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Press release

„Liberty Convoy 2010“ in Plauen/Germany April 16 to April 18, 2010

The „Liberty Convoy“ was a commemorative event held at the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Plauen including the „Vogtland“ region from the nazi regime by the 87th Infantry Division. On these three days a convoy of over 40 original vehicles (Jeep´s, Dodge and GMC trucks) with more than 100 re enactors in Original US Uniforms and arms made their way through the region surrounding Plauen. Three memorial plaques in memory of the events at the subsidiary camp to the concentration camp „Flossenbürg“ and of course also in commemoration of the liberation of the town Plauen were unveiled.

We, the people from the company „ad astra Plauen“ had planned and organized this event months before, together with our friends Andreas Bräuer and Rolf Ballhause.

We are particularly proud about the participation of 5 WWII veterans of the 87th ID: Tom Stafford, Eldon Gracy, Gene Garrison, Tom Burgess and Jesse Bowman. Those guys made all the way overseas to attend at this event!

The „Liberty Convoy“ was a outstanding and remarkable event. At all it was the first event of its kind in Plauen and the Vogtland

All the people around the streets and in the towns where the convoy stopped, seemed to be very interested and welcomed us and the veterans with open arms. Many little but touching stories from their experiences during the WWII and when the US-Army came in 1945 were told. Former soldiers of the Wehrmacht talked to the veterans, were shaking hands and embraced each other in reconciliation. These were a couple of great and special moments!

One of the most impressive moments was the meeting between a German man who fought in the battle of bulge against one of the veterans. They embraced with tears in his eyes. **The WWII was finally ended on this day for them!**

Many emotional meetings between former foes were made possible. The guys from the 87th ID had so much fun while they talked to the people, although they barely spoke German and the German folks tried their best to speak English, so we gave a little help on translating of course.

On Thursday, April 15th, the veterans and the organization team members met the Ambassador of the U.S. in Germany, Mr. Philip D. Murphy. Later that day, at the „Malzhaus“ in Plauen happened a meeting with some students and the veterans spoke to those young people. On Friday and Saturday also the Consul General of the U.S.A., Ms. Katherine Brucker, attended at the convoy.

Here now are some more information´s for you about spots where the convoy stopped:

On Friday the ride started early at „Camp Waldfrieden“, which is located about 10 miles away west of Plauen, went to Mehltheuer and Syrau and then went through the city in Plauen. There we unveiled a memorial plaque in memory of the liberation of the city. On April 16, 1945 Sgt. Tom Stafford and his fellow soldiers prevented the destruction of the stony Elsterbridge in Plauen. The artist Andreas Claviez, Plauen, handed in grateful recognition a copy of his watercolor „Stony Elsterbridge with a view to Johannis Church“ to each of the veterans.

In Oelsnitz the convoy finally arrived at the old and famous castle „Voigtsberg“.

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On Saturday we came to Pausa, to the bridge „Göltzschtal-Brücke“ (it´s the largest bridge in the world that was built with bricks). It´s a wonderful landscape there. In Reichenbach the daughter of the former lord mayor talked about her father. He surrendered the city to the U.S.-Army in 1945 and thus prevented the destruction. Later he was captured by the Russians and never came back home.

In Jocketa the veterans and the Consul General visited the former headquarter of the U.S.-Army at that time, a city-mansion, and had a coffee break, hosted by the old woman who was actually a young child during the occupation of that mansion. A very touching moment for all of us.

On Sunday in Falkenstein and Auerbach the citizens welcomed the convoy as well.

In Carlsfeld unveiled a memorial plaque in memory of the mass surrender of German troops in 1945, the result of the remarkable activity of Tom Stafford.

The convoy finally ended in Kraslice, a little town in the Czech Republic near to the borderline of Germany, with laying a wreath.

After the convoy ended, Tom Stafford and Gene Garrison and his family stayed for some more days in Plauen because of the ash cloud from the volcano in Iceland. You will remember, airplanes were not allowed to take off for a while. So we made sightseeing trips and had three wonderful days together! Tom Stafford said to a radio reporter, that he want to thank the people in Iceland for the eruption! That in my opinion is the biggest compliment that he gave to us!

It was so an exciting and emotional experience for all of us and we will never forget these days! All those memories of the time together with the veterans and their families will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Thank you for the wonderful conversations and the emotional days.

With the following words we want to express our thanks:

Dear Tom Stafford, Tom Burgess, Gene Garrison, Jesse Bowman and Eldon Gracy!

We'd like to express our warmest thanks for coming to Vogtland and leading the Liberty Convoy! We are deeply honoured that you all made the trip overseas. It is certainly hard to express how exciting and emotional and what a great pleasure it was to be able to spend such an amazing time with you! And we are so very grateful for your friendship. Also many thanks to Norma, Juanita, Kathleen, Rosemary, Geoffrey, Brian, Herman and Theodore! We wish you all the best, and may we all meet again some day. God bless you!

Finally we want to say: in 1945 you came as liberators and we will never forget this!

Petra Macht

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