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570TH United States Army Artillery Group / 508th Artillery Detachment

NARRATIVE: The 508th USA Artillery Detachment was organized at Fort Bliss, TX, comprised mostly of personnel from the 40th & 41st Artillery Detachments as noted above where initial training occurred. The 508th was sent to Europe (United States Army Europe, USAREUR) in a unit PCS (Permanent Change of Station) in March 1967. We had a Port of call report date at McGuire AFB, NJ for 9 March 1967 and a depart date of 10 March 1967 on Flight BKA C839 at 0001 Hrs. The authorized strength of the unit was 8 Officers, 1 Warrant Officer and 58 Enlisted men, for a total of 67 personnel. Our support unit was the **221st Royal Dutch Air Force**, a NATO unit, they provided the facility. The Dutch forces had their own barracks, an excellent NCO / Officer mess, etc, and also provided security for the compound. Our immediate chain of command was the 570th USA Artillery Group located in Munster – Handorf, Commander was LTC Bailey B. Smith in 1969; then 514th USA Artillery Group, Monchengladbach, Commander Colonel Robert Blake (West Point 43) or Col Robert Parks (West Point 44); SASCOM (Special Ammunition Support Command) Frankfurt, Colonel Leverne Blount (1969) (West Point 43). The headquarters for the 508th was located at Schoppingen. I remember flying in to Rhein Main AFB in Frankfurt, Germany at night, cold and drizzly, we disembarked from the plane, went thru customs or some sort of processing, then were loaded on a couple buses the same night, having no idea of our ultimate destination, we arrived early the next morning at the 221st Royal Dutch Air Force camp in **Erle, Germany**, which would be my home for the next three years. During the bus ride I kept seeing a sign that said “Ausfahrt”, initially thought that was a really big city, did not realize till later it meant “Exit” in German.

The site was typical of all Nike Hercules Missile sites, two separate areas, an admin area consisting of barracks, mess halls, administrative buildings, vehicle maintenance structure, etc, and the missile launcher area located about a mile or so distant. The administrative area was terrific, we had one story brick building with our own mess hall, (the food was always good),

the barracks would house perhaps 30 to 35 personnel, two men to a room, E-5 and up had their own room, I was promoted to SP5 / E-5 in November 1967.

The married enlisted that were accompanied by their wives lived off post. In the first year at the site I don't recall any married being accompanied by their spouse or living off post.

We had a common area or day room for shooting pool or playing ping pong and watching TV (in German), arms room, security room, the Commanding Officer had his own office, there was an orderly or staff room for the company clerk and Company NCO (1st Sgt or SFC) as well as shower room and a couple of fairly large bath rooms. At one point we had our own little ASP with a couple of Bible's for prayer, which during an inspection one of the Commanders from the 570th or 514th Artillery Group made us remove (the remark made was "get that god damned thing out of here". The Dutch forces had several buildings in the administrative area, barracks, NCO mess, a small medical team, and they manned security for the admin area. I never knew the number of Dutch personnel assigned at the 221st, but would guess there were around 200 to 250. I remember they ate well, had the best cheese I've ever tasted. Their colorful Commander Major Malinkrodt sported a huge handle bar mustache and drank beer and other liquor like a trooper. I drank more than a few beers or shots in the NCO / Officer Mess with him.

The launcher area where the missiles were stored was surrounded by two perimeters of chain link fence topped by rows of concertina wire. I think the interior perimeter was a double chain link fence between which one could walk, but I don't remember for certain. The missiles were housed in enclosed metal sheds from which they were rolled out on steel rails to the launcher erectors during drills and alerts or to perform maintenance. As I recall inside the second interior perimeter there were three sheds arranged in sort of a three quarter circle, large dirt berms surrounded around each shed on three sides, with 4 or 6 missiles housed per shed, there was a large mound or berm in the center of the interior perimeter which prohibited or obstructed vision across the interior perimeter. A concrete road about 20' wide, wide enough for a large trailer circled around the interior berm connecting each shed. Also located inside the interior perimeter was what was called the "Assembly or Warhead Building" which was used to perform maintenance or attach the Nuclear Warhead to the missile.

