I first met Hermann when I was in graduate school at Berkeley and he was doing graduate work at Stanford with Gordon Craig, so our friendship was one of more than 30 years. Way back then he was a very serious student, and he seemed older than I now realize he was. Leaving Stanford, he went to Berlin and the Free University. We renewed contacts in 1975 when I was the first faculty member at Stanford’s new “Stanford in Berlin” program. Stanford’s initial German program had been in Beutelsbach, a little village outside Stuttgart. Gordon Craig had hated that, thought Stanford should be in Berlin, and when the opportunity arose, he asked Hermann to help get things going, providing contacts at the Meinecke Institute, where Stanford first had its offices, and helping find the Villa Muthe-sius, into which Stanford later relocated.

As my own research interests evolved and I became an urban historian, I made several research trips to Berlin, and several times I used Hermann’s apartment in Charlottenburg as my base. That meant shared meals, beer in neighborhood Kneipen, and hearing about Hermann’s research and about developments at the FU. I was lucky to be in Berlin when he delivered his successful Habilitation lecture to a packed room in the Rostlauge and privileged to celebrate it afterwards with Hermann and his first wife Roswitha.

We also shared time in here in Washington, when he was getting the GHI going—searching for space, defining the mission and programs. In 1987 we collaborated on planning one of the first major GHI symposia, on American and the Reconstruction of Germany between 1945 and 1955. The conference itself was in Marburg, where Hermann then taught, and he was the very polished host. The papers were published in 1993 by Cambridge as number 7 of the GHI series, and Hermann, Axel Frohn, and I served as editors. Of course when we were planning the conference, we had no idea what would happen in the Fall of 1989 or that the events of that Fall and the subsequent collapse of the GDR would focus scholarly attention on the study of post-1945 German history in the way that it has. It was a very successful conference, and our goal was to have the publication both represent cutting edge scholarship on the postwar era and serve as a handbook for those just entering the field. The book is still frequently cited, and I think it has made an important contribution.

I might note a couple of problems we faced. One was that we initially thought of focusing the conference on just the 1945-1949 period, but it became clear as we corresponded with potential contributors that 1949 was a surprisingly artificial cut-off point. The second problem was quite an embarrassment to both of us. When one looks at the list of 23 contributors and conference participants, it is almost a Gruppenbild ohne Damen. Rebecca Boehling was the only woman invited, which probably betrayed our lack of awareness of German or American women working on postwar German history. We could only apologize to Rebecca and hope that our efforts helped stimulate work on the period. Today, of course, the lineup would look rather different.
Hermann’s first books were on the Cuno government in Weimar and a social history of workers in 19th century Saxony, but by the early 1980s he was turning to contemporary history. While in Washington as a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson Center and then while heading the GHI, Hermann was busy gathering material for his important book, Die besetzte Verbündete: Die amerikanische Deutschlandpolitik 1949-1955, published in 1991. It is too bad that this has not been translated into English. American scholars of US foreign policy ought to read it, and too few American historians can handle the German. In this book Hermann traced the complicated evolution of America’s Germany policy within the office of the High Commissioner and the relevant agencies in Washington and in the growing partnership with Konrad Adenauer. He showed how the US labored to confront the complex issues of German sovereignty, the status of Berlin, possible reunification, and the firm integration of the Federal Republic into Western Europe and then into NATO. US policy makers came to realize that the stabilization of Europe, resistance to further Soviet expansion, and reasonable management of tensions that might produce another war worked together to enhance American security. That gave the US a freer hand to do what it wanted or needed to do in Asia. It did not, however, serve to promote immediate German unification. I think Hermann was particularly proud of the chapter here on the response to the Stalin note apparently offering unification in exchange for German neutrality.

Hermann enjoyed Marburg, but as you all probably know, he hoped to return to Berlin. Nonetheless, in 1993 he embraced the challenge of rebuilding a history department in Halle. Not long after he moved there, he invited me to speak. It was my first visit to the city, so Hermann gave me a thorough tour, one that ranged from the inner city, which was starting to be redone by western firms, to the Halle Neustadt and its apartment towers. He also showed me his fascinating discoveries of caches of SED and FDJ papers and propaganda materials, which he expected to have his students mine for their own work.

I say the challenge of rebuilding the department, because he expressed his dismay and disquiet over the necessity of making personnel changes, and he was frustrated by the inadequate physical facilities, the huge gaps in the library, and the reluctance of the students to embrace new methods of scholarship and critical analysis. Obviously he succeeded, as evidenced by the stream of publications that came out of his institute. He edited the Hallische Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte, which included essays on such topics as SED university policy, DDR foreign policy, consumer issues in the DDR, and the daily lives of workers in the big DDR chemical plants. He also edited or co-edited several books documenting both the repressive activities of the DDR regime and the growth of the protest movement and “peaceful” revolution that overthrew it.

Hermann was a historian through and through. He was a tireless worker, with academic projects on his mind even when getting ready or returning from a soccer match. He viewed his departmental and university administrative duties (and his duties as initial GHI director) as vital and essential, but also as diversions from research and writing. He was a true archive rat, collecting documents on both sides of the Atlantic and never wanting to sit back in favor of some grand synthesis from the comfort of a study. Should anyone have doubts about this, let me suggest a look at the bibliography at the end of Der besetzte Verbündete. The list of archival collections, oral histories, printed primary sources, publications of the U.S. Office of the High Commission for Germany, memoirs, monographs, and
dissertations is comprehensive enough to provide a future doctoral student with a foundation on which to work.

In spite of some ventures into labor history, Hermann remained primarily a historian of diplomacy and high politics, at least until Der besetzte Verbündete was finished. At that point, some of the materials he found in his research for that book drew him in a slightly different direction. Indeed, whenever I visited, he was always pulling out binders of fascinating photocopied documents he had found in one archive or another. This all came together in his last big book, on the American contribution to democratization in postwar West Germany. Here one found not only some “high policy” in the actions of HICOG but also lower-level activities involving contacts, say, between American and German trade unions, the American Civil Liberties Union and Germans interested in civil and human rights, and American and German women’s groups. Hermann was particularly excited about this last topic, on which no one had written. He shows how the US, having recognized that women made up a sizable majority of Germans, sought to democratize women through formation of voluntary organizations, visits to the US, and contacts with American women’s organizations, such as the League of Women Voters. Even American 4-H clubs, surely organizations seldom noticed by either American or German historians, get their due. Die Wurzeln der westdeutschen NachkriegsDEMOCRATIE has become an essential work to stand alongside studies of denazification, reform of government bureaucracy, and changes in educational institutions.

It is remarkable how contemporary the work in these 2 major books sounds: creating internal and international security, stabilization, orientation toward the West, creation of democratically minded elites, broad reeducation in democracy going beyond just formal institutional structures such as parties and parliaments or the suppression of anti-democratic organization or the destruction of the symbols of a defeated regime. Hermann was talking about the formation of a new political culture as well as new national and international political institutions.

Hermann-Josef Rupieper was comfortable in America and Germany, in the English and German languages, in American and German universities. He will be missed on both sides of the Atlantic, which he did so much to bridge in his scholarship, his person, and his contributions to the German Historical Institute.