The Public Relations Division, HICOG, conducted 20 press, radio, magazine and newsreel correspondents, having a combined audience in Europe and North America of more than 200,000,000 persons, on a tour in May of Bavaria’s northern and eastern borders overlooking the Soviet Zone of Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria. The tour enabled them to observe firsthand how people live and work within the shadows of the Iron Curtain...to see how they are facing the threat of ideologies which would stifle human freedom...and to observe the efforts of the US resident officer to introduce democracy and restore faith and confidence among a people who live in a region where West meets East.

Touring the Border

By W. J. CALDWELL
Chief, Public Relations Branch, OLC Bavaria

The SLEEPY BAVARIAN HAMLET of Moedlareuth typifies the results of the Communist doctrine of divide...and utter confusion.

There, as in many other communities lying astride the Iron Curtain which wraps snake-like around miles of Bavaria’s twisting northern and eastern frontiers, the demarcation line between East and West lies flush in the center of town.

Citizens of Moedlareuth tell you that having the home town split in two with a forbidden wall to keep lifelong neighbors and friends apart is no joke. One man living on the Bavarian side of town hadn’t visited his brother, a resident of the Soviet half of the town, for more than 18 months despite the fact they live only a stone’s throw apart. Countless others experience similar family splits. But many, with a sly wink, admit that Russian vigilance has not prevented an occasional “sneak” journey across the border.

“A community of two nations,” grunted one leathery-faced native as he leaned on his cane on the Bavarian side of town.

“Yeah,” sighed a peasant woman as she snatched up an unwary child of three toddling in the direction of the unpainted fence which marked the zonal dividing line, “two nations side by side — but so distant.”

MOEDLAUREUTH WAS A TYPICAL German farming community situated party in the county of Hof, in the extreme northeast corner of Bavaria, until that fateful day when the Russians put up the fence in the middle of the village. The half which the Soviets claimed lies in adjacent Thuringia. That original barrier, which follows the course of a small stream which forms the state border, was later made more impenetrable by the Soviets. They dug a trench parallel to the fence and then added another wooden fence as a triple deterrent to East-West relations. Reinforcement of the Iron Curtain at that point followed swiftly on the heels of two Curtain-defying incidents.

A young Bavarian, on the day of his wedding, wanted to celebrate the nuptial occasion by publicly flaunting the Soviets. He brazenly drove his car across Moedlareuth’s main street, smashing the fence to a splintered loop, and then driving triumphantly back through another section of the wavering Curtain to western safety.

The second Iron Curtain-busting incident which prompted the three-layer border barrier involved a trucking company whose owner decided it was healthier to go west. Mobilizing his fleet of trucks and tractors, he convoyed the rumbling exodus across town, through the hapless wooden barrier, to a safe haven on the Bavarian side.

Moedlareuth as a whole comprises approximately 210 natives and some 50 houses, many dating back centuries. The Bavarian side of town was left without a school, a store, a post office and a community well by the Soviet’s decision to partition the community. Fortunately, one enterprising woman on the Bavarian side of town had, with true womanly intuition, opened a tiny shop in her home which served bottled beer. Her foresight saved the Bavarian side from a complete drought.

WILLIAM G. KEEN of Chattanooga, Tenn., US resident officer of county Hof, said the Soviet-inspired division had created quite a problem for the hamlet’s Bavarian citizens.

“In normal times,” 38-year-old Keen drawled, “the kids on the Bavarian side of town merely crossed the road into Thuringia and in a matter of minutes were in school. The school is now barred to them so they have to walk two miles to the nearest Bavarian school at Toepen. There was also the mail problem. At first the Bavarian residents

Looking over US Zone-Soviet Zone barrier at Moedlareuth are (l-r) Jerome Caminada, London Times; Richard O’Malley, Associated Press; Ed Haaker, NBC; Allen Drye, ABC, and Jack Henry, Reuters.

(Photographs illustrating this article were furnished by Claude Jacoby, PRD, HICOG, photographer; Gerald Waller, photographer for “Stars and Stripes,” and Arthur Settel, chief, Public Relations Division, HICOG.)

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were able to walk to the Soviet border and have their mail handed to them over the fence. But the Russians stopped that, so now mail has to be routed to them from Toepen, the closest Bavarian village having a post office."

