

# Bad Kreuznach (BK)

## September 1991 to October 1994

By Allen Lawless



We stayed a couple nights in Frankfurt with one of Anke's many cousins and then finally made it to BK. There we checked into a local hotel and I reported in to the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Band for duty.

At the time I arrived, the band wasn't in. The CQ told me that the band was on a job and was scheduled to return shortly. Since it was late in the day and I wasn't scheduled to sign in till the next day, I decided just to report in the next morning. I did so and was pleased to find Larry Bennett, my former compadre in the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division Band some ten years earlier, was now the First Sergeant of the 8<sup>th</sup> ID Band and would be my boss. We got caught up on old times and I learned what my responsibilities would be, besides playing the euphonium.

Larry told me that I would be running the Operations Group, which included Training. This wasn't a surprise since my German language skills had become known pretty much throughout the active Army band system. My MOS reflected the German linguist designator – 02C4LGM – and was indicated on all my orders and other paperwork.

The band commander was CW2 Richard D. Cody. I found him to be a very intense person, with extremely high standards of musical competence and expectations. These expectations occasionally ran against the grain of some of the band members, but most of us recognized the intent and gave him our best.

The facility the band worked out of was a former motor pool on Rose Barracks that had been converted over into office and rehearsal space. It was extremely cramped and not a great deal better than the facilities I had seen at Ft. Hood. Rose Barracks also happened to be 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Headquarters with units located in Mainz, Dexheim, Baumholder, and other outlying areas. While the total area of responsibility wasn't any larger than I had seen with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, we still seemed to travel quite a bit, particularly to Baumholder. Baumholder was a major training area for the Army, home of the 8<sup>th</sup> ID Second Brigade, and about a

90-minute drive from Bad Kreuznach.

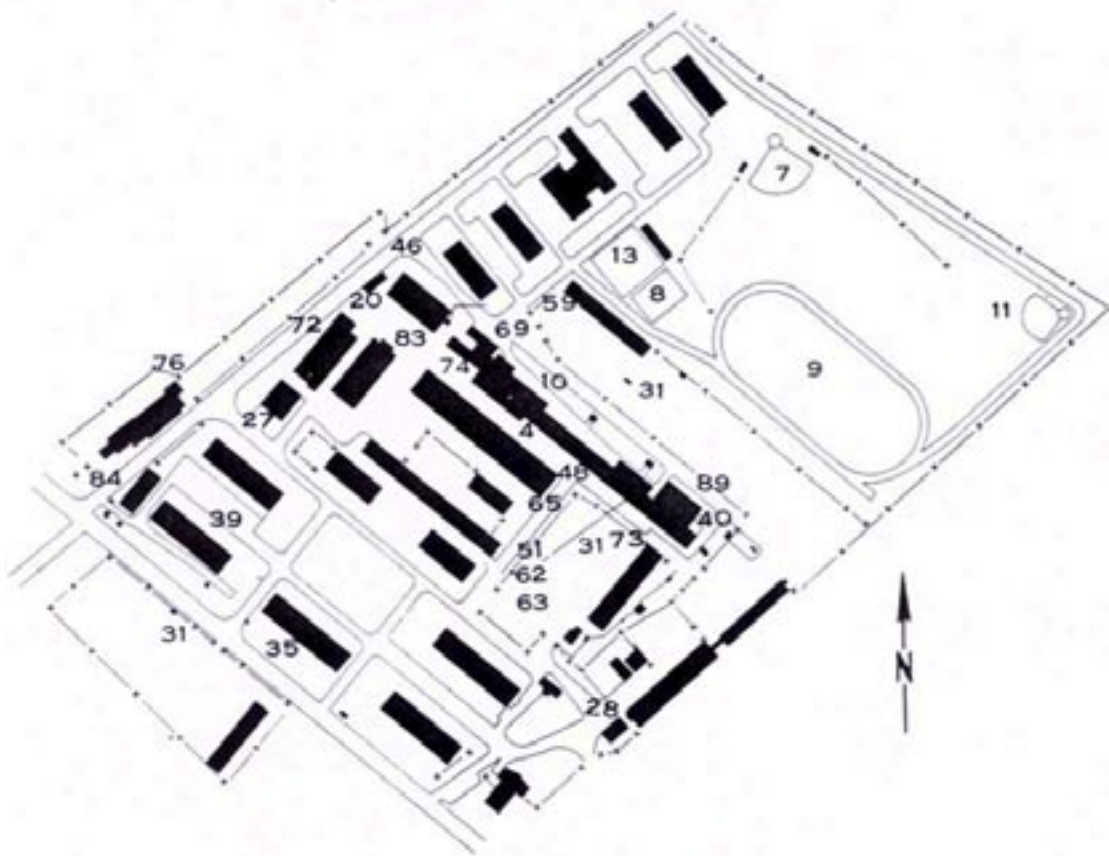
A bit of history regarding Rose Barracks (obtained from [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org)). This small kaserne, located in Bad Kreuznach, had been the home of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division until 1956. At that time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> AD relocated to Ft. Hood and the 8<sup>th</sup> ID assumed duty in BK. BK itself is a quaint town in Rhineland-Pfalz, located on the Nahe River and site of healthful vacation spas. BK also is a major wine-producing area with many vintners in the hills and fields surrounding the town. All the same, I did not feel as comfortable in BK as I did in Ansbach or in Berlin. Perhaps it was because I knew this three-year tour would be my last in the Army.



