

Rimbach, Germany (Hoher Bogen)
Also know as
Detachment Eckstein (after 1966)

In the summer of 1957, the Czech and Russian troops of the Warsaw Pact held massive troop maneuvers in the area that was designated by NATO as one of the major invasion corridors. This gap was 15 miles wide in a river valley between two mountain ranges running parallel to the eastern border of the German State of Bravaria and the now Czech Republic. This major activity alarmed the border patrol personnel and there was an emergency movement of an undefined 318th Tactical Group of ASA troops to watch over the activities. But, the ASA troops were mostly late. Because it was a short, major exercise and it over before it began.

In the spring of 1958, plans were made to "be prepared" for the next summer exercise. There was a search all along the border for a base of operations from which to monitor the situation. The mountain "Hoher Bogen" was a saddle back mountain (3 miles from CZ) with two peaks: Grafenried (3,201 feet) and Eckstein (3,520 feet). Eckstein was the eastern most part on the mountain with a major "view" of the east and became the name of the border site (in the late 60's). Three miles west of the mountain lay Rimbach, the closest village with access to the site.

Eckstein was chosen because there was a clear view eastward from the top of cliff (1,200 feet straight down). A single lane logging road was paved ('58) and the first ASA assigned to the area were on TDY for about 4-5 weeks before the start of the exercises and they stay until about 2 weeks after the end. Their initial stay was about 3 to 3.5 months of the year. This continued for several years till 1966. The work generated in the preamble to the exercise demonstrated that there was an advantage in a possible border site located in Rimbach year round. In the Late 60's (possible '66 or '67), Eckstein became a border site of USASA FS Herzo as "Detachment K."

Det K at first consisted of tactical vans and as such, resembled a tactical van parking lot more than a working border site. In 1967, the site complex was based on a Quonset Hut and various trailers (with the wheels taken off) were scattered about a double fenced oval compound (approx. 130 yards long by 35 yards at the widest). The station was set behind some rocky outcropping (Point "Eckstein") off 60 feet off the edge of the cliff. The rock outcroppings became the base for the mounting of antennas for operations.

The view was spectacular in summer. In summer, the weather was warm with temperatures in the low 80's for very hot days. Mostly, summer time day ranged from lows in the 50's to highs in the 70's. At night, one could see the lights of Pilsen and Prague. However, in winter, it could be one of the coldest places to be assigned with the ASA. Winds in excess of 60-70 mph were not uncommon during blizzards. Snow was over 6-8 feet on the mountain in winter (did not melt until late May). Winter lows went down to minus 25 degrees F with highs about 0-10 degrees. During the winter months, sunlight was rare. Mostly, there were clouds & fog day and night. It could be depressing not seeing the sun for as much as 60 days at a stretch.

Border Sites were by nature considered remote. True to its definition, this site was on the border and remote. So remote that from 1958 till 1975, there was no running water on the mountain. Water for coffee, hot chocolate, and washing had to be carried to "The Hill" in 5 gal Jerry cans. With no running water for basic facilities, the old tried and true methods of sanitation came into play. There a single, two-hole, wooden outhouse and a standup tube that was driven at an angle into the ground that came out lower on the cliff. This was known as the "Piss Tube." With a large funnel on the business end and a three-sided phone booth like structure (to shelter you from the wind), this was the other facility on the site. The newest Weed who happened to be assigned "Day" Shift on Sundays (a generally slow time) had to fill the sawed-off in half 55 gal drums with diesel fuel and burn the week's supply of crap. The Weed kept this duty until the next Weed was assigned to his Trick.

The station changed the Detachment letter designation in 1972 with the formation of FS Augsburg. Herzo Base transferred control of the site when its personnel moved to Augsburg. Not much changed between '68 & '72. In early, '72, all the trailers were grouped around the Quonset hut and a 2x4 and plywood "Hallways and Roof" structure was built. This allowed people to leave work locations AND not have to go 'Outside' into the

cold, snowy or wet weather. This was a major improvement to the work area. You could go between work areas without some sort of coat & hat.

