

CHAPTER V GERMANY

The Cold War Activation

The 558th Military Police Company was re-activated in March of 1962 in the Federal Republic of West Germany.¹²⁸ The unit was organized under Table of Organization and Equipment (TO/E) Number 19-60 as a physical security company. It was allocated three (3) line platoons, one (1) headquarters platoon and a detachment. When the 558th was re-activated it was one of only a few companies that were officially allowed a motto. That motto was *Only the Best May Belong*.¹²⁹

Upon activation, the 558th MP was assigned to the Advanced Weapons Support Command (AWSCOM). That division, at the time, was responsible for both the operation and control of numerous ordnance depots throughout Europe.¹³⁰ Specifically, the 558th Military Police Company was tasked with the direct responsibility of providing security for the US Army Special Weapons Depot at Kriegsfeld, West Germany. The location was NATO Site Number 107 but it was consistently referred to as “North Point”.¹³¹ The depot was the home of the 619th Ordnance Company, a subordinate unit of the 59th Ordnance Group/Brigade.¹³² For all intents and purposes, the 59th Ordnance Group and AWSCOM were one and the same.

The assignment of the 558th to Kriegsfeld was not the most glorious mission the unit could have been given, but it certainly was the longest assignment as well as the most notorious. From 1962 until closure in 1991, over 2000 military policemen rotated in and out of the 558th Military Police Company.

¹²⁸ National Archives and Records Admin. Record Group 338, Sub-group 5, M.P. Divisions, Unit Operational Records, USAREUR General Order No. 154, dated April 19, 1962.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ AWSCOM Headquarters, located in Pirmasens, West Germany, was subordinate to the general command structure of the US Army Communication Zone Europe (USACOMZEUR) which was originally located in Belgium. In 1967, it also had a Hdqt. unit in Worms, Germany.

¹³¹ The origin of the name “North Point” could not be ascertained in the historical record.

¹³² The 59th Ord. Brig. was activated in Germany on March 24th 1962 out of the renamed AWSCOM. AWSCOM had been created in 1959 out of the 71st Ord. Battalion, which had been activated in Germany in 1955. In 1961 and again in 1972, the 72nd Ordnance Battalion was assigned to the 59th Ord. Brigade (AWSCOM). The 619th Ord. Co. (Kriegsfeld) was, both times, placed organizationally under the 72nd. In October of 1972, AWSCOM and SASCOM (Special Ammunition Support Command) were merged and many Army Artillery Units were deactivated. Reorganization of these units occurred in 1974, 1978 and 1982. However, the units were all deactivated in June of 1992 when the 59th Ord. Brigade completed the task of removing all nuclear weapons from Europe. The 59th was eventually re-activated in 1994 at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, where it remains today.

Kriegsfeld's Early Beginnings

In 1960, the U.S. Army completed deployment of nuclear weapons systems throughout NATO.¹³³ The Kriegsfeld Depot was one of many sites used to both store and maintain the hardware. This, of course, included the nuclear warheads that the artillery and missile systems were designed to deliver. Over the succeeding years, North Point became one of many facilities that serviced, repaired and distributed these “special weapons” to not only Army units but to the other branches of the US Armed Forces and to other NATO allied forces as well.

The historical record did not reveal the exact date when the depot at North Point was actually constructed. However, US Army documents disclosed that the German Wehrmacht used the site as an ammunition and supply depot beginning in the late 1930's. The original function of the facility was to serve as one of the many supply points for the Siegfried Line, some 50 miles west of the site. The US Army took over the location after WW II. During the 1950's several different ordnance battalions used the installation to store conventional weapons and ammunition. In 1954, both the 135th Ordnance Company and the 15th Ordnance Battalion were stationed at Kriegsfeld and this arrangement lasted until 1959.¹³⁴ At one point in September of 1956, Kriegsfeld was actually scheduled as a site for a NIKE firing battery of the 32nd AAA Battalion. However, this was changed in 1957 when German opposition to the plan developed.¹³⁵ Those issues were not resolved until 1959.

The Kriegsfeld facility was remodeled and improved on many occasions during the 1950's. The property was fenced in 1954 and the original wooden guard towers were constructed in 1955. Utilities received an up-grade in 1956 and the weapons igloos were completed on June 30th 1956. The “bunkers” were built using the “construct and cover” [with dirt] technique.¹³⁶

The guard force for the facility was initially supplied by personnel assigned to the on-site ordnance companies. However, ordnance commanders began complaining that installation “security” functions siphoned away an already existing shortage of trained ordnance technicians. As a result, in late 1958, the security operation at Kriegsfeld was re-assigned to a Seventh Army infantry company. It would be this infantry unit that would eventually become the 558th MP Company.

¹³³ Nuclear weapons delivery systems were first deployed in Germany in 1956. However, the atomic warheads were held in both the US and England (Air Force) until 1960. Following the NATO Summit Conference of 1957, the U.S. promised “to establish large scale advanced weapons in Western Europe” which was relatively complete by 1960.

¹³⁴ Headquarter, USAREUR Historical Division, *Annual History Report, 1 July 1956 – 30 June 1957*, (1958) p. 229.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.267.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.267.

In 1959, preparations for the reception of tactical nuclear warheads at Kriegsfeld (and other sites as well) resulted in both a general re-alignment and a mission alteration of forces in the area. As a result, the 15th Ordnance Battalion Headquarters moved out of the North Point facility and assigned its subordinate Company A to continue the mission at Kriegsfeld. Then, in June of 1959, the 619th Ordnance Company was re-activated at Kriegsfeld out of the remnants of “A” Company of the 15th Ord. Bn. and the new unit took over special weapons operations at the site.¹³⁷ The 619th Ord. Co. would remain at North Point until the day the facility closed.

