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Grünstadt: traces of the Cold War

By Ursula Schramm



A CURRENT AERIAL VIEW OF THE FORMER US STATION ON THE GRÜNSTADTER MOUNTAIN ARE STILL THE AREAS RECOGNIZE WHERE THE LAUNCHER STOOD



HERE IS THE TRANSPORT OF A MISSILE THROUGH MERTESHEIM IN 1959. LATER THE MISSILES WERE DELIVERED VIA THE MILITARY ONLY EXIT FROM THE AUTOBAHN (BY FRED HORKEY)



THE PICTURE SHOWS THE MACE MISSILES WHO WERE ON ALERT DAY AND NIGHT (BY HOLMBERG)

From May 1960 to the end of August 1966 twelve cruise missiles with nuclear warheads were stationed on the Grünstadt Berg. They were programmed for targets behind the Iron Curtain. The local population did not suspect it.

"Grünstadt." It was over on the night of September 1, 1966. The missiles were taken out of service. Silence spread on Grünstadter Berg. The air conditioning systems for cooling

the electronic systems of the Mace Missiles had stopped whirring at one o'clock in Central Europe. The noise of the facilities, each for its own missile, was part of the everyday life of the 63 US Air Force (USAFE) soldiers stationed here, writes George Mindling and Robert Bolton in their book "**U. S. Air Force Tactical Missiles**". "If for some technical reasons the equipment was not running, the noise had ceased, we were shocked out of our sleep," says Robert Bolton, who served as a technician on the Grünstadter Berg for four and a half years.

For more than six years, the station was part of NATO's deterrent plan against the Warsaw Pact countries. Day and night, the unmanned bombers were in their launch positions, and could be ready in 15 minutes to answer an attack from the East with a counter-attack.

The Mace Missiles, type TM-76 A, had a range of about 1000 kilometers. Thus, they were probably programmed to strategic targets such as airfields and bridges in the former GDR and Poland. But there is no information, this data is still subject to secrecy. Even the members of the launch crews did not know it then. The displays of the missiles were covered with cardboard discs, and questions about them would have brought the soldiers into serious trouble.

The deployment of USAFE soldiers began in the first half of the 1950s. In December 1952, the site on the Grünstadter Berg had been confiscated by the Americans despite all the protests of the Grünstadt Glider Club. The club had just been re-established there only two years earlier. Like all aviations clubs it had been connected with the Nazis in 1937 and had been forcibly incorporated into the National Socialist Air Corps.

The confiscation of their flying field was another blow to the glider pilots, following the French occupying forces dismantling the aircraft hangar there in 1945 and following the air base being destroyed by locals, according to the association's chronicle.

The club airmen were able to use their space for another year while looking for a replacement location, which was eventually found in 1955 at the "Quirnheimer Wust" or Quirnheim Desert. It was really a desert. But the Americans showed heart for the needs of the glider airmen: A unit of the US Air Force was allowed to help the club's move by using heavy construction equipment to level the terrain at the new location.

Meanwhile, a listening station of the US Air Force intelligence service had set up its post on Grünstadter Berg. In 1959, during the arms race of NATO and Warsaw Pact, then began major construction on the Grünstadt hill top. It was prepared for a unit of the 38th tactical missile squadron in Sembach AB, buildings were constructed for the technical facilities and the accommodations of the soldiers, the launching stations of the missiles were concreted. At the end of May 1960, the station was moved into and for more than six years it was the location for nuclear equipped missiles. The folks of Grünstadt, called the missile base a "rocket station". Nobody knew that nuclear weapons were stationed here. At least nothing can be found in chronicles or in the city archive.



FROM 1960 TO 1966, ON THE GRUNSTADT MOUNTAIN, THERE WERE MISSILES WITH THERMONUCLEAR WARHEADS. ALTHOUGH THEY WERE COMMONLY CALLED "MISSILES", THEY DIFFER FROM BALLISTIC MISSILES IN THE PERMANENT PROPULSION DURING THE FLIGHT AND BECAUSE THE AERODYNAMICS ARE OFTEN SUPPORTED BY WINGS. THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN BY US SOLDIER PHILLIP THPMAS, WHO WAS STATIONED ON THE GRÜNSTADTER BERG FROM 1962 UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF 1965 AS A PARAMEDIC. (PHOTO: THOMAS)



ROBERT BOLTON UNDER A MACE A MISSILE IN GRÜNSTADT IN THE SUMMER OF 1965: BY THE WAY, PERSHING II MEDIUM-RANGE MISSILES, WHOSE DEPLOYMENT IN THE 1980S AS PART OF THE NATO DOUBLE DECISION TRIGGERED MASSIVE PROTESTERS, WOULD NOT HAVE STARTED IN RHINELAND-PALATINATE, BUT IN BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG. (PHOTO: BOLTON)

In September 1966, the site was orphaned after the departure of the US Air Force, when the special transporters, called Teracruzers, transported the missile via the autobahn to the then Air Base in Sembach. Only ten years later, in 1975, a intelligence service station of the US Army was set up on the site, which was in operation until 1985. Later, the area, of about 62 acres, of which 21 acres were still fenced, and was used occasionally in NATO maneuvers. At times, the fenced area was also a playground for a paintball team of US soldiers for gun battles with paintballs.