This became the standard of the Eckstein compound until some modern construction began 1974. In '74, it was decided that the "Rimbach - Americans" were having too much fun being away from FS discipline and were costing the government too much money for extra pay (separate rations, overseas pay, cost of living, housing allowance, etc.). The plan was to send all of the troops back to a base area and take them "Off the Economy." Therefore, the ASA command chose to build a microwave tower for remote control of antennas. They could be used and controlled by ASA personnel located 5 hours drive away in Augsburg. They hired the French Telecom Giant Alcatel to build the microwave tower and a civilian German general contracting firm to build a barracks to hold 8-10 personnel. To sustain the barracks in a modern fashion, they buried two 10,000 gallon tanks. One was for water and the other for diesel fuel for heating. Septic tanks brought modern plumbing to the "Hill."

In December, '74, they sent part of the troop to Augsburg and ran the new and old systems. When the bugs were worked out, in early '75, Eckstein border site transformed into an antenna site with only maintenance men as security guards. As ASA was decommissioned in 1977, the 'maintenance men / guards' were transferred to INSCOM. In a conversation with one of these guys at Eckstein in '90, the INSCOM maintenance man felt the assignment was the "best maintenance assignment in INSCOM." The site continued for 18 years the remote antenna function until 1993 when the site closed. By that time, the Cold War was over, the Czech Republic existed, the US had "advisors" working with the Czech military regarding NATO expansion, and the Russians had gone home long before Eckstein was under ASA control. The ASA personnel number 102 in 1973. This broke down into 4 Tricks of dozen each, 8 Comm Center guys, 5 MPs, 12 Traffic Analyst, 8 Maintenance, and 11 Day Pukes. The primary MOSs (in 1972) for Eckstein were 98G-RUs, 98G-CZs, 98Cs, O5K20K9s, Electronic Maintenance, Comm Center, and a few MPs, clerks, and straight day administration Pukes. Two Officers were assigned by the ASA - Commander & Operations Officer (Major & Captain, or 2 Captains). The rest of the 100 personnel were enlisted. The breakdown of Career Military vs. One Time Charlie's was 10% / 90% in 1972.

There was a US Air Force Security Service contingent assign to Rimbach that numbered approximately 65 people (in '73). The controlling group for the AF SS was out of Augsburg as well. It is not known the a. USAFSS Unit designation, b. when the Air Force SS stationed personnel to Rimbach. But surely, the Air Force did not arrive in the tactical days and most likely came when Eckstein was a formal Detachment out of Herzo Base (circa 1967). Together with a few wives, children (most under age 6 - no American schooling), and ASA & Air Force personnel, the American population was about 220 in 1973.

All purchases of "American" items came through two methods: 1. a small, 12x16 foot room that was restocked weekly with cokes, candy, laundry soap, newspapers, and small items, 2. a trip in an Army bus 3 hours to the closest Army base commissary and PX (Amberg or Hohenfells). The wives ran a 'Snack Bar' for hamburgers, hot dogs, tuna sandwiches, chips, cokes, and beer. This was the only food with an American flavor (unless prepared at an individuals quarters). Everything else was local bratwurst, schnitzel, and beer.

The local population regarded the ASA troops as a strange mixture of young, polite, men who liked to drink and 'go native'. There were good relations between the German hosts and the American community. The more an American would adapt to the German language, manner, & customs; the better things were for the individual. Since most of the guys (80%) had been to DLI in CA, they had the ability to pick up languages. In this remote area, the local population did NOT speak English (like Germans near most large American Bases). Therefore, the ASA guys and USAF Guys* had to learn German. Because the troop tended to use German as location slang, the process of learning very passable German was achievable in about 2-3 months. Within a year, the silver-tongued devils were as adept as the local guys at wooing and winning the fraulines in the neighboring towns. We became close with the Rimbach neighbors.

Lodging varied from people renting a single room in a Guest House with no cooking facilities, to 8-10 guys living in a large farm house (as if it were a college fraternity house). Most rented small, two or three room apartments. We receive movies three times a week and had a room in the basement of our rented HQ building

located in Rimbach. Other than a bit of American food, a few movies, and each other, all life was centered about things German.

In 1970, one ASA'er asked the village mayor, "Why does Rimbach not have a beer festival?" The mayor explained that the town needed a sponsor organization to host the fest and take the financial responsibility for the event. He also explained that the village had mostly farmers who could not leave their animals for 3-4 days to put up and take down a large beer tent. They did not have enough spare labor and did not wish to take the risk to pay someone to do the work. Therefore, there could not be a festival for poor Rimbach.