The likable resident officer said the community’s water well posed one of the greatest problems. The more daring Bavarians have sneaked across the border at night for their pail of water. But it’s risky. One hapless woman, wife of a Bavarian border policeman, was apprehended by Soviet Zone so-called “People’s Police” as she was kneeling by the forbidden well. Her captors drove her six miles to Soviet headquarters, where she was thoroughly grilled. She later was released but had to walk back. The Bavarian side of town now is building its own well to avoid the risk of more serious consequences befalling its citizens.

**IT WAS MID-AFTERNOON** when we drove into Moedlareuth and the streets on both sides of the frontier were deserted except for two “People’s Police” guarding the Soviet side of the barrier. Our arrival attracted natives from both sides of town. On the Soviet side, a score of men, women and children gathered near the barrier. They waved and exchanged pleasantries, seeming not to mind the two rifle-toting “People’s Police.” Shortly after we reached the town, the two “People’s Police” hurried to a field telephone and minutes later more than a dozen “People’s Police” reinforcements arrived from various directions. They clustered in a group 200 feet from where we stood.

A chicken pecked its way across the churned up border and just as nonchalantly returned over the “no man’s” strip. Citizens on the Soviet side watched with envy.

We had been at the border about an hour when a warning whisper was hissed among the Eastern onlookers that “the Russians are coming.” Frantic mothers on the eastern side of the border grabbed their offspring and together with their menfolk fled into their houses. Within seconds the Soviet part of Moedlareuth was deserted except for the gaping “People’s Police.” On the Bavarian side of town, the citizens remained unperturbed. They smiled, joked and seemed to say, “Gosh, ain’t freedom wonderful.”

A cloud of dust rose from the nearby hill where the Russian soldiers reportedly were on guard. The dust cloud moved rapidly closer and then from it emerged a battered German-army “jeep” of World War II vintage. The lumbering vehicle, manned by two uniformed “People’s Police,” rumbled over the dirt road toward us and then about 25 feet away it followed the road which runs parallel to the zonal boundary. The vehicle skidded to a stop by the group of “People’s Police,” but nothing more happened. The border guards continued to stare at us until we finally departed.*

**MOEDLAREUTH IS JUST ONE** of many towns straddling the zonal border which have been halved by the Soviets’ zonal policy. At towns lying partly in Bavaria and partly in Czechoslovakia, Communist officials have created a barren no-man’s buffer corridor by de-

* Ten minutes after the correspondents departed, a detail of approximately 50 armed Russian soldiers arrived at the border town but there was no incident.

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Along the Bavaria-Soviet Zone border: (above) Party of American, Allied and German correspondents and escort officials at Neustadt interzonal barrier, viewing the Soviet checkpoint down the road. (Left) Claude Jacoby, Public Relations Division staff photographer, taking photo at top. (Right) Telephoto view of the Soviet checkpoint. (Photos, top by Jacoby; left by Settel; right by Waller)

molishing houses on their side of the frontier. The unfortunate occupants were obliged to find shelter elsewhere.

Resident Officer Keen pointed to border police statistics to show how ineffective the Communist zonal policy is. The illegal border traffic is one-sided all along the Iron Curtain frontier, with many times more Easterners seeking to enter the western zones of Germany.

"The Easterners," the resident officer pointed out, "risk death, slave labor or other primitive forms of punishment to escape to the West. Many of them bring stories which would make your hair curl. Still others, with families in the East whom they don't dare desert through fear of Soviet reprisals, slip across the border merely to visit relatives and friends, to get a square meal or to purchase other necessities of life unavailable or beyond reach of their pocketbooks in the Soviet Zone."

Mr. Keen was quick to admit that the people living in the Hof area, as in other border counties, have their problems - mainly housing, unemployment, a steady influx of refugees, the flight of industry westward, the acquisition of needed raw materials for the border area's manifold industries, and new markets for the finished goods.

"Being human," he said, "many of the citizens complain - some probably too much. But on the whole the people seem thankful they are free and have been given the opportunity, mainly through American financial aid, to better their living conditions. The Marshall Plan was a big factor in restoring self-confidence. It helped show them democracy is not just talk, but cooperative action."