In 1960, nuclear warheads were distributed to Army ground forces in Germany and that year official records begin to refer to “North -Point” as a nuclear weapons “pre-stock point”. The records of USAREUR delineate Kriegsfeld as a facility containing storage igloo’s capable of “withstand[ing] an atomic blast.”¹³⁸

The task of providing security for all nuclear facilities was delegated to the MP Corps in 1961. In 1962 when the 558th was re-activated, it simply took over the Infantry unit previously assigned to the site and became the 558th Military Police Company. Mr. Phillip Schearer, a NCO and a Nuclear Weapons Assemblyman, was stationed at North Point when these events took place. He reported that:

The 619th Ordnance Co. was just set up...we did not have an MP unit... an Infantry Company provided security...it was decided to change the grunts MOS to MP and re-name the company...the CO [of the renamed company] was passed over three times ...offered a RIF (Reduction in Force) or reduction to enlisted status...he dropped from Captain to SFC E-7...

We had the widest mix of weapons...Corporal, Honest John, Nike, 280mm and 8-inch rounds...Our [nuclear weapons] were about the size of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined...I always felt the policy that the MP’s had no “need to know” what they were guarding was a serious mistake...they needed to understand the importance of defending North Point¹³⁹

Other units assigned to the Kriegsfeld Depot during the middle 1960’s were the 554th MP Company, the 184th Ammo Company, the 763rd Medical Detachment as well as E Company of the 102nd Signal Battalion. Most of these support units remained on-site for many years. The 554th MP Company was transferred out of AWSCOM late in 1967 and assigned to Headquarters USEUCOM where it was given a law enforcement mission at Vaihingen Germany. The unit became known as the “General’s Guard.”

¹³⁷ Headquarter, USAREUR Historical Division, *Annual History Report, 1 July 1960 – 30 June 1961*. (1962) p. 167.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 182.

¹³⁹ Phillip Schearer, Interview statement written April 18th, 2002. Mr. Schearer was a member of the 619th from 1961 to 1963.

The 558th Takes Control

Originally, when the 558th assumed security at Kriegsfeld, the depot was assembling and maintaining nuclear warheads for several missile and artillery systems then being deployed throughout NATO. Consequently, it did not take the Warsaw Pact long to discover the significance of the Kriegsfeld Depot and to decide what their planned response would be. Mr. Schearer reported that by 1963, the Soviet Union had listed North Point as number three (3) on their target priority list.¹⁴⁰

The primary mission of the 558th at North Point was two-fold. First, and most importantly, the company was responsible for the complete and continuous security of the post. This included a main gate at the entrance of facility, the ADT Alarm Center, and the infamous perimeter guard towers that encircled the weapons portion of the depot. Second, the MP Company provided security for convoy movement of nuclear material in and out of the base. Most of the convoys involved truck transport but on some occasions aircraft movement was conducted with either helicopters out of North Point or fixed wing aircraft from neighboring Sembach Air Base.¹⁴¹



Entrance to Kriegsfeld Special Weapons Depot (North Point) circa, 1970. “A” Gate is on the right, half hidden by the large sign. The lower level of the large building on the extreme right was the Hdqt. of the 558th.

Photograph courtesy of Melvin Somes and Shoebox Photos Project

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Sembach Air base was returned to the Government of Germany in Jan. of 1995. A weather detachment of the USAF remains on-site.

Throughout the 1960's and early 1970's numerous organizational problems existed at Kriegsfeld. Some were eventually corrected but some were beyond the solution capacity of either the MP or Ordnance commanders.

Administratively, the 558th company commander was in charge of his unit. However, operational control of the unit was vested with the commanding officer of the Ordnance Company, usually a Major. This duplicity of command created friction among the officer cadre and on occasion it would percolate down the chain of command. . On many occasions ordnance procedures conflicted with that of the MP's. The end result was a less than ideal working relationship between soldiers of the two units at the post.

In addition, the company detachment that had been assigned to the 558th during the Korean War was carried into the unit's service in Germany. This "paper" outfit required that officers keep a distinct and separate set of books for the detachment. Commanders had to account for the weapons, equipment and material but were not given the personnel to staff the detachment.

Also, incoming troopers, both enlisted men and officers, had to endure a special "security clearance" background investigation prior to being allowed access to the weapons portion of the installation. In some instances, this process (referred to as a personnel reliability program or PRP) took over eight (8) months. The lengthy security validation process frustrated everyone. Commanders were prohibited from proper utilization of MP's until they were "cleared" and the MP's working tower duty viewed assignment pending PRP as "busy work".

Finally, the Kriegsfeld personnel suffered through both billeting and housing shortages. In the 1960's the post had only two barracks on site and a dependent housing area at a small satellite facility called Weirhof. Weirhof was located several miles from the depot and also contained a chapel, an officers club, the BOQ, and the medical clinic. This facility provided housing for officers and senior NCO's but was shared with other military units in the area. Therefore, it suffered with a chronic shortage of available living quarters. Moreover, all enlisted personnel who were unmarried, including the MP's, lived on post in one of the two barracks. Single males were prohibited from living off-post. These rigid rules resulted in overcrowding at both the post and Weirhof and thereby contributing another factor to low morale.

The Depot

The Kriegsfeld Depot was, as most of the NATO nuclear sites had been, a bifurcated Army post. One section of the installation was a typical army post containing billets, mess hall, company administrative offices and a motor pool. Access to the post was controlled through a singular road entrance known as "A" Gate.

