Jean Edward Smith, ed., *The Papers of Lucius D. Clay* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974), II, 640; Clay, p. 360.
60. *Stars and Stripes*, 25 April 1948.
61. Smith, II, 614.
62. *Stars and Stripes*, 1 and 4 April, 18 August 1948.
63. Clay, p. 386; *Stars and Stripes*, 22 July, 9 July, 4 August, 11 July, 18 July 1948.
64. Frank Howley, *Berlin Command* (New York: G.B. Putnam's, 1950), Foreword, pp. 3, 198-99, 202-03, and 221.
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