

Ansbach

March 1979 to March 1982

By Allen Lawless



Upon arrival at Rhein/Main Airport near Frankfurt, I processed in to the 21st Replacement Company. Later that afternoon I boarded a commercial bus and, along with others, began the trip to other points within Germany.

A few hours later I arrived at the 501st Replacement Station, which was located about 2 km from Ansbach. I wound up spending the night there. The next day, I made my way to Ansbach, the 501st AG Company, and the First Armored Division Band. After some processing at each of those places, I was picked up by Chris Burnett and finally arrived at Bleidorn Kaserne in the southern part of Ansbach.

Ansbach is a picturesque town in northern Bavaria and capital of Franconia. This assignment was the advent of what was to be my long career in Germany. Among other things, I began studying classical music and jazz. While practicing my instrument continued to some extent, I was much more interested in hearing music. The purchase of huge stereo systems through the PX was a popular pastime and depository for many a GI's paycheck. While I held off on that, I certainly was able to borrow recordings and listen to them. Chris Burnett and Larry Bennett even taped some things for me, as did Carl Ruppel.

I also quit smoking during this period, gravitating toward a pipe for a month or so until the sheer act of filling, lighting, and cleaning the meerschaum pipe became more trouble than it was worth. I began jogging in the woods nearby Bleidorn Kaserne, an act that I was sure was going to kill me before I could gain any benefit out of it. But then, the busy summer season came upon us. And that meant gigs. Lots of gigs.

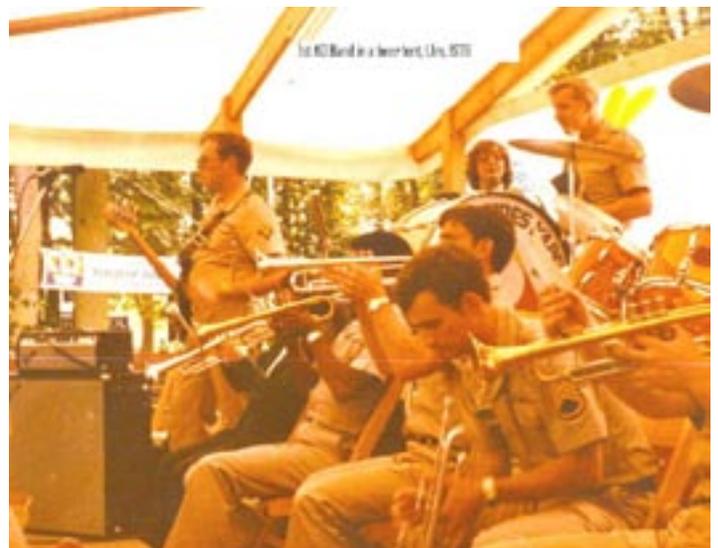
The prelude to the busy summer season was a formal concert in Pegnitz, Germany. Pegnitz was a small Bavarian town northeast of Nürnberg and featured a bridge several hundred years old. This concert was a public relations band-aid for the Germans in that area since the REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) exercises earlier that year had resulted in an Army tank

destroying that bridge. The folks in Pegnitz weren't entirely happy over that development but they did favorably respond to the offer and so we were booked.

We rehearsed for a couple of weeks before this concert, doing a couple of American long-haired concert pieces that drew polite applause, Broadway show tunes which garnered a bit more enthusiasm, Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," and a few beer tent numbers that brought the house down. It was my first significant exposure to music-making in Germany and I was captivated and thrilled. This, I thought, is the kind of duty that one dreams of. And it was only the beginning! I was to learn just how busy we could be.

In the summer of 1979, we played for over two months without a day off. It became an endless series of getting on "Nathan", the band bus and proud owner of the loudest Cummins diesel engine ever built – thereby necessitating the wear of earplugs for those who didn't want to go deaf early – and washing the only two sets of TW's I had. The Tropical Worsted (TW) uniform, a summertime somewhat informal uniform, was characterized by wash and wear polyester shirt and pants, tan in color, with rank insignia sewn on the sleeves, distinctive unit insignia on the epaulets, authorized ribbons and badges over the left shirt pocket, and a nameplate. Brass insignia was also worn on the collar points.