The exterior perimeter of the launcher area as well as the immediate interior of the exterior perimeter was the primary responsibility of the Dutch Air Force security team, they had a guard house at the entry point which was manned 24/7.

During the summer the Dutch would let sheep run loose inside all the fenced perimeters to eat the grass, much easier than trying to mow and they had personnel detailed to take care of the sheep.

The interior perimeter and access to the missile storage sheds was the responsibility of the US Warhead Detachment (the 508th) security team.

The mission of the 508th Warhead Detachment was to perform maintenance, maintain & install Nuclear Warheads on the Nike Hercules Missiles at the site, to provide security, as well as to destroy them in the event that they might fall into enemy hands.

We had a guard house which we manned 24/7 at the entry point to the interior perimeter. As I recall there were usually about five or six guards assigned to each 24 hour shift as well as an NCO, and daily Duty Officer, typically an E-5 or higher grade was Sergeant of the Guard. Every person, except the NCO in charge was armed with an M-14 Rifle and 100 rounds of ammunition as well as gas mask. We controlled entry and exit of all personnel, vehicles, etc., conducted hourly walking patrols to inspect the buildings in which the missiles were housed to insure they were secure. One had to make a notation on a sheet indicating the time at which each building was inspected. At the end of the shift the sheets were turned over to the NCO in charge. I do recall we had to maintain a daily roster of personnel who entered and exited the area, identification was thorough.

There was a small safe chained to the floor in the guard house which contained two keys required to gain access to the codes to arm the PAL devices (Permissive Action Link) in order to arm the warheads and it required two different personnel to arm the PAL device, each with a separate key. Aside from the Battery Commander, only the NCO in charge and the Officer of the Day had knowledge of the combinations to the safe and or access to the safe, the combination was changed daily. I don't recall exactly who had access or authority to arm the PAL device other than the Battery Commander, Officer of the Day, one of them perhaps in concert with the Sergeant of the guard.

Aside from protecting the Nike missiles the other part of the job was to be able to destroy them to if necessary to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Everyone was trained to use the Shape Charges which would be placed on top of the missile. It was fairly basic explosive or demolition training, which involved the proper use of blasting caps, detonating cord, plunger device, crimpers, etc.

The technical side was Warhead assembly to the missile, was never involved with that aspect, but there was a portion of the team assigned to perform that task, somewhere around a half dozen or so personnel including one or two officers and an NCO or two in charge. The Warhead Assembly team caught the most attention during command inspections.

The daily routine was standard military, first reveille, the Charge of Quarters went thru the barracks to wake the troops still in the rack. It was the responsibility of the Charge of Quarters to raise the US flag with one other person. After chow, there was a team formation to address the daily work details or provide information (usually an ass chewing), then clean the barracks and off to work.

We worked a shift of 24 hours on duty, 24 off duty followed by an 8 hour day. My primary duty was initially as a security guard (Custodial Agent), eventually becoming responsible for security operations for the site.

Was were also assigned to witness destruction of classified documents, Team CBR NCO (Chemical, Biological & Radiological training), had clearances for Secret, NATO Secret and confidential documents. Had occasional assignment as Charge of Quarters, and other training duties.

The security at the launcher area was very detailed, consisted of checking ID's, and there were a variety of other requirements. It was not always an easy or non-stressful job, especially during command inspection. In October 1967 I received a letter of Appreciation from my Commander, Captain Michael R. Briggs for "outstanding performance" as Senior Custodial Agent during a Command Training Inspection that lasted four days. The letter stated my performance contributed significantly to the Satisfactory rating received by the Team during the inspection. A copy of the letter is included in the Appendix to the military section.

In August 1968 when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia we went on full combat alert for nearly a week, only time I remember we came close to arming the warheads and only time the entire team was in the launcher area. We had US and NATO Air Force planes over head constantly, some no more than a few hundred feet.

