

Opinion/Commentary/Letters

A German hears noisy America

By GUNTER HAAF

WASHINGTON D.C. — It is not yet dawn outside my apartment here when I am jolted out of my sleep by the roar of a diesel engine, the shriek of brakes and the clanging of metal cans. The garbage truck has struck again, and I am reminded despite my grogginess that this is America, the land of perpetual noise.

Certainly I have been bothered by troublesome sounds in my hometown of Hamburg, in West Germany. A car idles at midnight. A motorbike sputters past. A neighbor tests his new stereo set. But these are, happily, only random disturbances. Here in the United States, noise is endemic.

My introduction to American noise first came in New York City, where even atop a skyscraper I could not escape the hum and the

buzz of the traffic below. But then, I figured, this was normal for the world's most dynamic metropolis. Things would be different once I crossed the Hudson and traveled into the real America.

'Numerically speaking, the (noise) problem here in the United States dwarfs the problem in West Germany.'

Out West, however, silence was not always easy to find. Consider the trailer camp outside Denver, where a nearby airport, railroad and highway intersection combine to produce an unforgettable technological symphony. Or take the national park in Utah, which was majestically quiet until sunrise, when a platoon of dune buggies revved up, vanishing in a thunderous cloud of pink dust.

Major roads, it almost goes without saying, are shaken by huge trucks, their chrome-plated mufflers polished like saxophones for the purpose of producing noise. I was convinced of America's superior work ethic on a Sunday morning in Miami Beach as a giant tractor, clashing its gears, hardly seemed to annoy sunbathers jam-

med onto a strip of sand not far away.

All this — and much more — led me to ponder on whether we Germans, having been packed into our tiny country for centuries, finally lost patience with unnecessary din. And perhaps it was this impatience that prompted us to put pressure on our politicians to pass and enforce stringent noise controls.

The basic guidelines underlying the fight against noise in West Germany were initially set down in 1968 in a regulation that limited, among other things, the decibel count to which citizens could be exposed, day and night, in commercial and residential areas.

Under these rules, plastic containers were substituted for metal garbage cans, and compressors on construction sites were redesigned to make them quieter. Airports were required to cease operations no later than 11 o'clock at night.

But this was not enough. Germans continued to complain about too much noise, and their complaints were bolstered by a study that showed that 10,000 people had become totally or partially deaf in 1974, and that three million were working in conditions that might endanger their hearing.

Armed with this evidence, special-interest groups argued for even tougher measures, and as a result of their lobbying, new regulations were introduced last May. These included compensation for Germans able to prove that noise has somehow damaged their lives. Unless noise levels are reduced, the claims for compensation could soon exceed the costs of preventive steps.

But while the noise is the "number one environmental problem" in West Germany, as an expert there told me, it remains a low priority issue in the United States. In fact, America only began to enter the field of noise prevention and regulation in 1972.

Numerically speaking, the problem here in the United States dwarfs the problem in West Germany. Reading two pieces of American legislation on the subject — the Noise Control Act of 1972 and the Model Noise Control Ordinance of 1975 — I learned that some 80 million people in this country are "significantly affected by noise."

I also discovered in the same documents that between 22 million and 44 million Americans have "lost part of the use of their homes because of aircraft and transportation noise."

And one of the documents concluded that "inadequately controlled noise presents a growing danger to the health and welfare of the nation's population."

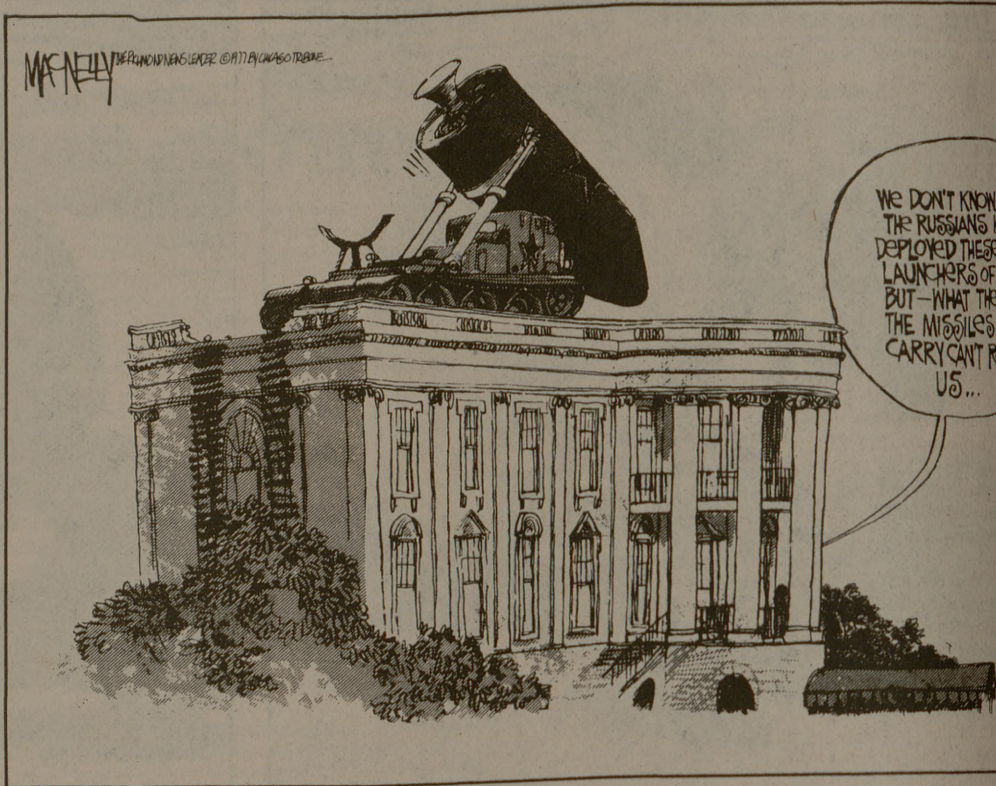
The text of the Model Noise Control Ordinance sounds strict, asserting as it does that "public health" shall be the "sole determinant" of noise levels, and that "no person shall unreasonably make, continue or cause to be made or continued, any noise disturbance." But a closer look reveals that there are not many teeth in this law.

