



MISSION CHAMPIONS



Major Virgil R. Walker

Commander, Dependents School Service Europe (DSS) 1946-1947

As victory near the end of World War II became clear, the Occupational Planning Board recommended that dependents of military occupation personnel should be brought to Germany and that a school system should be established for them. At the end of the war and with the eventual arrival of dependent children, there was an immediate need in Europe and in the Pacific to plan an educational system and schools for the minor dependents of occupation personnel.

In May 1946, the United States Forces European Theater (USFET) published General Order 132 establishing the Dependents Schools Service (DSS) under the command of Major Virgil R. Walker. DSS was assigned to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G1, USFET Headquarters, in Frankfurt, Germany.

Prior to the war, Major Walker was an educator and former school superintendent from Minnesota. He was hand-picked for the position by Lieutenant General Joseph McNarney, who served on General Eisenhower's staff, was then commanding the information and education sections for USFET. McNarney was aware of Walker's background as director of the University of Minnesota Laboratory School and a school administrator before the war and asked him to start a dependents school program.

In a 1971 interview with historian and former DoDDS educator Ole Olson, Virgil Walker said, "Primarily, our mission was to provide American-type schooling for dependents. The military government had already given back German schools to the Germans for civilian use—and there wasn't room in them for our youngsters anyway, even if language had not been a problem. DSS was set up to assist commanders in organizing and maintaining schools on elementary and secondary levels throughout the U.S. Zone of Germany, to provide advice on private schools and colleges in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe, and to furnish German educators with model American schools in order to help them democratize and restore their own educational system."

Major Walker was instructed to "establish standards as high as those of the best schools in the United States." He and his staff began the monumental task of recruiting teachers, planning curriculum, identifying facilities and space that could be used for classrooms, and establishing guidelines for the daily operation of schools.

In DSS to DoDDS, Dr. Allen Dale Olson noted, "By October 14, 1946, 38 elementary schools and 5 high schools opened their doors to 1,297 dependent children under the supervision of 116 teachers." The size and scope of the operation grew exponentially from that starting point. Similar efforts were underway under various commands in Japan, Okinawa, and Austria.

By 1947, a Dependents Schools Detachment organized and by April 1948, reorganized as the Dependents Schools division under the supervision of an Army colonel.

After the war, Dr. Walker, became a statistician and administrator in the Research Branch of the U.S. Office of Education in Washington, D.C.

Sources:

A Historical Study of The Establishment and Evolution of the United States Dependents Schools in Europe (1946-1971) and From DSS to DoDDS

by Allen Dale Olson

Logistics Matters: The Growth of Little Americas in Occupied Germany

by Linda L. Kruger

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