The efforts of the city Grünstadt in 1990 to buy the site, were unsuccessful. According to information from the Federal Agency for Real Estate Tasks, which now owns the area, the former US intelligence station was only released in 2007 by the Americans. A sale was not intended, said a spokesman on request. It was held ready as a compensation area for construction projects of the federal government.

Since the beginning of this year it is used again, but this time for peaceful purposes: The rescue dog squad of the Altleininggen fire department may practice there. The fire department had asked the Federal Institute and for a small administrative fee they received the permission and keys to the gate to the fenced area. The department does not have to pay rent. So anyone who hears the dogs barking here does not have to worry about the military coming in again.

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THE MISSILE HILL

By Ursula Schramm

The Soviet secret service knew as early as the mid-1950s that the US Air Force Security Service, the "US Air Force Security Service" on Grünstadter Berg, operated a small radio station one kilometer from the city center. Thus, the Russians, as the Americans called the enemy, certainly did not overlook the fact that in 1959 a mini-base of the US Air Force in Europe was installed there. It went into operation on 29 May 1960. Twelve cruise missiles, Mace A Missiles, were there, ready 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 52 weeks a year, in the "Victor Alert", as the US Air Force called the permanent alert. For more than six years, the unmanned bombers stood ready on the

hill above the small town, ready to answer within 15 minutes of a Soviet first strike, with thermonuclear warheads. In 1966, on the night of 1 September, the systems were shut down and in the following weeks missiles, warheads and technical equipment were moved to the former Sembach Air Base, later the missiles were shipped down the Rhine and from Rotterdam to the United States. It was over: Grünstadter Berg was no longer part of the front line in the Cold War.

Not only interesting for historians

Detailed information on the Mace missiles can be found in the book "**U.S. Air Force Tactical Missiles 1949 - 1969 The Pioneers**" by George Mindling and Robert Bolton. It describes the development of the Matador and Mace cruise missiles. It not only lists the locations of these "pilotless bomber", but also makes evident the pride of thousands of "Missileers", those US soldiers who, after a rigorous selection process served at squadrons in the Federal Republic, in Southeast Asia and the US. Their service was to "deter the adversaries" and "the security of our nation," said Major General Richard T. Boverie in the preface to the book. Boverie was stationed at Sembach Air Base from 1956 to 1961 before his rise to become a two-star general.

For the Berlin journalist Klaus Stark, Mindling and Bolton have written "living military history". Not only interesting for historians, but also "for the local population, who finally learns what happened back then in their neighborhood," he writes in a letter to the editor on the website of the Missileer veterans (www.mace.b.com).

However, those who ask the authorities today, still get no information on the fact that nuclear armed missiles stood on the hill above Grünstadt. Six years, they were visible, practically in the field. Anyone approaching from the East via the Grünstadt autobahn could see the corrugated iron shelters, which were installed to protect the missiles from the weather from 1964 onwards.

A thousand times Hiroshima

For the Grünstadters it was simply called the "rocket station", secured by a double wire fence, closely guarded, brightly lit day and night. But what the "Americans" had actually put into position that did not really interest. Thus, neither in the city archives nor in local chronicles, have a reference to the nuclear warheads, even the search in newspaper archives brings nothing, and even older Grünstadter do not know the past of the former US station.

The station on the Grünstad Hill was in the 1960s part of the 38th Tactical Missile Wing, which had its headquarters in Sembach Air Base beginning in 1959. In addition to Grünstadt missile sites in Enkenbach and Mehlingen belonged to this organization in the Palatinate, each with twelve Mace-A missiles. And each guided missile was nuclear-equipped, the explosive power corresponded to 1100 kilotons of TNT, so 1.1 megatons. By comparison, the atomic bomb dropped by US Americans on Hiroshima on August 6

had a destructive power of 13 kilotons. Twelve missiles with 1.1 megatons - that is 13.2 megatons, per location a thousand times Hiroshima.

In addition, they were among the "Quick Reaction Alert" bases that were the first to have respond to an attack by the Warsaw Pact. The missiles were presumably programmed to target airfields and bridges in the GDR and in Poland in the event of war, but their launch locations were the prime targets for the Soviets as well.

