

SPECIAL EDITION

# AFS JANUS

Commitment to Service in Times of Crisis

Newsletter for AFS Alumni & Friends - June 2020



## Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Bergen-Belsen Liberation

This year's 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was a rather different occasion from the one planned, due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, AFS deeply honors the seventy AFS Ambulance Drivers who assisted the efforts to liberate this camp in April and May 1945. They helped evacuate



Camp No. 1 at Belsen, where prisoners-of-war were kept initially, 1945. Photograph from the Carl Ziegler Album.

over 11,000 people from the camp, transported medical equipment and distributed meals to the survivors.

The Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which occupied approximately six square miles of one-story, single-room huts surrounded by barbed wire, initially served as a prisoner-of-war camp. Over time, it was transformed into a horrific concentration camp for Jewish people and inmates from other concentration camps. Lack of adequate food and water, poor sanitary conditions, and inhuman and overcrowded living conditions, led to an outbreak of diseases such as typhus, tuberculosis and others causing tens of thousands of prisoners to die. In April 1945, the camp's population rose to more than 60,000.

AFS volunteers worked ten-hour days for several weeks to evacuate the camp.

Robert L. Barrel [CM 56, C Platoon, 567 Company (Coy)] arrived at Belsen the day it was discovered by British troops



Survivors were not taken directly to hospitals but instead to a "human laundry" where their clothes were removed, and their bodies were thoroughly washed by German nurses. Photograph from the Carl Ziegler Album.

and was completely unprepared for the scale of mass murders, deprivation, and degradation he encountered. Inmates, who were too weak to communicate with their rescuers, were carefully removed from their bunks.

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### Did you know...

WWI ambulance donor George F. Baker Jr was the son of the cofounder and chairman of First National Bank which became Citibank.

WWII ambulance driver Jacob Ament (CM 92, IN 59-T), who had been paralyzed by polio as a teen, became the first person to survive an experimental operation that allowed him to stand and walk again.

WWI ambulance driver Phelps Barnum (S.S.U. 33) was an architect who directed the design and construction of 43 airports in Central and South American for Pan American World Airways.

## Continuation of Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Bergen-Belsen Liberation

They were taken to a field hospital where they could recover for a time before they were transported by air to England for further treatment.



Huts that would ordinarily hold 100 people were packed with as many as 2,000 prisoners at Belsen, often with 15 to one bed. Photograph from the Carl Ziegler Album.

Despite the best efforts of the AFS and the British Army to save the camp's inhabitants, 9,000 perished by the end of April and another 4,000 died within the following two months. It is estimated that nearly 20,000 prisoners-of-war and roughly 52,000 inmates (including Anne Frank and her sister Margot) lost their lives at Belsen.

AFS thanks Barrel, Clarkson, Allen, and all American Field Service volunteers who aided in the evacuation for their courage and commitment to peace.

*“My AFS experience changed the course of my life. I grew up tremendously. My attitude towards other nationalities did not change. I’ve always thought that people are people wherever they are or wherever they come from.”*

**Robert L. Barrell**

Although the COVID-19 pandemic prevented survivors, veterans, and their loved ones from gathering in person this year to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the camp's liberation, these historic events remain no less of a reminder that we must never lose sight of our mission: to create a more just and peaceful world by building intercultural understanding and cooperation among people. Educating more young people to become global citizens is crucial in times like these, and it matters for the future of humanity.

Visit [afs.org/news-events](https://www.afs.org/news-events) to find references and sources for all materials used in this article.

## AFS WWII Ambulance Drivers Last Post

Arthur Bruce Boenau, IB 57 (1926–2019)

Kenneth Melling Schubert, IB 14 (–2020)

Richard McMasters Hunt, IB 57 (1926–2020)

Donald Raymond Vogt, IB 57 (1925–2019)

Richard William Nelson, CM 60 (1925–2020)

Craig Phillip Gilbert, CM 93 (1925–2020)

### Honoring Richard M. Hunt, AFS World War II volunteer and Life Trustee



AFS is saddened by the passing of AFS World War II volunteer and Life Trustee Richard (Rick) M. Hunt, who died on April 10, 2020. Rick was eighteen years old when he became an AFS Ambulance Driver in World War II in India and later joined the AFS Board in 1952. He was a Harvard University Marshall and professor for 40 years, as well as a notable philanthropist. We are truly grateful for his service and support.

Find out more at [afs.org/news-events](https://www.afs.org/news-events).