The routine was the same almost every day. Get up in the morning, recover from the beer tent the night before (walking about slowly for awhile because it hurt to move quickly), prepare a uniform, have a formation, load the band truck, get on the bus, travel two hours



to the next beer tent, unpack and set up, eat a meal (usually a half-chicken or bratwurst at the beer tent), start drinking beer, and play two sets. A two-hour performance usually turned into 2.5 hours because we simply couldn't do any wrong.

Musically, beer tents don't require finesse, sensitivity or talent. Playing a beer tent requires power, endurance, and lots of volume. The louder the better. The band was full of exceptional musicians like Steve Gilbert (tenor sax and flute), Dale Tope (trumpeter who specialized in the stratosphere), Bruce Shockley (bass guitar and guitar, vocals, drums, bassoon, clarinet, and any damned instrument he could get his hands on), Leon Johnson (piano and vocals and a terrific graphic artist), Bob "Bix" Beitelman who was probably the best finesse-type trumpet player we had and who could read like nobody I'd ever seen, and Chris Burnett, of whom I already spoke. Despite the informal setting of beer tents, being set up, oddly enough, in a tent in the middle of a field somewhere, we did take our performances seriously enough to quaff down a few liters of beer before, during, and after the gig. This loosened up those of us who drank beer enough to play with as much controlled volume as we could, while hopefully playing somewhat in tune.

The crowds were certainly with us. I had never seen such enthusiastic acceptance of an Army band's performances and I grew to thoroughly enjoy the experience.

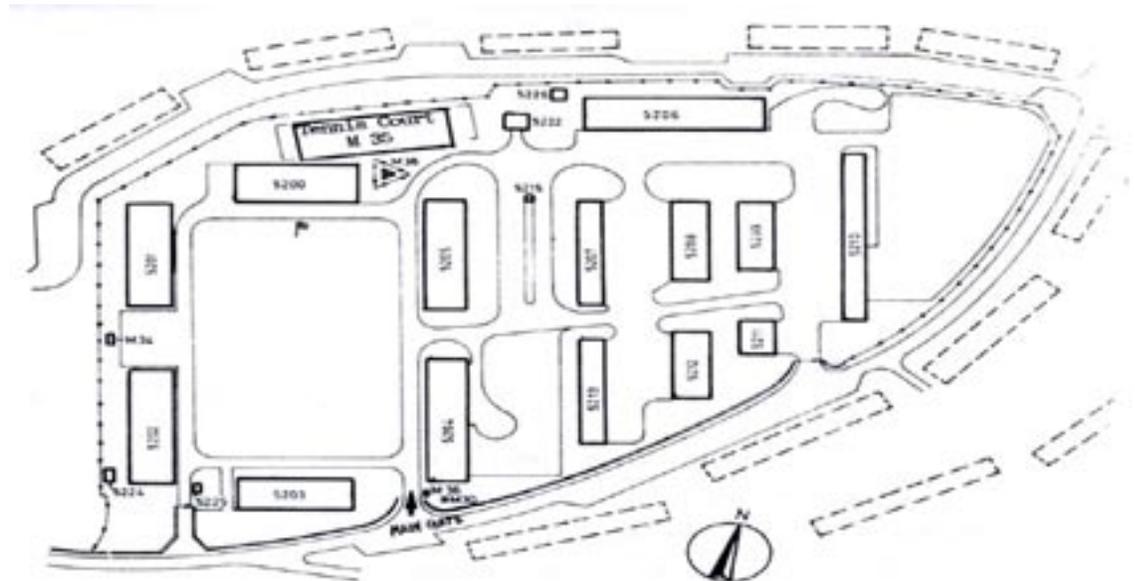
Afterwards, it was time to pack up, schmooze a little with certain members of our adoring crowd, kill another liter of beer, and pour ourselves back onto the bus for the two-hour bus ride back to Ansbach. We would often have to stop at a roadside set of bushes for the

inevitable "watering" that was important to the general condition of our bladders.