Keep your finger close to the trigger

It became particularly dangerous in October 1962, in the days of the Cuba crisis, when the world was on the brink of nuclear war due to the stationing of Soviet missiles on that Caribbean island. The electronic technician Robert Bolton, who started his service in March of that year as a 21-year-old on the Grünstadt mountain, still remembers exactly. "The mood was very tense. We were considered the spearheads on the organization in normal times as members of the launch crew and always had our finger close to the trigger, and could make the Mace Missile ready in 15 minutes. In this dangerous phase for all, we were especially vigilant. When the crisis was over, there was no party. We did our job as before, keeping the missiles ready until the end of August 1966," he wrote in an e-mail.

From 1975 to 1985 there was again a listening post, this time from the US Army, and at times there were maneuvering activities. After the US armed forces released the area in 2007 - around 62 acres, of which 21 acres are still fenced in - it is under the administration of the Federal Agency for Real Estate Tasks. But even here there is no information about the past. Reference is made to the "relevant international agreements". The site now serves as a compensation area for construction projects of the federal government, a military reactivation, it is said, is no longer provided.

Even longer than on the Grünstadter hill there were nuclear weapons in the position of the US Army at Quirnheim. On the other side of the Ice River valley, just five miles from the Air Force Station as the crow flies, it offered another potential target for the enemy. From 1961 to 1983 there were here nuclear equipped Nike Hercules rockets: three batteries, each with twelve ground-to-air missiles. The nuclear warhead were stored in subterranean bunkers, nine or ten it should have been. In contrast to the stationing of the Mace Missiles at Grünstadt, this is no secret and it has been known for at least 30 years. It was officially in 1987 in a press release of the district administration Bad Dürkheim, which was found in the Grünstadt RHEINPFALZ archive: "The decommissioned rockets were equipped with nuclear warheads," it says.

Vacated in 1994

After the withdrawal of the Nikes and as a result of the Nato Double-Track Decision conversion of the Quirnheim position was finished and conventionally armed Patriot missiles were stationed there and press and local politicians were then invited to the site. Compared to the patriot missile's small conventional warheads, the Nike nuclear

warheads were "little bombs": In the 1970s 20 warheads were exchanged, the majority were in B-XS format of two kilotons of explosive power and two with B-XL size of 40 kilotons, The position Quirnheim was vacated in 1994. In the housing area, where about 200 soldiers lived, a business park was created, and on the launch base, a solar park was set up.

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SECRET DEAL - ATOMIC PFALZ - MACE CRUISE MISSILES

Detailed informal information on former locations of nuclear weapons in Germany can be found on the Internet site www.atomwaffena-z.info. It is run by the International Nuclear Abolition Campaign ICAN, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2017, which allowed us to publish. The information is also rated in safety circles as serious. The US position for nuclear-equipped cruise missiles, type Mace A, near Grünstadt was therefore linked to positions (Pfälzer locations greased) in Mehlingen, Enkenbach, Wüschheim, Kirchberg and Hecken. In addition, there were two bunkered launchers for the type Mace B in the Eifel. Mace A cruise missiles had a range of 1000 kilometers (Mace B: 2400 kilometers). In 1966, the last of these were shipped to the US, from then on F-100 and F-105 bombers served as carriers for nuclear warheads. In Sembach nuclear-armed cruise missiles (type Matador) were stationed from 1962 to 1964.

NIKE HERCULES ROCKETS

Atomic firing positions existed in the Palatinate not only for medium-range cruise missiles, but also for thermonuclear Nike Hercules anti-aircraft missiles (range: 140 kilometers). For example, the Missile Battalion of the 56th US Arty Group ordered firing positions at the Geinsheim, Landau, Lemberg-Salzwoog and Zweibrücken-Oberauerbach sites. Other Nike firing stations were in Quirnheim, Schönborn, Gerersheim and Haßloch. At the airbase Zweibrücken, from 1964 to 1969, there were also stationed Canadian nuclear capable Starfighters.

BEARING FOR ATOMIC WEAPONS

For a while, Ramstein Air Base was home to the largest US nuclear weapons camp in Europe, now considered empty. There were also ten large nuclear weapons nuclear warehouses in West Germany. The most important of these "ammunition supply depots", from where the nuclear weapons were also distributed, was in Miesau, another one was in Fischbach near Dahn. "Special ammunition camp" with atomic inventory also existed in Kriegsfeld and Maßweiler. From 1983 to 1988, Pershing II replacement missiles with atomsome warheads were said to have been stored in the Weilerbach special weapons warehouse.

AUTHORITIES: "NO INFORMATION"

There is no official information about this. The Ministry of the Interior in Mainz refers to the Federal Ministry of Defense. His spokesman said that the federal government's information policy is based on the secrecy rules of NATO for security reasons. There would be no information on the nature or specificity of nuclear weapons and suspected storage locations, current or former. The "strategic nuclear capabilities" of the Alliance, said the spokesman, especially those of the US, are still "the ultimate guarantor of the security of their members". Our demand for the US Army remained unanswered. An open secret is: On the Bundeswehr air base Büchel today US nuclear weapons are still stored, since 2007 probably the only nuclear weapons location in Germany.