

B48 CHECKING OUT "THE BIZ" IN LUXEMBOURG

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B48 CHECKING OUT "THE BIZ" IN LUXEMBOURG

DATE: 14 AUGUST 2011

"I know you're on vacation but you promised me a tour of RTL," I said to pester Benny Brown. Actually I knew he was looking for any excuse to stop in at the Radio/Television Luxembourg studios because his mandatory two-month vacation was driving him...and Marlies...nuts. "That's the way they do things here," he said. "They just shut everything down in the summer because the whole continent is on vacation anyway," he groused.

Benny was an oddity when at AFN and nothing much has changed. A military brat, (Father was a Lt. Colonel in JAG) he enlisted in the Army at age 17, trained in armored cavalry and was sent to Vietnam to do war in a tank. His next assignment took him to Europe and he talked his way into AFN Network headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany. The oddity part is, in my day, not that many on-air talent had seen combat. Sure, in basic training we were taught how to kill the enemy with a bullet or a bayonet but the closest most of us had gotten to actual combat was defending the music we picked to play on the air. Certainly nothing to lose sleep over.



On our trip into Luxembourg City I did a little probing. "When were you in Viet Nam?" I asked. "Oh, I was there last night," Benny said. "I go there a lot." Marlies nodded her head knowingly and I got the point. Benny left Vietnam but 'Nam' hadn't left him. It also explained why they hadn't asked us to bunk with them during our visit. They had two bedrooms; one for Marlies and the guest room where Benny sleeps. If we were to stay there we'd have to sleep with Benny so we opted for a hotel instead of an instant replay of the Tet Offensive.



In 1958 Radio Luxembourg already had a long and glorious past and a powerful transmitter. Before AFN came to France it was the only English language station we could get in Orleans. Over time they ran out of space at their original downtown location and, ten years ago, moved to a new building overlooking the city.



The building houses not only Radio Luxembourg's state-of-the-art studios but also executive headquarters for the giant consortium of radio and TV stations that the group has grown to.

Not saddled with a bashful nature, Benny showed us into the studio where he works and stepped up to the mike to pose. He looked so comfortable I was afraid he wouldn't leave.





We then crossed the plaza to the television portion of RTL, the area with which I am most familiar. This building houses the local station and broadcasts in the Luxembourg language. It is on the air 24 hours a day but live from 6 to 9 PM only. When I

questioned the short broadcast day the response was, "What would you do if you had a small amount of potential viewers?" Luxembourg City has a population of 500,000 but a high percentage are outsiders and don't speak the language. I learned that Letzebuergish is a language but only formally recognized several decades ago. German is the language taught in schools but French and English are in common use as well. TV programming in German and French abound in the area so theirs is a niche market.



It's a three studio operation with one set up for a morning children's program, one large production studio and a third dedicated to local news. It is modern with up-to-date equipment and better than the average facility you would find in a medium size market in the U.S. I did notice

their cameras are still operated by cameramen instead of the robotized ones in use in Los Angeles. I knew because of the tell-tale high chairs behind the cameras. In news studios some things are universal.



MasterControl also functions as a production control room during their local news broadcasts, otherwise there's plenty of time for engineering maintenance during the day. There is a relaxed pace I never enjoyed during my time in the broadcast world.



Benny led us through a tunnel that connects the two buildings which also contains a pictorial history of RTL from its modest beginnings with English transmissions in 1933 to the multi-media powerhouse it has become today. The annual report shows a well balanced communications company with an emphasis on environmental concerns. The Report is required reading before leaving the premises. I abandoned the usual caution about my camera and handed it to a lithe woman with a great pair of legs for the obligatory photo. Benny assured me not worry because she couldn't get past security with it anyway.



On the way back to Piesport, Benny dragged me back to reality. "Look," he said. "It's almost August and you're scheduled to ship home on the 11th. What happens if you don't sell the car?" More to the point he said, "What's your Plan B?" Damn, there's always someone who comes along and pricks your bubble just when you're having a good time. I couldn't disagree with him but now we had to come up with Plan B.



On our return I checked the oil and water levels of the MG. For the third day in a row water had to be added to the radiator. Benny's mechanic made a quick discovery. "Wasserpump," Thomas said in his best English and pointed out a water drip deep in the engine. Mild panic ensued since he didn't have a replacement and we were scheduled to leave the next morning. A quick call to Anglo Parts, Germany got an MG T Series water pump on a UPS truck to our next destination. Marlies made the call just minutes before they shut down for a two-week vacation.



After spending another day parked in front of the winery, the MG had not drawn one single offer but Heinz and Sylvia were busier than ever pouring the grape. Heinz had cooled to the idea of using it as a come on for the winery though. I think he saw the water dripping from the engine.



Next, we visit a local festival in Broggingen, Germany...only if the MG will make it.