The second section contained the weapons facility. This more secure area, referred to as the "inner perimeter" in company documents, but because it was on higher ground, it was known as "the hill" to most soldiers, consisted of about 40 acres of woodland with approximately a dozen earth-covered bunkers. These bunkers were used for both the storage of "sensitive" material and for the assembly and maintenance duties performed by the 619 Ordnance Co. personnel. During the early 1960's, the weapons section of the post contained what Mr. Schearer referred to as "tons of material."

The Kriegsfeld Depot defense plan stipulated that in the event of an incursion or attack upon the facility that a supplemental force from either the Seventh Army or Eighth Infantry Division would respond to North Point as a back-up defense force. Viewed as somewhat of a "pipe-dream", this Augmentation Reserve Force (ARF) was to respond from places such as Kaiserslautern, Bad Kreuznach or Baumholder and arrive at North Point within four (4) hours. Although never used or tested, many commanders and their soldiers figured by that time the base and its personnel were "goners."



Partial view of North Point depot, circa 1970. The bunker section was behind the long white building (Day room and supply) on left. Directly behind this building was the heliport and the walking post (No.12). The EM Club, post theater and gym are barely visible on far right. The MP Barracks and the Secondary Alert Team (SAT) room were in the building on the right, which is casting a shadow on the roadway. View was looking out the window of the Ordnance personnel barracks.

Photograph courtesy of Melvin Somes and Shoebox Photo Project

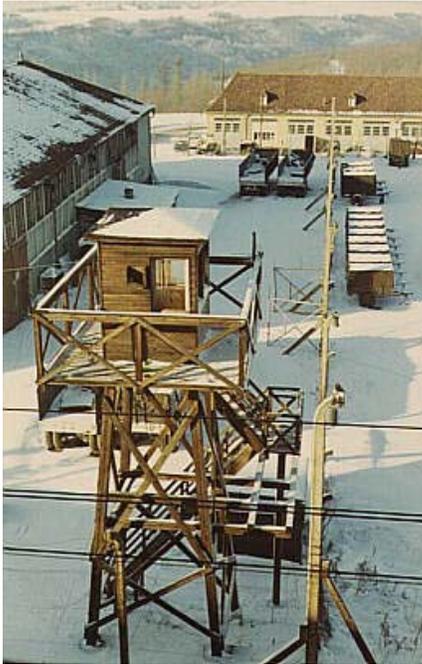


This photograph looks over the fence line from the Ord. Barracks to the Sergeant-of-the-Guard building located within the “inner perimeter” section of North Point. circa, 1970.

Photograph courtesy of Melvin Somes and Shoebox Photos Project

The weapons storage section of North Point was encircled with eleven (11) wooden guard towers. (The twelfth [12th] guard post, next to the helipad, was a walking post) The individual towers consisted of a sheltered interior portion measuring six (6) feet square with a three (3) foot wide catwalk around the

outside. The towers were approximately 20 ft. high and spaced some 200 feet apart. The perimeter of the weapons section of the facility was protected by a lighted, double fence and the remainder of the installation was protected by a single fence. It was in the towers that the MP's performed guard duty. They watched for either unlawful entry or unauthorized personnel. Equipment in the towers during the 1960's consisted of a field phone, a SOP Manual and an ammo box with matches. Lighters and strike-anywhere matches were prohibited inside the weapons area.



Guard Towers of the 1960's
Although this is not
North Point - it is
representative of the towers
used all over Europe at the
Special Weapons Depots.

The ordnance depot section of North Point contained approximately eight (8) storage bunkers (igloos) and one (1) large maintenance (main) bunker. Many MP's can remember seeing ordnance personnel working on either the Nike, Pershing, or Sergeant missile hulks or the various artillery rounds inside or adjacent to the main bunker.¹⁴² Ordnance personnel worked day shift, Monday through Friday with weekend leave. MP's worked around the clock with constantly oscillating shift schedules.

A guardhouse at the entrance of the weapons section, manned by the Sergeant of the Guard (SOG), controlled access to the special weapons section. A motorized MP unit stationed at the "SOG Shack" had to patrol the bunkers and sign a check sheet every hour attesting that the bunker doors were padlocked.

Opening a bunker received special attention. Ordnance personnel had to connect a field phone to the front of the bunker and give the proper code to the alarm center. This ADT alarm center, originally located next to the MP offices, was staffed around-the-clock and alarms would sound if the bunker doors were tripped without prior permission.

¹⁴² The Sergeant missile system was deployed in Germany in 1962 and the replacing Lance system was deployed in September of 1973. The first Lance system fielded went to U.S. Army - Europe. The system gained notoriety as a "neutron bomb" because of its enhanced radiation warhead.

Working at Kriegsfeld

Inspections, alerts and dignitary visits were a common occurrence at North Point. Frequently, the commander of the Ordnance Co. would challenge or spot-check both the on and off-duty MP's. Viewed as harassment, the practice further eroded morale. Alerts to test the response and reaction of the Secondary Alert Team (SAT), a two-man quick response unit, were activated on almost a weekly basis. Some alerts were even called by the MP's in the towers in response to the "boogieman" who roamed the wooded area of the depot at will.

Stories of the macabre continue to plague the reputation of North Point. Even today, veterans of the units assigned to North Point still perpetuate what appear to be largely rumors of reported suicides and homicides at Kriegsfeld. The historical record does not confirm any of the incidents. Although some GI's were relieved and hospitalized for either psychiatric or abuse problems, no evidence of the stories of monsters or murders perpetrated in connection with tower duty was ever uncovered.

Visits to Kriegsfeld by NATO member commanders and US Navy Captains were less frequent but they did occur. Also, the West German Army frequently brought weapons into and out of the installation. As a result, many military and NATO dignitaries knew more about the weapons at North Point than most of the MP's did.