The Army was undergoing some major changes as a result of the end of the Cold War. The drawdown was in full swing. When the 1<sup>st</sup> AD returned to Germany service during the first Gulf War in late 1991, the soldiers in the division were rewarded by being ordered to vacate Ansbach and relocate to Bad Kreuznach. In January 1992, the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reflagged in a ceremony at Baumholder to become the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. I found myself in Old Ironsides once again. The rah rah thing that seemed to grace all official division paperwork was "Iron Soldier". We all were "Iron Soldiers".

It seemed like Baumholder was our home away from home. It was not only one of the Army's principal training areas, indeed the only significant training area located west of the Rhine River, but also the home of one of the division's brigades. We supported the NCO Academy there, all manner of military ceremonies, and other community functions. Occasionally we'd get a request to play a fest of some type in the local area. Most of all, we spent our time (and a little bit of money) in the military community of Baumholder. Just off the parade ground and up the hill was a Popeye's Chicken joint. I became introduced to dirty rice there and loved it.

As in most military facilities in Germany, BK consisted of a number of small installations scattered throughout the small town. As previously stated, Rose Barracks (located below) was the focal point and location of division headquarters. (The band was situated in the western section of the building just south of number 4 in the diagram below; the main gate being on Alzeyerstr in between numbers 31 and 35.) Located next to and



course of business. I seem to remember even a unisex latrine (bathroom). We had no place to drill; traffic was a constant stream. So we began looking toward a vacant dining facility at the Hospital Kaserne. Negotiations continued while we contemplated how we would make this move; eventually all of the barracks soldiers moved to the Hospital Kaserne while the band continued to operate out of Rose Barracks.

slightly north was Minick Barracks. The only thing I remember about Minick was that it was the location of a dining facility. More about that in a minute.

The rest of BK consisted of George C. Marshall Kaserne, which was the site of many support activities including family housing, the Base Support Battalion (I never did figure out what they were supposed to do), and the vehicle inspection point. Somewhere over in that area was the PX gas station and garage, where I got some work done on my 1993 Taurus station wagon. I'll never buy another Ford product, but that's another story.

The Army hospital was located on, not surprisingly, the Hospital Kaserne. There was the Army Airfield and another tiny kaserne upon which the MPs were stationed.

While in BK, we fought hard to move the band to a different location and out of cramped Rose Barracks. We needed someplace that would give us the room we sorely needed. Our rehearsal facility was cramped, office space was at a premium (I and four other people worked out of the same desk), and we continually stumbled over each other in the building during the normal

and friend, vowed to run five marathons before the year ended. We were out every weekend training long distances of 20 kms and occasionally runs of 30 kms. Toward the end of summer, we managed to put in three marathons and we finished our fifth marathon in eastern France in early December. On several occasions we went out to do a marathon in the early morning then in the afternoon had a band commitment somewhere. Getting on and off the bus was a bit of a challenge due to soreness.

One of the training regimens mandated by U.S. Army Europe was called "Sergeant's Time". Actually, I experienced this requirement in Berlin. There was much conjecture and little clarity as to the defined purpose of this training. However, an edict did filter downwards that this time would be used solely for tactical training. That meant that this time could not be used to train toward our musical mission. So every Wednesday afternoon, from 1300 to 1630, we'd invent nifty things to do to "qualify" and legitimize our training. This ran the gamut from pulling out our tactical equipment and staring at it awhile, brushing off some cobwebs in the process, to actually putting on our Kevlar helmets and

web gear to at least look more tactical.

