

Hohenfels Training Area: 72 Years in the making

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The Hohenfels Training Area (HTA) was originally founded by the German Army on April 1, 1938.

With approximately 544 properties and farms in the area impacted by the new site, the German resettlement organization was tasked with compensating the landowners for the land required for the training area.

Since German tradition was to name training areas after the nearest town, the training area was almost named Schmidmühlen Troop Training Area given that the acquisition of land and the evacuation of homeowners started from the area near the town of Schmidmühlen. However, General Ritter von Schober, commanding general of German VII Army Corps, decided to name it Hohenfels Troop Training Area since the camps, waterworks and sewage systems were located near Hohenfels.



On April 22, 1945, American troops arrive at the Hohenfels Training Area. The U.S. Troops liberated 300 British and American Soldiers from captivity. Today, it's not uncommon to see the British or other multinational troops training at Hohenfels. Photo Courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Hammond.

To participate in training exercises, German troops from throughout the country arrived at the train station in Parsberg. The troops marched from Parsberg to the reservation where they dispersed. The Soldiers lived under extreme field conditions camping in four-man tents, with no showers, warm water for shaving and mess halls. Drinking water was carried in their canteens and food carried in their knapsacks. The entire training period was considered to be a field exercise from the moment they left the railroad station until they re-boarded the train.

Besides small arms—mortars, 20mm and 37mm anti-aircraft guns, 75mm mountain guns and 105mm field artillery pieces (howitzers) were fired in the training area. In the winter of 1939-1940, a bunker line was constructed in the Albertshof-Grossmottendorf area where German troops received training and prepared for the attack against the "Magnet Line" in France.

From late 1939 to early spring 1940, 3,000 Polish non-commissioned officers and soldiers were interned at Unterodenhart (location of today's 1-4 Infantry Regiment). During the fall of 1942, around 7,000 Prisoners of War (POW) from the British Empire who refused to work were

permanently billeted at the camp. During this time, each POW received a gift parcel weighing 5 kg every 14 days from the allied Red Cross. These POWs could walk freely within close vicinity of the camp. By day they traded coffee, tea, and cigarettes received in Red Cross parcels for items they needed or wanted, and returned to their quarters at sunset.

On April 22, 1945, the American Army entered the training area with nine tanks coming from Velburg/Hohenburg via Willertshain-Albertshof—releasing the British and about 300 Americans. There was no resistance from the German side. Units of the German division "Goetz von Berlichingen," as well as other units had already left moving towards Regensburg. The "Adolf Hitler Corps," billeted in Camp Poellnrich, left during the night of April 21, 1945, without fighting. However, the Hungarian troops failed to hoist a white flag, and did not give any signs of surrender. Allegedly 40-50 were killed and injured during the fighting. The U.S. tanks, with infantry following, continued unhampered through to Hohenfels, and proceeded from the Lauterach valley via Schmidmühlen to the Naab at Burglengelfeld. The permanent party Soldiers had orders to withdraw via Roding to Cham, but those who could not reach the southern bank of the river Danube were captured near Fischbach in them Bayerischer Wald.

In 1948, the training area was the site of the resettlement of refugees and expellees from Soviet-occupied German territories. All new settlers were integrated in the community of "Hohenfels-Nainhof," which became one of the largest rural communities in Bavaria. At this time, the Bavarian Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry visited Hohenfels and emphasized that "no more will this soil be used to train men in the area of the never again." As long as we live, will Hohenfels become a center for military activities of any kind."

Three years later, U.S. Forces claimed the area for military training purposes, and requested its expansion to the west. In a meeting hosted August 17, 1951 at Parsberg between the German government, State Government of Bavaria, Land Commissioner of Bavaria, and U.S. Army representatives, an agreement was reached to extend the training area to the west. About 780 families, more than 3,256 persons evacuated the area as a result of this agreement, and in October 1951, the training area was increased to its current size of 40,017 acres. American units began training there in October of that year.

Compensation was made to landowners within a very short period and led to hectic activity everywhere. Lumber merchants, real estate agents, and businessmen poured in by the thousands to bid for the approximately 200 hectares of forest to be felled and hauled away.

Contractors went to work; the sound of hammers, caterpillar vehicles, cranes, bulldozers, scrapers, crusher plants and the blasting of rocks dominated for almost one year. Approximately 100 million Deutsche Marks (24 million Dollars) was spent for construction. The city of Hohenfels began to prosper when the training center opened. Roads were built, lumber cut, and real estate prices soared.

In 1952, a massive construction program was initiated in the current field camps known as Camps Albertshof, Poellnrich, Melnhauhe, and Linderberg. Motor pools were excavated; troop billets erected and mess halls built. Camps Albertshof and Poellnrich received the majority of permanent structures while Camp Melnhauhe and Linderberg were developed for use primarily as tent cities with the only permanent structures being the mess halls and latrine facilities. Hohenfels was experiencing its highest economic growth period in more than 1,000 years.

In January 1953, the economic boom subsided and the locals returned to their past ways, tillage of the soil. The first unit to move out of the training area was Company C, 406th Engineer Battalion, and in 1955, the German Bundeswehr was founded. In 1956, the first German unit, the 5th Panzer Division, was stationed at Camp Poellnrich until their deactivation in 2001.

With the establishment of the Bundeswehr headquarters, their first task was the initiation of the 5th Armored Division, which later transferred to Koblenz, and after several months, the appointment of the first Liaison Officer to the U.S. headquarters. His staff was about 200 people, most of them citizens of Hohenfels and the surrounding communities.

In 1958, the HTA was reorganized under the Seventh Army Training Center, predecessor of the 7th Army Training Command. In March 1975, a mechanized infantry battalion of "Brigade 75" was stationed at Hohenfels pending completion of the brigades permanent Garrison in northern Germany. "Brigade 75," later designated 3rd Brigade, 2nd Armored Division, was deployed from Ft. Hood, Texas to the European Northern Army Group of NATO. In October 1978, the battalion was moved to its northern Germany location, and two years later was relocated to Hohenfels. Additionally, the Basic Noncommissioned Officers' Course offered at the Combined Arms Training Center moved from Rose Barracks to Camp Poellnrich.

In 1984, the training area had 52 ranges within its firing and maneuver area and a Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System warehouse that held enough equipment for 15 companies. REFORGER, which was coined from Return of Forces to Germany, exercises and HAWK, a U.S. medium range surface-to-air missile, sites became primary missions for the HTA. Due to the increasing training requirements for the U.S. Army, in 1986, development of the Combat Maneuver Training Complex, a new facility providing realistic and stressful training that approximates the combat environment.

On November 16, 1990, the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Division becomes the permanent Opposing Force on Hohenfels. In 1994, the U.S. Army withdraws from Wildflecken, and Hohenfels and Grafenwoehr becomes the main focal point for all U.S. Army training in Europe.

In 2005, the Combat Maneuver Training Center was officially named the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC).

After 72 years, the JMRC continues with multinational training exercises and trains U.S. Army Europe units and our multinational partners for current conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the globe.