



GRAND HOTEL

ZELL AM SEE

THE GREAT LAKESIDE HOLIDAY WORLD



Welcome to

"Rainbow University"

USFA "School of Standards" in Zell am See

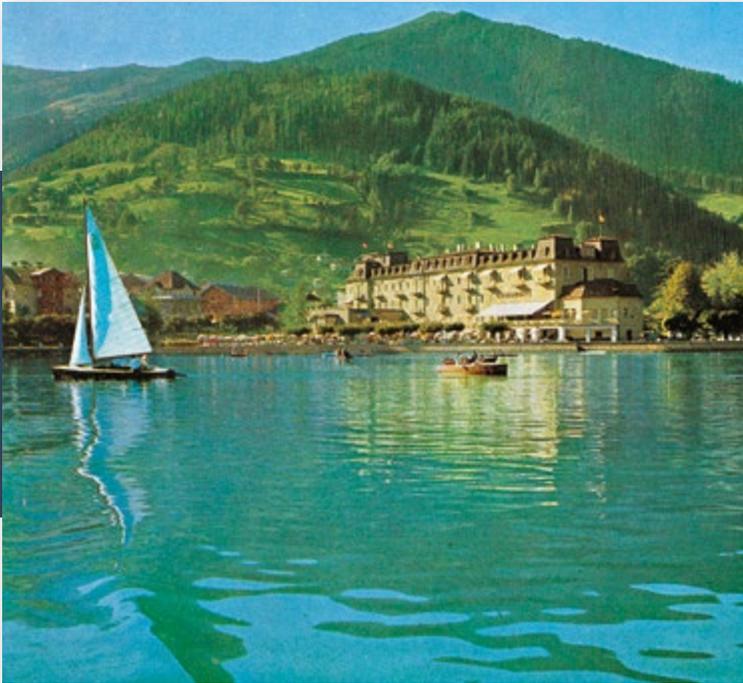


The GRAND HOTEL ZELL AM SEE served the Americans as "Rainbow University" and "School of Standards" (photograph around 1950). "Rainbow University" / USFA "School of Standards" in Zell am See

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The GRAND HOTEL ZELL AM SEE experienced good and bad times in the 20th century—bankruptcies, ownership changes, economic crises, and requisitioning. We want to bring you closer to one of the most moving periods on the following pages:

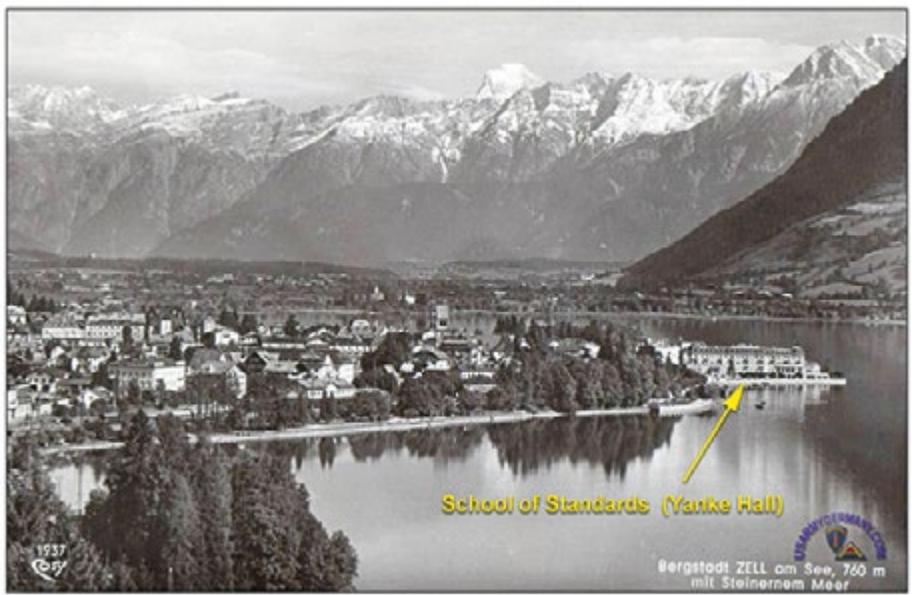
the GRAND HOTEL as a college for American soldiers.

