

ACROSS THE BRIDGE: GIs IN GERMANY

Film Screening and Discussion at the GHI, October 17, 2001. Co-sponsored by the German-American Center for Visiting Scholars (GACVS). Conveners: Philipp Gassert (University of Heidelberg), Robert P. Grathwol (GACVS/Humboldt Foundation), Donita Moorhus (GACVS/Humboldt Foundation). Host for the GHI: R. Gerald Livingston (GHI).

This event was a pre-release screening of the documentary film “Across the Bridge: GIs in Germany,” which is about the relationships between the American military (soldiers, dependents, civilian employees) and the Germans among whom they lived and worked during the half-century of the Cold War. On behalf of the GHI, R. Gerald Livingston welcomed an audience of about 50 guests, who had been invited to view the film and to offer comments and criticism designed to improve the final version. Philipp Gassert discussed his participation in the exploratory meetings of scholars studying the history of the American military in Germany that had been convened by Moorhus and Grathwol as well as his position as a *Zeitzeuge* who had grown up in a small German town that hosted a garrison of American troops from 1952 to 1994. He also described the active research program at the Historisches Seminar at the University of Heidelberg under the direction of Professor Detlef Junker. (For a report on the conference “GIs in Germany” sponsored by GHI in November 2000, see the Spring 2001 *Bulletin* of the GHI, pp. 130–37). Finally, Gassert mentioned the Historisches Seminar’s interest in creating an archive of materials related to the American military presence in Germany and appealed to members of the audience who had served in Germany to consider contributing documents and artifacts to such an archive.

Robert Grathwol explained how his research, conducted in collaboration with Donita Moorhus, had led to the film project, which was sponsored and funded with a generous grant from the German Information Center. Grathwol emphasized the overwhelming numbers of Americans involved as part of the military presence in Germany—between 12 and 16 million when soldiers, dependents, and civilian support personnel are all counted. The American population in Germany represented every geographic area as well as every ethnic, religious, and social group that constitutes American society. The social and cultural contacts that developed between these Americans and the Germans whom they encountered turned the experience—albeit largely unintentionally—into the largest cultural exchange program in human history. Grathwol indicated that the intended audience for the film was the general public but that, as

historians, he and Moorhus had tried to insure that cinematic considerations did not outweigh historical accuracy in the film's presentation.

The film itself begins with the battle to seize the bridge at Remagen and progresses to the withdrawal of the bulk of American forces in the mid-1990s. The narrative line is carried by the observations of those who lived the experience rather than by an omniscient narrator. Music consonant with the chronology of the story underscores the cross-cultural influences. A lively discussion followed the screening of the film.

Comments ranged from laudatory for all that the film covered in its 52 minutes to critical of some of the issues it left out. Cinematic choices, such as the staging of interviews, occasional rough transitions (both visually and historically), and the multiplicity of focal points attracted commentary. Some observers found the selection of interviewees too heavily weighted towards officers, so that the experience of the enlisted soldier received less attention. As co-producers Grathwol and Moorhus acknowledged that the film remained a work in progress. The film's producer-director, Max Lewkowicz, of Rainmaker Productions Inc., in New York City, hopes to use the nearly 200 hours of videotaped interviews and the substantial collection of archival footage that he has acquired to develop a six-hour series for public television.

*Robert P. Grathwol
Philipp Gassert*

MEDIEVAL HISTORY SEMINAR

Seminar at the GHI, October 25–28, 2001. Conveners: Caroline W. Bynum (Columbia University, New York), Johannes Fried (University of Frankfurt), Patrick J. Geary (University of California, Los Angeles), Christof Mauch (GHI), Christoph Strupp (GHI).

In 2001 the German Historical Institute successfully launched a new annual program for German and American doctoral students in medieval history: the Medieval History Seminar. The seminar is based on the format of our well-established Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar for students of modern history. Every year in the fall it will bring together an equal number of doctoral students from both sides of the Atlantic for a weekend of scholarly discussion and exchange.

For the first seminar, proposals from all areas of medieval history were taken into consideration. The conveners selected seven American and nine German students to present their dissertation projects. Over the