US Consulates Come Back

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US Consulate General, Frankfurt

TWO DAYS AFTER the United States declared war against Germany in December 1941, the skeleton staff still working at the American Embassy in Berlin received a telephone call. It was the German Foreign Office, and a voice announced, although it was already 2 p.m., that all heavy luggage must be delivered at the Embassy before dinner-time. Absolutely nothing, the voice said, would be shipped out after that.

The Americans — there were 120, including families — followed directions to be at the Embassy themselves at 9 a.m. the following day. Promptly at that hour they were taken in buses to a waiting train, destination unknown. Diplomatic privileges had come to an abrupt halt, and State Department personnel still vividly remember revision to German rations and their five months’ internment at Bad Nauheim, 20 miles north of Frankfurt, to wait for an exchange of persons to be arranged.

The American Consulate in Berlin today is “way across town,” both literally and figuratively, from the ruins of the Embassy beside the Brandenburg Gate, just inside the Soviet Sector. Where once the Embassy was engaged in negotiations of world-wide importance with the German government, the present consulate is primarily engaged in citizenship and passport activities. Consul Francis A. Lane, until recently chief of the 56-member staff, made a symbolic statement when he said of a request put to him concerning commercial firms in the Soviet Sector: “This matter will be simple to expedite. It is impossible.”

Besides having served both in Bremen and Stuttgart during his 21 years in the Foreign Service, Mr. Lane spent the war years on the staff of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces and that of the US Political Adviser for German Affairs, SHAFF.

However, in keeping with State Department policy of periodical transfer of its Foreign Service officers, Consul Lane has been sent to Gibraltar and replaced by Robert B. Streeper, former consul general in Madras, India. Pending the arrival of Mr. Streeper, a member of the consulate staff, Bryant Buckingham, acted as consul.

ALONG WITH THE present five American consulates general in Germany, Berlin was opened for the third time in its history early in 1946. Bremen dates originally from 1794; Frankfurt, 1829; Stuttgart, middle of the 19th century; Hamburg 1865; Berlin, about 1870, and Munich, 1879. The last reopenings took place between March 1 and May 1, 1946. Former offices not reopened were Cologne, Dresden and Leipzig.*

* For earlier article, see “US Consulates in Germany.” Information Bulletin, Issue No. 51, July 22, 1946.
Right after the war, Berlin and Frankfurt were set up as “consular branches,” not yet full-fledged consular offices. Although Frankfurt has been “promoted” to a consulate general, Berlin still is in the consulate stage, thus coming under direct supervision of the Office of Political Affairs, HICOG. The remaining consular offices, all consulates general, also come under the Office of Political Affairs and Director Samuel Reber, but in a less direct fashion. They form a division, headed by Supervisory Consul General Albert M. Doyle, who succeeded retiring Consul General Marshall M. Vance on July 31. His office supervises all consular functions and channels information to and from HICOG.

In the early days of 1946 an elderly German gentleman entered the building at 11 Bockenheimer Anlage, Frankfurt, and told the receptionist he had come to “exercise option for citizenship.” His father, he explained confidently, had fought in the Civil War and when hostilities ended, had been offered an option for citizenship on the basis of service. Father had, however, returned to Germany, married and remained, and so today he, the son, would like to take up the option. What must he sign?

A former active Nazi with a destroyed factory to rebuild, he deemed the opportune moment had arrived for him to step forward. He was among the first of the tens of thousands of claimants to American citizenship — “American DP’s,” they were tagged — to tread a soon well-worn path through the rubble to the Frankfurt consulate.

Not one of the former consular buildings in Germany survived the destruction. The office at Bockenheimer Anlage, housed in a renovated doctor’s home, was manned late in 1945 by three officers and one secretary who answered telephones all over the building and replied “yes,” when callers asked, “Is this the Consulate? — the Embassy? — the Consulate General? — the State Department? — the Consular Branch?” In those days, no one in or outside the office knew.

In accordance with the Presidential Directive of Dec. 22, 1945, a procedure was established to resume immigration from Germany to the United States. In the subsequent screening of these claimants to American citizenship (some with more and some with even less claim than the son of the Civil War soldier), it took until 1948 for the offices to expedite the enormous case backlog. This processing, and the issuance of 37,326 non-preference visas to displaced persons between April 1946 and July 1, 1948 (when the Displaced Persons Commission came into being), was the principal work of consular personnel in the early post-war days.

Claimants caught in Germany by the war, displaced persons and ethnic Germans (Germans expelled from Eastern countries under the Potsdam Agreement) have created “diplomatic” work which has set precedents both in type and amount.

For instance, Mr. Doyle, the supervisory consul general, serves as the immigration co-ordinating officer for the Displaced Persons Program in Austria, Germany and Italy. He thus supervises the 12 DP visa-issuing subposts established when the Displaced Persons Act went into effect July 1, 1948. Consular officers at these subposts decide on the eligibility of prospective immigrants under US nationality laws. This step comes after their eligibility as displaced persons has been ascertained by the DP Commission. Nine Foreign Service officers, 33 Foreign Service Staff officers, and 35 Foreign Service clerks and secretaries are currently assigned to this program.