Some visits were essential to the operations at Kriegsfeld. Lt. Walter Rotsch, who served with the 558th in 1966, reported that the Permissive Action Linkage (PAL) detachment responded to North Point on a regular basis. This unit, headquartered at Pirmasens, had one part of the code for input into the nuclear warheads to initiate a detonation sequence. Officers and senior NCO's staffed the PAL unit and they traveled throughout AWSCOM territory re-setting the firing codes of the nuclear weapons.¹⁴³

In addition, security inspections were scheduled for the site approximately three (3) times a year. These were conducted by AWSCOM command officers and resulted in a certification of the facility and its personnel as a secure site. The inspections were of two (2) types. One was a technical proficiency inspection (TPI) and the second was a physical security inspection (PSI). The Commanding Officers of units that did not pass these certification inspections found their careers in the Army extremely short.



Field Maneuvers, 1970.
MP, Sp/4 Melvin
Somes of the 558th guards
a helicopter as it prepares
to depart on an air
mission. These aircraft
departed on a regular basis
with nuclear weapons for
a "classified location ...
somewhere in Europe".

Photograph courtesy of
Shoebox Photos and
Melvin Somes.

Working conditions at North Point were not very pleasant. The MP's assigned there were essentially security guards who spent their overseas tour in a guard tower watching a perimeter fence. Eventually, the MP's working guard duty in NATO became known as "tower-rats". Neither the inventor nor the origin of this somewhat disparaging term is known. In the 1960's it was not in use at Kriegsfeld. However, by 1976 it was in use all over Europe.

¹⁴³ Walter Rotsch, written narrative, March 31, 2002.

Duty at North Point was monotonous, lonely and during winter months, very cold. The original wooden towers did not get heat until after the bitter winter of 1966 and then only after many MP's came down with freeze related injuries. That year, Lt. Thomas Anderson managed to get electric heater equipment for the towers and the MP's provided the labor to wire the system during off-duty time.

Relaxation and diversion from the poor working conditions was limited. Recreation was available at either the post movie theater, the Enlisted Men's (EM) Club or a local civilian gasthaus. Overindulgence in alcohol and the resultant incidents were always a problem. On many nights after the clubs closed the post facility suffered damage. On more than one occasion an intoxicated MP was the victim of either a fatal pedestrian or auto collision.

Diversion from the duty while atop the guard tower was virtually non-existent. Reading or writing within the confines of the "inner perimeter" was *verboten*. Similarly, radios were also prohibited during guard duty but this rule was violated wholesale. Although done enmasse, MP's who were caught by their Lieutenants either reading or listening to a radio were assured a weeks worth of walking post (No. 12) as punishment. Thankfully, most squad leaders, the Sergeants, turned a blind eye on tower recreation. Many MP's picked out either a tree or deer family and watched them grow. Some of the more enterprising troopers were able to tame hedgehogs and squirrels and make "tower pets" of them. (This practice probably led to the eventual use of the term "tower rat")

By 1976, a program that allowed MP's to sign up for rotation out of North Point and into a Corps unit had been instituted. However, it required at least a full year service at the facility with two (2) years of enlistment remaining. Colonel Dan Watkins (Ret.) reported that most soldiers turned it down, by then having made up their minds to leave the Army and not wanting the turmoil of moving, losing friends and learning a new company.¹⁴⁴

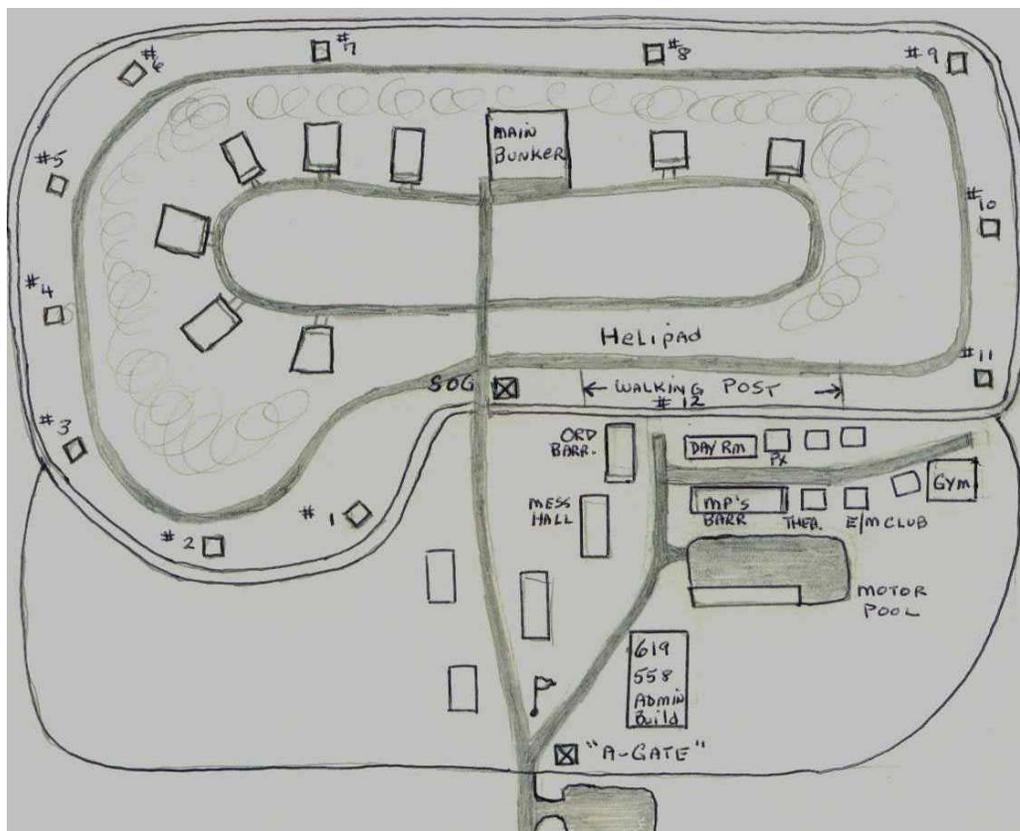


Diagram of North Point, 1967. Not to scale

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Watkins, Written Narrative, Feb. 3, 2003

The plan appears to have been of limited duration. Soldiers assigned there during the 1980's reported that they would "have done anything to get out of North Point." Many did.

