

## **„A message of hope“ – Memories of a contemporary witness**

Prof. Dr. Herbert Alsheimer's speech at the George Marshall Society evening  
Feb 10, 2010, County seat, Hofheim

I happily accepted the invitation to talk here as a contemporary witness. Not least because the eponym of the George Marshall association was linked to a message of hope for Germans, especially for the young people at the time and for the people from the Rhein-Main district, after our country's most horrible and most disgraceful defeat in its history.

### **Images of the Rhein-Main district in the immediate postwar period**

I was born in Frankfurt am Main. After the unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces on May 7 and May 8 1945 I returned - after a temporary evacuation – to my home town. I lived in „Gallusviertel“ and was a member of a catholic youth group.

Serious hardship prevailed in the bombed city: housing shortage, caused by the influx of expellees was almost irresolvable; hunger, a lack of medicine, disease, higher-than-average infant mortality.

In the last few years of the Nazi period, some open spaces in the Frankfurt green belt area were, for supply reasons, already being dedicated to vegetable gardening. Blue kohlrabi was cultivated on a large-scale, where the Marshall fountain can now be found. The postwar administration did not initially change anything. Because of the occupation of Frankfurt (on 29.03.1945), the handing-over practice of Hessian farmers – despite unchanged rationing rules – had changed rapidly. The Nazi Terror, which had rigorously forced abidance by these rules, had come to an end. Illegal slaughtering was no longer threatened with the death penalty. There were fewer handing-over.

Back to the „Gallusviertel“. There you could find the „Monikaheim“, a home, supervised by catholic sisters, for neglected and unorientated girls. It was - for whatever reason - generously provided with food by the US Army. On a daily basis, using trams, members of my youth group carried two big cans of soup with American ingredients into the main railway station. The oecumenical railway mission shared it out to expellees and released prisoners of war, who had temporarily stopped in Frankfurt in overcrowded passenger and freight trains.

I will never forget the images showing German defeat that presented themselves in the main station. I saw German women and children, whose faces showed a mixture of hope and despair, who sat for hours on the flagstones of platforms 2-5 and held out names and photographs to the passing through prisoners of war: „Has anyone seen my husband, my fiance, my father? Last heard of from Lower Silesia, forces' postal service number xyz.“ And I saw tears in the eyes of those waiting, when a train left, without them being able to find something out about their loved ones.

American families alighted on the northern platforms (20-24), which simultaneously connected to our Rhein-Main airport. They were well-fed. The incoming officers and soldiers were destined to relieve the American army's combat troops and to take over, within the military government's framework, administrative tasks. For hungry Germans it was worth collecting leftovers and cigarette stubs on these platforms.

Allow me to round off these pictures of hardship with a glance into the records of the former district president's office in Wiesbaden. On May 27 1947 Gelnhausen's district administrator wrote this to the military government: „The sufficient production of caskets in the Gelnhausen district has been called into question. The number of deaths has increased considerably and will probably total 1500 in 1947. Despite my multifaceted endeavors, I have not yet managed to obtain the necessary nails required for the production of caskets. I am still missing 240kg“.

### **Growing control in Germany after the Potsdam Agreement**

In the immediate postwar period, the Allies made a distinction between „victors“ and „occupying powers“. Victorious powers were the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as well as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). They were participants at the Potsdam Conference discussing Germany's political and economical future. The French Republic was also an occupying power alongside the three victors. The two Anglo-Saxon victors had handed France an occupation zone created from „shares of their zones“.

The victors and occupying powers did not have a common plan. In other words with the exception of both Anglo-Saxon powers, they did not trust each other an inch.

The majority of Germans did not appreciate this. The search for missing relatives, the concern regarding a new temporary home, the fight for life itself captured their attention and absorbed their energy.

There were signs of unanimity amongst the Allies. The implemented agreement about the formation of an international tribunal in Nuremberg and the agreements from the Potsdam Conference, the latter had been shaky from the beginning.

The highest authority in Germany, which had been made use of by the victorious powers – whereto the rule in states, towns and boroughs also belonged- should, as follows, be officiated according to the Potsdam Agreement:

1. In principle from the Supreme Commander of the occupying powers each in their own zone of occupation.
2. In all questions „relating to Germany as a whole“ (e.g questions regarding currency), an Allied Control Council should decide according to the unanimity principle. All four occupying powers were members of the Control Council.
3. A foreign minister council should be set up and meet, as the case arises, in order to coordinate the Allied policy on Germany.
4. For the time being no standardized government for all zones of occupation should be established, however when supervised by the Allied Control Council, common German four zone administrative offices should work in the fields of foreign trade, finance and industry.
5. The establishment of common administrative offices in the economics field satisfied an American and British wish. Both governments were prepared to equip the Germans so that they could sustain them - on a low level – themselves (Occupying forces directive JCS 1067).

