

August 2002

Berlin Aktuell
(Article to be published)

Ambassador Coats

My wife, Marsha, and I arrived in Berlin on September 7, 2001. Four days later, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon defined my role in ways that I had not anticipated. The relative peace and prosperity that followed the end of the cold war collapsed along with the World Trade Center towers in New York. The subsequent need to coordinate efforts related to the War on Terrorism has become a primary responsibility for every U.S. Ambassador.

I came to the world of diplomacy from the world of politics having represented the state of Indiana in Congress from 1981 to 1999, first in the House of Representatives and then for ten years in the Senate. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and head of the Military Personnel and Air/Land Forces Subcommittees, I had some working knowledge of Germany. Over 13 million American soldiers and their families have served and lived in Germany since the end of World War II and these Americans have learned about German culture and German society and made German friends. The relationship fostered through our military has made our current relationship very special. This is a story without parallel to any other experience that Americans have had with a foreign society.

But, of course, I was interested to learn more about the diplomatic history of the German-American partnership. In describing an earlier period of that relationship, one of my predecessors, Ambassador Arthur Burns, described his assignment in the 1980s in the Federal Republic's of Germany's first capital, Bonn, as "eine Mission unter Freunden." It was in Bonn that the vision of German-American partnership was born and nurtured.

In many ways, Bonn would have been a less abrupt change for Marsha and I - more similar to the lives we had known in Washington, D.C. and Fort Wayne, Indiana. But Berlin has become our new "home away from home" and we have come to love it - the peaceful green spaces of the Grunewald where we walk our dog, the raw optimism of a city reborn, and, most of all, the history that we see and feel all around us.

The U.S. Ambassador's Residence where we are privileged to live is much more than a symbolic American home in Germany. After the war, it offered temporary shelter to American officials on the scene to lend a hand in the reconstruction of a war-torn city. Later it became the official residence of the Commanding Generals of the Berlin Brigade. One of the last Brigade Commanders, Brigadier General Sid Schachnow, was himself a Holocaust refugee from Lithuania. He emigrated to the United States and worked his way up in the Army to become the military official responsible for protecting Berlin, symbol of the Germany that had once been his enemy.

As President Bush, in his speech to the Bundestag, said "the history of our time is written in the life of Berlin." The evening before the President addressed the German Parliament, upon his arrival in Germany, together with Chancellor Schroeder we crossed the thin brick line that traces where the Berlin Wall passed the Brandenburg Gate dividing East from West.

The same Brandenburg Gate where years before President Reagan challenged the Soviet Union to "tear down this wall" and put an end to the division of Europe. And the same Brandenburg Gate where I stood, just days after my arrival in Berlin last September, before 200,000 Berliners to tell them just how

grateful we were for the unqualified cooperation, commitment and solidarity of the German government and the German people in the wake of the tragedy of September 11.

In May 2002, Governing Mayor Wowereit and I signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the historic site of Pariser Platz concerning the construction of the new U.S. embassy. This marked an important step in bringing our embassy back to Pariser Platz after an absence of more than 50 years. Next year we hope to begin construction. Our new embassy beside the Brandenburg Gate will be a symbol and a reminder of how much we share.

Since those September days last year when I arrived in Germany, I have had the opportunity, to see and hear different aspects of the German mood with respect to the struggle against terrorism and, in particular, to America and America's role in the world. Naturally, in every democratic society - including our own - differences of opinion are to be expected; indeed, they should be encouraged.

But the current international situation and the course of our common struggle against terror requires that we continue the close cooperation and coordination that has marked our post war relationship.

I think often about Ambassador Burns' words - "eine Mission unter Freunden" - and about the partnership based on friendship that extends beyond the embassy's walls to encompass ties between millions of German and American citizens. That partnership has achieved monumental results. What has struck me most in the year that I have been in Germany is the continued importance of that close partnership as we address the challenges of the 21st century. I am confident that, working together, we will once again overcome obstacles and make this new century one of hope, progress, and benefit for all mankind.