1.

The Grand Hotel before and during World War II

During World War I, the GRAND HOTEL had to cease hotel operations and the rooms were used as a hospital.

However, tourism recovered relatively quickly. Carl Böhm, the builder of the GRAND HOTEL, passed away in 1921. During the war years, the hotel was taken over by Karl Pischkittl (later Palmer). However, in the course of the 1920s, political tensions increased, and even before the Great Depression with enormous inflation in 1929, Zell am See also experienced a famine. The "1000-Mark Ban" imposed by Germany in 1931 put further pressure on tourism. Despite these challenges, social life in the lakeside hotels continued unabated. Famous guests like the writer Stefan Zweig and the composer Richard Strauss stayed at the GRAND HOTEL, where legendary parties and balls took place with singing and dancing.



Austrian postcard from the late 1930s—an arrow points to Hotel Central am See, which was requisitioned by the US Army at the end of WWII.

The Austrofascist corporate state under Engelbert Dollfuß banned the NSDAP in 1933, leading to repeated demonstrations, illegal rallies, clashes, and acts of sabotage even in Pinzgau. Insurmountable divisions emerged within the municipal council, and from July 1933, the city was governed by a government commissioner. Despite the dramatic political times, important infrastructure and tourism projects were initiated, including the construction of the cable car to the Schmitenhöhe in 1927, the airport in 1930, and the Großglockner High Alpine Road in 1934. The civil war in 1934 was calmer in Pinzgau than in other parts of Austria. After the failed coup and the assassination of Dollfuß, the Nazi flags were already visible on the horizon.

Zell am See became world-famous in sports: the Academic Winter Games were held in 1937, and Heinrich Harrer won the downhill race. The Anschluss (annexation) to Nazi Germany in March 1938 was celebrated by the majority of the population, and the vision of an independent Austrian state disappeared.



Images from around the year 1938

In 1938, an extension with a hall and bar was built at the GRAND HOTEL. In 1941, the Kastner/Palmer family sold the GRAND HOTEL to the Reich German association "Vacation Homes for Trade and Industry" in Wiesbaden. However, the guests from Nazi Germany were often unruly, and there were frequent complaints about noise and inappropriate behavior. The operation of the holiday home continued until 1945.

From 1944, the air war increasingly reached the mountains. On February 25, 1944, Allied forces attacked railway targets near Zell am See as part of a major offensive against southern Germany. On December 29, 1944, a freight train loaded with ammunition standing between Zell and Bruck was attacked by low-flying aircraft and exploded due to machine-gun fire. By the end of the war, there had been 459 air raid alarms, but the town itself was spared from bomb hits. In the last months of the war, thousands of refugees arrived from war zones.

About 1,050 residents of Zell were drafted into military service, and the community ultimately mourned 183 dead and missing.

2.

The Americans are coming!

On May 4, 1945, units of the 3rd U.S. Infantry and 20th U.S. Armored Divisions occupied the city of Salzburg without resistance. On May 5, the 42nd U.S. Infantry Division ("Rainbow Division"), which had advanced through Munich and Dachau, reached the Salzburg border. Reconnaissance activities followed in Innergebirg (e.g., in the Unken/St. Martin bei Lofer area). The commander of the 42nd was General Harry J. Collins, who had been in command since December 1944.

During these days, remnants of the 82nd German Corps, various high-ranking Wehrmacht commanders, and political leaders of the Third Reich were present in Pinzgau. Many hotels and guesthouses had to be converted into hospitals ("German Military Hospitals"), and the number of civilian residents in Zell am See increased to over 11,000. The last days of the war were terrible: in countless railway wagons standing on the track from Leogang to Taxenbach!, 4,000 people—wounded soldiers, refugees, and displaced persons—lived in squalor.

On May 6, General Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's staff surrendered at the Saalfelden barracks.