Aside from visa-issuing, however, offices gradually have resumed functions normal to a Foreign Service post. Political and economic reporting, citizenship services, protection of American interests and trade promotion are common to all posts in Germany today. The degree of importance attached to certain types of work in different areas varies with the office’s geographic location.

Because it is situated so conveniently close to the HICOG Headquarters Building, the Frankfurt Consulate General has been chosen to house the Office of the Supervisory Consul General. The Frankfurt office is therefore the scene of conferences bringing together consuls general, DP visa-issuing officers and other groups as the need arises.

To centralize and simplify procedures, the Frankfurt Consulate handles all visa and passport work for German government officials going to the United States from Bonn. It has the busiest Citizenship and Passport Section in Germany by virtue of the large American community created by HICOG and the relatively high proportion of military personnel there. All procedures for establishing or determining American citizenship are included in this section, and in recent years the registration of births has been a significant part of the work.

Numerous services, passport and otherwise, are performed at Frankfurt for visiting government officials and for the increasing number of business men entering Germany. Explanations for this are Frankfurt’s status as a transportation center and her position at least temporarily as a commercial, financial and government center of western Germany even since the truncation of the country.

Frankfurt, in the six-month period ending last May 1, prepared 1,860 trade letters, more than three times the number sent out from any other office. The many queries directed there are the result of association in the writers’ minds of Frankfurt as the “headquarters” of everything in Germany. All incorrectly addressed letters are also forwarded to that office. Only those seeking knowledge of a particular district are sent to another consular office for acknowledgment.

This office also has performed thus far this year the largest number of notarial services (legalization of documents), the 2,450 total being the result again of the large number of Americans in the vicinity. Frankfurt’s most recent publicity came when the Jubilee Plaque, placed on the old building by the City of Frankfurt on the consulate general’s 100th birthday in 1929, was uncovered in a Frankfurt junk pile. For administrative purposes the DP visa-issuing subposts at Butzbach and Schweinfurt are assigned to this office.
THE CONSULATE GENERAL at Bremen is the oldest consular office in Germany, its 1794 charter bearing the signature of President George Washington. Its early duties were concerned with shipping between the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen and the United States in its early years of existence.

In postwar Germany, Bremen has about-faced. The present restrictions on the German merchant marine have curtailed her shipping services but the increasing industrial and political importance of the district, which includes towns of the Ruhr such as Duesseldorf and Essen as well as Cologne and Germany's present capital, Bonn, have resulted in more political and economic reports originating there than from any of the other consular districts.

In the six-month period ending May 1, the Bremen office prepared 223 political and 226 economic reports. The only office approaching the latter figure was Hamburg, which produced 159 political reports; no office approached the total for economic reports. The importance of reports never can be measured by number alone, but here it is an accurate reflection of the amount of activity in the Bremen area.

The Bremen office certified the largest number of consular invoices, 2,227 in the six-month period, because of the heavy industry exports from that area. Frankfurt, a center with many finishing industries, certified just over 2,000 in the same period.

The Bremen office has under its jurisdiction what may well be the smallest consulate in the world, that at Bremerhaven. One officer and one clerk comprise the staff. Their duties consist only of shipping and notarial services. The office is a forwarding branch for the US Government Dispatch Agent handling supplies for Germany and Austria and is the only port of debarkation for the Army in Europe.

Consul General Maurice W. Altaffer was in charge of the Bremen office, until his transfer in August to the State Department in Washington, being succeeded by Laverne Baldwin, formerly stationed in Istanbul. Its staff is composed of 75 persons.

THE ONLY CONSULAR office which began operating as a regular foreign service post immediately upon reopening its doors was Hamburg. With a district situated entirely in the British Zone, it was never within the sphere of influence of OMGUS or HICOG. It issued no displaced persons’ visas until a visa-issuing subpost was established at Wentorf in January 1949. Before the war, a considerable portion of the consular work done in this largest of German seaports was based on shipping activity. Because shipping restrictions have continued, other work comes to the force in reviewing consular functions. When figures are considered, political reporting predominates with economic reporting, passport and visa work following close behind.

State Department personnel in Hamburg have been receiving all community needs, including both home and office accommodations, from the British Control Commission for Germany. However, the Hamburg Consulate Gen-


Albert M. Doyle (left), Supervisory Consul General, heads the division formed by the US consulates general in Germany, supervises all consular functions and channels information to and from HICOG. Mr. Doyle replaced Consul General Marshall M. Vance, who retired from the Foreign Service on July 31. Above, Secretary Mary McDonald, in behalf of Frankfurt personnel, presents going-away gift to Mr. Vance. (Photo by Jacoby, PRD HICOG)

eral, will be the first in Germany to move again into government-owned quarters when its transfer is made next January to buildings at 27 and 28 Alster-Ufer Strasse.

Consul General Robert T. Cowan heads the staff of slightly more than 100 members.