Renovations and Improvements

As time moved on the working conditions at North Point improved. In the early 1970's terrorist activity in Europe drastically increased the Army's concern about a potential attack on any site such as North Point. This concern resulted in both physical improvements to nuclear weapons sites all over NATO and to the restructuring of the type of nuclear weapons held at each site. Major Mike Yurk (Ret) was a Lieutenant at North Point from 1977-80 as the changes were nearing completion and he offered the following narrative.¹⁴⁵

Our greatest threat was from terrorist and that threat became more acute during the late 1970's and early 1980's as did security concerns. From the 1972 terrorist attack at the Munich Olympics to the rise of attacks throughout Europe... and the Middle East... there became a greater concern that terrorist would attack a nuclear weapons site in an effort to get a nuclear weapon. The increased threat and emphasis on security of nuclear weapons had a significant and positive effect on the MP units and the storage sites. Units and sites that had been ignored by everyone finally got attention and money.

The renovations at North Point began in 1976 and were completed by 1980.¹⁴⁶ The entire weapons section was rebuilt and the post facility went through partial renovation. A new Site Security Control Center (SSCC) was constructed within the "inner perimeter" and that building had a large cement tower (Tower One) built into the structure. New fence lines and new steel towers, reduced from eleven (11) to seven (7), were put into service. The new towers had bulletproof glass and were relocated between a new double fence-line. A roadway was built between the fences which then allowed motorized patrols direct access to the perimeter. In addition, better communications devices, sensor alarms on the fences and operable searchlights were all part of the new equipment installed during the rebuilding.



North Point,
circa, 1980
New "Tower
One" was
attached to the
Site Security
Control Center
(SSCC). New
fence lines and
wire had also
been added.

Photograph
courtesy of Mike
Yurk.

Several changes in both command and facility occurred at North Point during the 1970's. Most were of minor importance and had little effect on the working environment. Some, however, were major changes effecting thousands of soldiers.

¹⁴⁵ M. Yurk, written narrative, Hudson, WI. Feb. 2002.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

A divisional reorganization in October of 1972 resulted in the 59th Ordnance Brigade being placed under USAREUR command. Both the insignia and shoulder patch of all of the units at Kriegsfeld changed from the “white arrow” of AWSCOM to that of the familiar “blue shield” of USAREUR. Also, in November of 1972, the 72nd Ordnance Battalion was reactivated under the 59th Ord. Group and the units at Kriegsfeld were placed under the control of the 72nd. The 72nd Ordnance Battalion had previously been authorized a unit crest, emblazoned as “security and reliability,” and after the command changes, all units at North Point began wearing the crest. Then, in June of 1980, the 59th Ordnance Group was authorized a “crossed cannons” shoulder patch and that insignia was worn by all units in the Group. (Photographs of the crest and patch are included in the photograph gallery)

In 1974, the 131st MP Detachment was transferred from Kaiserslautern to Kriegsfeld and assigned to the 558th MP Co. In reality, this detachment was the old Munsan-ni section that was allotted in 1951 but never assigned personnel following the company reactivation in Germany. The additional personnel included with the assigned detachment allowed the CO of the 558th to institute a new K-9 unit.

By 1975, the K-9 section at North Point was operational and aided with the increased need for security and the detection of potential terrorist threats. The K-9 troopers assisted with vehicle searches, package checks and the patrol of the perimeter fence as well as the weapons storage area. The 131 MP Detachment retained its distinct unit number until 1977 when it was deactivated and absorbed into the 558th MP Company.

Also, the Kriegsfeld units abandoned the “static” (stationary) defense mode in the 1970’s. The change was instituted throughout the command and required that all units initiate full-field combat support activation exercises. These exercises required that the 619th and 558th move to a designated field site and set-up a nuclear weapons depot capable of supporting artillery and missile battalions. The famous “Reforger” exercises were one of the series of maneuvers that the 558th and the 619th participated in.

The post section of the base was also improved with either the construction of new facilities or the renovation of existing ones. A third barracks along with numerous other support buildings were constructed. A bowling alley and a new educational center were also added during the renovation process. The gymnasium was remodeled and enlarged. Moreover, a daily bus service to Kaiserslautern, Sembach, Ramstein, Miesau and Worms was instituted at about the same time.

The type of nuclear weapons that North Point stored and maintained also changed during this time period. By 1978, the site was processing nuclear artillery rounds only. Gone were the missile hulks, their hardware and warheads. Those weapons were transferred to either other sites or other Ordnance companies in a general re-alignment of weapons facilities that occurred throughout Germany in 1974.

Inner Perimeter,
approx. 1980.

The new towers were constructed during the renovations of 1976 - 1980. They were moved inside the fence-lines where the patrol road was also re-located. The new towers also had searchlights and bullet proof glass.

