

## JUST CALL ME JACK

*By Fred Hobbs*

In the world today some folks like to point out that “we live in a global village.”

American statesmen and politicians talk about forging creative alliances aimed at world peace. Spirited debate continues over whether the United States is “special” or even if it should be considered in that category.

But for Jack, back almost a half-century ago, there was no debate. To him, the U.S. was special and he wanted to live here. His full name was Hans-Peter Weimar, but to his American GI friends in post-World War II Berlin, he insisted:

“Just call me Jack”. To him, the name sounded quintessentially American.

Jack was not quite a teenager when the war ended. His family had endured the dangers and deprivations caused by the maniacal regime of Hitler and his henchman. In 1945, he was one of the many children living in the rubble of Germany’s capitol. At first the main concern surrounded his family’s desperate hope that the Russians would not be their sole occupiers. Fortunately for them, the four powers occupation agreement was reached; their home was in West Berlin in the American sector of the divided city.

In 1948, the Soviet blockade of West Berlin posed another threat to Jack and all Berliners. Stalin wanted the Americans, British and French out of Berlin and so he ordered a halt to all land and water access to the city. No trains. No boats. So, the western powers agreed to supply Berlin by air, an operation spearheaded by the United States. The daring and innovative Berlin Airlift was launched, forging in Jack a permanent love for America and American life.

Cargo planes either landed or took off from Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport an average of every two minutes, 24 hours a day. A supply of nearly 3500 tons of food and other necessities were flown into the city daily. Potatoes, sugar, powdered milk for adults and whole milk for the children. Meat, vegetables, fruit and other perishables were delivered whenever possible. As Jack and his young friends ringed the fence below, planes often flew at low altitude dropping tiny handkerchief parachutes containing chocolate bars and chewing gum, a typically American gesture. A gesture Jack never forgot.

In May, 1949 the Soviets gave up on the blockade. And the next chapter in Jack’s life began. As Europe started to rebuild economically thanks in large measure to the Marshall Plan, Jack had a plan of his own. In the mid 1950s, he became an announcer on RIAS (Radio in the American Sector.) Although it was broadcast in the German language, the station was part of the effort to promote better understanding of the U.S. and to counter Soviet and East German communist propaganda. Later, Jack worked at a local Berlin English-language FM station as a newscaster and staff announcer.

Jack visited the U.S. several times over the years. He learned that Hollywood movie stars, provincial New Yorkers and alleged Chicago hoods do not constitute the real fiber of the nation. He marveled at the expanse of America, not fully aware before of our vast reaches of natural beauty.

Circumstances, some economic, some personal, some medical, prevented Jack from moving permanently to America, but he frequently expressed the desire. His often-voiced admiration of this country surely would serve to provide the reasons “Why I Want to Live in America.”

As an eternal sign of that sentiment, his gravestone in a West Berlin cemetery bears his full given name, but includes the inscription, “Just Call Me Jack.”

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