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1 April 1995
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Joe Lipsius
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Dear Joe,

Karl-Heinz Lange has asked me to send you a copy of our English translation of his work about Torgau in April 1945. I didn't know who you were until I came across your name in his text. I believe you were the staff officer of the 272nd he refers to on page 28. I trust you are a member of the 69th Div Assoc. Are you planning on going to the Elbe this month?

I first met Karl-Heinz about 10 years ago, and I've stayed with his family on a trip to Torgau several years ago. He is a retired school teacher (of English) from Torgau, and speaks English adequately, but not as well as Heinz Richter. But it is almost impossible to translate German directly into vernacular English, for the sentence structure is so different. So I volunteered to attempt this for them, hence the enclosed. This is the 2nd generation of revision, but it still had a lot of deficiencies and typos, so I made another one, which I've sent off to Germany. I hope the pencil scratches here and there are not too distracting.

In several places, between [.....] signs, I've introduced information that I happen to know, or comments that I think are needed, but whether or not they will be in the final draft, I do not know.

And by the way, I hope you know that there will be Ceremony at Arlington Nat. Cemetery next Saturday, the 8th, at 10:30 AM. It's held to commemorate the Elbe link up as well as other "cooperative" aspects of our relationship with Russia, such as the Murmansk Convoy run, the Persian Gulf Command. The Chairman of the JCS, the Sec. Defense, Postmaster General, Russian Ambassador, etc. will be there, with members of the 69th, the Naval/Merchant Marine Murmansk run, the Air Force, the Persian Gulf Command. I believe we're supposed to meet at the Visitors Center parking lot.

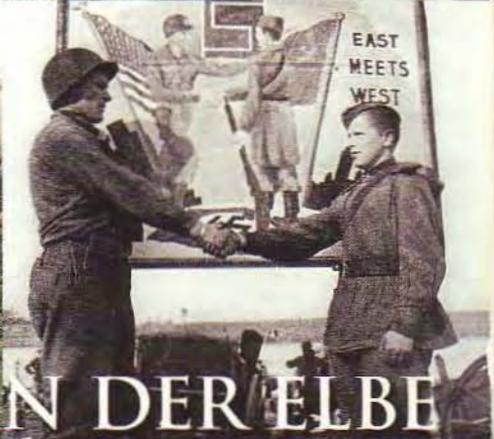
I trust this finds you in good health. Please write to me when you have the chance.

