

Beyond Iron Curtain, education shone through at BAHS

by Michael Ertel
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Kids have always considered the last day of school to be the best one. This was when the teacher returned all the toys, comic books and pea shooters, when students would discuss their summer plans and when they cleaned out their lockers housing books and other assorted junk.

The final bell of the final class, which seemed to last for hours, would sound off and the hallways would flood with a mass exodus of children. Local radio stations would play the Alice Cooper song *School's Out* at least four times. Cooper would lead chorus of children school-wide who would wail, "school's out for summer." In 1994, the song's next verse had special meaning. "School's out forever."

The day: June 1, 1994. The place: Berlin American High School.

As this school year began, Principal Dr. Allen Davenport knew the road to graduation would be riddled with obstacles, but he challenged his students. "I want to help the students keep their academic process moving. After all, learning is the most important thing," he said. Davenport also

added that he wanted the year to be a celebration of the many achievements of BAHS through the years.

The school's origin dates back to 1946. The school was named after 45-year-old father of three, Col. Thomas A. Roberts, who had given his life on the beaches of Normandy in the wake of the D-day invasion. Doors flew open Oct. 14, 1946 and the first graduation was held that May.

For the first 19 years, the high schoolers shared the campus with the elementary kids on Am Huttenweg, which is still the site of the TAR elementary school.

That first graduating class of the school named after a WWII hero took more than historic first steps, they left a legacy.

At their graduation they wrote, "we the senior class dedicate this gateway of 1947 to those democratic principles for which America stands and democracy has been reborn anew another generation."

Unfortunately, world events dictated that their school lost two generations in that pursuit.

By the time the sophomore class of 1947 reached senior year, the city was enveloped by the Iron Curtain and vital supplies had to be airlifted into Berlin. Residents lived in fear and the world watched as the city was blockaded. The students lost some of that youthful innocence while grown-ups toyed with their future.

From here on, American children in Berlin lived in a fishbowl. As the only Department of Defense Dependents School behind the west's frontiers, the kids had to make amends.

In the fall of 1961, while high school football coach Ed Brandon held tryouts for the Berlin Bears, the Wall was constructed and once again, the school was isolated.

Sports and other programs that rely on competition to build school pride were especially hard for the youngsters first held by the blockade's grasp then surrounded by the clutches of the Wall.

The school teams were subject to security searches, passport paperwork and tedious trips on the road enroute to friendly

games of basketball, football and chess matches among other activities.

Halfway through the school's existence, in December, 1971, movement for the students and the rest of Berlin was made easier when the two Germans agreed on a limited freedom of travel.

In November, 1989 as Bears head football coach George Pepoy was preparing his team for their final victory of the year against the Woolbridge Warriors, the Wall opened a gateway to freedom.

Even though their surroundings were bending world history, the faculty were focused on shaping the student's future. The school's future however, was gratefully doomed.

As the phase-out of soldiers in Berlin began, so did the thinning of the school's roster. At the beginning of the 1993-94 school year, there were 60 students in their senior year. The kids that had bonded because of the isolation and size of the community looked to the final year with anticipation and self-doubt.

BAHS, which has always been under the microscope because of its location, has recently served as a microcosm for the world. Salutarian Joachim Jensen, a Denmark Denmark said, "the experiences we've had in this truly international class can only help us be better citizens in a global society."

German citizen and classmate Stephan Ripplebeck agreed. "It is interesting to see all the different cultures we had here at BAHS." Cultures like the Asian one fellow graduate Nobumi Katsue came from, "when I first came here (three years ago), I didn't speak much English, with the help of my friends and Mister (Jack) Lyon, everything is different now," said the youngster who was selected as a member of the National Honor Society this year.

School was not just out for the kids of BAHS though, the teachers were graduating too. This was also their final year at BAHS. They, just as every other person that called the school home for eight or more hours a day, will be the new guys on the block come September.

The next few weeks will be spent clearing out the school's inventory, coordinating for the transfer of the school grounds and looking towards the future. But always, they will keep the images of the past etched in their memory.

Room 202, which for years was the site of Philipp Schmall's English class, will be renovated and then occupied by a German teacher and students.

Stanley Perkins said at graduation, "I've been waiting to leave here for a long time. I'm ready to start my future now." Berliners have hoped for a chance to start their future without us for years, too. In September that future will begin. The future of Berlin lies in room 202.



photo by Gregory Fox

NOW: Sgt. Jorge Ingles embraces his son, Jorge Jr., at the BAHS graduation May 28. The class of 1994 was the school's last to graduate.



photo by J.G. Freeman

THEN: Katrine Lindroth is crowned 'Prom Queen 1971.' Crowning Lindroth are the runners-up Toni Yarborough (left) and Renee Shipley (right) as Bill Planz, the queen's escort, looks on.