For one thing, the

Environmental Protection Agency spent only \$21 million to carry out the Noise Control Act between 1973 and 1975. Moreover, the standards here appear to be low compared to West Germany, where the permissible nighttime noise level is fully 10 decibels less than in the United States.

Out of curiosity, I also examined studiously the rules covering "refuse collection vehicles," or garbage trucks, finding that the shattering explosion that catapults me out of bed at dawn actually stems from ambiguities in the law. So, it seems, the U.S. drive toward silence is more theoretical than real, and perhaps I ought to return here in five years for a good night's sleep.

Haaf, a West German science writer, is currently on a Harkness Fellowship in the United States.



Student wants single football tickets available

Editor:
Re: "Football tickets to rise; Student price may reach \$4" in Tuesday's Battalion.

I was upset at first to read of the price hike until I realized that the new tennis courts and baseball complex were probably funded with some of that same football revenue and our student service fee. My only complaint is that once again a student is forced to buy tickets for an entire season. If prices go up, I would not mind the extra hassle of presenting an I.D., activity card and four dollars for the games that I am able to go to AND want to go to. Get rid of the ticket books and give us a choice.

— Bill Rafferty '78

A&M crowd is interested

Editor:
I, too, was at the TCU-Texas A&M basketball game on February 1, 1977. While there were very few cheers organized by either school, there were several instances of some for both sides.

It seems to me that this business of organized cheers is far and away blown out of proportion. Genuine enthusiasm can be created by cheerleaders, but not maintained unless the fans really care.

And that's why I think this flap is nonsense because the fans around me were interested in the game. The actual level of noise was sparse, but it was that kind of game: basically dull. In the first half, Texas A&M played badly but lead, 40-23, because TCU played worse than my high school team. The second half brought roaring cheers from the home fans, because their team finally discovered what its purpose was (to score). The A&M fans cheered occasionally which was a reflection of how the team played.

I do feel that true spirit cannot be forced on a crowd nor is noise anything more than just that if force is

used. Texas A&M fans are genuinely interested in their team. And what a team it has been this year.

— Tim Stanfield

Thank you, team for determination

Editor:
I would like to personally thank the 4,500 Aggs who attended the Texas A&M-Texas Tech basketball game, and yelled their guts out in support of the fightin' Texas Aggie Basketball Team.

In my four years of attending Texas A&M University, I have never seen a basketball team play with more intensity than our present group of young players. As a team they were picked to finish no higher than seventh or eighth in the conference, yet, surprisingly, they are now in fourth place.

Tuesday night they lost a hard-fought game to Texas Tech by a slim one point margin. I cannot help but think that the vocal support of a few thousand more students might have been worth one more Aggie basket. One which would have provided the winning margin.

Texas A&M University has always had a reputation as having the loudest student body at any sporting event. But anyone who has been to any of the other top Southwest Conference schools can tell you that A&M is rapidly losing that reputation. By not attending Aggie basketball games, not only are students tarnishing the university's pride, but they are missing one of the most ex-

citing aspects of their four years here at A&M.

To the three thousand students who attend every game and to the Fightin' Texas Aggie Basketball Team, I would like to say that I am extremely proud of you. Your determination and spirit make me proud to be an Aggie.

— Kurt Lobpries, '77

Battalion needs visual variations

Editor:
Just once I would like to turn to the Battalion's sports section and see pictures of some other events be-

side basketball and football. Granted these are the two most popular sports at A&M, but their visual coverage is too often run into the ground.

Last Tuesday's Batt ran a picture of the Rice-A&M basketball game which had been played over a week earlier. And every picture in the sports section the week before was also of this same game.

The Batt treated football the same way last semester, frequently running pictures of Saturday's game as late as Thursday and Friday of the following week. Such extensive coverage of one sport while ignoring others is hardly the mark of good reporting.

Tennis, track, swimming, gymnastics and other sports deserve visual recognition but are often overlooked. Pictures of other than football and basketball would stimulate the student's interest in more sports, and would give these forgotten teams the publicity they need and deserve.

— Carolyn Blawie

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