

War Era Story Project 2012

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Two GIs initiated a successful Plan for Rehabbing during Occupation at Munich, Germany

Germany surrendered just before my graduation from High School, and I enlisted the following day in the U.S. Army. Early the following year, I was transferred to the Bavarian region of Germany where my buddy and I were to guard and protect Austrian border crossings at Kufstein. Due to my rank elevation, I became eligible to use a Jeep occasionally for weekends. My friend persuaded me to help him search for his mother's German relatives in Munich and report back if they had survived the war.

We found them in a multi-family community partially devastated by U.S. bombs. Debris still cluttered the streets. Their apartment was in a three-story brick building with only three walls, the fourth wall still lying in the street below. To keep out the weather, they sewed numerous blankets together and draped them over the opening. Note that nine months had elapsed since the end of the war and yet these people had not removed the rubble in the streets nor even started to repair their damaged buildings.

Communication with the German family was extremely difficult until a young schoolteacher learned of our plight and offered to be an interpreter. It was then that we learned that those survivors expected the Americans would clean up the mess and repair the buildings. Later we reported this to our commanding officers. Their response indicated it would take many months to even organize a program to initiate such a project due to the vast need in the country. Since these survivors expected a solution from us, we concocted a plan that involved their participation while also providing them an incentive to benefit from their efforts.

Our plan used 'bartering' with cigarettes as the exchange medium to accomplish our goal. At our PX, each GI was eligible to purchase one carton of cigarettes per week. We had no idea how many cartons would motivate them to perform their part of the deal. We met with the interpreter, the German family and several neighbors to present our proposition while placing six cartons on the table for their use in purchasing sand and cement to mix mortar. We agreed to return three weeks later with 12 cartons as final payment for their completion of street rubbish removal and wall repair. In those three weeks, all was accomplished. The return to the family and neighbors was far beyond shelter protection - they earned dignity, self-pride and betterment of their community. My buddy and I gained respect for them and they, in turn, became our friends.