All the same, the 1AD Band did go to the field on several occasions, staying out several days at a time. One miserable event placed us in pup tents along the side of a hill. We had lots of fun getting no sleep and yelling, “Bang, you’re dead!” while pulling some of these ridiculous adventures. Needless to say, this was not my favorite activity.

The Christmas season in BK in 1992 promised to be a busy one. City officials were keen on getting the band to play at least one Christmas Concert, so we obliged. To help bridge the language gap, I prepared translations of Mr. Cody’s remarks and delivered them at the citizen’s concert as well as the more formal concert for the VIPs. I found the more I did it the better I became – but I knew I’d never make it as an emcee or disk jockey. For that service, the Army awarded me an Army Commendation Medal, the first I’d ever received.

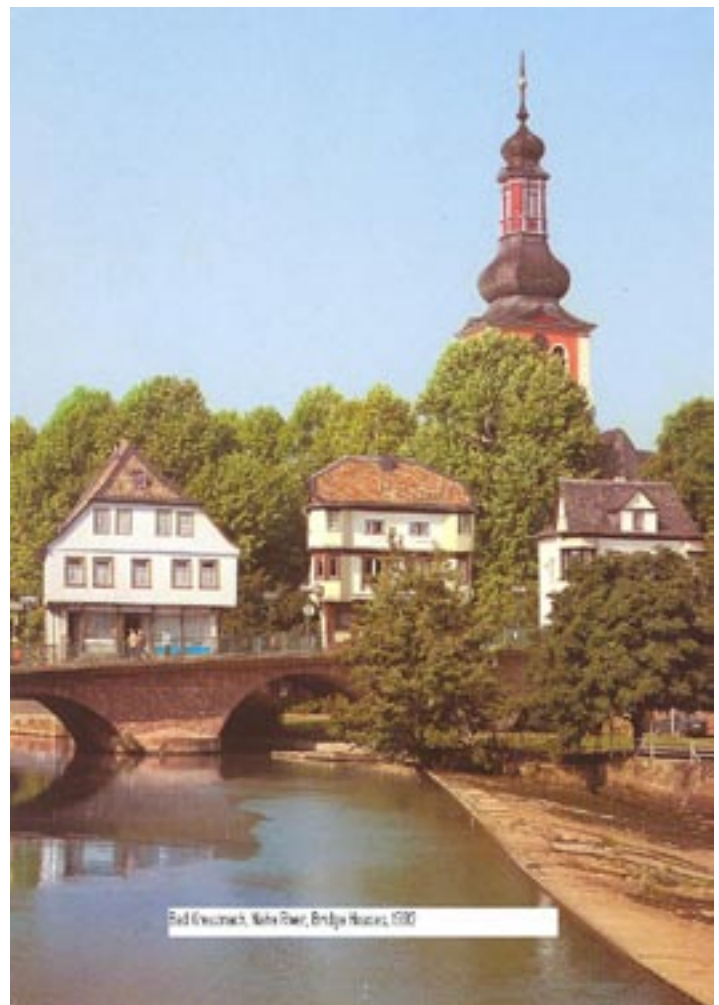
I wasn’t usually a big fan of eating lunch, but I occasionally went over to the dining facility in back of Rose Barracks for the noon meal. Even more rarely, I went over to the very small company-sized dining facility on Minick Barracks, just a stone’s throw from Rose Barracks. I was completely shocked when, after going through the chow line and sitting down with my food, I saw the dining facility manager. His name was Jon Baas. Jon and I had served together at Ft. Devens. We were both SP4s at the time and while he was a bit older than I, he didn’t quite have as much time in service as I did. We got caught up on old times. It was a pleasure running into somebody from the old days – and made me feel older than I wanted.

In January, 1993 I realized that I had but two years remaining before my retirement. If I meant to complete my college degree, it was going to have to happen now. So I began taking a full load of 6 credit hours per semester through the University of Maryland. Maryland featured very short semesters of less than two months – the better to cram in 5 semesters per year.

To get a handle on exactly what I was going to need to complete my degree, I had to get my military education and experience evaluated, a process which would assign college credit in recognition for having that experience. At the end of that process, I discovered I had enough course work completed for an Associate’s Degree. I ap-

plied for an A.A. in General Studies and was awarded the degree in June, 1993. Not wanting to stop until I had a Bachelor of Arts degree in Management Studies, I had to keep going. Each semester I took two courses, at least one of which required a full-length paper since I was now at the junior and senior levels.