Photograph
courtesy of Mike Yurk



The MP work schedules were constantly being changed in an effort to improve morale. As new commanders came and went, they experimented with different work cycles and/or hours in an effort to both efficiently use available manpower and to improve working conditions. In the long run, the changes had little effect on the monotonous routine.

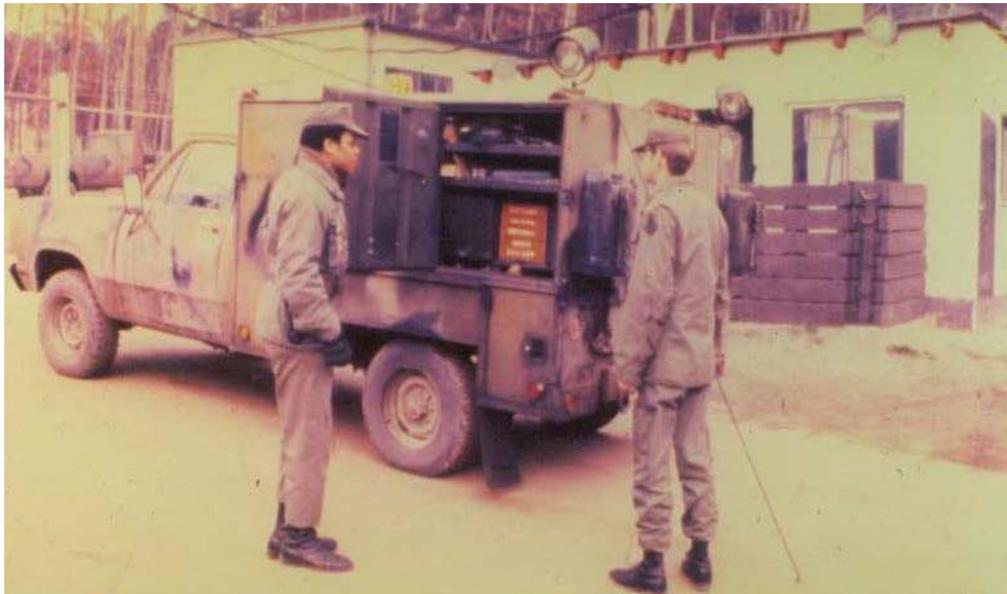
Another debilitating factor for the MP's was that they suffered from a feeling of subservience to the ordnance staff. It was, to a large extent, a truism and nothing either could or would be done about it. Allied with the subordinate standing, the MP's were never told exactly what they were doing and why it was important. There was an over-emphasis placed upon "security" for fear that someone would talk about what went on at North Point. However, most if not all the soldiers at Kriegsfeld knew exactly what was at the depot and what they were guarding the facility for.

By the mid 1970's, a "Fog-Guard" had been instituted at North Point to assist the MP's when they could not clearly observe the site. When fog would limit visibility, alerts were sounded from the site siren and off-duty personnel (both 558th and the 619th) from the barracks would have to work guarding both the perimeter and the bunkers until weather conditions improved. The 619th personnel were generally posted in front of the bunker doors; dressed in civilian clothes they were armed with M-16's. The duty became so overwhelming for the troops who were required to live on post that they would "get thru the gate" by 0430 before any alert was usually sounded. This practice resulted in insufficient numbers of personnel available to accomplish the mission. Eventually, Major Lewis ordered a duty roster initiated requiring one-half of the Ordnance Co. to remain on post during the weekends.



North Point, circa 1980. - MP's from the Secondary Alert Team (SAT) exit the Site Security Center (SSCC) for an alert response somewhere within the confines of the inner perimeter.

Photograph courtesy of Mike Yurk



Inner Perimeter access gate, approx. 1980.

MP's inspect a vehicle about to enter the inner perimeter through the access gate.

Photograph courtesy of Mike Yurk

The company went co-ed in 1976.¹⁴⁷ The first female MP's graduated from Fort Gordon in late 1973 and by 1978 women were assigned to the 558th headquarters platoon. By 1980, all the platoons at Kriegsfeld had women MP's assigned to them and the Company Commander was a woman.¹⁴⁸ Special arrangements were undertaken to integrate women into the workforce. Separate and "off-limits" areas had to be created to house and assimilate female MP's into the unit. These separate facilities notwithstanding, many marriages between the MP's of North Point were the result of women working at the site.

However, for most soldiers, either enlistee or the earlier draftee, the real problem was always boredom and monotony. What seemed like endless duty as a tower guard was debilitating. Many professional and well-qualified soldiers left both the Corps and the Army after the experience. The re-enlistment rate for E-4 and below became almost non-existent. By the mid to late 1980's, the drug problem at North Point became so severe that a drug screening facility was set up on-site.



Kriegsfeld Depot, circa, 1980

MP's assemble outside the MP Barracks awaiting assignment. Between the platoon (foreground) and the MP barracks (background) is the 619th Motor Pool parking lot. The annex built on each end of the barracks building is the last four windows on each end.

Photograph courtesy of Mike Yurk

Nonetheless, the MP's of North Point found time to aid and support the local population. Many MP's from North Point either volunteered at, or financially supported, the local orphanage. Many soldiers took German children on local day trips and served as surrogate fathers. In addition, the troopers of North Point supported and assisted other community efforts and functions such as the local Boy Scout Troop, Fire Departments, Forest Rangers as well as a host of other social organizations. Finally, as occupation forces have done throughout the ages, many MP's married local residents and returned to the US with their brides.

