



The C. W. Abrams building, long Allied headquarters, reverts to German control 50 years after war's end.

Story by Karl Weisel

SAYING goodbye is hardly ever easy, but for some people who call the Frankfurt military community home, change means bidding farewell to a lifelong relationship. The Army's operational mission in the city all but ended last December when V Corps completed its move to Heidelberg.

Now, as the last residents of the military housing areas complete their moves and the Army leaves little trace of its presence behind, old-timers are experiencing nostalgia about "the good old days."

"It was a lifetime of experiences that very few people ever have," said 75-year-old Art Vess, a support services clerk with the 418th Base Support Battalion's community recreation division. Vess first saw Frankfurt in April 1945, when he was a supply ser-

geant with Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army.

Then, he had only glimpsed of the bombed-out shell that was Frankfurt following the Allied bombing of the city. But in May 1946, he married a young Luxembourger whom he'd met during the war and, soon after, the couple moved to Frankfurt.

Vess's first civilian job with the

U.S. government was with the Office of the Chief of Engineers. As a resident of the Frankfurt military post, he lived in an apartment building that was surrounded by fences and patrolled by military police.

The "requisitioned property" that was part of the U.S. military compound covered a large portion of the city, including many blocks of residential housing and the sprawling botanical garden, the Palmengarten.

"The fences were to keep the Germans out," said Vess, who vividly remembers how Frankfurt looked and smelled at the time. In summer, the odor of decomposing bodies that hadn't yet been removed from shattered buildings filled the air. And all around, engineers worked frantically to level condemned structures and salvage what could be used for rebuilding.

Vess remembers the people's struggle, not only to rebuild their homes and businesses,



World War II veteran and long-time Frankfurt resident Art Vess helps a customer with a purchase at an MWR closeout sale.

Karl Weisel is editor of the Frankfurt military community's newspaper, the Frankfurt Chronicle.

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but simply to survive. They were desperate for even the most rudimentary things, he said.

"You could buy almost anything with cigarettes; people valued them more than they did the inflated currency," Vess recalled.

Eventually, in an effort to control the flourishing black market, a barter market was established downtown, whereby Americans could trade goods, like cigarettes and coffee, for items of

in Frankfurt to be near his children and grandchildren. Also, his wife is buried there.

William S. Berry's story is similar.

Berry, deputy assistant chief of staff for V Corps' resource management division, will retire in September after 54 years of combined U.S. military and government civilian service, most of it in Germany.

He also first saw Frankfurt in May 1945, as a soldier returning from rest and recuperation in France shortly after the war in Europe ended.

Berry re-enlisted, spent three months in the States and then returned to Frankfurt, where he pulled railway security with the 1st Military Police Group.

Pilferage was a concern, he remembered, and goods were hard to come by, even for the Americans. It wasn't until 1948, when Reichmarks were converted to Deutschmarks, that shops were again filled.

"I think the most phenomenal thing is that Germany developed from an occupied country into a thoroughly democratic one to become one of our main allies in Europe," Berry said.

He remembers when the original draft of the German Federal Republic's constitution was drafted in the Abrams building, where the Army's top brass was located.

And he was among the earliest students of the University of Maryland's night-school program in Frankfurt, in the early 1950s, he said.

Leslie Spear, born in 1948 at Frankfurt's 97th General Hospital to U.S. government civilian parents, will miss many aspects of Frankfurt, too.

"This is the only home I've ever known," said Spear, who's lived all of her 46 years in Frankfurt. Her's was the first family to move into the U.S. military's Platen Housing area in the early 1950s, and she and her sister attended pre-school through the 12th grade in Frankfurt.

"When we moved into Platen, the housing area consisted of only one or two buildings," she remembered. "There were lots of fields and dirt banks. We used to go sledding down those banks.

"There were very few American families at the time, so we were very close to the American and German families who lived near us," Spear said.

Spear's father, who played a role in the Berlin Airlift and helped city officials in their efforts to erect the Freedom Bell and Kinder Luftbrücke statues in that city, also had worked closely with the Germans in the reconstruction of Frankfurt. He retired from government service in Frankfurt and died 10 years ago, Spear said.

In all, the Germans and Americans have been friends and neighbors for 50 years. "They will never forget that we gave them jobs and something to eat after the war," Spear reflected.

Much as she believes they will miss the U.S. presence, "we will equally miss them and their way of life," she said. □



Karl Weiszel

William Berry admires his office view of Frankfurt, one he has seen change dramatically since 1945.

similar value offered by local citizens, Vess said.

The trading opened doors to communication that had expressly been closed directly after the war, he said. "In the beginning, we were forbidden to fraternize with the German people."

Today, Vess has many German friends. The similar experiences the Germans and Americans shared simply to survive the war drew people together, he said. "We were survivors, and we used our experiences to teach our children about living."

