

ROTHWESTERN AIR BASE and the 319th USASA BATTALION



Rothwesten Kaserne, May 1950

Rothwesten Air Base was built in 1934 by the German Government. During its existence as a German Luftwaffe base, it was occupied successively by a Photo Reconnaissance Squadron and a Fighter Squadron, a Pilot Training Center, and lastly was used by the Germans as a Russian Prisoner of War camp.

In April of 1945, most of the existing operations buildings were destroyed or badly damaged by the retreating German Army.

During the period from 1945 through 1947, the base was used by the US Army as a German POW camp. In 1948, an American Constabulary unit used the post as a base, relinquishing it to the 615th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron (USAFE). The 615th used Rothwesten alone as their headquarters until 1955 when the first elements of the 307th CR Bn moved to Rothwesten and shared the post with them.

The source of the above insert is footnoted.¹ (Note: USAFE is abbreviation for the United States Air Force Europe.)

The relatively remote Reinhardswald Forest in the State of Hesse bordered the quiet German village of Rothwesten. In early 1935 the area had been selected by the Air Staff of Hitler's Air Marshal, Herman Goering, for the clandestine construction of post-World War I Germany's first Army Flying School. The secret flying school was considered to be a key element first step in Hitler's plans for the future domination of Europe. Such a facility had been clearly forbidden under the country's Surrender Treaty with the Allied Forces.

The site was heavily wooded and the air base structures were designed and built to resemble a series of harmless appearing apartment buildings, particularly from the air. The new secret base was known as "Rothwesten Reichsfliegerhorst," and it became the Alma Mater of many Luftwaffe pilots. Most of them went on to instruct others who were to fight in what history would record as World War II.

Typical of the period's customs, many of the base staff, flight instructors, and fledgling pilots were immortalized in colorfully painted humorous caricatures on the walls of several buildings, particularly in the NCO and officer recreation areas. A base community of homes for families of German Officers and NCO's was added in 1936. A German two star general lived in the same quarters, destined to be occupied by a series of US Air Force commanding officers.²

In the late 1930's and during World War II, the air base facility was known as "Rothwesten Fliegerhorst," an air base of the German Luftwaffe, and was built in during the period 1934-1935. In addition to a flying school, several Luftwaffe reconnaissance units were based there. "Rothwesten Reichsfliegerhorst" was partially destroyed by retreating German Forces on March 31, 1945.³

¹ Website: http://usarmygermany.com/Units/ASA%20Europe/USAREUR_ASAE.htm.

² Website: <http://601st-615th-acw.org/history.htm>.

³ Ibid.

*The base became the home of the 36th Fighter Group in April of 1945. It was the first American unit to operate aircraft from German soil. In that day's report to higher command they noted that they had "just moved into a recently abandoned German Fighter Strip just nor of Kassel." During its brief stay there, the 36th shot down and damaged four German 190s without a single American casualty. It was later replaced by the US 22nd and 32nd "Fighter Groups. They were in turn succeeded by the 417th Starlight Night Fighter Squadron and the 155th Photo Recon Squadron which both remained there until shortly after the "shooting war" with Germany finally and officially ended.*⁴

The 1st Constabulary Regiment of the United States Constabulary occupied the base from about 1945-46 through 1951. The 601st United States Air Force Air Control & Warning Squadron (601st USAF AC&W) main unit was first based at Rothwesten on July 24, 1947. The unit moved to another air base on March 18, 1963.

*In 1948 secret negotiations took place which soon made Rothwesten unexpectedly world famous. Held in tightest security measures, early in 1948 the Base's Building No. 1 was a conference site for the Allied Occupation Powers who were exploring a number of possible in West Germany's currency system. They deemed it necessary to conduct these sessions at a remote US installation to escape notice and discovery by both the public and the headline hungry press. Building No. 1 was unoccupied during the 601st AC&W Squadron's use of the base. Discussion and negotiations were conducted by the Allied Committee on the German Economy. The group made world headlines when later in 1948 it announced Germany's historic change from the Reichmark to Deutschmark for its metal and paper money.*⁵

In 1953, the 3rd Shoran Beacon Flight was located to Rothwesten. The 601st USAF AC&W provided logistical support.