Sincerely,

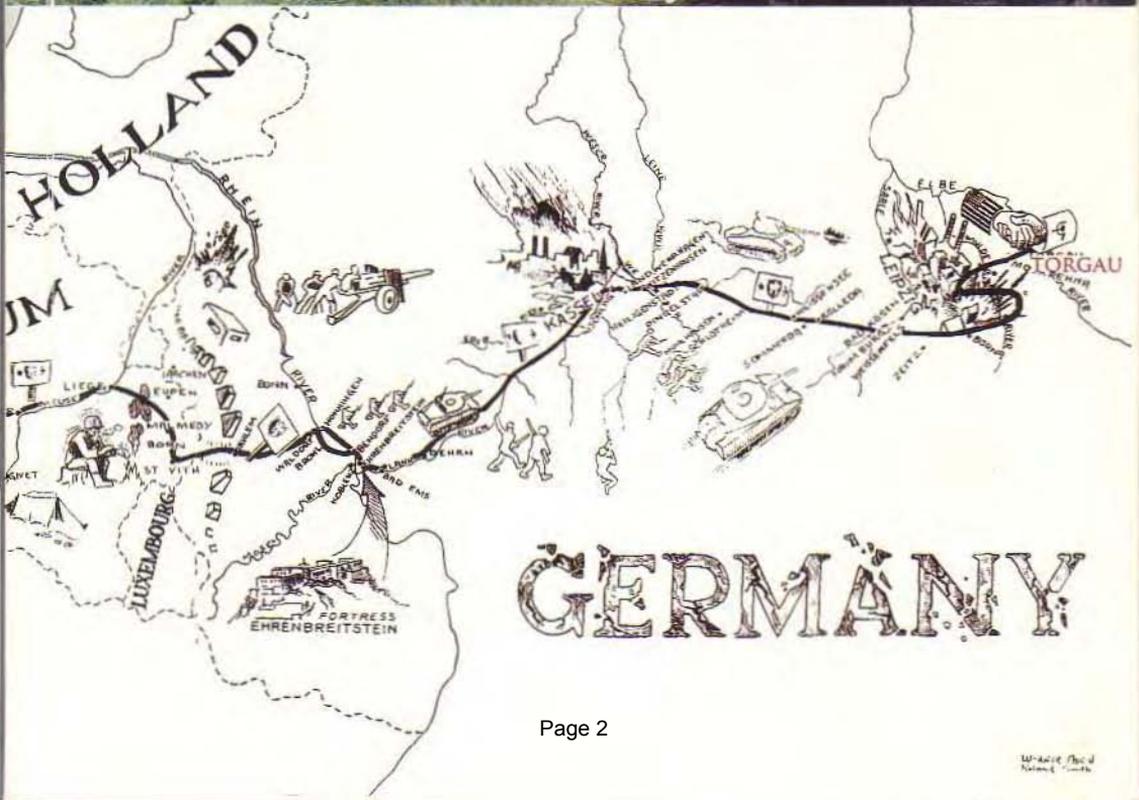




APRIL 1945 IN TORGAU



BEGEGNUNG AN DER ELBE



A P R I L 1 9 4 5 I N T O R G A U
LINK-UP AND MEETINGS AT THE ELBE RIVER

A general description of the events at the Elbe River in Torgau between
April 10 and May 6, 1945.

by **Karl-Heinz Lange**

Photo Documents by Manfred Braunlich

(Commissioned by the Historical Association of Torgau)

Dedicated to William Robertson, M.D., and Alexander Silvasenko, Lieutenants, respectively, of the US Army and the Red Army, who made the first official direct contact between the US-Army and the Red Army at their link-up on the East Bank of the Elbe River at Torgau, April 25, 1945. They made the town of Torgau famous throughout the world..

Translation by Heinz Richter and William Robertson MD, 1995.

April 1945 in Torgau

**Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung der Vorgänge
in Torgau an der Elbe
vom 10. April 1945 bis 6. Mai 1945**

von Karl-Heinz Lange
mit Bilddokumenten von Manfred Bräunlich

Gewidmet
Dr. William Robertson, M.D.
und Alexander Silwaschko

Sie haben am 25. April 1945 am Ostufer der Elbe von Torgau
den Kontakt zwischen den beiden Armeen hergestellt
und den Namen der Stadt Torgau
weltbekannt werden
lassen.



Torgauer Geschichtsverein e. V.
Torgau 2005

Joe Lipsius, received an interesting letter dated January 9, 1995 from a man from Torgau, German, Karl-Heinz Lange. He was seeking information about the movements and actions of the 272nd Infantry Regiment and certain other units as well as other happenings on April 25, 1945, the day of the historic linkups between the 69th Infantry and the Russian Army that helped end WWII, and the days following.

It turned out that Lange, a historian of the linkup, was preparing a booklet titled "April 1945 in Torgau," to be issued by the 50th Anniversary of the linkups, April 25, 1995. 69th veteran Bill Robertson, leader of the Torgau linkup patrol, in a letter to Joe dated April 1, 1995, enclosed his typed English manuscript of the proposed booklet at Lange's request. Lipsius has kept the correspondence and typed version of the booklet for these many years.

In about August 2009, because of the historical importance of the details of the movement of the Robertson Patrol, it was decided to include them in a link called April 1945 in Torgau on the 69th Infantry Website. This brought a response from Lange that his first edition and the English version were based on "Yanks Meet Reds" by Mark Scott, Santa Barbara, CA (1988) and reminiscences of participants of the event. This book and their memory of what happened when interviewed in later years were not as accurate as another source used in Lange's 2005 edition, a 1945 source called "The Fox Report," by US Captain William J. Fox, a trained interviewer who questioned the leaders immediately after the events. Lange asked to change the text for the Robertson patrol actions and movement on the website link to the text from "The Fox Report," as he had no English version of his booklet and was unable to adequately translate it.