Gradually, the survivors of the war were replaced by a younger generation who hadn't experienced war and couldn't appreciate what his generation had experienced, said Vess. He will retire in September, but plans to remain



Martin Gregson

Leslie Spear looks over a photo album dedicated to her father's work in Frankfurt.



These seniors will be part of the last class to graduate from Frankfurt American High School.

Frankfurt High's Final Bell

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

ONE year short of its 50th anniversary, the once-largest American high school in Europe is closing its doors.

"None of us ever imagined it could happen," said guidance counselor Alice Sax, who came to Frankfurt American High School in Germany to teach in 1963.

"Frankfurt has always been a focus for the Army in Europe. Everybody came through here en route to points around the world," she reflected.

"It was the hub of U.S. Army, Europe," added Winston Carter, a social studies and history teacher who's been at the school since 1974. "It was the place of maximum excitement, where people were taken care of and funneled through during such tense times as the hostage situation in Lebanon and Operation Desert Storm."

The school opened in 1946 and was first located in the Frankfurt suburb of Bornheim. U.S. Army V Corps moved to Frankfurt in 1952. The corps moved to Heidelberg last November, and the historic high school's physical facility,

which officially closes in June, will be returned to the German government.

The school served the children of military families that came to Germany from all over the globe. "We had students from Norway, the former Soviet Union, Spain and Saudi Arabia, among other places," Sax added.



A Frankfurt High student plays the school's swan song.

"Back then, we had five-day dormitories for students who could go home on weekends and seven-day dorms for those who couldn't," she said. "Students from Giessen, Hanau and Fulda, Germany, were also bused here before American high schools opened in those cities. Among the students were the children of U.S. Department of State employees and members of all the military services."

There were so many students, in fact, that classes spilled over into six Quonset huts in front of the school.

"When the students first arrived in a strange country, having left their friends behind, many were tearful," Sax remembered. "But they were more tearful when they left here."

Sax and other teachers began feeling dramatic changes at the school several years ago, when corridors and classrooms that once bulged at the seams with upwards of 3,500 students suddenly became much quieter.

By November 1994, only 400 students remained, prompting school officials to close off entire sections of the sprawling building. A year earlier, the school lost 19 teachers by attrition.

"The kids who came here, even for a year or two, still call Frankfurt American High School home. I certainly understand why."

Seven others were placed in new jobs.

Six months before his class of 82 seniors was to become the last to graduate from Frankfurt AHS on May 16, Jacob Unutoa admitted he was really sad. "But, we're keeping the school's spirit alive," he said. "Every Friday we have pep rallies, and there are periodic class competitions."

Senior Leo Stone, who'd been a student at the school for three years, said he'd miss "the special place. There are no real problems here — no violence, drugs or alcohol. It's been a great place to learn and meet other kids from around the world without having to deal with problems that are plaguing schools back home."

"This year has been the best year of my high school life because of all the activities that were available for seniors," added Michael Lane, who played linebacker for the Frankfurt Eagles football team. "We're like one big, happy family."

Senior Kristina Judt, the wife of V Corps soldier Spec. Paul Judt, said "There's more of a feeling of unity here. You don't have to worry about preset standards. The other kids take you as you are. And the teachers here really care about you."

Humanities and photography instructor Jerry Martin used to take students on trips throughout Europe and to North Africa, he said. The high school has been part of his life for the past 31 years.

Today, he's heavily involved with the school's alumni association and gets calls from former students from as far away as Japan and Australia.

Like Martin, math teacher Lynn Haight came to Frankfurt with the idea of staying only a short time. Then he met and married a German woman. He



Some of FAHS's 400 remaining students share time with friends before classes begin.

celebrated his 30th year at the school last spring.

"Sure it's sad to see it close," said Haight. "At first, it was tough to accept. But everything's changed. The housing areas are virtually empty and there aren't any traffic jams. The once-bustling Abrams building is like a tomb, too."

"People just never anticipated that Frankfurt would close," added Haight. "Frankfurt American High School, besides being one of the major schools in Europe, has been well-known for its high-quality education," Sax added. "We've had students go on to do wonderful things."

Among those students is retired Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, who served as commander of U.S. and coalition forces during Operation Desert Storm. He attended the school in his sophomore year.

Numerous other students went on

to serve in the military forces during and after the draft. Others have become well-known in their fields.

Richard Axtman, a 1970s-era graduate, invented the medical device that automatically releases medicine into a patient's bloodstream. For some diabetics, it's supplanted painful injections.

Jeanne Larsen, a graduate of the Class of '67 and currently a professor at Hollins College in Roanoke, Va., has published three novels, among them "The Bronze Mirror" in 1992.

