

May 6, 2020, 10:14 PM

Moosach: The end of the war in the red schoolhouse

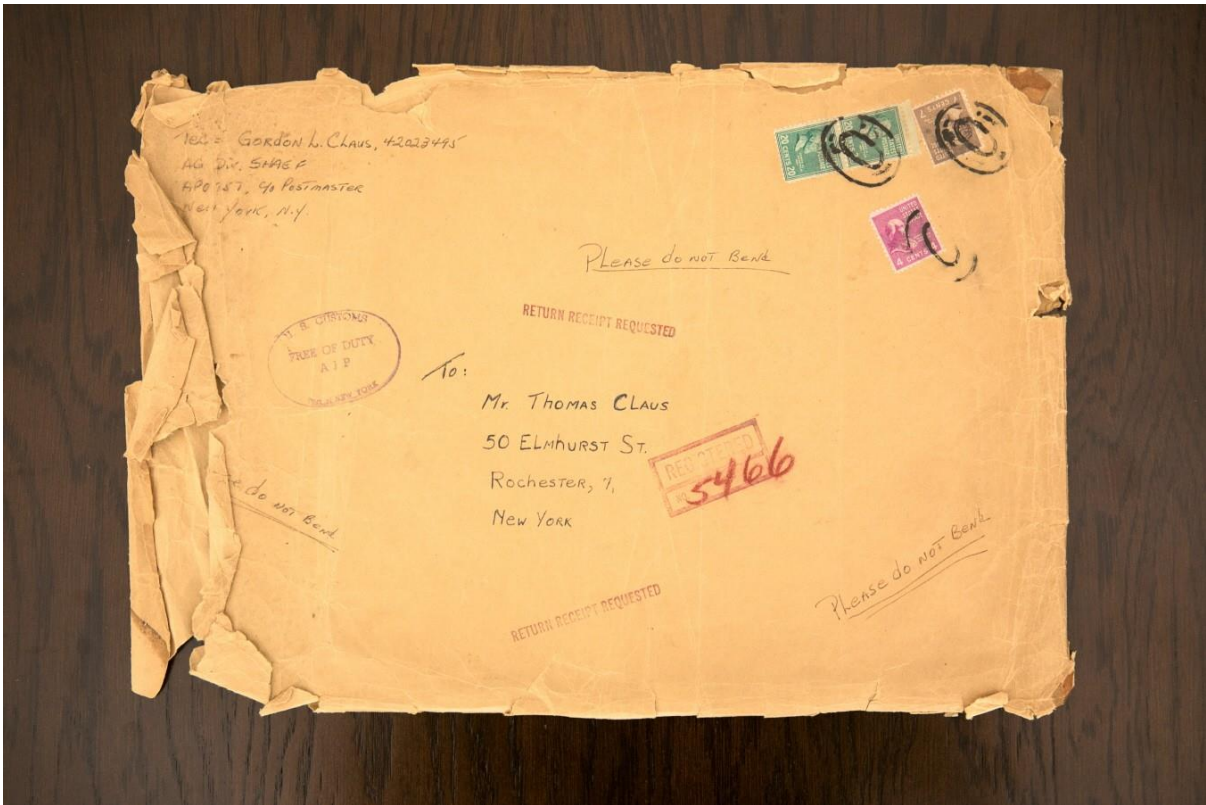
Doug Claus has a document from the night of the surrender with 31 signatures, including that of General Eisenhower. The American, who lives in Munich, tries to identify all the signatories

By Anita Naujokat, Moosach

In the early hours of May 7th, 75 years ago: War photographer Ralph Morse rushes to Reims with a US Army vehicle from his hotel room in Paris after a tip-off. He works for the US magazine *Life*, for which the youngest war correspondent at the age of 24 reported on the American advance through Western Europe. The frenzied press convoy did not drive to the majestic cathedral, but to an anonymous school building across from the train station on the outskirts of the city, as Morse reportedly told *Time Magazine* hours later. In that "little red schoolhouse", as the Americans called it, was a forward post of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces under the direction of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. In it, Morse soon witnessed the signing of the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht.



But not only powerful, but also lower ranks and servants were gathered there. And so it came that a document of the times from the sidelines from that historic night from Reims over the USA to Moosach. Doug Claus lives in the Olympic Pressestadt. After the death of his father, Gordon L. Claus, in the United States in 2006, he had inherited from his mother a picture book with 31 signatures on the cover, including that of General Eisenhower. In his office, his father worked as a Mail Clerk, later General Clerk, Claus says. That night, he found the brochure in the school and had it signed on the covers by generals and other attendees as a very personal souvenir. His mother believed that this heirloom was better suited to the historical location of Europe than in the USA.



Doug Claus, who first came to Munich in 1982 as an intern at BMW, has made it his mission to identify the signatories. Rather half-heartedly, he started a few years ago, he says, to create a website (www.littleredschoolhouse-reims.eu) on which he depicts the cover pages as well as one page per signature. Recently, he has also created the Twitter account #BookletReims for this purpose, tweeting every day for four weeks the details he knows about another signature, with the aim of knowing everyone until the 75th anniversary. But the 60-year-old has not succeeded. "It would have been nice," says the American, who still works for BMW, "but it's not possible. This is a long-term project." Twelve signatories are still unknown to him, 19 names he has now identified, but of many he knows nothing about their function. For some, such as Walter Bedell Smith, a link leads to the respective website.



Claus has no doubt that it is in fact Eisenhower's signature. His maternal uncle also got a signature from Eisenhower, for him, Claus, they were identical. He also had the brochure evaluated by an auction house in the United States. It was considered to be genuine and authentic. Claus had it evaluated for possible insurance because he was toying with the idea of lending it on a long-term loan to the Musée de la Reddition, the surrender museum, in that school building in Reims. Six months ago, he contacted the museum. This would have brought the brochure back to its place of creation, but because of the Corona crisis and the cancelled event for the 75th anniversary, nothing has come of it so far, says Claus.

Claus got in touch with journalist and author, David Kiley, who wrote an article on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Kiley's father, Charles, was also in Reims as a Worldwide Pool Reporter. Although David Kiley did not find his father's signature on the pamphlet, David says his father was probably already on his way to Berlin for the next signing of the surrender. "Despite this," says Claus, it is nice to have found someone who also has a family connection to it. He is already looking forward to a meeting. Probably in the Olympic Pressestadt.