The Robertson Patrol movement as told to interviewer Fox now replaces what was posted here before.

Lange's booklet did not report the story of Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue's Patrol Linkup with the Red Army near Strehla, which occurred first, nor Major Fred W. Craig's Patrol meeting. It reported exclusively about the events in Torgau and why Torgau made world history, not Strehla, though the very first meeting took place near Strehla three-and-a-half hours earlier.

Available to you through the 69th Infantry website link, "Books of Interest," are two publications with complete details about the three linkup patrols:

- (1) "Elbe Begegnung Link-Up," by Dr. Uwe Niedersen. English/German.*
- (2) "The Russian-American Link-Up 25 April 1945," by William J. Fox.*

Excerpt from "The Fox Report"

Interview from the end of April 1945, with Lieutenant William D. Robertson, S-2 of the 1st Battalion, 273rd Infantry Regiment.

Unit: Contact patrol from the 1st Battalion, 273rd Infantry Regiment, 69th Infantry Division, led by 2nd Lt. Willia D. Robertson, Battalion S-2.

Interviews: 2nd Lt. William D. Robertson, S-2, 1st Battalion 273rd Infantry, and Pfc Frank P. Huff, the Lieutenant's driver on the patrol.

Interviewer: Captain William J. Fox (2nd Information and Historical Service – V. Corps).

Time, Place and Circumstances: This interview was started at the 273rd Regimental CP in Trebsen late in the afternoon of 27 April but was conducted mainly and finished late that night at the 2nd Battalion CP in the same town. We were all pretty exhausted when the interview was made, since we had been caught up in the whirlpool of excitement at the first contact between the two Armies and there still was a good deal of confusion as to what actually had happened. The news of the linkup had just been given to the world in a joint announcement by the President, Prime Minister, and the Soviet Marshal from Washington, London, and Moscow. Robertson's contact actually was the second one, but it was announced as the first. This added to the confusion. However, he brought back the first Russian emissaries to an American headquarters. The lieutenant, a young, energetic, slightly-built man, recited all the events in this story, calling upon Huff only occasionally to check specific points.

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Second Lieutenant William D. Robertson, as the 1st Battalion S-2, 273rd Infantry, had been working long and hard hours since the battalion had been asked by the burgermeister of Wurzen to accept the surrender of the town during the night of 23-24 April and to clear it of the many thousands of newly freed American and Allied PWs (prisoners of war) as well as hundreds of German soldiers who were ready to give up.

These negotiations were completed and, after higher headquarters' approval, Major Conley, the 1st Battalion CO (commanding officer), moved part of his command and, ultimately, his own CP (command post), across the Mulde River. The situation was wild and chaotic as these streams of the newly freed, including many displaced slave laborers and the newly captured, moved through the battalion's hands. There was no sleep at all for the 1st Bn the first night but, when things were more under control by the night of the 24th, rest was in order. Thus, with this as a background, Robertson got his first sleep in two days and slept long and well for about 11 hours.

When he awakened, it was morning on the 25th. Many things had gone on and, as S-2, he thought he had better check the battalion area and see how the evacuation was proceeding through the town of Wurzen and across the Mulde. He had been out of touch temporarily and wanted to clarify the situation for himself.

He went first to the 1st Battalion PW enclosure and assured himself that there were enough guards there to cope with any emergency and then checked several other points in the zone. The one outstanding factor was the large number of wandering groups of displaced workers whose carts and wagons and vans filled the streets of Wurzen and the roads leading into it from all sides. These, he understood, were all to be cleared west of the Mulde, or at least gathered up into manageable groups in the battalion area, as quickly as possible. The long columns of refugees were everywhere, and many of them were camped along the roadsides.

It was to clear up as much of this mess as possible, he said, that he started out of town in a generally northern direction. In the single jeep with Robertson were Pfc Paul Staub, of the Bronx, NYC, a member of the battalion intelligence section; Pfc Frank P. Huff, of Washington, Virginia, the driver; and Cpl. James J. McDonnell, of Peabody, Massachusetts, the 1st Battalion gas NCO (non-commissioned officer), who was the acting 1st Battalion intelligence sergeant since the regular intelligence sergeant was in the hospital. Their armament at first consisted of the one machine gun mounted on the jeep, two M-3s and two M-1s. There was no radio with them.