Not everybody drank, and certainly not everybody drank to excess. But drinking was officially sanctioned, if not expected. Alcohol was readily available, it was fairly cheap, and it comprised a significant part of local culture. Bavaria was noted for its breweries and it seemed that every town, regardless of size, featured its own. These were microbreweries in every sense of the word, but the difference was, these breweries had typically been around for hundreds of years. You can't argue with that kind of history.

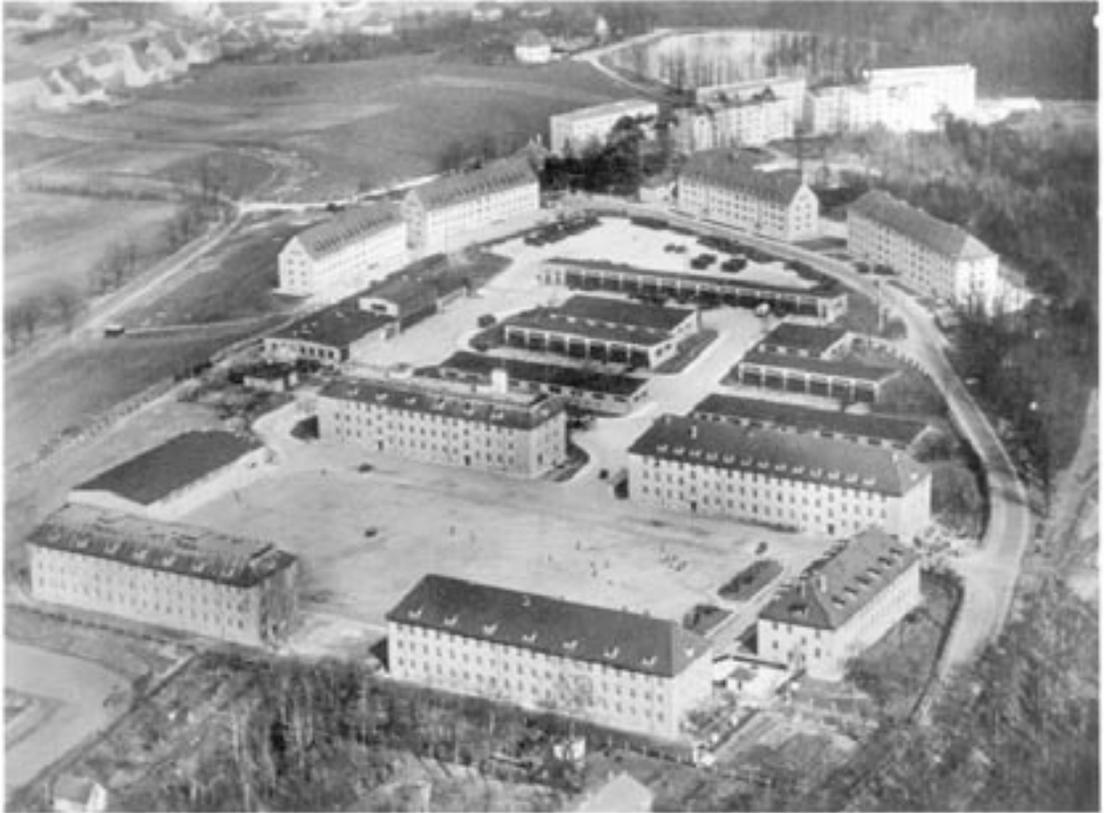
Ansbach, of course, had its own brewery named "Hühner". This was an acceptable brew, especially when the band was invited to participate in a brewery tour. We were able to see the huge copper vats and tile-lined fermentation tanks that facilitated the process. The packaging line was noisy and seeing the thousands of half-liter bottles was a little overwhelming. Afterwards, the brewery management treated us to grilled bratwurst and as much beer as we wanted. I have photos of this event, featuring a beautiful sunlit day. We had a good time.