There was a German National named Dieter assigned to the unit, his daily routine as company driver was to pick up mail in Handorf at HQ, to transport the guards to or from the launcher area for guard duty, and perform whatever other errands the Commanding Officer required. He also drove us to Bremerhaven or Giessen every other week to pick up rations for the mess hall. Riding with him on the ration trip was always fun, it usually meant the opportunity to shop at

one of the large Post Exchanges, drink plenty of beer as well as experience some very non-traditional driving on the Autobahn, he would keep you on the edge of your seat.

During my tour of duty with the 508th I participated in competition for NCO of the Quarter Year in the 570th Artillery Group in March of 1969 and in December of 1969 for 514th Artillery Group NCO of the Quarter Year, both of which I won. Letters of Commendation from Company Commanders of both the 514th and 570th Artillery Groups are in the appendix to the military section.

In July of 1968 myself and about 10 other personnel were awarded a five day administrative absence by the 570th Artillery Group Commander for a trip to Garmisch-Partenkirchen as a result of our outstanding performance. It was fantastic to see the world from the top of the Zugspitze in Austria, colder than hell, but beautiful. We also did see several other tourist sights' during the trip including a short boat ride on the Rhine river, mostly drinking beer and to see Mad King Ludwig's Castle.

There were so few personnel on the Team that typically only a few individuals could leave the post at a given time, perhaps 5 or 6 on a daily basis, no more than 10 as I recall. There were a few guys on the post that were my drinking buddies, but mostly I had German friends in Erle or from nearby with whom I hung out. They had cars, I did not, many times we would drive to nearby towns and frequent their favorite bars. The last year and a half I had a two room apartment in Erle (population perhaps 800) cost me \$25 a month, address was: Schulten-Wurt 10, 4271 Erle bei Dorsten. Unfortunately I also had to maintain a room in the barracks. I rode my bicycle back and forth to the post in good weather.

The apartment was on the second floor of a civilian's house, down the street was a female barber that was good at cutting hair. The German mailing address for the Dutch site was: APO 09078, Erle, Germany, 4271 NATO, Erle.

There were two or three Gasthauses in Erle, drank a lot of beer in each, ate great blood sausage, and other sausages, cheese and brötchen (Bread). I watched the APOLLO 11 moon landing on TV in black and white while sitting in Gaststätte Schneemann in Erle, Germany. Other than drinking with my buddies, social life with the opposite sex was scarce. I took a 3 day pass to Amsterdam somewhere mid duty tour, stayed in a really crappy hotel room, price around \$10, top floor of something, could barely open the door to the room and the stairs were nearly strait up, had to push my suit case up ahead of me. Walked around Amsterdam, went thru "Pigalle", checked out the whores, then later encountered two American women drinking in a bar, they were the first women speaking English that I had heard in nearly two years, their

parents had sent them to Amsterdam at the end of the semester. I made the trip to Amsterdam by German train. Somewhere around mid 1967 i got my "Dear Orville (John) letter from Doris B. back in Schuyler telling me she had married some guy named Eugene. No problem, there was plenty of German beer with which to drown my sorrows.

The guys at the base would often team up 3 or 4 at a time to take a cab to nearby towns, such as Raesfeld, Dorsten, Dortmund, or Essen. Our favorite bar in Dorsten was the "Domschänke" (I was informed by Waltraud that it still existed in 2012 at the same location and under the same name). I eventually learned how to take the bus to Dorsten by myself. For about the last year or so I dated a wonderful girl named Waltraud H., from Dorsten, she would on occasion take the bus to Erle, we spent many, many wonderful hours together. In 2012 Waltraud's son located me via e-mail and since then Waltraud and I have communicated via e-mail. During the tour I spent more time with my German friends than the soldiers at the base, learned much of the German language from them during the three years. Erle was a nice small town and the people were friendly, we were the first Americans there since World War II.

For the most part the Officer cadre was pretty cool, one of the Lieutenants purchased a 1965 Ferrari, silver in color. Over all it was a good three year tour. I was young and impressionable, only 23 when I arrived and 26 when I returned stateside.

The duty was not terrible, not extremely stressful, just continual inspections from the 570th and 514TH Artillery Groups or SASCOM or higher commands. I remember most of the personnel that went over with the unit PCS, a list is in the appendix.

(The above was written November 2015)