

The Alternative Line

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Dear Porsche Pushers; This is a small treatise on the idea of cultural upbringing and unexpected consequences. Nothing too earth shattering; merely some observations on why the world seems to look as crazy as it sometimes is, and why at other times seems so easily, and incorrectly, predictable.

I had occasion while in Berlin to visit the Checkpoint Charlie Wall Museum and to talk history over the past 100 years with two gentlemen who lived as youngsters in the eastern sector of Germany, and through the turbulent cold-war period, and now are professionals in a unified Germany, but living in a depressed area; the former East Berlin. What seemed most interesting to me was their response when I described my Audi Quattro as being the certain evidence that the Wehrmacht would rise again. (Which as much as anything shows my stupid arrogance at failing to realize they might have sensitive feelings about such a reference, but c'est la vie.) One of them expressed surprise that, as an American, I would seem to show some admiration for the German Army of WWII. (I was to learn the meaning was not war-machine, but war-power). That led to our discussion on topics from the Berlin Airlift and the Marshall Plan to Churchill's famous "America is magnanimous nation" reference, all the way to the cultural shift facing Russian women today, the evident problems that exhibits in Russia itself, and the global security risks inherent from that. There is also a grudging respect for the Soviet draftees on the wall who could easily have shot many escapees, but chose not to, even at risk to themselves. (I seem to like German beer, or something. I don't know...) Anyway...

Right about now I know you are thinking; "...when did I pick up Newsweek by mistake?" Don't worry, sooner or later I talk about cars. What was striking from that conversation, however, was my realization that we Americans seem to have the shortest memories on the planet. Unless you happen to have ever been a Communist, in which case we seem incapable of letting go. But I digress... In their case, both these gentlemen were living in the area of the "Candy Bomber", a pilot in the Berlin Airlift who dropped sweets to the kids who collected at the runway end as he flew over. It was both a heart warming and humbling experience to have these men associate that act of singular humanity with me, just because I was an American, and to be further surprised that I believed most Americans recognized the German Army as a very capable group of people, poorly led. Respect is funny that way. And mutual respect is a precious commodity not to be squandered.

It often seems from the media that other cultures are daffy or illogical. But you should see their media's portrayal of US. Just as inaccurate. So here is a quiz; Name three vehicles imported in large numbers from the US by Germans? Answer: Jeep, BMW and M-B. Knock me over with a feather. But the Jeep Cherokee with a diesel engine is a VERY popular SUV. And the Z3 is built in South Carolina and shipped to an adoring welcome there. The M-B SUV is a little less volume, but then again, M-B always was, wasn't it? And HARLEY's are EVERYWHERE.

But don't you remember the dogmatic drivel about Germans being dissatisfied with American quality? Remember who it was TOLD you that? Don't believe everything you hear or read. Trans-Am's are also popular. Talk with real people. You will be PROUD to say you are an American, and humbled at their admiration for your way of life and ability to forgive wrongs and get on with it. You will be surprised at their appreciation for what your parents did for them, when historically no conqueror before had ever failed to demand the reparations which sowed the seeds of the next conflict twenty years later. You would be amazed how many actually understand that, and individually hope to learn that unique American Cowboy way of unorthodox thinking. And if you get the chance, tell them how much you like driving their work as well. Their reaction will make you feel wonderful.