It wasn't all fun and games, though. Being a division band, we had a fair-sized portion of the division's



BLEIDORN KASERNE
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battalions to support for their biennial change of command ceremonies. This meant a lot of travel throughout the division's areas. Ansbach was the location of the 1st Armored Division Headquarters. The division's aviation assets were out at Katterbach Kaserne, located east of Ansbach about 2 kms. Other division units were in Crailsheim, Nürnberg, Bamberg, Fürth (a Nürnberg suburb); division artillery was in Zirndorf (also right outside Nürnberg), Illesheim, Schwabach, Erlangen, Herzogenaurach (shortened to Herzo Base), and other sub-communities. The division was spread out over a significant amount of ground and we did a lot of traveling on Nathan.



Bleidorn Kaserne, depicted below in a sketch and below that in a photo that dates from 1953 - like most of the U.S. Army facilities in Germany - was confiscated at the end of WWII. The Kaserne (or post) was situated on the top of a hill overlooking Ansbach from the south. It was a smallish kaserne, perhaps only 10 acres, with family housing (indicated below by dotted lines) surrounding the kaserne. The band was situated in Bldg. 5202. Also located about a half-mile away was Barton Barracks, home of various units most especially 1st AD Signal units and a 4-lane bowling alley. On Monday afternoons, during bowling season, the band would take off work and those of us who wanted to bowl did so. I bought my first bowling ball and shoes and actually began learning the sport during that time.

Down the hill and on the other side of the Old City (Altstadt) was Hindenburg Kaserne, the headquarters of the 1st Armored Division. The 501st AG Company was located here. At the time, the band was considered an

element of the AG Company and as such, the bandmaster was not the commander of the band. This changed in 1985 such that all division bands were redesignated as separate companies and were then disassociated from AG Companies. Hindenburg Kaserne was also the site of a Shoppette, the vehicle inspection point and registration station, a cafeteria/Burger Bar, and other ancillary activities. It was the closest thing around resembling legitimate facilities – the commissary was out at Katterbach.

We also traveled to southern Germany. I remember a wonderful gig at which we supported the Russian



Institute, a U.S. Army training program for officers. The Russian Institute was located in Garmisch, an idyllic center for skiing in the winter and lovely mountain vistas in the summer. We performed a formal concert at a gala event, dressed in our blues. Tom Harper and I stayed with an Army Lieutenant Colonel – we went jogging up into the mountains and it turned into a kind of race toward the end. I was in decent physical condition at that point because my running had continued on a regular basis and I was pretty young.

We had a partnership with the German Army band which was located in Regensburg. Through our partnership with this band we were permitted to qualify for the German Army Schutzenschnur, which is their marksmanship badge. I qualified in bronze and wore the badge on my uniform in accordance with Army regulations. We also performed several concerts with the band and they even once traveled to Ansbach to perform with us in the town concert hall. Any time we traveled to Regensburg we were treated like royalty. The German Army was very gracious and accommodating to us, even though we could not reciprocate in the same way. We simply didn't have the support. Our own facilities were austere and uncomfortable.

Even our telephones were archaic. In those days, before digital telephone support, we called the phone system "Hitler's revenge". The simple act of calling Nürnberg or Erlangen required shouting into the receiver to be heard on the other end. Calling Frankfurt was even worse. Worst yet, the band had only two phone lines anyway. One was a so-called Class A line (which could call out beyond Ansbach) and the other would permit you to only call other extensions in Ansbach.