At the start, Robertson said, he had no idea of contacting the Russians. His jeep moved up the road toward Falkenhain, leaving Wurzen about 1000. All along the route, the lone patrol constantly ran into small, straggling groups of two and three German soldiers who were walking, bicycling and pushing carts with their belongings in the direction of the American lines. All were disarmed without trouble and were told to keep on going to Wurzen. The patrol's stock of weapons mounted.

They turned up into Zachorna, checked around, found nothing, came back out to the main road and, a short distance beyond that point, the patrol saw a dejected German major and about a company of his soldiers sitting along the side of the road in a forlorn attitude, tired, dirty, disgusted. He surrendered his group with pleasure. Using Staub, who was his German interpreter, Robertson told the major to get his men moving toward Wurzen.

The patrol kept going. In the edge of the woods west of Frauwalde, one of the largest concentrations of refugee wagons was parked. Robertson got them on their way to the Mulde.

On into Ochsenaal they went. There was no opposition, every sign of complete disintegration. In the village, the lieutenant said that “the civilians seemed happier to see us than the Russians later were on the other side of the Elbe.” The fantastic cavalcade continued, and more Germans gave themselves up. A German civilian who had been hiding a British soldier eagerly brought him out of hiding, and the Englishman was given a gun for protection and told where the American lines were.

The patrol members saw a German soldier scurry into a yard and, when they flushed him with little difficulty, he proved to be an SS man and still somewhat arrogant. However, when he surrendered, he pointed up the road to where he said a comrade was hiding. He was put on the jeep’s hood, and the vehicle drove up beside his friend, who had been covering the road with a machine gun. The second SS trooper surrendered without a fight, though in a surly manner. Both were rather hard to handle at first, but became more manageable when they were told that they would be given over to the Russians unless they cooperated. They were taken along as hostages and, as they went, both tried to tear off their SS markings.

The jeep patrol then turned north, still following this main road, and went on into Sitzenroda, where about 30 more freed British PWs were met. They reported that there were American wounded and PWs in Torgau. By this time, Robertson said, he began to feel certain that the Russians couldn’t be too far away and, with the evident breakdown of German resistance, he had decided to try to make contact. The report about the American wounded added another reason why he should go on.

At the northern outskirts of Sitzenroda, they ran into five more Germans who wanted safe conduct passes, since they were on their way back to surrender. These were written out by Robertson and the soldiers told to go to Wurzen. It was then about noon. Just as the passes were written and the Germans on their way, a staff car whizzed by without slowing. The patrol members had time only to glimpse enemy uniforms in it and immediately gave chase. Robertson ordered the two SS men to get down on the jeep’s bumper so that they wouldn’t interfere with the machine gun’s field of fire. The jeep raced after the staff car for about two miles, firing as it went along and finally hitting it once. The car stopped, and out piled four nervous German medical officers, all armed, and a driver. They were disarmed, given safe conduct passes, and given strict injunctions to return as rapidly as possible to Wurzen.

>From there to Torgau there were no events. The patrol passed only about 10-12 German soldiers and about 15-20 civilians, all going south. Robertson said he made frequent stops and asked most of the civilians whether or not the Russians were on the west side of the Elbe. None of

them knew of a crossing, but one volunteered the information that they were building a bridge across to the north. At another point, about two miles north of Beckwitz, the patrol stopped a German civilian, took a white sheet from him, rolled it around a pole, and put it in the back seat, just in case. The time then was about 1230.

The day was getting on and there still were no Russians. As he came nearer to Torgau, Robertson said he could hear the sound of light small arms fire. The patrol went into Torgau, taking a left-fork road around a roadblock that barred the main street. They didn't go right into the main portion of town, but stayed more to its western fringe at first. The streets were almost completely deserted, save for a few wandering slave laborers. The jeep was going fast, since the place had an eerie atmosphere, but it ground to a stop so they could question one of the freed workers, a Pole, who told them that there were mines in the garrison in the northwest portion of town. He knew nothing of any American wounded.