Excursus: The castle Fischhorn and Hermann Göring

In May 1943, Schloss Fischhorn was confiscated by Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler for horse breeding. It previously belonged to Heinrich Gildemeister, the Peruvian ambassador to Germany, who became wealthy through trading Pinzgauer cattle. The castle housed significant looted Polish art. On April 23, 1945, the first rumors emerged that Hitler had committed suicide. Field Marshal Göring saw himself as Hitler's successor and declared the takeover of power in a telegram to the Führer's bunker. Hitler, who was still alive, flew into a rage and accused Göring of treason. The SS command was ordered to arrest him. Göring was held at Obersalzberg until Hitler's actual death on April 30, 1945, and then transferred to Burg Mauterndorf. However, after the fall of Berlin, Göring was to be executed by the SS. On May 9, he was freed by one of "his" Luftwaffe units and left Burg Mauterndorf for Pinzgau. Göring, still unashamedly, wanted to negotiate the surrender with President Eisenhower and proposed Schloss Fischhorn for the meeting. On the way, he was captured without resistance by a U.S. unit and interned at Schloss Fischhorn. The next day he was taken to Kitzbühel, where he gave an interview at the local Grand Hotel. In the days before the American invasion of Pinzgau, chaos broke out at Schloss Fischhorn due to looting. SS officials tried to hide the artworks in the region and cover their tracks. Even decades later, significant artworks continue to surface.

There were no major battles in Pinzgau. Shortly before the arrival of U.S. troops, the establishment of the "Volkssturm" (a national militia) was considered, especially in the Taxenbach area. Fortunately, this "last stand" was not deployed. By May 8, the occupation of Pinzgau was complete.

The first American soldiers in Zell am See were paratroopers of the 101st U.S. Airborne Division, which was attached to the 7th Army. They entered Zell am See on May 8, 1945.

The following hotels and guesthouses were requisitioned by the American troops: Grand Hotel am See, Hotel Zentral (residence of the Zauner family), Hotel Austria, Hotel Alte Post, Pinzgauer Hof, and the guesthouses Lebzelter, Hirschenwirt, Au-erwirt, Grüner Baum, and Cafe Feinschmeck. A hospital was also set up in Hotel Excelsior (now Raiffeisenbank).

In June, the famous "Rainbow Division" (42nd Infantry) took over the administration of the Pinzgau area. The name „Rainbow Division“ came from the large recruiting area of the unit, which spanned from East to West America, and was already used in World War I. In 1945, about 50,000 American soldiers were stationed in Salzburg, with around 3,000 in Saalfelden alone.

Accounts of the arrival of the U.S. troops are varied: many younger interviewees expressed their excitement about the vehicles and all the new things the soldiers brought to the area. Many recalled having to vacate their homes and apartments for the soldiers and not knowing where they would find shelter themselves. However, there were also reports of soldiers who stole everything that wasn't nailed down (cf. Saalfelden Gendarmerie Chronicle).

In August 1945, while the war still raged in Asia, the 101st U.S. Airborne Division stationed in Zell am See could be redeployed at any moment, with the possibility of an invasion of Japan looming. However, after the atomic bombings on August 6 and 9, Japan surrendered on August 15, and the American soldiers were relieved. This significantly eased the situation between the occupying forces and the local population, even in Zell am See.



Zell am See - this resort town was another favorite among the military tourists. The hotel in the background - under renovation at the time the photo was taken - was occupied for many years by the US Army.

(Source: Herb Williamson, 10th MRU, Salzburg, Austria)

3.

*The School of Standards &
Rainbow University at the Grand Hotel*



Rainbow University (Yanke Hall) Grandhotel Zell am See, Austria 1945
(cover from 1945 Rainbow Division booklet)

Before the end of the war, plans were made to establish a school for military leaders in Zell am See, with a focus on deployment in the Pacific. The trainees were to attend courses in Japanese tactics, troop leadership, and other military topics. However, the need for these subjects soon became obsolete. The division's leadership therefore decided to establish a university instead, recruiting from about 8,000 soldiers with high school diplomas ("Rainbow Leaders School"). The training was no longer solely focused on military subjects but aimed to prepare the students for their return to civilian life.