Even if it had been separated into four insular zones of occupation, the attainment of this minimal goal would have been almost impossible, particularly because Germany had been divided by the separation of the areas beyond the Oder and Neisse and the isolation of the Saarland. No economy based on the division of labor could develop it's beneficial effect in such confinement.. Everyone negotiating in Potsdam knew this.

6. The Soviets and French however did not want to have these common administrative offices. Their governments did not want to let themselves be talked into the withdrawal of.reparations for the benefit of their countries and in their dismantling policy. For the Soviets this was a clear breach of promise. From Paris it was heard that the French Republic was not involved in the Potsdam Agreement and therefore, as a result, not bound to it.

7. The Americans and British pressed for the establishment of four zone administrative offices and because this was not successful despite a lot of effort with the two other occupying powers, they acted alone. They let the countries in their zones, which became Bizones, conclude appropriate administrative agreements. And so that it did not look like the Anglo-Saxons were building – contrary to the Potsdam Agreement – a central government, seats were shared out throughout the Bizone: finance in Bad Homburg, telecommunications in Frankfurt am Main, economics in Minden, nutrition in Stuttgart.

### **George C. Marshall and Germany**

The ruthless installation of a communist regime in an East European forefront of the Soviet Union lead to a continual deterioration, from 1945-1947, of relations between the USA and the Eastern victorious powers.

At the same time as being part of a West European search for stability, the USA improved their relations with the Germans. George C. Marshall's appointment as Foreign Minister to the USA on 7.1.1947 was, for the now evident, official transition of US Foreign policy, not causative. However. what is correct is

that this change took place in his term of office. New American policy had found in George C. Marshall a decisive, military organizationally skilled executor.

- On March 12 1947 President Harry S. Truman announced the Truman doctrine in front of both the Senate and the House of Representatives. America will help free people to oppose the force of armed minorities.
- At approximately the same time the directive for occupation for Germany JCS 1067 was replaced by the more lenient directive JCS 1779. Officially, the goal was from now on a stable coequal Germany in Europe.
- George C. Marshall allowed the Foreign minister conference, that was held from March 10 to April 24 1947 in Moscow, to end inconclusively. The reason for this was, on the one hand, because the Soviets and the French remained adamant regarding the question of common administrative offices, and on the other hand because of unacceptable demands concerning the Ruhr district's future and a withdrawal of reparations benefits from a prospective German production.
- Marshall, who was in Moscow, ordered US Supreme Commander Lucius D. Clay to Berlin-Tempelhof, where the foreign minister broke his return flight to Washington on 25.4.1947. Whilst there Clay received new directives.
- On 7 May 1947 Colonel Phelps, the US town major of Frankfurt, briefed the Lord Mayor Dr. Walter Kolb on the fact that the inefficient, divided between two zones, bizonal administrative offices in Frankfurt am Main should be combined together. Frankfurt and the Rhein-Main area are still profiting from this decision even today. The foundation of Frankfurt am Main as a financial center of the postwar era was made on this day.
- On 29 May 1947 the American and British military government created a new occupying forces legal foundation for the structure of the Bizone. Previously it had been based on, as described above, an administrative agreement between the German states. The laws enacted by the meanwhile newly created Economic Affairs Council „shall be superior to any German enactment and shall be binding on all courts“ within its area of competence. In Germany there was once again a central legislative administrated by Germans.
- On 5 June 1947 George C. Marshall announced, in a short speech to Harvard students, the European Recovery Program (Marshall-Plan) plan. The Bizone should be involved in it.
- On 25 June 1947 the Economic Affairs Council of the unified economic area convened in the west wing of the Stock Exchange building in Frankfurt am Main for its constituent meeting.

Only two months had gone by since Marshall's stopover in Tempelhof: two months, that had given the defeated German's attitude to life a tangible feeling of hope. There were therefore visible signs. Citizens, who had understood the event's meaning, flew, for the first time after the war, black-red-gold flags in front of the Economic Affairs Council's convention center in the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The flags had to be taken down again because the USA and Great Britain still shyed away from international criticism, they established a German government of their own.

Barely a year later - in the night from 17 to 18 June 1948 – the Economic Affairs Council terminated Ludwig Erhard's recovered law of basic principles, the economic accompanying law of the Allied currency reform.

Erhard considered Marshall Plan aid „as a special happenstance ..., that we do not find ourselves in front of an almost hopeless situation but, however, thanks to this support we could break new, safe ground on the way to recovery“.

The Marshall plan was a real help and a psychological driving force for the success of the currency reform and therefore for the reconstruction of Germany. We – especially as inhabitants of

the Rhein-Main region – are indebted to George C. Marshall and to the American people and it is good that we remember this by being part of the George Marshall Society.