¹⁴⁷ M. Yurk, written narrative, Hudson, WI. Feb.2002.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Although duty as a security guard was considered by many as the worst assignment the Corps, both Officers and Enlisted Men still speak, even today, both respectfully if not affectionately of their time with the 558th MP Company at Kriegsfeld. For example, Kevin Richardson, now a Police Lieutenant in Massachusetts served there from 1974-75. He reported that assignment to a security company was one of the toughest jobs in the Corps. The rewards were few and duty always seemed to be at an isolated outpost. In addition, Mr. T. Bell, now a State Trooper in Pennsylvania reported his time with the third platoon was the worst duty but the best time of his life.¹⁴⁹

The security of the Kriegsfeld Depot, and many facilities like it, remained a vital and necessary function of the MP's assigned to Europe. Under the watchful eyes and ears of the individuals tasked with providing site security, the special weapons and their delivery systems remained both secret and controlled. Although at the time, the guards manning the towers knew very little about the contribution they were making or of the overall strategic ramification of their assignment, to no small measure they were guardians of the free world.

And so it went. Day after day; year after year. The decades rolled by and MP's came and went. Time marched on and the confrontation between East and West played-out on the frontier of a divided Germany. Throughout the decades of the Cold War, the troopers of the 558th Military Police Company continued manning the towers at North Point. Newer, more deadly warheads and missiles also came and went. Enough nuclear material probably passed through the depot to blow the world apart several times over. But in all those years, not a single incursion or attack was perpetrated against the facility. The 558th had done its job.

Then one day, the Cold War began to melt.

THE MELT DOWN

DE-ACTIVATION

The Cold War actually ended without the feared Armageddon.¹⁵⁰ The roots of its demise began when the citizens of the European countries of NATO began to reject the philosophy of "mutually assured destruction". They rightfully understood that European nations would suffer annihilation in any conflict on the continent. The NATO forces as well as the Warsaw Pact heard the pleas for disarmament. A rapid succession of events then occurred.

In 1987 negotiations between the United States and European countries, including the USSR, resulted in the *Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Reduction Treaty* (INF). This treaty, along with a Presidential Order, required the removal of all US Army nuclear weapons from Europe by 1992. The INF Treaty was followed-up with the 1989 *Conventional Forces Europe Reduction Treaty*.

Then, on November 9th, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell and German reunification occurred the following year. The Soviet Union began to disintegrate in 1990 and the Warsaw Pact dissolved in July of 1991.

¹⁴⁹ T. Bell, interview reduced to written record, Pennsylvania, Dec. 17, 2001

¹⁵⁰ Although many texts report that the Cold War was "won without a shot being fired", this is not correct. In fact, many shots were fired. For those who served in NATO during those turbulent times know, many casualties resulted from the confrontation between East and West, especially in Berlin.

President George Bush announced the unilateral nuclear cuts on Sept. 27, 1991. President Mikail Gorbachev announced the same on Oct. 5 1991.

In the end, the INF treaty became the death knell for both the ordnance units that held the nuclear weapons and the MP units that guarded them.¹⁵¹

The “atomic army” was coming home.

Slowly throughout 1990 and 1991, the nuclear weapons were removed from North Point. All nuclear material was moved to Muenster Diberg where the 6th MP Co. assumed security for the weapons. From there the warheads were moved out of Europe and eventually to facilities of the United States where “verifiable” destruction was initiated.¹⁵² The removal phase of the nuclear weapons stockpile from North Point, as well as many other munition depots of the 59th Ordnance, was appropriately designated as “*Operation Silent Echo*”.

Throughout the summer of 1991 rumors of closure had circulated the Kriegsfeld depot. The commanders consistently told the soldiers at North Point that the facility and units would remain in place. However, rumors from Army contacts located in the US told the troops otherwise. In addition, the soldiers at North Point began noticing that all the weapons were leaving the site and nothing was being shipped in. In late 1991, an official announcement of a de-activation and pending closure was made.

The 558th Military Police Company would close the book on another chapter of Army service.

On November 1, 1991, the 558th Military Police Company cased its colors and deactivated at the Kriegsfeld facility. There was an official ceremony on site. A closing ceremony program had been printed and distributed to personnel. Numerous Army officials and local dignitaries were present for the official closing. The company flag, awards, citations and streamers were packed in an Army shipping crate and eventually moved to the Unit Property warehouse at Anniston Army Depot, Fort McClellan, Alabama. There, they await a day that the 558th may once again be called upon to serve the country.

¹⁵¹ Newer, more advanced weapons systems such as cruise missiles, Polaris submarines and Stealth bombers actually made most land based systems in Europe obsolete.

¹⁵² The 59th Ordnance Brigade was de-activated and dis-banded in Germany in June of 1992 when it completed the task of removing all of its nuclear weapons from Europe. (See footnote No.117) Missile hulks were shipped to the United States and used for target practice. The removal of chemical weapons had been completed by Sept. 1990 under “*Operation Golden Python*”, also known as “*Operation Steel Box*.” These munitions were eventually sent to Johnson Atoll (Pacific) for destruction.

Chapter VI

Epilogue

The 558th Military Police Company has been inactive now for more than a decade. It is doubtful that the unit will ever be called back to active service. Considering budget restraints, drawdowns and cutbacks, the MP Corps, like all of the military, has been forced to do more with less. However, the company lives on in the memory of the thousands of individual members who served in the 558th and made up the organization. Sadly, as the ravages of time take its toll, that memory too will eventually fade. Thankfully, the unit will live on in both the recorded history as well as the artifacts located in places such as the Center for Military History, the MP Museum and the Military History Institute.

Today, very little infrastructure survives to commemorate where the 558th M.P. Company took up duty station. The intervening years have erased a large portion of both the physical facilities as well as the early documented history of the organization. Facilities have suffered the ravages of both the elements and renovation. Documentation suffers from house cleaning, purges and neglect.