The Army Security Agency established operations at Rothwesten as early as 1955. The 307th Communications Reconnaissance Battalion, which was activated on 27 December 1951, assigned to the Chief, United States Army Security Agency, Europe, and attached to the Commander-in-Chief Europe for logistical and disciplinary control. In 1955, the 307th CRB was located at Rothwestern as follows: Battalion Headquarters was first located in the building now occupied by Kassel Sub-Post but moved shortly afterwards to Building 9253. Operations was in the basement of the Starlight Theater; the Battalion Motor Pool was in the area later occupied by the Post Engineer Motor Pool; Headquarters of the 353rd Communications Reconnaissance Company (later Company B) occupied the building later occupied by an Air Force Unit; and Headquarters Company moved into the building that later housed the 184th USASA Operations Company. The NCO Club, Officer's Club, EM Club, and BOQs remained in the same locations during the changes. The only dependent quarters in the Rothwesten area at that time were the duplex type buildings although the Air Force had started construction of the eighteen family apartments in the Rothwesten community. On 15 October 1957, the 307th CRB was deactivated and the 319th USASA Battalion formed from the officers and men of the 307th CRB. At the same time, the 184th US Army Security Agency Company was organized and assigned to the 319th USASA Battalion. The 184th USASA Company was billeted near the mess hall in a building that was well down the slope of the hill. The Snack Bar, Sick Bay, etc. were located at the top of the hill. Personnel rode on a bus to the operations building which was separated from all other buildings.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

During early 1958, a test team was dispatched from Rothwesten to determine the feasibility of opening an operational site in the Eschwege area. After the team's reports had been evaluated, it was decided to open such a site on Mt. Meissner. This was accomplished in September 1958 when a team from Company C and the 2nd Operations Platoon of the 279th USASA Company, which was attached to Headquarters Company of this battalion moved to the present location at Mt. Meissner. On 24 March 1959, the 2nd Operations Platoon of the 279th was assigned to Headquarters Company and the site at Mt. Meissner came under the control of Headquarters Company. This control was later assumed by Company C. (**Webmaster Note:** The 2nd Platoon of the 279th was an ELINT outfit [probably redesignated at some point as ELINT Platoon, C Co, 319th USASA Bn (Corps)] - equipped with the ESGX-3, later designated as AN/MLQ-24, that travelled the 5K zone to perform "threat" radar intercept and analysis.)

The source of the above insert is footnoted.⁶

On 1 October 1958, the 182nd USASA Company was attached to the 319th USASA Battalion. The 182nd had formerly been designated the 339th USASA Company and had been largely manned by personnel from the Scheyern station. After the company was attached to the 319th USASA Battalion, the 182nd USASA Company also wore the V Corps patch. The 182nd USASA Company's operations building was in the main "commons" area, across from the Snack Bar.

Reassignments during the spring of 1960 saw the 279th USASA Detachment attached to the 319th USASA Battalion on 7 April and the 182nd USASA Company reassigned to the 318th USASA Battalion on 15 May. On 7 April 1961, the 279th USASA Detachment was detached from the battalion, but remained in Rothwesten until July when it moved into the Offenbach Kaserne.

In June 1966, ASA units at the site were reorganized and re-designated as the 17th United States Army Security Agency Field Station. In December 1967, it was re-designated United States Army Security Agency Field Station Rothwesten. In June 1972, the USASA Field Station Rothwesten was discontinued as part of an effort to centralize operations in Germany to a new station in Augsburg. The 319th USASA Battalion was deactivated during this same general time frame and was replaced by the 307th ASA Battalion.

Finally, the German military occupied the base after the United States Military downsized the troops in Germany. Under the German occupation, the name was changed to the *Fritz Erler Kaserne*. Today, the German troops have withdrawn and the land is being privately developed.

⁶ Website: http://usarmygermany.com/Units/ASA%20Europe/USAREUR_ASAE.htm.