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## Diplomatic Dialogue

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# Diplomatic Dialogue

by Sunny Evans

## An Interview with Germany's Capt. Rainer Seth



Captain Rainer Seth with his wife, Angela, and sons, Andy and Shawn.

Representing the Federal Republic of Germany at NPS is Army Captain Rainer Seth who is a student in the Operations Research curriculum. Captain Seth and his family arrived in Monterey in March 1985, and expect to be here until September 1987. Members of Captain Seth's family include his wife, Angela, and two sons, Andy (age 16) and Shawn (age 13). The Seths are living in a home in Carmel which they enjoy as they find the area similar to Europe.

### Where is your home in Germany?

My father was in the armed forces too, so we moved quite a lot. I was born in the very northern part of Germany, in Kiel at the Baltic Sea. I was brought up in the very southern part of Germany, in Lindau at the Lake of Constance. Before we came here, we lived in the very western part of the country between Cologne and the Belgium border. So, it is hard to say exactly where

my home is, but I consider home where my house is and that is in the western part of Germany in the town of Langerwehe.

### Please describe some of the scenic areas of Germany.

Germany as a whole is a beautiful country, and you find something for every taste there. If you start out in the northern part with the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, this is a beautiful area. As you go farther down, and to the middle, we have the heather areas south of Hamburg, and then the landscape goes into the hilly ranges along the River Rhine with the beautiful wine regions, old castles and German history. Traveling further down, you reach the Alps. You see the mountain lakes and the snow mountains. My favorite area is the southern part, Bavaria, especially the Lake of Constance. You can go swimming, sailing, and skiing there.

### What was your previous military experience prior to attending NPS?

I joined the Army in 1970, attended Basic Officers' Training and was commissioned in 1972. From there, I went to study electrical engineering and received my masters degree in 1975. After that, I worked as a shop officer in a maintenance unit and then as Company Commander of a maintenance and training unit until 1979. From 1979 to last year, I was an instructor for computer technology at the German Army Maintenance School.

### Because West German citizens have the right to refuse military service, do you have problems supplying your armed forces with enough people?

We have the draft system as you know, and by having the draft system, all young men 18 years of age and older are drafted unless they have a good reason not to serve in the military, which might be family, personal or health reasons. We had times in the late 60's and early 70's with people refusing service, but right now there does not appear to be a problem. We might have problems in the late 80's or early 90's because of low birth rates. They are thinking of reducing the amount of soldiers or letting women join the Army, which is not so today.

### In your opinion, how does the German public feel towards the American military presence in Germany?

That's kind of a difficult question. One thing is that the American presence reminds the German people of World War II because that was the time when the Americans got there. We still have problems coping with those years although the generation that really experienced the war is the old generation, and they are dying away. So, our

generation does not have this deep relationship to the war. As far as I am concerned, I do not have a guilt complex as some people might have who were active in those years. I think the American soldiers are pretty much accepted as our allies and our shield against the socialistic world. I think the relationship is pretty good. From my own experience, I can say that our maintenance battalion had a partnership with American maintenance battalions, and it was quite a nice time we spent together. We shared field exercises as well as social events with each other. It is quite natural for Germans to see Americans in uniform.

**What is the present situation for the citizens of East and West Berlin as far as freedom to travel back and forth?**

You touched the wound point of German history. If a West German wants to go to the east, he has to apply for a visa to get there and pay a certain amount of money, kind of an entrance fee, and this is a daily fee. The other way around, it is nearly impossible for an East German to go to the west. The members of the Communist party in good standing are allowed to go but not with their family, so they always have people back home just in case they think of defecting. For retirees who receive pensions, the East German government is not so restrictive.

**What measures have been taken in recent years by your government to discourage the activities of political extremist groups?**

We have a democracy in Germany and as long as those people are in accord with our Constitution, they are allowed to act politically. We have extremists to the left and to the right. One party which was extreme to the right was forbidden. They are working on doing something with the leftists now, but it is not that easy because state governments vary from conservative to social democratic.

**What are some of your likes and dislikes about American life?**

I like the way people get acquainted and the way they help each other without knowing each other very well. So, you are never alone wherever you go because you find somebody who talks to you, or somebody for you to talk to. You feel welcome even when you go into a grocery store. People smile at you and tell you to come back. That's not the way in Germany. You get service here that you don't get in Germany. You don't have baggers and people to push your cart to your car. You have to do it all yourself, and if you don't move fast enough, you hear about it.

What I dislike is that everything is centered around money. This is my feeling anyway. The more money you have, the more you are appreciated, and the less money you have, you are appreciated accordingly.

**Do you have a favorite pastime?**

I have a new favorite here. Last year, I received my private pilot's license. I am very glad I was able to find time between classes and the homework to take the instructions and to work for that test. Now I can enjoy this area even more because I can see it from a different perspective. Other than that, I have a pastime called a computer which is over there in my study.

**Have you any comments on the significant number of German-made automobiles in the local area?**

Well, yes, you do find a lot of Mercedes and BMW's. You also see a lot of Rolls Royces. It is a distinguished neighborhood and we are glad to live here, but we are driving two American-made cars.

**Does Germany import many automobiles?**

Yes, they import a lot of Japanese cars, and they also import cars from Russia, Czechoslovakia, France, Britain, Sweden, and a very few from the U.S.

**How are the Russian cars?**

Rough. They are not very comfortable, but they are good driving machines, if you are just looking for a machine.

**Do you see any hope in the future for the reunification of Germany?**

No, I don't think so. Since the war, 41 years have passed, and we have developed two totally different systems socially, economically, and the people are taught to be biased towards their own type of government. There is such a large gap between our two countries now, that I do not see how we could reunite at present time. But still, in the preamble of our Constitution, it is said that the ultimate goal of the German nation is to be reunited in peace.

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