Fort Custer, which created and trained more than a thousand MP units during World War II, has been drastically reduced in size. Although still an Army post, it serves today as a National Guard/ Reserve training ground. The Provost Marshal School and its attendant training facility have been erased from the scene. Both camp newspapers, the *NEWS* and the *TIMES* have some, but not all, issues preserved on microfilm.

Camp Como no longer exists. It was abandoned when the last POW was repatriated in 1946. The site remained dormant for many years until the Corps of Engineers dismantled it in the 1960's. Today, the internment facility is an overgrown brush field criss-crossed with dirt fire roads. The disposition of property title is unknown. However, it is listed as an EPA hazardous waste site.

A lengthy search failed to locate any copies of the Camp Como newspapers.

The bases in the Philippines have been returned to the government of the Islands. The city of Tacloban has expanded immensely over the years. The airfield is now ocean front condos. A memorial located on the beach commemorates MacArthur's famous return to the Philippines in 1944. Cavite City and Sangley Point were both abandoned by US Forces in 1972. The original Bilibid Prison building still stands today but the New Bilibid Prison complex at Muntlupa was leveled after the war. A new correctional facility was constructed in its place many years later.

The Eighth Army Headquarters still occupies Yongsan, Korea and the 728th MP Battalion is still stationed nearby. Most personnel of the 728th MP's are oblivious to their heritage some 50 years removed. The 142nd MP Company occupies Yongsan, the site once home to the 558th.

The Kriegsfeld depot was closed when the 59th Ordnance de-activated in Germany in 1992. The base was turned over to the “new” German government and some plans had been developed to turn the site into a low-income housing project. At some point in the 1990’s the bunkers at North Point were used by a private business to store fireworks. On occasion, the Kriegsfeld facility was used as an intermittent training facility for US Army personnel who remained closeby. However, statutory and treaty requirements eventually ended that practice. As of this writing, the site is, on occasion, used by the Bundeswehr (Germany military) for training exercises. Aside from this somewhat sporadic use, the site remains vacant.

The MP’s who served with the 558th left a legacy of goodwill behind them. All over the world they protected soldiers and facilities, helped civilians, assisted both refugees and displaced persons, aided children, guarded prisoners and supported freedom. They functioned as ambassadors of good will and toiled as the guardians of democracy. In no small measure they played an integral part in winning the Cold War. The unit established a solid reputation for professionalism and integrity. The collection of awards and campaign credits received by the unit needs no explanation.

The personnel who served with the 558th in Korea speak very highly of their experience and the time they spent there. Most personnel were well aware of the significance of their contribution and proud of the opportunity that they had to serve their country and represent the US in a foreign land. The Korean people, even today, write newspaper editorials that speak of the commendable service the Military Police Corps provided the nation during the war.

North Point’s reputation fared far less. Most soldiers reported assignment there as the worst possible duty. Many left either the Corps or the Army after that experience. It was a preventable loss. Commanders, who certainly recognized the problems, could have implemented practices to alleviate monotonous working conditions. Appropriate rewards, appreciation, contribution acknowledgement and variable assignments would have helped to retain qualified individuals. Sadly, division and theater commanders could have instituted a rotation practice between the security companies and the law enforcement units thus giving the “tower guards” a broad base of both knowledge and experience. As it were, most MP’s assigned to security units spent an eighteen month tour in a tower. They then left the Corps, and in many instances the Army, never to experience what some of us considered the finest assignment available.

Detractors notwithstanding, the people who served at Kriegsfeld were proud of the service that they rendered. Adversity creates the strongest of human bonds – and without exemption the bonds formed between the MP’s while at North Point have lasted a lifetime. The soldiers take pride in knowing that in all those years no one ever got through the fence of the 558th.

APPENDIX A

Chapter 14*

MILITARY POLICE ESCORT GUARD COMPANY

175. MISSION. The mission of the military police escort guard company is to provide a guard force for prisoners of war, both at a prisoner of war inclosure or camp and during transfer to and between collecting points, ports, camps and inclosures.

176. ORGANIZATION. The military police escort guard company is organized in accordance with Table of Organization and Equipment No. 19-47. The company is organized into a company headquarters and four escort guard sections. The company normally is capable of providing escort and guard for 1000 prisoners of war.

177. ASSIGNMENT. Military police escort guard companies may be attached to higher headquarters of a theater of operations and to service commands, defense commands, and ports of embarkation of the zone of the interior. The duties performed by the company depend upon the type of headquarters to which it is attached.

178. DUTIES WHEN ATTACHED TO AN ARMY OR SEPARATE CORPS. One or more military police escort guard companies may be attached to a field army in a theater of operations, or to a corps when it is operating independently. Such companies operate at the army or corps prisoner of war inclosure. Those prisoners who are to be transferred from the army or corps prisoner of war inclosure to the zone of the interior are transported to the port of embarkation under a guard furnished by the escort guard company. At the port of embarkation, the prisoners are turned over to the port commander for shipment to the zone of the interior. (See ch. 11)

179. DUTIES WHEN ATTACHED TO A SERVICE COMMAND, DEFENSE COMMAND, OR PORT OF EMBARKATION. a. Military police escort guard companies attached to a service command, defense command, or port of embarkation are assigned either to a prisoner of war camp, to a prisoner of war project, or employed to guard prisoners of war being transported to or between camps on work projects.

- b. Companies assigned to a prisoner of war camp perform the following duties:
- (1) Guard prisoners within the camp.
 - (2) Furnish guard details for prisoners working outside the camp.
 - (3) Furnish guard details for prisoners of war being transferred from one prisoner of war camp to another.

**War Department Basic Field Manual FM 19-5, War Department 14 June 1944*