To that answer came an ASA reply, "Bull Shit"! "We will have 100 Americans to put up and take down the tent. We live here and it is our responsibility to do what we can for the village. Labor is no longer a problem for the Rimbach Beer Fest. What else is a problem?" And so, six weeks later the first 'German-American Friendship Festival' was held. Success was assured because of the 200 Rimbach-Americans (ASA, USAF SS, and a few wives) drank to insure that the fest would and should continue.

When the Americans left in 1975, it was a loss to the economy of Rimbach. But, the ASA troops left a structure that was to grow and thrive. The extra rooms that people built to house Americans were added to a growing number of Guest Houses for German tourists. Rimbach continued the Beer Fest and it is currently one of the largest in the county. The village has since expanded its tourist economy and is one of the major attractions in the area. (Note: the address for tourist information, room reservations -- in German Only: Verkehrsamt Rimbach, Hohenbogenstrasse 10, D-93485 Rimbach Germany. Phone: +49 9941 8931 (country code 49 for Germany). Fax +49 9941 7292.)

At the closing of the site and in recognition of the contributions to the village, Rimbach dedicated a large black granite monument as a memorial to the ASA and the AF Security Service '58-'75. This was left as a reminder to their future generations that Americans had once lived in Rimbach and they left more than they took.

On the Hoher Bogen at Eckstein, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of France maintained sites next to the American site. The Germans had a site much like Det K, but in 1970, they built a sixteen-story tower (with the antennas in the top crown of the tower). The German Air Force and Army had troops that were stationed in a neighboring town and they were at the station for 24-hour shifts. They had sleeping quarters, mess hall, and other facilities within the tower. Not much is known about their operation. They changed shifts at 4pm everyday. The French Air Force had a sealed compound within the German Compound. The Germans had security for the outside of the total compound. The French troops were required to all live in a barracks in the Border City of Furth im Wald. When any of these three sets of troops happened to bump into one another, there was a feeling of knowing each other's business, but not really knowing.

As an ending note on German facilities, Germany built a copy of their first tower (mission & capabilities unknown) starting in early 1991. It went operational in mid '92. The second tower operated until mid-to-late '93. Then the whole German site (with associated French) closed in the fall of 1993. The climate changed so quickly that plans for a multimillion Deutsche Mark tower, went down the tubes within a year leaving empty twin towers on the Eckstein point.

As a side note, one of the concrete antenna mounts had an inscription (by an anonymous ASA veteran) in the concrete, "To the Men of Det 'K' who lived and died for freedom." This was maybe a tongue in cheek statement. No one known to the author died at Eckstein from military activity, however, there was one perpetual casualty from Eckstein, Fred Rider. One night (circa early 1969), as the legend goes, Fred got drunk and decided that he wanted to see the Czech border. He took a taxi to the border and jumped into the "No Man's Land" area between the two borders. The German Border Police did not know what was going on. But the Czech Border Guards ran out & hauled drunken Fred to CZ.

He was later turned over to the Russians by the Czech border police. Because to the communist, he was obviously crazy, the Russians sent him to a 'mental hospital' to pump his brain full of chemicals. He was traded about 3 months later for 3 of 'theirs'. But, the chemical left him with no ability to retain certain parts of memory

for longer than 30 or so minutes at a time. Fred Rider became a life long resident of Walter Reed Hospital because of his own mistake.

Many ASA sites have had their moments in history. The folks working the 'Cold War' in Homestead, Florida during the 'Missile Crisis' rate as one of the foremost moments in ASA history. Although, this is nothing compared to the ASAers who were 'In the Shit' of Korea, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and other places of direct action. However, Eckstein and world history came together a few times.

Without speaking directly about the operations at Eckstein, there were two major world events when Eckstein was very much in the focus of the SIGINT world. There might have been others, but these two are known at the first "Czech Invasion" and the "Yom Kipper War."

The 'Finest Hour' for Eckstein was the 'Prague Spring' of 1968. The Czechs were moving to liberalize their form of communism, called 'Communism with a human face'. This lasted for several months through the winter '67 and late summer of '68, until the Russian Leadership would no longer allow the policies coming from Prague to continue. The Russian Army invaded CZECH to restore the communist rule in a brutal fashion. There was a possibility of full revolt by the CZECH Army. But, there were many hard-liners within the Army that would not block the Russians. But, no one knew of how the actions would develop.