On May 9, 1945, the approximately ten-year occupation of the GRAND HOTEL by the 42nd Infantry Division ("Rainbow Division") began. Since 1937, there had been a hall (an annex to the right of the main entrance, today the "Imperial Bar") that was used intensively as a cinema and theater, in addition to a bar. The hall was named "Yankee Hall" after Lieutenant Otto H. Yankee, who was killed in action against German troops on January 24, 1945. As early as the summer of 1945, plans were made (following the suggestion of Major Jones) to establish a university. The "Rainbow University" existed until the 42nd Division withdrew at the end of 1948. Afterward, a branch of the "Zone Command Austria" and a "School of Standards" were established. In 1949, Major Victor Conley took over the leadership of the "School of Standards" for the less educated soldiers of the division.

The management of the GRAND HOTEL had been in the hands of Mr. Georg Schäfer since the spring of 1942, then still under the "German" association for holiday homes. His cooperation with the U.S. soldiers was described by Commander John B. Leonhard as "very satisfactory," and it was noted: "We (the USAF) ... desire no changes to the current situation."

The university campus included the Grand Hotel, the Seehotel Zauner, and the Metzgerwirt (as a study hall). The Americans also established a ski training center at the Berghotel Schmittenhöhe.

The officers studied subjects such as military leadership, map reading, logistics management, troop movements, court and committee administration, signal communication, basic medical aid, and military intelligence. Non-commissioned officers were also trained in medical and administrative subjects and acquired additional knowledge in specific branches of service. Besides military subjects, the curriculum included classic academic disciplines such as English, art, history, philosophy, psychology, economics, mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry, commerce, geology, agriculture, industry, and technology.

More than 300 officers and specialists applied for professorships and teaching positions. The school staff (7899th School of Standards Detachment) consisted of 12 officers and 57 enlisted men. Major Victor G. Conley was the detachment com-

mander and school commander from 1949 onwards.

The maximum student body consisted of 190 non-commissioned officers and around 35 officers. Additionally, about 170 soldiers participated each month in the Winter Warfare School, where they were taught survival techniques in the mountains. Over 1,300 non-commissioned officers completed the course in 1948. In April 1948, a special course in military justice was started to train non-commissioned officers for the new Army court-martial program, which began in February of the same year.

The students continued their education at U.S. universities with full credit. For soldiers without a high school diploma, there were courses that allowed them to obtain an equivalent qualification (similar to that of an Austrian upper secondary school).

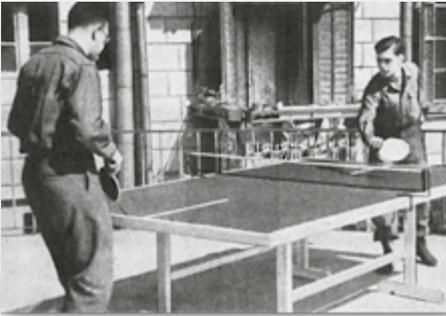
The university was also a significant economic stimulus for the local economy. In November, an article in the "PZZ (Pinzgauer and Pongauer Zeitung für unsere Alpenländer)" stated: "... nothing is more unifying and peace-promoting than science and its representatives." Vienna, Graz, and Innsbruck also showed great interest in the "small yet grand town with a university, its own newspaper, and a theater that could stand in any major city."

In a later greeting, Harry J. Collins wrote: „Thousands of young men were trained for combat. With the same energy, we will now train them for peace—with higher education for the benefit of all: "Our job didn't end when the enemy surrendered. We owe our men a good education so they can successfully reintegrate into civilian life after completing their service. The men of the 'Rainbow' gave their best, and now we must give them the chance to study. Also in the interest of our country, so that it may enjoy many years of peace and prosperity after this terrible war."

The memory of the Rainbow Division is still honored in the Salzburg region. The "Rainbow Division – Association for the Remembrance of the Liberation of Salzburg" organizes an annual parade at the beginning of May to commemorate the end of the war. General Harry J. Collins settled in Salzburg after the war as a military commander and married there. He died in 1963—his tombstone at the Salzburg cemetery of St. Peter commemorates him.