Since BK was not the center of a significant troop population, I had to do a lot of traveling to get the courses I needed. This meant driving two nights a week and weekends to places like Wiesbaden, Mainz, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Rhein Main. To grab an occasional seminar, I’d travel to Spangdahlem in the west and Würzburg in the east. Many of my classes were conducted in German. Since Maryland required significant education in a foreign language for those students seeking an Arts degree, this meant a lot of German classes in addition to those I had already taken. These were a lot of fun – I took an upper-level course in German fairy tales and a series of seminars which “immersed” the student in the German language – speaking English was forbidden over the course of the entire weekend.



It was during one of these courses that the instructor peered at me closely during the opening introductions, pointed his finger at me and said to me in German that he had me at home. Not knowing this gentleman at all, I was intrigued by what he meant. He explained that he had bought a commercially-available videotape of the Reunification of Germany and that a closeup shot of me was in the opening sequence of the video. The next weekend he brought the tape in and I then remembered what he was referring to.

During the ceremony that returned Checkpoint Charlie to the government of West Berlin on June 22, 1990, I happened to be standing in the front rank of the 298<sup>th</sup>



Army Band playing Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever* for easily the 10,563<sup>rd</sup> time when some guy came over and stuck a professional video camera in my face. He literally got within inches of my face. This was somewhat disconcerting, but I continued to play while he taped me. This footage eventually ended up in the video tape that my German instructor had at his home.

Eventually Peter and I became friends, as far as it can

go between teacher and student. My German was better than most Americans, so we managed to do quite well in talking with each other. It became important for me to be able to test out of a couple of classes and I was able to do that with Peter and avoid attending formal classes – Maryland got their money, though, up front. Had I failed the oral examinations, I would have been out of luck. I would've paid my money but not gotten the needed credit. But as it turned out, I took the oral exams and passed them, basically completing two semesters worth of work in just a few hours.

By the time I was done with my degree requirements in early spring, 1994, I took only one class in BK. That was all they offered that I needed. I traveled at least two weeknights per week and most weekends to get to places that offered the courses I needed. Travel time ranged anywhere from one to 2.5 hours each way. This was exhausting and inevitably led to problems with my marriage.

Anke left me in January, 1994. We had grown apart due to work and school constraints and the lack of communication resulting from those efforts. She obtained her own apartment in the Mainz area while I began the job search process both in Germany and in the States. I spent many hours developing and perfecting my resumes in both English and German and then began sending it out to opportunities that I'd learned about through the Transition Office. I slowly began accepting the fact that my time in the Army was rapidly coming to an end.

I graduated with a B.A. in Management Studies and a second Associate in Arts degree in German Studies from the University of Maryland in May, 1994. It was not quite 20 years since I'd graduated high school. From the time in January, 1993 till the time I took my last class, I'd maintained a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Altogether, I wound up with a GPA of 3.63 throughout my 9 years of college classes. Not bad while working full-time in the process. Despite this success, the fact that my marriage crumbled illustrated how out-of-touch I was with anything outside of school and work. This was sobering.

It would be unfair not to acknowledge my leadership during my last year or so in going to school. I was given many breaks in the form of excused absences from playing gigs – particularly on weekends when I

had all-day classes. 1SG Pam Suino and CW2 Charles Vollherbst were extremely accommodating to me and I sincerely appreciated their understanding and support. SSG Keith Fields, fellow euphoniumist, definitely covered for me during that period. All the same, Chief Vollherbst's insistence that Fields and I perform Karl King's *The Melody Shop*, a circus march that is an absolute barn-burner for euphonium players and one that requires not a little bit of practice to perform even badly, reminded me that I was indeed paid to play euphonium. Everything else came in second. I would spend my lunchtime practicing in the band hall. Keith and I eventually worked out a duet routine that seemed to go over pretty well at the various fests we played.

Wine festivals were different than beer festivals. Even though they took place outdoors, regardless of weather, the drinking of wine was considered to be a step up on the cultural ladder. So it wasn't uncommon to see white tablecloths and other finery, somewhat out of place in an area that featured a grass-covered floor. Apart from the aesthetics, the reception we received from the German audiences never ceased to amaze me. The Germans always seemed to appreciate our musicianship, even when the acoustics weren't quite that of a concert hall. Contrast that to the reception typically



afforded to us by American audiences and it didn't take long for new band members to figure out that playing German festivals was infinitely more preferable than playing American festivals.

