



**Regensburg and America in the 1950s  
Official Opening of Festival  
Regensburg, October 26, 2004  
Ambassador Coats**

Lord Mayor Schaidinger,  
Herr Unger,  
Herr Hage,  
Professor Bierling,  
Professor Hebel,  
Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

It is a pleasure to be with you today in the beautiful city of Regensburg. Marsha and I are especially pleased to be here on the occasion of this festival on Regensburg and America in the 1950s – important, formative years in the German-American and transatlantic relationships.

Historians of the postwar German-American relationship usually focus on the level of high politics conducted in Washington, in Bonn, and now Berlin. But there was much more to the relationship than high politics.

It was also a story of people, at every level of society. Since 1945, more than 15 million Americans – most of them members of the American military and their families – have lived and worked in West Germany. That is an extraordinary story, unparalleled to any other experience that Americans have had with a different culture. The relationship that was fostered through our military people in uniform has made our current day relationship very special.

This festival is about the people of Regensburg and their reactions to the postwar presence of Americans and American culture. Jazz, rock and roll, American movies, big flashy cars. Yes, but more than that. It is about how they built the basis for a friendship that has endured and matured.

Marsha and I have heard the recollections of many “Zeitzeugen” – Germans and Americans – and are always touched by the surprising closeness that developed within a short period of time after the war.

Those stories are so moving because they chronicle the commitment that fueled both Germany’s recovery and the transatlantic partnership in the postwar years.

One such story was the story of a young Army captain, posted to a small German town in 1945. He was advised that an official policy on non-fraternization of U.S. troops with the German people was in effect. Despite that policy, in the summer of 1946, that Army captain decided to establish a German-American friendship club. His superiors saw the club as a violation of military occupation policy. He was ordered to terminate the project; and he was relieved from his post. Convinced of the validity of his idea, he demanded a court martial. General Clay, then the Deputy Military Commander of Germany, heard of the matter and intervened, deciding that non-fraternization was no longer a practical policy. He then not only cancelled the court martial request but added that army captain to his personal staff with instructions to found German-American societies and clubs throughout the American zone.

That was a very significant moment in the beginning of a new relationship between the Americans and the Germans. I know that there are many other such stories of Germans and Americans reaching out to form official relationships and personal friendships.

The staff of the Amerika Haueser and the exchange programs that were started in the 50s did much to create and cement that new-found sense of partnership. Those kinds of efforts are worth emulating today.

That is why Marsha and I are so pleased to be with you to open this festival because it celebrates this very special German-American relationship, and encourages its future.

And so, it is now my pleasure to officially open the Regensburg and America in the 1950s festival.

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