

298th Army Band

A Book in Progress

By Allen Lawless



I served for almost nine continuous years in the 298th Army Band, located in West Berlin, Germany, from January 1983 to September 1991. This was a significant period of time – not quite half of my total military career of 20 years. Little wonder, then, that the city of Berlin and duty with the 298th has stayed with me over the years and is an experience I will never forget. The most mean-

ingful period of my service there, in terms of historical contributions, involved the Fall of the Berlin Wall and Reunification of East and West Germany. I was privileged to be there during all of that.

Berlin has a special flavor all its own. The people are big-city and behave accordingly. Most are brash and cheeky; they don't take any garbage from anybody. But once befriended, there is no closer, better friend than a Berliner.

I was one of those Americans who took it upon himself to get to know the German people, their language, and their customs. I was never sorry I did so; the experience was exhilarating, challenging, and the cornerstone of why I wanted to remain in Germany for so long. Of my 20-year military career, I spent almost 15 of those years in Germany in three different assignments. The last 12 years of my career were entirely spent in Germany. In short, it was a great gig.

The 298th Army Band arrived in Berlin in July 1945. The band had come from London where it had been known as the European Theater of Operations (ETO) Band. On an official War Department basis, however, the band, numbering 56 musicians, had been



split into two 28-men bands. The designators were the 300th Infantry and the 298th Infantry Bands. For all intents and purposes, the two bands were actually one. But this is the origination of the "298th" designator. At some point in history, the "300th" designator was dropped.

The 298th served continuously in Berlin from July 1945 until its deactivation in late 1994. This period of over 49 years of continu-



ous service renders the band as being the longest-serving unit in Berlin. Many units had come and gone, but the band stayed.

I had it in the back of my mind for some years to write some sort of historical account of my service in Berlin. I failed to keep a journal or a diary, so any such effort would have been a record of my somewhat inaccurate memory. This probably would have been a bad idea. But in December 2004, I discovered while doing some informal research, that no historical account of the 298th had ever been written. And now, 10 years after the band's deactivation, it was becoming more and more unlikely that anyone would write such an account.

So I made the decision to conduct the research and write a document concerning the history of the band. This wouldn't be the rather dry, esoteric stuff that would interest solely those who were there (although there's no getting around some of that). No, I thought, in order to have a certain appeal to the reader and yet lend some authenticity to the account, it would be best to obtain the stories and anecdotes of other veterans who had served during the band's period of service.

I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to talk with dozens of 298th veterans in phone interviews, letters, and emails. I have met many, many wonderful people in conducting my research. Their interest and their support has been inspiring and is certainly appreciated.

I hope to capture the flavor of their stories in what will likely become a book. Research and outlining continue; I hope to have a viable first draft by the end of 2005.

Should you be a veteran of the 298th, regardless when you served, or if you know somebody who is, I would very much appreciate hearing from you.