

## **Founders International Baptism**

by Colin Tanswell

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In the Autumn of 1958, (before some of you, your parents or grand-parents were born, a sobering thought), I was a member of the RAF Wildenrath cross-country team, during my National Service. At this time, we were champions of RAF Germany and unbeaten in inter-service competitions. In order for stiffer opposition, and to win a few pots maybe, we decided to enter local events, the first at Wegberg CC Festival, was run over a muddy course and I finished last. As other team members did better we were encouraged to enter the Dahlhausen Sports Club event.

We arrived on the day of the race at a town not far from Essen, having experienced anti-British feelings on the way as the area had been heavily bombed during the war. Outside the stadium we noted large posters advertising the event. Our German had not progressed much beyond 'Ein Bier Bitte' but we were still able to ascertain that a Great Britain team was taking part. A case of mistaken identity, we thought, as children sought our autographs.

At registration, we noted that the entry also included top German clubs & some international runners. On buying a programme we were horrified to discover that the GB team was not Gordon Pirie, Frank Sando, Gerry North etc. (top runners of the day) but OURSELVES. Our protests to the organisers brought no result; they either did not understand our concern over our inflated status or did not wish to compromise their advertising claims.

We suspected that we had been set up following our showing at Wegberg and were fearful of letting down the name of our country in this hostile environment.

I remember little of the race, except that it was hilly; I suspect that I was running in a panic. I finished 33rd, none of our team let the side down, most had run above expectations and we were not disgraced. The winner was Ludwig Muller, who had represented his country in the European Championships. Our leading finisher, in 6<sup>th</sup> place, had been in the London Schools steeplechase championship, a far cry from the European Championships.

This was my first representative appearance for my country. My second 'vest' has been a long time coming!

Colin Tanswell, August 2020