

Capt. Jesse C. Beesley mentioned in book: THE U.S. ARMY IN THE OCCUPATION OF GERMANY starting p.242

I highly recommend the below referenced website, it also includes many photos taken of the events as they are described.

ARMY HISTORICAL SERIES

THE U.S. ARMY IN THE OCCUPATION OF GERMANY 1944-1946

by

Earl F. Ziemke

CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

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Excerpt from Chapter XIV The Eclipse.

<http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/Occ-GY/ch14.htm>

On April 15, Lt. Col. F. Van Wyck Mason, SHAEF G-5 historian, and **Capt. Jesse C. Beesley**, civil affairs historian for the Communications Zone, set out from Luxembourg in a recon car to follow the route Third Army had taken into Germany. For Mason the "first point of interest" was Bad Kreuznach, twenty miles west of the Rhine crossing at Mainz. As he described it:

The military government detachment commander had his largest attacks not from the local population, but from the demands of the high brass in our own army. His time was so taken up with finding dachshund puppies for General Blank and locating people to cut the lawn for Colonel So-and-so that he was hard put to administer the town. I had a look at the jail which was well supplied with Nazis and suspects. Then went on to the PW cage on the edge of town. We arrived at sunset and saw a breathtaking panorama, 37,000 German, Hungarian, and other Axis prisoners roaming in a caged area of about half a square mile. They certainly were not coddled there. They slept on the bare ground with whatever covering they had brought with them. They got two "C" rations a day and that was all. There was a separate enclosure for officers where they were so tightly packed they had barely room to lie

[242]

down, and more trucks kept coming up every few minutes. Adjoining it was another enclosure for about 500 German WACs and nonmedical personnel that were surprisingly good looking on the whole. Fortunately for them the weather was good and continued to be good for some time afterwards.

In command of the camp was a 1st Lt. of infantry with less than 300 men. The boys looked a bit serious as they crouched behind their machine guns, for there was only one strand of wire and no search lights for night time. Periodically some Germans did try to get loose, but they were always cut down before they got 50 yards distance.

From Frankfurt, the historians drove to Weimar on the *Autobahn*, and Mason found the trip a great pleasure "after bumping one's backside over the incredibly rutted and ruined roads of France." Between Frankfurt and Weimar they passed into the area in which Third Army had run out of trained military government detachments, and they "sensed that something was amiss the moment we hit Weimar":

The feeling of something being amiss was riot lessened by finding German policemen in full uniform and carrying loaded carbines in front of the town hall, where apparently military government of some kind was being set up. Investigation revealed the reason. The acting Military Governor was a completely untrained Lt. Col. of the field artillery who had been firing in the line 56 hours before.

Lt. Col. Billingsley, the officer in question, seemed infinitely relieved to have trained military government officers suddenly appear, and he urgently requested that I break our trip and lend a hand in setting up military government in Weimar. This we did, among the first acts being to disarm the police and bring him up to date on directives concerning displaced persons. It appears that the whole area was under Lt. Col. Billingsley, and none of his officers had the least grounding in the responsibility and powers of military government.

Further to assist Lt. Col. Billingsley, **Capt. Beesley** and I undertook to visit various detachments of his post in the surrounding country. In this connection we visited Erfurt, Langensalza, Mulhaus, Apolda, and Jena. All of these cities, with the exception of Apolda, had suffered from 25 to 40 percent damage. It was interesting to observe the difference in the attitude of the inhabitants in those towns which had been smashed and those which had not. Those in the unhit towns were arrogant and hostile. Such was the condition of Apolda where we found an artillery 1st Lieutenant and 40 men holding down a city of 70,000 normal population and at least 15,000 transients. Lt. Hurtz was doing a fine job under the circumstances but lacked knowledge of his rights. When we told him he was "Caesar" in that town, he was pleased and immediately issued orders for the arrest of the Nazi mayor and equally Nazi police chief. He listened attentively to all we said and when he realized his powers, he was a much happier boy than he had been a couple of hours earlier. Because of the attitude of the inhabitants, we arranged to station a particularly hardboiled battalion of infantry in that town.

While Mason and **Beesley** were at Weimar, First Army's V Corps on 19 April took Leipzig, the fourth largest city in Germany. To control the city, swollen by DPs and refugees from its normal 700,000 population to over a million, the corps designated Col. Jim Dan Hill, Commanding Officer, 190th Field Artillery Group, as military commander of Leipzig and gave him three field artillery battalions, four security guard detachments, and Provisional Military Government Detachment A. Detachment A had sixteen officers and twenty-four enlisted men, but only two of the officers had even a small amount of previous military government experience. Hill and his troops entered Leipzig on the 19th while fighting was still going on in the Napoleon Platz around the Battle of the Nations Monument, which in its cav-

[243]

SCENE OF THE ATROCITY AT THEKLA (photo is in the original that this excerpt was taken from)

ernous stone base provided cover for a diehard German colonel and a company or so of soldiers. Some sections of the city were destroyed. Other sections were untouched, however, and in them the electric service continued without a break, water service could be restored in a few days, and the streetcar system required only minor repairs to wire and track. The Nazi *Oberbürgermeister*, his deputy, and their families had committed suicide. Hill divided the city into three military police zones and put a battalion in each zone; the Germans, however, were not as much a threat to order as the Allied liaison officers who, he complained, "tend to get emotional with the DPs and get them all stirred up." His main difficulty with the Germans was getting them adjusted to doing common labor. They had become accustomed to having foreign workers do the menial jobs.