Private R. Wilson received this certificate after completing a course at the School of Standards (1950)



Students from Rainbow University in Zell am See playing ping pong in their free time.



Learning for the time after the deployment abroad

Daily life in Zell am See

After the war, food supply was the biggest concern for the locals and refugees. While about 4,000 people lived in the municipality during the interwar period, the population swelled to over 11,400 immediately after the war. The monthly food ration cards issued allowed for a daily caloric intake of about 1,000 to 1,500 kcal. "Emergency recipes" for wild herbs were published in newspapers. Malnutrition led to many stillbirths and infant deaths.

For particularly affected children, there was a limited supply of "Care packages." These were also distributed at Christmas in front of the Grand Hotel. The famous Trapp family, known for "The Sound of Music," played a crucial role in collecting money and material donations for the people of Pinzgau through their concerts. Besides the precarious food situation, heating homes was a problem. Near Maishofen, peat could be harvested and used as fuel.

Excursus: The Trapp Family & the Erlhof in Thumersbach

The world-famous "Sound of Music" Trapp family lived in Zell am See for several years. During World War I, Agathe Whitehead moved with her children Rupert and Agathe from the embattled port city of Pula to the summer house in the Thumersbach district, the Erlhof, which the family had acquired around 1900. The Trapp family lived there until 1923, and the children Maria, Werner, Hedwig, and Johanna were born there. The mother of Agathe Whitehead is buried in the Zell cemetery. The Erlhof has been owned by the Piëch family since 1974.

Efforts were made to normalize relations with the civilian population. The memories of the youth of that time primarily include new products they had never seen before, such as chewing gum, which became a symbol, or a nightlife that they observed with curiosity from a distance, and "treasures" they scavenged from the U.S. soldiers' trash. The craftsmen from Saalfelden who worked at the barracks for the U.S. Army also fondly remember the new foods they were introduced to there. For the U.S. soldiers, a non-fraternization order was initially in place during the occupation. This meant they were not allowed to have private contact with Austrian women. However, after the first turbulent days of the occupation, a decree was

issued to respect the property rights, religion, and customs of the locals. On October 12, 1945, the first issue of the university newspaper "Pen & Pencils" was published. On page 4, it headlined: "Austrian Frauleins make their lovers climb mountains yet." For the American soldiers, the time in Pinzgau was unexpectedly pleasant. The non-fraternization order was apparently loosely enforced in practice: "Anyone who wanted to win the favor of a mountain girl had to do like the local young men and bring back an edelweiss from dangerous terrain in the mountains."

Being friends with the Americans had many advantages at that time. Paydays were particularly coveted—the poverty led to illegal prostitution by "Ami-women," which occasionally led to genuine romantic relationships. The university magazine "Pad & Pencil" also highlighted the diverse recreational opportunities in the region at the foot of the Hohe Tauern mountains. It also included reports on Zell am See's tradition as a holiday destination, with many prominent guests in the 19th and 20th centuries.



5.

Reconstruction and return of tourism

The war left significant marks on the town; many houses and streets were damaged or dilapidated. Despite the ongoing food shortages, the focus was quickly set on tourism again. Of the original 3,700 beds for tourists, about 400 remained.

Under the political leadership of Mayor Dr. Erwin Prodingner and Vice Mayor Josef Grani, the reconstruction of the mountain town began.

In early 1946, the town's first ski lift, the Ebenberglift, was built. The Breitecklift, located higher up on the Schmittenhöhe, followed in March 1947. The Schmittenhöhe cable car had already existed since 1927—the mountain hotel on the summit was also used as a winter resort for American soldiers. The Köhlergraben ski jump in Schmittental hosted the regional championships in special ski jumping in 1946, attended by 4,000 spectators. The motorboat "Libelle" resumed boat trips on the lake. In 1948, a summer pavilion was built in Elisabeth Park, and the renovated beach baths were reopened.

This was only possible due to the tireless efforts of the population, which generated a noticeable economic upswing. Tourism also returned: by 1949, 1,800 beds were available again.