Because of the potential break in the Warsaw Pact countries, the Eckstein ASA'ers more than fulfilled their responsibilities to the ASA and the country. At the end of the three weeks of the heavy confrontation and for months afterward, Det K was up to the task at hand.

In September of '73, Egypt pushed over the Nile and the Yom Kipper War had started. With a window on Czech, most would say, 'what does that have to do with Rimbach, Germany?' The entire US Defense establishment went to 'DEFCON 3'. Everyone worldwide was affected, but Rimbach is a ways from Egypt.

As History later documented, the Russian did not wish to join into direct conflict for the Arab cause. However, they felt that they had an obligation to the countries with which they had military ties. The US had the same obligation to Israel. The war was a surprise all over the globe.

The Russians had a set of decisions to make and this is a rough guess of the process:

Do we enter the war?

Answer: NO.

Do we re-supply Arab provisions expended in the war?

Answer: YES.

Do we use Russian supplies or use Warsaw Pact supplies?

Answer: Warsaw Pact.

How do we re-supply?

Answer: Consolidate materials from all the WP countries in a central area and fly them where needed.

What is the central supply consolidation depot and shipping point?

Answer: PRAGUE!!!

The tradition of Eckstein ASA'ers of '68 held true for the Eckstein Class of '73. During the worldwide crisis, drinking, whoring, and whenching took a back seat to volunteer 12 - 16 hour shifts. The troops were never asked to work overtime; they just stayed until exhaustion took over. Then, they would catch 4 hours sleep, eat, and return. It was the day for this group of ASAers to 'stand in the breach'. If the Cold War had turned hot, the

mission of Eckstein made it a priority target. But, the '73 troops were there 'standing tall', just like the crew in '68. (Upon the immediate cooling of hostilities, the drinking, whoring, and whenching resumed to a normal level.)

08/57 First big Warsaw Pact exercise in CZECH
03/58 Site selection for late summer exercises
07/58 Tactical ASA Troops on the Hoher Bogen at Eckstein summit
??/66 Year Round Troops assigned
08/68 Prague Spring Russian Invasion
??/69 Fred Rider goes over the CZ Border.
03/72 Transfer from Herzo FS to Augsburg FS (DET 'K' to DET 'N')
06/72 Construction of the enclosed site
09/73 Yom Kipper War
03/74 Construction on Microwave Tower & Barracks start
12/74 Troop pulls back to Augsburg starts
01/75 Site operations and personnel transfer to Augsburg.
01/75 Maintenance groups moves to mountain and guards site.
??/77 ASA Decommissioned and control to INSCOM -- US Army Intelligence
04/93 The SIGINT mission at Eckstein, Det 'K' on the Hoher Bogen, Rimbach, Germany ended. Eckstein closes.

The history of Rimbach as an ASA site is a small part of the total ASA story. However, it was a representative segment of what the ASA was in total. A bit crazy, offbeats, unconventional, marching to different drummers, were all descriptive words to tell the mood and character of Rimbach. Life there was very good for the person who wanted the 'overseas experience' Border sites and mobile, tactical troops seemed to signify the changing environment that was service with the Army Security Agency. The Eckstein Border Site is closed, but the fond memories remain in the hearts of those few that were privileged to be able to call Rimbach --- "Home."

Author's Note: The proceeding was an incomplete history of the story of the Eckstein Border Site located on the mountain, Hoher Bogen, in the Bayerscher Wald (Bavarian Forest) Germany. My involvement with the border site started with my assignment in 1972 and ended with my ETS in 1974. Most of this accounting is a summation of the verbal history from ASA personnel and the local German population. The Germans were a strong source of information about the location, area, and the construction on the mountain. Much of the early history came from memories and recollections of returning ASAer returning to Rimbach on vacations. This history was augmented by the author's return visits in 1990, 1994, and 1996. This Incomplete history is not an accounting of the nefarious and notorious behavior and antics of which the Rimbach-Americans" (a name given by the local villagers to the American population in reference to the ASA troops). Since the border sites had relatively few people assigned, it is hard to locate & generate a great interest in the histories and the people of the remote locations. But this is an attempt to record the history of one site. I felt that someone should make a serious record of Eckstein for the ASA Web pages. This is an attempt to fill in that bit of history.)

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