Some names I remember: First Sergeant Billy C. Patterson, the first enlisted bandleader I ever saw who wore First Sergeant stripes. All the others had been Master Sergeants. CW3 Benny Easter, the bandmaster. SFC Dave Everhart, tuba; SFC Ken Lanterman flute and woodwind group leader; SFC Hank Kindell, trumpet and brass group leader; SFC Charlie Heintz, easily the loudest alto saxophone player in the Army. Charlie used a tenor sax reed on his alto sax mouthpiece for that "special touch." SSG Larry Bennett, one of the loudest trumpet players on the planet who played a beautiful Schilke trumpet. SSG Steve Vonada, SSG Rich Reinhart, SP5 Bob Levitsky who announced his goal in life was to get out of the Army and become a slum lord in Boston.



I have no doubt that he succeeded. Another very clever thing about Levitsky was his regular habit of subsisting on very little (apart from food given at gigs) and taking a substantial part of his paycheck down to a German bank and buying South African Krugerrands. These gold coins, containing one troy ounce of gold, could not be purchased through American sources because of the economic sanctions placed on South Africa because of their policies toward apartheid. It was during this period that the price of gold shot up to \$400 an ounce. Bob's investment paid off handsomely.

Other notables: SP4 Mark Connelly, tenor sax and a roommate of mine for awhile; SP4 Peggy Eisman, euphonium; SP5 Cindy Obie, clarinet; SP5 Butch Loihle, percussion (who later went to Heidelberg). SP4 Mac Shreve, clarinet (a prior service Vietnam veteran who got his own small apartment off post and rode his Vespa to and from work). SP5 Barb Kapke, trumpet (who had a performance degree). She knew how to play her instrument, but she wasn't inclined to do so since she was disaffected with the Army. SP5 Pete Poth, clarinet; SSG Dani Wolf, horn; SSG Don Kopf, trombone; SSG Steve Whitten, bassoonist; SP5 Mike Holbrook, horn; SP4 Bruce "Gonzo" Jensen, horn and string bass; SP4 Cindy Plant, oboe; SP4 Jim Culver, tuba; SP4 Carl Ruppel, clarinet; SP4 Michael Session, sax; SSG Monroe Hatcher, sax; SP4 Paul Musser, sax; SP5 Jerry Wooldridge, tuba; SP5 Jerry Standridge, sax and later to become a bandmaster in his own right. At the time of this writing (2005), Standridge is still active duty.

Once 1SG Patterson and CW3 Easter rotated back to the States, they were replaced by 1SG Clyde O. Hunter

from the TRADOC band and CW2 James M. McNeal, respectively.

There were more, but you get the point.

Bleidorn was also the home of the 2nd Battalion, 28th Field Artillery Regiment. The kaserne itself was comprised of a quadrangle around which were four buildings, two on the long sides of the quadrangle, and one building on each end. The four buildings were barracks. The building on the south end of the kaserne was the battalion's dining facility and the building on the north end was a gymnasium – not a sports center, a simple gym. On the east side of the kaserne was the motor pool where the vehicles were kept and maintained and there was even a small building which had been converted to a theater. While I was there, several of us performed the musical “Chicago”. Tom Harper was music director; we had a lot of fun with the various performances. I played the cello part on euphonium and it seemed to work out fine. Surrounding the kaserne proper was a family housing area. Located nearby was an enlisted club which featured a restaurant (somewhat iffy food, but most of the time better than the dining facility's) and the ubiquitous bar. I would occasionally eat there, but I never spent any appreciable time in the bar. I wanted to interact with the Germans more than artillerymen, MPs, and Signal guys.

The artillery. One of the combat arms. A function of the Army that I almost entered, had it not been for bad eyesight. Headquarters Battery of the 2/28 was located in the same building as the 1AD Band. As previously mentioned, the barracks guys of the band were billeted on the southern one-third of the third floor of this very old building and the band occupied the entire fourth floor for rehearsal and office space. In the barracks, we had to endure an awful lot. For example, the CQ of the 2/28 would wake up the cannoneers every morning, regardless of the band schedule, by clanging steel rods together. Despite our complaints, they never seemed to understand that there was another unit in the same building that didn't necessarily need to keep the same schedule as they did.