The patrol continued and reached the lower end of the garrison area quickly. Outside one of the buildings, which Robertson took to be a CP of some sort, they saw a Volkswagen with its motor running. The driver was just getting into the vehicle, and a German officer was just coming out of the building. The jeep swooped down on them too fast for either to do anything; both were caught before they could get away. Robertson told the Germans that the Russians were west of the river in several places and said that he wanted to continue on a bit farther, ordering them to give up the keys to their car and to remain where they were until he returned in an estimated 15 minutes.

The four Americans continued on their way along the perimeter road and, while still in the garrison area, came upon two sedans parked in the street, with drunken Germans loading champagne and wine into the vehicles. The patrol took them into custody and told them the same story as had been told the others, ordering the inebriates to go down the street and join the Volkswagen group.

Trying to check the Britishers' story and to get more concrete details, they then interrogated a German medical NCO who was nearby and asked him whether or not there were any American wounded in the vicinity. He pointed up the road toward Zinna and said they might be up in that direction about two kilometers. He was loaded on the jeep to act as guide, but when they reached the site of an old windmill, a barn, and a house, the place where he thought the wounded might be located, there was no one around. While they were searching about the area, a German civilian said that two wagons had gone from that spot in the direction of Torgau only about one-half hour previously, and they may have taken the American wounded with them.

That ended the search. Robertson said they didn't go on any farther, because he could see artillery shells landing in the next town, which he presumed to be Suptitz.

The patrol returned to Torgau. When they reached the garrison area this time, they found that some of the men who had been imprisoned in the compound were waiting for them. All of the prisoners at Torgau were reported to be political or espionage inmates and all were either under sentence of death or were awaiting trial for offenses the result of which was death. Two of these were Americans, one an ensign named Peck, of the New York firm of Peck and Peck, clothiers, who was wearing a French blouse, OD trousers, and a silver bar (which led Robertson to call him "lieutenant"). The other was an enlisted man who said that he had formerly been in the 69th Division and had left it for some special photographic job. Robertson said he was positive of only one thing – that they were Americans – and that he didn't know what their exact job had been or exactly why they were at Torgau. They were all happy to see each other and joined forces.

The Volkswagen was still obediently in place about 200 yards away from this meeting, as were all the Germans who had been told to join it. The medical NCO and the two SS men were dumped off with the rest and left in the care of the freed prisoners.

By this time, the amount of small arms firing had increased considerably from the direction of the river, so they all loaded on the jeep and moved toward its source, figuring that at last this might be the Russians. After getting about 2,000 yards into the heart of the city, near the castle, they dismounted and continued on foot, the bullets by now ricocheting off the buildings nearby. They moved along cautiously, all strung out in line, the jeep following at a discreet distance. Robertson and Staub carried the white flag, Peck was with them, Huff manned the machine gun, and the liberated photographer drove. The bullets chopped chinks out of the buildings nearby, once hitting into the wall not far above their heads. They continued past a roadblock, saw no one around save a few scattered, frightened civilians. In a few minutes, they saw the towers of the castle and learned from a civilian that the Elbe was only about 300 yards away.

Robertson began to wish more and more that he had brought an American flag. One would feel so reassuring at a time like this. If there were Russians across the river, perhaps they would recognize the American banner faster than a white flag. The chances of getting shot at that moment weren't too alluring.

So, they decided to make an American flag. Reaching an apothecary shop,

they at first tried to get inside through a blasted window but found that there still was too much loose glass about. Then they tried to shoot the lock off the front door, but succeeded only in putting a hole in the wood. Finally, Robertson bashed in the glass of the door, cutting his hand in the process. They looked around the store and found some of the raw materials for a flag that was to become historic. They found red and blue water paint and, using the white bed sheet, made a flag. They painted the stripes with a roller and made the stars by using a rubber floor mat with round holes in it and running the blue coloring over it. The result was a very messy but satisfactory American flag, with an unorthodox white field and blue stars. It looked like the real thing, however, and served its purpose.