## AFS NOW: Highlights of AFS Today

### AFS Students Continue To Develop Their Global Competence During The Covid-19 Pandemic:

“The AFS Global Competence Certificate program has been really helpful. I never thought that my exchange experience would end this quickly. But throughout this program, I realized just how many things I have learned. I found friends from so many new cultures, and it doesn't only add to my knowledge but also makes me a better person.”

“I developed my adaptability, communication skills and valuing difference during my exchange year. And I'll continue to develop my open-mindedness, empathy and critical thinking during the course.”

“This course made me feel the impact of my exchange year and how it made me grow as a person. Connecting with other exchange students is fun as well.”

Visit [afs.org/afs-global-you-adventurer](https://www.afs.org/afs-global-you-adventurer) to learn more about our upcoming virtual learning programs.



## AFS NOW: Highlights of AFS Today

### Afs Alumni Dealing With The Pandemic Supported By The Skills They Gained Through Their Afs Experience:

“My year with AFS helped me understand the common feelings and experiences we all face and how we have the potential to be stronger and closer through those experiences. I hope that our world will be a bit better place after this terrifying common experience,” says AFS alumna Cansu Kaya (Turkey to Belgium, 2008). She is a PhD student in Medicinal Chemistry, working on research about the COVID-19 pandemic.



Carolina Sass de Haro in Brazil is fighting to preserve small businesses that depend on the local tourism industry in these difficult times. She is recognizing the need to be “more resilient, more tolerant to cultural differences and different points of view. The experience as an AFS volunteer helped me have a stronger sense of community and social responsibility.”



#### Dear AFS Friend,

In August 1946, Stephen Galatti, one of the founders of AFS and a key figure in our organization’s history, asked “What, if any, is the position of the American Field Service in peacetime?” In 2020 this question stands before us with a renewed urgency and importance, even if in a rather different context.

The COVID-19 pandemic is making an unquestionably deep impact on the world. Its influence on AFS has been profound as well. We had to suspend all our exchange programs and reunite thousands of AFS participants with their families in their home countries. Coordinating with dozens of airlines, through flight cancellations and changes, charters, government-organized repatriation, challenges of domestic travel – AFS volunteers, board members and staff worked tirelessly for weeks. Their commitment to service has been a true inspiration and comfort. And their impact is impressive – in record time, almost 7,000 participants from 60 different countries were repatriated.

And I’m not surprised. While AFS is a very different organization than during WWI and WWII, our commitment to service and volunteerism has not changed. But today, we also must address Galatti’s question in the light of the current global crisis – what role will AFS play and how will we keep serving our participants and our communities?

One thing is clear: worldwide, AFS is doubling down on our commitment to educate more young people to become global citizens and provide them with transformational intercultural experiences. We have quickly launched a special online intercultural learning program, based on our AFS Global Competence Certificate, helping close to 6,000 AFSers reflect on their shared experience, continuing their intercultural learning and processing uncertainty of the current COVID-19 situation.

The pandemic forces us to think fresh and fast. We are in the process of creating new virtual learning opportunities for young people around the world and strengthening our program content to really focus on the profound personal growth our participants **experience on our programs by providing them with social impact skills and instilling in them the confidence to be a leader.**

**In uncertain times especially, cultural exchange must continue and will. Thank you for standing with AFS and supporting our mission.**

Sincerely,

Daniel Obst

President & CEO  
AFS Intercultural Programs



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New York, NY 10010

## Contribute to the AFS COVID-19 Response Fund

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for global cooperation and reflects the importance of the AFS mission. Stand with us by giving to the AFS COVID-19 Response Fund ([afs.org/donate](https://afs.org/donate)), so we can:

- Aid host families in providing extraordinary support to thousands of students unable to return to their home countries during the pandemic.
- Facilitate emergency return travel for students where possible.
- Deploy online resources for students' continued learning and peer-based community sharing.
- Reinforce AFS staff and our global network of 50,000 local volunteers serving our students during this crisis.

If you would like to remember AFS Intercultural Programs in your will or trust, you may include

a specific dollar amount or percentage of your estate assets, and include that in your official

will or trust documents. Please contact Paul Gamner at [paul.gamner@afs.org](mailto:paul.gamner@afs.org) to learn more.



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AFS Janus was prepared by Andrea Kutsenkow, Paul Gamner, Stefanie Grech and Milena Miladinovic of AFS Intercultural Programs. Some photographs are courtesy of the Archives of the American Field Service and AFS Intercultural Programs (AFS

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