At Thekla, just outside Leipzig, V Corps uncovered a small concentration camp. On the afternoon of the day before, the guards had herded over three hundred inmates

[244]

into a wooden barracks building, doused it with gasoline, and set it on fire with thermite grenades. Those who ran from the building were shot. When the Americans entered, the fire was still burning, and seventy-five bodies were hanging on the concertina wire and electrically charged barbed wire surrounding the camp. Somehow about a hundred had managed to escape to freedom. In accordance with standing instructions from Eisenhower to make the Germans bury atrocity victims in the most prominent and suitable spot in the nearest town, military government ordered the newly appointed Leipzig *Bürgermeister* to supply seventy-five caskets and two hundred German civilians to dig the graves. The site was the parkway along the main road into Leipzig's most beautiful cemetery, the *Suedfriedhof*. The city also had to provide a cross

and a wreath for each grave, and all city officials and a hundred other prominent citizens were required to attend the funeral. Three U.S. chaplains, representing the three faiths, conducted the service. Several hundred DPs dropped flowers on the graves as, a reporter noted, "did a few of the nearly 900 Germans who attended voluntarily." ²⁷

Mason and Beesley saw Leipzig the day after it was taken:

There were plenty of dead bodies and still burning houses in the suburbs. The troops carried their arms in very handy positions. Rivers of prisoners were driving out of Leipzig in supply trucks, going back empty to the railheads. Leipzig was terribly smashed in the center but some of the suburbs seem to be in pretty fair shape. The *Buergermeister* and the *Oberbuergermeister* committed suicide together with their families. We saw the latter group at the office-the father, the mother, and a very pretty 18-year old daughter.

The police problem in a city of this size was of a special interest to me, so we spent the bulk of our time with Colonel Green, Public Safety Officer on Colonel Hill's staff. He had, of course, disarmed [the police] and required them to wear uniform caps, trousers, and boots but with civilian coats. He said it was necessary because so many trigger-happy "doughfeet" were loose and had shot half a dozen of his men the day before thinking they were soldiers. The uniforms were distinctly similar. Such police as remained were stolidly obeying orders and arresting their previous bosses just as happily as they had political victims a few days earlier.

Colonel Hill invited us to join him in listening to the nomination of a new *Buergermeister* for Leipzig. It was a solemn bunch of Boche who appeared. One thing they were very anxious to know-would the Russians gain eventual possession of their city? ²⁸

The two staff historians had, half seriously, hoped to end their trip in Berlin. Mason, a World War I veteran, regarded this occasion as his second attempt to get there, but he was disappointed again. Ninth Army was stopped on the Elbe, not much more than a day's march from Berlin, but Eisenhower had decided that the army would go no farther. When Mason and **Beesley** started back from Leipzig, they also missed what could have been the next best finale for their trip, the American Soviet link-up on 25 April at Torgau on the Elbe River, thirty miles east of Leipzig. A night stop at Muenden, north of Kassel, however, produced a rare experience, a reasonably bona fide encounter with the *Werwolf* organization:

That evening, Squadron Leader Gordon Freisen [the local military government de-


[245]

tachment was British] . . . invited us to assist in the interrogation of a pair of Hitler Jugend toughs caught with a notched pistol and a supply of explosives near one of our bridges. Their attitude was typical, at first openly defiant, then as hunger and fatigue began to work, more and more malleable. The amusing thing about these youths and the Nazis we subsequently questioned was their complete willingness to betray one another once they were convinced that a friend had tattled, and it required very little persuasion to convince them that they had been betrayed. To the disappointment of some of our men, it was quite unnecessary to become physical in the interrogation.

As a result we organized a raiding party of four officers and six enlisted men. We picked up three Nazis in possession of illegal arms. All of them lied like troopers to start with, but invariably would lead us to where the weapons were hidden-generally under the eaves of an outbuilding. It was very picturesque because of the full moon and the light it threw from the helmets and weapons of the men

We topped off the evening with a raid on an inn in the suburbs which had been established as a sort of headquarters for the local "werewolves." One of the Hitler youths had admitted that there were four female military personnel at the inn, one of which was his sweetie. He betrayed her quite cheerfully. The result was, we swooped down on the inn and ransacked the place thoroughly. Among other things, flushing a G.I. who was certainly qualified for the sixty-five dollar question.

The next day Mason and **Beesley** crossed into Luxembourg "where people smiled and waved, and one could look at a pretty girl without having that sixty-five dollars in the back of one's mind."

 **Date:** 1944-1946

 **Place:** Germany

 **Description:** "THE U.S. ARMY IN THE OCCUPATION OF GERMANY" by Earl F. Ziemke An excerpt that mentions relative

Capt. Jesse Cox Beesley Jr.