In 1949, then-President Dr. Karl Renner visited Zell am See and the large construction site of the Kaprun Valley power plant, which had started in 1938 and was partially financed by the ERP fund/Marshall Plan. The construction is a symbol of Austria's post-war reconstruction, providing a strong sense of identity and propaganda value for the still young Second Republic. The power plant was put into operation on September 23, 1955, and today (2023), it covers nearly 10% of the national peak electricity demand as part of the Kaprun power plant group.

In 1950, a fire broke out on the top floor of the GRAND HOTEL. The roof and all the furniture were destroyed by the flames—the hotel was burned down to the ground floor. However, the "Rainbow Division" did not vacate the hotel until 1953. In 1955, after the signing of the State Treaty, the Americans left.

After the Americans' departure in 1955, Kommerzialrat Franz Gramshammer leased the GRAND HOTEL for a symbolic schilling and immediately began renovations. A good time began, and the GRAND HOTEL experienced a colorful second bloom.



Images from around the year 1960

Appendix: Eyewitness accounts

John F.W. Koch (from unknown): "I served in Co. D 222nd (Inf Regt) in Vienna, lived on Cobenzl Gasse in the Heuringer section up the street from the Grinzing Strassenbahn station. I was in Vienna from August 1945 through Thanksgiving Day 1945, at which time Joe Juris, #1 gunner on our H2O-cooled heavy machine gun, and I enrolled in Rainbow University in Zell am See, Austria. That was much better than pulling guard on General Mark Clark's L-5 airstrip on the West side of the Donau Canal, where every night the Russians would fire at us with their sub-machine guns using live ammo, naturally. We were not permitted to return fire—they were our 'Allies.'

I was originally with the 66th Black Panther Division Co.D 262 Inf. We landed at Cherbourg, France, on 12/24/44. The troop ship Leopoldville that was on our right side was torpedoed as we entered the harbor. The torpedo passed under our ship H.M.S. Cheshire and struck the Leopoldville, killing 800 men of the 262nd and 264th regiments. We were headed for the Bulge, but the disaster knocked us out as a full-strength unit. We were directed to the St. Nazaire and Lorient pockets on the west coast of France, where the Germans (50,000) were holed up at their submarine pens.

After Zell am See, we went to Linz and stood guard on the Herman Goering Tank Works, which is now the Voest-Alpine Steel Co. I have returned to Europe and Austria (I think of Austria as my home away from home) 6 times. The most recent was in September 2000. I still correspond with friends in Vienna, Linz, Zell am See, Rauris, Liezen, and several other villages. Our Instrument Corporal married a girl from Vienna, and my aunt came from there before WWI."

Thomas J. Warren (from Fairfax Station): "Arrived in USFA June 1950, first month in USFA School of Standards Zell am Zee, then to Radio Opn Co. 63d Signal at Riedenburg Kasserne, later to Camp Truscott, detached to Team D 63d Signal at Camp Rum near Innsbruck until closed in 1955. Couldn't have had better duty."

Pictures





The principal building of Rainbow University opened in Zell am See only 12 days after the signing of the formal Japanese surrender



In October 1951, a fire broke out in Yanke Hall damaging some of the troop billets. American and Austrian fire fighters examine damage as smoke still envelopes Yanke Hall in the morning hours.



Entrance to Yankee Hall, Zell am See, October 1951. Equipment and belongings are salvaged from the damaged building after a fire broke out during the night.



Lockers and other items have been salvaged from the building and placed on the street in front of Yankee Hall.



Soldiers and Austrian firemen seem to be discussing what they should do next.



Skiers in front of the Grand Hotel / Rainbow University.



Jeeps at the railway crossing between the Grand Hotel and Hotel Zentral at the lake. The Fischerhäusl still stood there (year unknown).



Additional scenes from Yanke Hall, date unknown.



A military ceremony held at Yanke Hall includes the 49th Army Band as well as the unit stationed at Zell am See, date unknown.



After the ceremony, Zell am See soldiers return to their duties.



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