Actress and FAHS alumna Julie Smith, whose real name is Juliet Moore, has appeared in about a dozen movies and soap operas, one of which was "Guns and Roses," said Martin.

Vincent Sentner, a 1982 graduate, is a computer mogul in Florida, Martin added. And '70s graduate Marlene Sakaue is a high-ranking official at the American Consulate in Bonn, Germany.

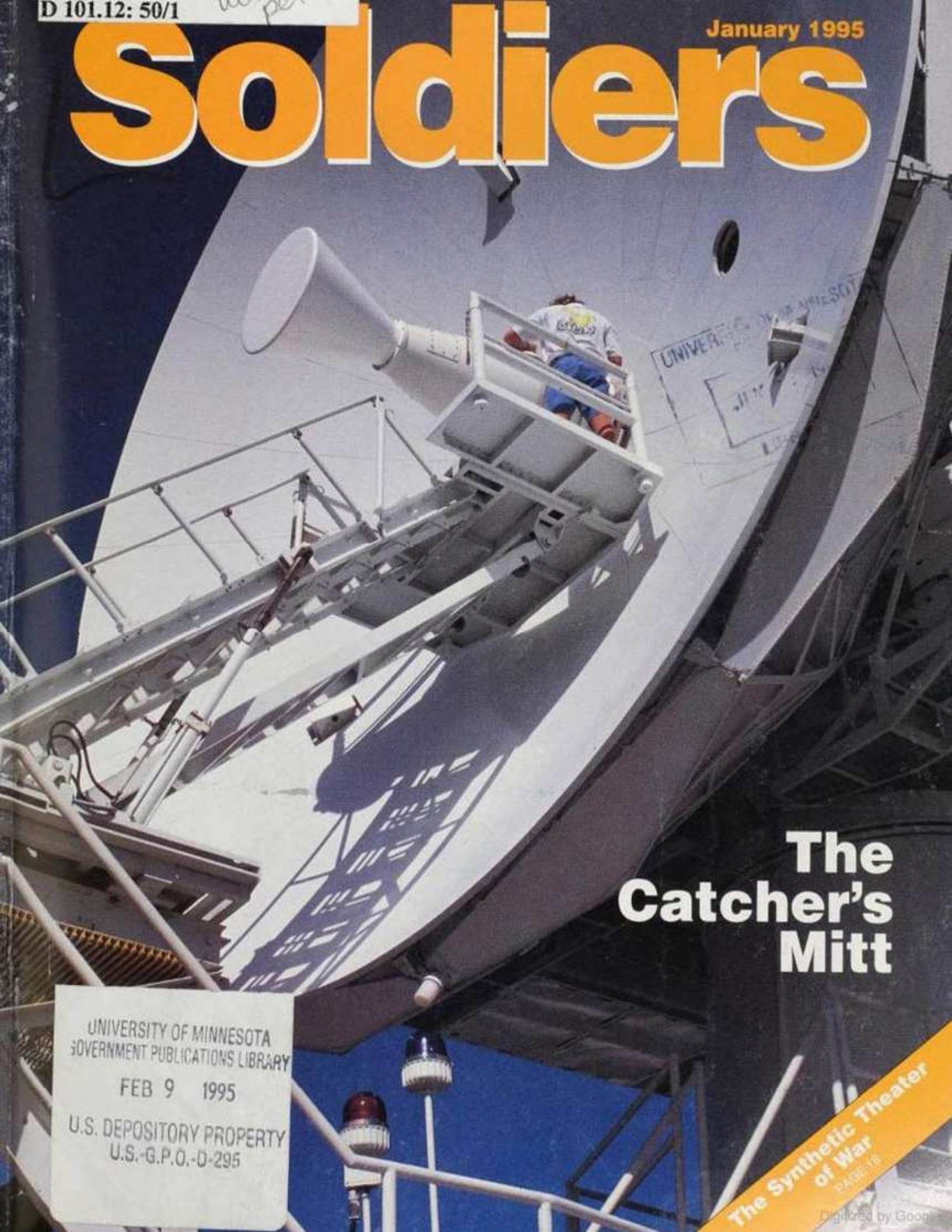
Terry Erickson Brown, a graduate of the Class of '68, became one of America's leading ceramicists, and Anne Payne Larose became a leading sculptress, Martin said.

In sports, former FAHS student Duke Taylor became a top referee for college basketball and soccer on the East Coast.

You could guess what some of the students would become, said Haight. He remembers a kid named Keith Gary, who led the FAHS football team to an undefeated season. Gary, who attended the school in 1980 or 1981, went on to play defensive lineman for the Pittsburgh Steelers for about five years.

"The kids who came here, even if just for a year or two, still call Frankfurt American High School home," Martin said. "I certainly understand why." □

Soldiers



The Catcher's Mitt

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