Another curious element of living amongst artillerymen was their proclivity in living like animals. More than once I saw fights break out in the chow line – these were mostly racially oriented. The shower room on the third floor was maintained by the artillerymen. While the

band used the shower room, we preferred to at least have shower heads on the water pipes protruding from the wall. Not those guys – within a day or so after maintenance engineers would come and replace the shower heads that had magically disappeared, the shower heads would once again be removed. The artillerymen loved the “hose” effect, I suppose. Yet another curiosity was the necessity of those who lived in the barracks to keep their own roll of toilet paper. TP just didn't stay in the stalls – it would be stolen shortly after being placed on the roll device. Nothing is more disconcerting than going into a toilet stall to do your business and find out when you're done that there's no toilet paper. I never could quite figure that one out. But since we spent a considerable time away from Bleidorn Kaserne, somehow it didn't seem so bad.

One gig that remains to me to this day is a weekend festival we played in a small town in the Champagne region in France. This town, named Bar sur Seine, evidently had not experienced American soldiers since the town was liberated in World War II. They literally rolled the red carpet out for us. Upon our arrival in our commercial bus, they herded us upstairs in the rather old, but quaint city hall. There they, without fanfare, distributed cold flutes of champagne. Case upon case of the sparkling wine were stacked along the back wall and several waiters dressed in black tuxedos with the traditional serving towel over their forearm refused to allow any glass to become empty. The mayor of this quaint village spoke a few words of welcome and we acknowledged his speech by gratefully accepting yet another glass of champagne.

We remained in the welcoming ceremony for a while



and finally we stumbled back onto the bus and headed out to our accommodations – a boy's school located outside of town a couple of kilometers. Since it was summer, the school was not in session so we found a bunk and a locker, unpacked, and readied ourselves for the weekend.

We played a concert that night which was met with wild enthusiasm, and afterwards several of us found



ourselves in a private home, owned by a champagne vineyard owner. (Afterwards, we all concluded we had no idea how we got there.) He spoke no English and we spoke no French, but he called his son-in-law to come over and translate. He spoke excellent English and we proceeded to drink even more champagne. After a while, we were all pretty inebriated and had concluded, since we had no idea where we were, that we had been kidnapped. We eventually found our way back to the boy's school and fell into our respective bunks. The next morning was a real crusher – there is NO hangover as bad as one created by champagne.

The next day was more of the same – parades, concerts, champagne, excellent food, and an audience for which we could do no wrong. Arriving back at Bleidorn on Sunday was a bit anticlimactic. We all felt that we had experienced a little bit of heaven and a lot of hangovers.

Bar sur Seine was the prelude to a number of gigs in France and Belgium, but none of them even came close to the kind of atmosphere that we experienced there. One in particular, in Tournai, Belgium, was an exercise

in living in austere conditions. The Belgian Army barracks in which we (and to be fair, the rest of the military participants in this weekend festival) were built during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Mattresses were made of straw and there were no fewer than 15 – 20 of us in a single room. There was no hot water for showers. I distinctly remember Dave Everhart standing nude in a fixture that most of us called a “birdbath”, trying to wash up because it was the only place around that featured hot water of any kind.

Another memorable gig was the 1AD Band's stage band performing a 12-tonal piece by composer Rolf Liebermann entitled, *Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra*. I played 3rd trombone in the first two performances of this piece by the 1AD Band, held in Hof, Germany. Hof was a border town between West Germany and Czechoslovakia and, as can be imagined, was patrolled by elements of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment throughout the Cold War.