The job search on either side of the pond resulted in nothing. I had a couple of interviews in the Frankfurt area, but these didn't pan out.

During the summer of 1994, several notable things happened. First, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of significant World War II events were being planned. While the 1AD Band did not participate in the commemoration ceremonies in Normandy acknowledging the D-Day landings (this honor was relegated to the USAREUR Band in Heidelberg), we were tasked to provide band support for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration ceremonies in southern France. This was a significant effort, requiring a great deal from the Operations staff. SSG Geoff McCorquodale performed superbly in setting up and executing the band's travel to Draguignon, where the band would be quartered for approximately four days.

The commemoration ceremonies in and near Draguignon went off very well. The band traveled down in a commercial bus and stayed in French Army barracks, along with other 1AD and French soldiers. I had certainly seen other French-run affairs horribly botched and ill-run due to abysmal planning efforts, but this one went surprisingly very well. The ceremonies themselves took place adjacent to an American military cemetery. The setting and ceremonies were suitably dignified, be-





fitting the sacrifices of those who lost their lives there in August, 1944.

Upon the band's return to BK, we had yet another series of commemoration ceremonies to perform in late September. This promised to be my last gig with any Army band. Over the course of two days, the band performed a number of short ceremonies in several towns in eastern France. Each town had been liberated by advancing Allied armies in WWII, therefore these towns extended invitations for band support. Accommodations were not very comfortable, but the entire tour took only a couple of days. In many respects, I was proud to take part in these ceremonies – they recognized the efforts made by our contemporaries 50 years earlier. Supporting these types of ceremonies was the very reason for our existence as bandsmen and as military musicians. Those who took part remembered those who fell.

I was also able to organize and execute the participation of those interested band members who wanted to qualify for the German Army Sportleistungsabzeichen (Athletic performance badge). I had qualified for the badge in silver while in Berlin, but I wanted to try and qualify for gold. This was physically the most challenging thing I'd ever attempted and ran the gamut from canoeing in the Mosel River, to riding a bicycle at break-neck speeds along the Mosel, to a 25 km forced march, to a 400-meter sprint, to the high jump, and to multiple tries at each event. Our very gracious host toward this effort was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 920<sup>th</sup> Signal Regiment of the German Army, stationed at the Hunsrück Kaserne near Kastellaun. They were able to do far more for us than we could do for them, but we did arrange qualification for their soldiers with our M16A2 rifles. Establishing a professional friendship with members of this unit was one of the highlights of my career. And

yes, when it was all done, I did qualify for the Leistungsabzeichen in Gold. One of the award ceremonies is depicted in this photograph.

The business with Anke was also disconcerting. I had no idea what her plans were – finally, in late September things came to a head and she articulated her final decision. She would remain in Germany and I would return to the States. Anticipating staying in Germany after retirement I had already obtained a European Out, or permission to retire in Germany. Since I could not find a job, I had to have my retirement orders amended and have my household

goods packed up and shipped to the States. The month of October was a blur – I had much to do, including clearing quarters and out-processing, before I departed on transition leave at the end of October. I made arrangements for shipment of the 1993 Ford Taurus station wagon (bought expressly for children that we were not going to have), obtained my German driver's license with motorcycle endorsement (good for life), and otherwise prepared to leave Germany after almost 15 years of service in that country.

When it was all over, the Army awarded me a Meritorious Service Medal and a plaque. My military career was over. I would go on transition leave on 1 Nov 94 through 31 Jan 95 and then retire as a Sergeant First Class. I was scared to death leaving an institution which I'd called home for the past 20 years and venturing forth in an unfamiliar world as a civilian. But it was time to hang up the uniform and do something else for the rest of my working days. I still didn't have a clue what that could be, but the clock had run out.

So I packed my bags and flew out of Germany, landing eventually in Newark, NJ. In Newark I rented a car and drove down to Ft. Dix, NJ, where I would out-process the next day. After a fitful night's sleep in the Ft. Dix Guest House, I processed out of the Army and secured a few copies of that all-important document, the DD214. Back in the car, I drove back up to Newark, and got on a flight for Detroit. It was time to meet the world as a civilian.