While many Bavarians complain of the drain on their economy from the refugees, some are well aware of the contributions these refugees have made in bringing new industries to their area. The Neuerer porcelain factory in Hof is a good example. This world-famous concern, one of many border factories visited by the correspondents, formerly was located in Czechoslovakia. It moved west and in addition to providing employment for hundreds of Hof workers, it is now earning much-needed dollars for the West German economy by exporting the bulk of its products to the United States.

The correspondents visited three Bavarian border areas - Hof, Coburg and Passau - and in each there was one postwar problem most frequently voiced. Creation of the Iron Curtain along the border had caused a major trade dislocation, since in normal times the bulk of commercial relations these areas had were with the East. Coal and other raw materials had been obtained cheaply from nearby Czechoslovakia and other countries now behind the Iron Curtain. And the finished products formerly were marketed in the East.

Today, except for authorized crossing-points, roads and railroad lines connecting Bavaria with her eastern markets have been blocked off at the border. Consequently, manufacturers have had to turn west - getting coal from the more distant Ruhr and seeking markets in far-off western European countries and the United States.

Hans Peter Thomsen of Madison, Wis., resident officer in the counties of Coburg and Neustadt since last August, said this problem is especially acute in Coburg, which jets peninsula-like into the Soviet Zone. The county is rimmed by the Iron Curtain on the west, north and east, forcing traffic to follow a 90-degree route between Coburg and western Europe.

It greatly increases the operating costs of Coburg's manufacturers, making it difficult for the area's businesses, which comprise small industrial enterprises producing mainly toys, ceramics, chinaware, furniture, electric cables and Christmas tree ornaments, and 5,000 small
farms, to compete on the world's free markets. This is one reason why unemployment in the Coburg area is higher than the overall Bavarian average. Generally speaking, the people living on Bavaria's borders facing Communist-dominated lands are trying to make the best of their lot. Roads linking them with the west are being repaired and new ones built, and housing slowly but resolutely is being provided in most areas to accommodate workers seeking employment in old and new industries.

In some border communities which in prewar days attracted tourists from far and wide, the local officials have been more reluctant about marring their beautiful landscape with smoke and soot-erupting factories. Passau, which faces Austria and where William J. Garlock of Bloomfield, N.J., serves as resident officer, has launched a large power project as an economy aid. However, many of Passau's leading citizens still frown on industries which they fear would deter future tourist trade when life there once more becomes normal.

All along the border, the problem of training youth for democratic living was heard. The Communist-dominated youth movement (FDJ) in the Soviet Zone of Germany, freely financed by the Communist Party, is making a determined effort to convert Bavarian youth to their cause. The highly-regimented FDJers have made surprisingly few inroads on Bavarian youth, however, despite the impetus a movement of their kind normally receives when substandard economic conditions and widespread unemployment exist.

The anti-Communist youth movement in the border areas generally has received less financial support from local government officials, but their unregimented organization has grown—a growth which many observers attribute in part to the proximity of Communism itself. The Bavarian youth, like their elders, don't have to be told about the evils of a Communist state. Stories recounted by refugees of life under Red rule has been convincing proof for most of the youth that while conditions in their own Bavarian communities may be bad, their life still is a paradise to that in the East.

HICOG, through its resident officers, and US military authorities are working hand in glove with Bavarian officials to maximize work and play opportunities for Bavarian youth. In Coburg, for instance, a youth home was established in the summer of 1950 through the joint efforts and cooperation of local Bavarian authorities, HICOG and the US Army.

The Hof area, as part of its energetic youth program, has completed plans for an international youth forum and camp on the border—one of many such activities planned this summer to promote greater understanding with other nations and to provide, for the benefit of the East zone, an example of unregimented youth activity.

The US Resident Officer—The American Government's so-called "grass-roots ambassador"—deserves much of the credit for introducing the western brand of democracy to a people who, geographically, are exposed to Eastern influences.

Only a person who has never taken the trouble to observe the resident officer in action can doubt the vital role he is playing in postwar Germany. His job is a round-the-clock one, with endless conferences, meetings and discussions with local officials and citizens representing all facets of community life.