Despite current shipping inactivity, the Hamburg consulate broke into the headlines with “shipping” news last June when three of its secretaries and one of its vice consuls discarded their shoes and pocketbooks for a half-hour sail before lunch on the Baltic-Mecklenburg coast, and eight hours later still were trying to reach land in the face of driving wind and rain. Finally they reached the Soviet Zone shore. The four set out at a fast barefoot pace toward the nearby zonal border but soon were approached by German and then Russian police. The only identification which could be produced was a paper verifying the vice consul had once served in Spain. And no one could understand the lack of shoes. It was only after a night spent in a guarded farmhouse and 24 hours of “negotiations” involving various offices, nations and people that the four were released at Luebeck.

THE CONSULATE GENERAL in Stuttgart was in the 1930’s one of the six largest visa-issuing offices in the world and one of the three largest visa-issuing posts in Europe, Warsaw and Naples heading the list. At that time all immigration visa work in southern Germany was centralized there while in the north it was divided between Hamburg and Berlin. Stuttgart’s postwar visa-issuing has been limited to her own consular district, the state of Wurttemberg-Baden.

Stuttgart administers the subpost visa-issuing offices at Ludwigsburg and Rastatt. The latter, located in the old castle of the Grand Duke of Baden, boasts the most auspicious visa-issuing surroundings in Germany. Consul gen-
eral at Stuttgart is Patrick Mallon, who administers a staff of 72 persons.

The American Consulate General at Munich has had an unusual function hinged onto its program: that of administering the European relay base of the United States Information Service from New York, or the Voice of America. Although in no way responsible for the program material, the consulate general has on its staff 85 persons connected with the relay station, including 15 engineers and 45 local technicians.

With the largest consular district in Germany, this office also has the largest staff. Its more than 250 employees made it the largest consulate general in the world two years ago when the latest figures were published. There were only five embassies in the Foreign Service larger at that time. Consul General Sam E. Woods, who holds the personal rank of minister, is in charge.

The fact that the state of Bavaria, which the consular district entirely covers, is the largest of the German states and that in Munich one finds the headquarters of that area's many separatist and independence movements, makes its political reports of particular interest. The location of the Bavarian Alps in the Munich district has also made that office a tourist activity reporting center.

Munich is the only consular district which had under its jurisdiction three DP subposts. On Dec. 31, 1949 the post at Amberg was closed, but those situated at Augsburg and at Funk Barracks in Munich still are functioning. Funk Barracks, of all the subposts, has issued the largest number of DP visas since more displaced persons were concentrated in that area.

The visa work, for ethnic Germans, common to all consular offices in Germany, is a type of immigration never before undertaken in American history. For the first time, people are immigrating to the United States on the quota of a country in which they were not born.

Ethnic Germans under the DP Act are those displaced populations of German origin who were born in Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania or Yugoslavia, or areas under the control and domination of any such countries. Most came from countries with quotas so low their turn for immigration could hardly have been predicted. This situation exists because the US quota system was set up under the Immigration Act of 1924 on the basis of the percentage of blood stock of each country in the United States in 1890. It resulted in low Eastern European country quotas.

Section 12 of the DP Act attempted to alleviate the ethnic German problem by setting aside for these people 50 percent of the German and Austrian 1949 and 1950 quotas. For the opportunity of immigrating immediately, stringent rules were enforced. In contrast to usual German immigration regulations, no former member of the Nazi Party or a subsidiary group could qualify.

It became the duty of the consular screening officer to establish ethnic German status through interviews and documents presented. The ethnic could be several possible combinations of the following: of German blood stock, educated in a German school, brought up in a German community where German customs, holidays, etc., were observed, have spoken the German language, have been culturally as well as racially German.

Normally, public records are available for the consulates to check alleged truths. Since interview statements in these cases could not be proved through documents other than those presented by the prospective immigrants themselves, an unusual responsibility has been attached to the judgment of the consular officers who passed the 9,207 ethnics who had received visas through May 31, 1950.

The consular offices here have maintained fruitful relationships in Germany with the two tragic exceptions of World Wars I and II. Some humorously recall Frankfurt's "Civil War Incident" when local citizens wondered whether to continue "fruitful relations" with the ousted US consul from Louisiana or his replacement from Michigan. The ex-consul refused to leave the city, negotiated a loan for his "country," the Southern States, and busied himself finding financial support for outfitting privateers to harry Northern shipping.

His replacement, with the personal blessings of President Lincoln, also began negotiating loans for his "country" and became so perturbed over the activity of his predecessor that he obtained special permission from Congress to fly the American flag and display the American seal on his office to convince the Free City that he still represented all of the United States. (Before that incident, it had never been the custom to display the flag regularly.) He must have succeeded. He negotiated five loans for the United States.

The consular offices have a tradition to maintain important for the effectiveness of US representation in Germany in the future; that of continuing the close and friendly relations with the German public which they have tried to cultivate for a century. Consular functions should not be confused with occupation policy. Consular functions are continuous; occupation functions are temporary.

Veteran consulate personnel of Germany feel that only by keeping the complete confidence of contacts and of the public can the Foreign Service function most successfully in the future in Germany.

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