The Hof Symphony, a professional regional orchestra, provided the backdrop for this piece. The Concerto featured, of course, the jazz band of the 1AD Band. We had some hellacious players. Chris Burnett, a young 23-year-old from Kansas, performed the lead alto solos in the piece. Steve Gilbert, trained by North Texas State University, provided the lead tenor work. I was merely thrilled to be there, take part in my small way, and hear the other works on the program – operatic selections from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and other notable works. It was my first foray into performing with a viable symphony orchestra and I found the experience profoundly interesting.

We stayed an entire weekend there in Hof. The next year, probably 1980, the 1AD Band again provided the jazz band for Liebermann's *Concerto*, but somebody else replaced me on trombone.

Later in the summer of 1979, Arnetta and Angela joined me in Germany. I had picked out a very nice apartment in a village named Heilsbronn, which was located 17 kilometers by train away from Ansbach and toward Nürnberg. We did not ship my car as we could not afford the insurance. The Carter Administration was not very kind to the military and that showed in our relatively thin wallets. I had enough money for two haircuts per month, my monthly train ticket (DM 60), two trips by taxi home from the commissary (about a

13-kilometer trip), rent, and generally a couple of trips to the Getränkemarkt in the village to buy mineral water, juice, and even a case of beer on occasion. Once in a while, we would take a walk into the village and order a pizza. I distinctly remember the local pizzeria being the hangout for the local “moped” gang – these were the teenagers who weren’t old enough to have a driver’s license but were old enough to zip around on noisy, slow two-cycle mopeds, trying to look tough but coming off looking like small time kids who had watched too many motorcycle movies from the early Fifties.

Even more rarely, we’d take the Army bus to the Nürnberg PX to buy essential household items not available at the Ansbach PX or the Katterbach Commissary. We had no money for other niceties. I would even bake our own bread and make our own ice cream.

Getting rid of trash was another problem. Since it cost money to rent a trash container and have it picked up, I would take our shopping cart late on Sunday nights and walk about a half-mile to a local business that was closed. Under the cover of darkness, I would pitch our

garbage into their dumpster. I never got caught, though I’m sure what I was doing was probably illegal.

I would take the train to and from work. There was a walk of about a mile from our apartment to the train station in Heilsbronn, and another walk about a mile from the train station in Ansbach up the hill to Bleidorn. It was a good way to get exercise and I remember fondly the smell of the early morning air on my way to the station. The train would get in promptly at 7:13 A.M. and the trip would take about 20 minutes. After that, the brisk walk up the hill and I would arrive at work shortly before 8 A.M. sweating slightly from the effort.

Also during the spring of 1979, I quit smoking and began a running regimen. While awaiting Arnetta and Angela and while living in the barracks, I would run four to five days a week in the neighboring forest. My objective was time, not pace. I would run 40 minutes, regardless of the pace. Later on one Saturday when we were living in Heilsbronn, I ran for one hour for the first time. It was a heady experience. As I became better conditioned, my pace picked up naturally and I began incurring the endorphin “kick” that others have remarked



about. I would find myself mentally elsewhere, not at all thinking about my pace, my breathing, and how much pain I was feeling. It was a wonderful time to begin a new sport and for the next 24 years, I would continue to run on a regular basis. Later in Berlin, I began running half-marathons and marathons, in addition to regular training runs, and I have 13 marathons under my now-expanding waistline.

Not long after Arnetta and Angela arrived in Germany, Arnetta became pregnant. Brandon was born in May, 1980. Just before his birth, we moved into government quarters just down the hill from Bleidorn Kaserne. Instead of a journey that took 45 minutes, I could walk to work inside five minutes. I also was promoted to Staff Sergeant in May, 1980.

Due to lack of communication, financial concerns, and incompatibility with each other, our marriage began falling apart. It was a dark time for me, indeed for all of us. I moved out of our quarters while Arnetta and the

kids remained. I would see the kids as often as I could, often picking them up from day care since Arnetta had taken a job at the sports center. I'd pick them up, take them home, and prepare their supper. I would go back to my barracks room after visiting for awhile, and it hurt to do so.