Sandwiched in to his never-ending schedule of activities are the many problems the resident officer is expected to solve—a controversy stemming from a hunting incident involving a member of the Allied governments stationed in Germany, liaison between American and German officials on a project affecting the interests of both nations, engineering HICOG's exchanges program at the county level, answering questions or providing information in defense of Western democratic concepts and principles. These are just a few of the jobs which daily demand of the resident officer Solomon-like judgment, wisdom and discretion.

Traditional rivalry between city and county government officials in Coburg—a rivalry which existed long before 1920 when Coburg, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, ceased its historic role as a duchy and was incorporated into the Bavarian state—had retarded community cooperation. This condition was further heightened by the fact that the Coburg area politically leans toward two extremes—right and left.

Resident Officer Thomsen sensed this rivalry shortly after he took up his post there. He investigated, analyzed the situation, consulted the more open-minded community leaders, and then took some positive steps. Mr. Thomsen intensified HICOG's educational program by organizing youth forums and discussion groups. In the field of adult education he induced the adult people's school (Volkshochschule) to institute a series of lectures, conducted by elected city and county officials of the area, on local civic affairs, explaining that "this develop-
ment is significant if you will bear in mind the traditional philosophy of the government official — namely, to govern." Mr. Thomsen said of the lectures: "Slowly but surely, the concept of the public official as a public servant, responsible to the citizens of his community, is taking root."

Mr. THOMSEN SUCCEEDED in getting the citizens interested in problems pertaining to their particular fields, but bringing them together to tackle problems on a community-wide basis was another thing. Public officials were reluctant to look at the over-all welfare of the community. Coburg city officials, the majority members of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and Coburg county officials, predominantly Social Democrats (SPD), were at odds for reasons primarily of political dogma.

The resident officer finally solved that problem by hitting upon the community planning council idea.

"Citizens not only have a right to determine by whom they should be governed," Mr. Thomsen argued, "but how their schools and parks should look, how their hospitals and streets should be built. In other words, they have the right to help plan their community."

The attitude of officialdom toward community planning in its earlier stages was succinctly expressed by Coburg’s mayor, Dr. Walter Langer, who told Mr. Thomsen: "It is easy for you Americans to plan because you have the dollars." Retorted Mr. Thomsen: "No, Dr. Langer, we have dollars because we have planned."

The resident officer was determined to show political dichards that community-wide planning was not a matter of dollars but common sense. His first success was among the area’s educators and scholars, who, at his suggestion, formed a city planning group late in 1950. The group attracted interested citizens from both the city and county, including some government officials who, while they still suspiciously eyed community planning, were sufficiently politically-minded to heed the views of their constituents.

The planning committee grew, and both county and city government heads began taking an active role. However, at the beginning community planning was limited to city or county — never the two jointly.

Coburg city planning commission holds session with correspondents and escort officials as observers. Standing is Hans Anweller, (SPD), city councillor, listening to a question put by one of the visitors.

(Photo by Jacoby)

CITY AND COUNTY OFFICIALS, sitting with local citizens on the planning committee, at first glared at each other. Then they began wrangling. Mr. Thomsen was encouraged when he noticed they were beginning to agree occasionally on minor problems affecting either city or county. The big turning point came early this year when the two rival political camps decided to meet to discuss problems common to both city and county. That history-making meeting was held late last January when city and county officials, along with government representatives from Munich and Bonn, sat down at one table with an eye on their common community problems.

Mr. Thomsen had reason to be proud of an accomplishment for which he was mainly responsible.

Duplicating the truce declared by city and county officials of Coburg, Bavarian citizens along the border are meeting and solving many of their problems. And in seeking to better their own way of life, they are not turning their back on their less fortunate fellow countrymen who live across the zonal border in the Soviet Zone.

At virtually every village and hamlet we visited we were asked by Bavarians: "Do you realize that the Germans living in the East also are waiting to be liberated by you Americans?"

More than once we were told that "whenever the Americans withdraw their troops from a border point, it causes even greater concern among the eastern Germans than among the Bavarians. The eastern Germans feel safer knowing the American soldiers are nearby."

And many Bavarians relayed this message they said they had received from relatives and friends in the Soviet Zone: "Please remind the Americans that most of us are Communists by force — not of our own free will."

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