

Trip to the American Consulate in Hamburg

My parents tried to get back to the US starting immediately after the war. Things surely did not look promising in Germany, not with Germany divided, and the Russians in control East Germany, and later blocking all land access to divided Berlin, resulting in the massive airlift of 1948.

And sometime in '46 we went to the American consulate in Hamburg. Hamburg was about eighty miles to the north, on the Elbe river near the north sea. The Elbe river is the large central river of Germany, coming out of Czechoslovakia near Prague. The others are the historic Rhine on the west also flowing into the North Sea near Amsterdam, and the Danube on the south going east, ultimately flowing into the Black Sea.

Hamburg had been the scene of a terrible firestorm caused by Allied incendiary bombs, but I did not get to see any of the destruction. The trip was a hurried one up there by train, with an absolutely terrible and frightening return trip that evening, the exact events of which have escaped my memory after more than fifty years, but the impact of which is firmly burned into my memory.

The trip up must have been uneventful, even though it was my first train ride, ever. It is one thing to get on a fairly empty train and sit down, but something entirely different to try to get on an absolutely overcrowded train at night, in a big town, to get back home, and fighting just to get in, then fighting to keep from getting trampled standing in the aisle with nothing to hang on to, and one's parents huddling over me to keep me from being literally squashed, and not for a few minutes, but hours upon hours.

I remember seeing someone at the consulate, but not much more. But apparently they were real rough on my parents, so I was later told. They wanted to know why my parents had gone to Germany in 1938, and whether my father had been a Nazi. Apparently the mayor of the village, or someone, had put my father down on the list, either to protect him, or to fill some quota. There also apparently was a real close physical inspection, to make sure there were no diseases, no deformities, that all the fingers were there, all the sort of stuff Hitler was so criticized for doing. Somehow they must have passed and were put on the waiting list, but nothing happened for four years or so until somebody apparently got prodded from down Houston way, and in 1950 there was suddenly a two week notice that an opening had appeared. Somehow my parents managed to make some arrangement and we found ourselves once more on the train to Hamburg, and by airplane to New York and on to Houston into a typical Texas dry and hot August from the green and lush land of northern Germany.