Armed with this homemade psychological weapon, they all went into the castle courtyard where Robertson, Peck, and Staub climbed the circular staircase in the tower nearest the river; McDonnell, Huff, and the photographer remained in the yard with the jeep. Robertson took the flag and went to the topmost part where the tower was open from all directions. The Elbe River and its open eastern bank stretched out in front of him. Hanging the flag out of the tower, facing south so that it would be broadside to any onlookers on the opposite bank, he held it with his hands first to see what would happen. Nothing did. Then he lowered the staff to the floor, stepped on it, and held the flag outside with his foot while he waved his arms and tried to attract attention. Still nothing happened. It was evident by then that the Russians were not on the west bank and might not be on the east bank.

The lieutenant said he knew no Russian and didn't know what to say but he kept yelling, calling out anything which might indicate he was friendly. "Case fire," he hollered, and "Tovarisch," "American," "Amerikanski," "Russia," "America," "Kamerad", and, several times, "Do you have anyone there who can speak English?" He said he could see figures moving around on the opposite bank, but couldn't tell as yet whether or not they were Russians. They were dug in and by this time had ceased firing. There was no one opposing them on the west bank, and they apparently had been firing "just for the hell of it." They became more inquisitive, and he could hear them hollering across to him but could not understand a word they said.

At this point, Peck, who had remained on the level below Robertson, out of sight, came up and stuck his head out. Seeing this second figure, the Russians on the opposite side opened up on the tower with a general and liberal hail of fire. A shell from an anti-tank gun to the left (north) of the blasted bridge below the tower hit one corner near them, and small arms fire bounced off the stones. Some of this apparently came from the town, since there were rifle reports from that direction.

When the AT gun shell hit, the ensign hastily returned to his lower perch and Robertson pulled all of his body except head and arms below the level of visibility, endeavoring to make himself as small as possible and at the same time still try to get the idea over that he was friendly. He continued to holler and wave his arms, and the firing ceased again. Suddenly, a green star cluster was fired from the other side of the river and was followed within about 15 seconds by another. This was it! That was the recognition signal! Those were the Russians over there! But how to let them know who was in the tower?

Remembering that Peck had said that among the prisoners with him in garrison was at least one Russian, the young S-2 gave orders to the men in the courtyard to take off with the jeep and get back as fast as possible with him. McDonnell, Huff and the photographer were off in a flash.

Robertson hollered some more, louder and longer this time. He called over that “we’re a four-man American patrol,” repeating the “four-man” several times, and shouted the word “Americans” often enough to hope they would understand. He yelled for them to come over to the west side. But no one came.

He told them that “we have no flares.” His pleading seemed to be in vain, for the Russians appeared to tire of waiting for someone to appear. They started firing again. The time was about 1520. The AT gun fired again. Robertson could see the muzzle flash and almost instantly the shell hit the lower left corner of his position. The Russians were zeroed in, and that was too close. He backed down inside hastily.

Just at this point, the boys raced into the courtyard in the jeep, carrying the freed Russian prisoner. No one could speak Russian, but the former prisoner understood German. Peck, who also spoke the language, gave him his instructions hurriedly. He was told to get back into the tower and relay what Robertson had hollered earlier. The Russian did so, eagerly, and the three-language parley worked. From the same position Robertson had occupied earlier, he shouted in Russian, and about five minutes later called down in German that there were some Russians coming along by the bridge. They shouted that they were coming over. Robertson took a quick look, saw much milling and shouting in the Russian positions, and then he and the rest scrambled downstairs as fast as they could go, ran through the courtyard, around the wing of the castle out in the road in plain view, waving their arms and shouting so that the Russians could see them, and rushed to the bridge.

The Russian PW took the initiative and started climbing the left top girder, headed for the other side. Robertson followed him, with Huff and the

ensign coming along behind. The girders were narrow and broken, and they all crawled across very slowly. They could see a group of about 15 Russians standing near a pile of dirt and debris from the blasted bridge pier near the river bank. One of these finally succumbed to his anxiety and started crawling from his side. The two groups met at the low part of the "V" formed by two broken girders near the eastern shore. The two Russians met first and, after their gleeful outpourings of greeting, each continued past the other. Robertson was on his hands and knees as the Russian soldier – for such as he was – came sliding down towards him. The lieutenant said he couldn't think of anything fancy to say. He just grinned and reached out to pound the Russian on the knees. They were still over the river on a broken span. The time was about 1600. Russian-American contact had been made!