

The swearing-in ceremony for the 27 members of the Foreign Service Class of 1950.



Photo courtesy of Harry Odell

The Class of 1950

By Dave Krecke

Fifty Years of Friendship

The year 2000 may mean a new millennium for many Americans, but it's the golden anniversary for members of the Foreign Service's basic training class of 1950.

A close-knit group of 27 young men and their families, they were dispatched to West Germany as "Resident Officers" to spearhead the transition from U.S. military to civilian occupation. All had served in World War II as military officers in various branches and theaters of service. Two in the group—downed pilots captured by the Germans—had even endured lengthy stretches as prisoners of war. Theirs may be the only entering Foreign Service class in which all officers were sent to a single country on the same mission.

The group affectionately recalls the shipboard poker games that began on the voyage to Bremerhaven. Men slept below decks while their spouses and children stayed above. The game continues to this day whenever card-playing class members gather for reunions. And

gather they do, every New Year's Eve since the 1950s and for special occasions in between.

After a brief period of training in Frankfurt, the officers fanned out to assignments as representatives of the U.S. High Commission in communities throughout the American Sector, encouraging citizens of the war-torn nation to adopt democratic practices at the local level. They worked with schools and community organizations, showed re-education films, selected promising Germans for familiarization trips to the United States and set up town hall meetings where German citizens—for the first time in their lives—could question the decisions of government officials. The program's ambitious goal was to create a new German political system, one in which the state would be accountable to its citizens.

Always visible as the only Americans in most of their communities, the officers and their families were expected to serve as role models, teaching democracy through their own examples. So important was this aspect of the program that no bachelors were supposed to be sent to Germany. So, while married members of the class were playing poker on the troopship, a handful of their colleagues were getting married to fulfill what they understood to be the program's final requirement. These men flew with their new brides to Europe, joining the group in Frankfurt. For the happily married members of this cohort, the year 2000 is also the year they celebrate their golden wedding anniversaries.

In a class by themselves

Robert J. Barnard
Emerson M. Brown
Charles T. Butler
William A. Chapin
Jonathon "Jock" Dean
Robert W. Dean
Adolph "Spike" Dubs
Warrick E. Elrod
Richard T. Foose
Emmett B. Ford
John D. Gough
Thomas F. Hocter
Walter E. Jenkins
Francis Xavier Lambert

Earl Lubensky
Kenneth W. Martindale
Harry I. Odell
Robert L. Ouverson
Frederick H. Sacksteder
Stanley D. Schiff
Talcott W. Seelye
John P. Shaw
Matthew D. Smith
Thomas C. Stave
Lee T. Stull
Malcolm Thompson
Arthur T. Tienken



The class of 1950 and their families don life jackets in an emergency drill aboard the troopship Henry Gibbins en route to Bremerhaven.



Photos courtesy of Earl Lubensky

The Korean War broke out a few months after the group arrived in Germany. Fearing the Soviets might take advantage of the thinly deployed U.S. troops in the west by invading the allied sectors from the east, the United States dramatically increased its military presence there. Some in the group facilitated the arrival of these troops in their communities, locating quarters where GIs could be billeted and creating a welcome environment among local residents. Fortunately, there was no invasion.

Many remember Germany's high unemployment rate at the time, a condition worsened by the presence of thousands of ethnic-German refugees fleeing neighboring lands no longer in German territory. Tensions ran high as local residents, already suffering under austere postwar deprivation, were required to open their homes to refugee families. Using funds U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy had raised from wealthy American donors, several officers supported orphanages, youth centers and other worthy causes in their towns.

In 1990, the class celebrated its 40th anniversary in Dinkelsbühl in the southern German state of Bavaria. When the reunion was over, many returned with their wives for the first time to their previous stations. The towns they remembered as struggling, almost poverty-



A view of the war damage in Kassel, still evident in 1950 when this photo was taken.

Photo by Earl Lubensky

stricken places when they had seen them last had been transformed in the intervening years into thriving, prosperous communities with no evidence of war damage.

Mayors and local officials welcomed the visitors warmly. One class member, who had served in the town of Buchen in what is now the state of Baden-Württemberg, made a special effort to visit the orphanage run by a Catholic priest, his closest German friend.



European Youth Week in Fritzlar, the American Sector of Germany, an activity sponsored by a resident officer of the class of 1950 as part of the effort to bring European young people together in the postwar period.

Photo by Earl Lubensky



Photo by Stan Schiff

Art Tienken, left, Matt Smith and Bob Dean practice low-stakes, high-fun poker during their golden anniversary game.

Did this brief, two-year program have a major impact on the democratization of Germany? Different members of the class give different answers. Some confess that by the early 1950s the Germans were already well on their way to establishing a democratic state, largely on their own. Others say that one of the most important roles they played was identifying promising German democrats who would lead the country in the future.

Whatever the answer to that question, two things are abundantly clear. The United States gained from this savvy group—"present," in Secretary of State Dean Acheson's words, "at the creation"—representatives who distinguished themselves in

He learned that his friend had died years before but was heartened to meet the young priest who was carrying on his good work in that same children's home, populated in 1990 by German, Turkish and North African-born children. On that nostalgic visit, his wife happened to meet the chancellor of the University of Munich, himself a native of Buchen. Her face lit up when the chancellor fondly remembered the "American family" that had lived in his hometown and the English conversation classes the resident officer and his wife had conducted when the chancellor was a gymnasium student.

government service in Germany and other regions of the world for more than a generation. And a full house will still beat three-of-a-kind in what surely is one of the world's longest, continuously running poker games.

Happy Golden Anniversary, class of 1950! ■

(For a more detailed account of the work of the class of 1950, read classmate Talcott W. Seelye's two-part article "Resident Officer in Germany" in the July and August 1953 issues of the *Foreign Service Journal*, available in the State Department Ralph Bunche Library.)



Photo by Dave Krecke

Director General of the Foreign Service Edward "Skip" Gnehm hosts the class of 1950 and their wives at the State Department on May 4.