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The Legend of Sgt. Gerszewski

The following information was found on the Internet and the I have reproduced it as closely as possible. All of the names of the various persons mentioned are present, as well as the name of the author are credited.

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My primary intention in presenting this document is to honor Sgt. Adolph Gerszewski, who was killed in action in Heilbronn, Germany in the closing times of WWII. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, and was honored by naming a Kaserne on the outskirts of Karlsruhe, in Knielingen, Germany called “Gerszewski Barracks”.

Many of us, upon arrival in Germany, were first stationed at Gerszewski Barracks until our Nike Sites were ready for occupancy. The information in this document puts a human face to a barracks, which was just a duty station for many, and helps provide a closure.

This document also states that a painting of Adolph Gerszewski was donated to Knielingen Art Museum after the close and demolition of the Barracks. The painting was originally given to the Kaserne by a Gerszewski family member. Unfortunately, upon contacting the museum, I was told there is no record of them having the artwork. I find it to be distressing and perplexing that a professional institution would have such a lax processes in the accountability of its possessions... It is a museum

This history is just a brief snapshot of the times of Gerszewski Barracks, both good and bad, and I hope all will find it interesting, as we honor the man.





In Sacred Memory of
SGT. ADOLPH GERSZEWSKI

Born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, April 5, 1912

Killed in Action at Heilbronn, Germany

50 YEARS AGO TODAY

Ade Gerszewski was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action against the enemy. In tribute to his heroic deeds, the United States Army Base in Karlsruhe, West Germany was named in his honor. He is the only North Dakotan for whom a United States Military Installation is named,

Gerszewski Barracks

Home of Combat Equipment Battalion - East "Project Reformer"
Home of 249th Engineer Combat Battalion - Heavy "The Black Lions"
Home of the 18th Engineer Brigade

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Gerszewski Barracks History

By: Bruce Christman

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Black Hawk Kaserne

June 5, 1945: In the agreements of the allied USA, Soviet Union, Great Britain and France, Germany is divided by zones of occupation. Karlsruhe lies in the American zone.

Rhein Kaserne was code named "BlackHawk" kaserne by the Americans because a tank battalion known as the Black Hawks moved in from Italy to occupy it.

The Black Hawks were eventually redesignated as Troop A, 1st Constabulary Squadron, an element of the 15th Constabulary Regiment. They were responsible for policing a large sector around Karlsruhe.

In the middle of June: Renaming of roads, places and schools begins.

July: The Americans seize 2000 dwellings for the accommodation of the officer corps and their staffs.

7 July: The French pull out of Karlsruhe. It is handed over to the Americans.

8 July: In accordance with the allied zone agreement US armed forces occupy the city.

22 July: In Blackhawk Kaserne (Rhein Kaserne) the first refugees, 360 Danube swabia from Yugoslavia, arrive.

Gerszewski Barracks

September 1945: Blackhawk Kaserne was renamed for Sgt Gerszewski and became known from then on as Gerszewski Barracks.

THE LEGEND OF SGT GERSZEWSKI

By CPT M.K. MAUFFRAY, AIC Gerszewski Kaserne (249th Engineer Battalion)

Awarded the Silver Star

On 9 April 1945, Sergeant Adolph C. Gerszewski was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action.

SGT. Gerszewski, cognizant of the great danger to his men when the enemy had infiltrated their position, made a reconnaissance, discovered the enemy's positions, and engaged in a firefight. He killed five Germans, wounded three, and the remainder were driven from their entrenchments. He was killed later, attempting to aid a casualty.

His Platoon & Regiment They received the meritorious unit citation for battle honors for outstanding accomplishment in combat during the period 5 April 1945 to 11 April 1945, in the vicinity of Heilbronn, Germany.

The unit citation states that:

Crossing the Neckar River by assault boat under heavy fire, the battalion secured a bridgehead in the face of unyielding resistance and inaugurated its block-by-block, house-by-house, and even room-by-room conquest of the key rail city of Heilbronn.

Deadly cross-fire from automatic weapons emplaced in rubble heaps and cellars of ruined buildings slowed the attack; snipers in countless vantage points constantly harassed our troops; and thickly wooded hills on three sides afforded the enemy perfect observation for the direction of all types of artillery fire.

Yet despite fanatical resistance, the Battalion continued its implacable advance, repulsing repeated tank-infantry counter attacks and destroying group after group of infiltrating enemy infantry. Supporting armor and tank destroyers were sped across the river by a hastily installed pontoon bridge, which was as quickly demolished by artillery fire; casualties were evacuated and supplies brought forward by ferry under continuous shelling; and on 11 April, after seven days of the most savagely-prosecuted fighting on the entire Western front, the Battalion virtually completed the capture of the city, thus by the individual bravery of its members and the esprit de corps of the organization reflecting the highest tradition of the military service.

Gerszewski Barracks Named To Honor SGT Gerszewski

SGT. Gerszewski's individual bravery in the battle for Heilbronn earned him the Silver Star Medal.

During the Post-World War II period, his Commander named the major installations in central Germany after the Silver Star Medal Awardees from his unit. Thus the former Rhein Kaserne, initially constructed as three separate Kasernes in 1936 and occupied by the 35th Pioneer Battalion of the German Wehrmacht from 1939 to 1945, was renamed to Gerszewski Kaserne.

Dedication And Research Credit Thanks to the dedication and research of Dr. John Hoffman, D.C., a close relative of SGT. Gerszewski, the legend lives on of SGT. Gerszewski's individual bravery in World War II.

The photographs of Sergeant Gerszewski's Platoon Behind the Front Lines, in March 1945.

END

Occupation and Rebuilding

On July 22, the first refugees were moved to the kaserne from Danube-Swabia and Yugoslavia. Apparently they worked as laborers for rebuilding the area.

An Anti Aircraft Artillery unit was also at the kaserne in 1945. A German named Herb Dinkle was stationed there and operated the AAA that protected the bridge over the Rhein River.

In 1946 the Black Hawks were reorganized and redesignated as Troop A, 1st Constabulary Squadron. They were part of the 15th Constabulary Regiment also located on the kaserne. They were responsible for policing a large area around Karlsruhe. The Black Hawks remained at Gerszewski Barracks until 1948.

The 72nd Heavy Tank Battalion was also stationed at Gerszewski Barracks. In 1949 the 72nd was moved from Gerszewski Barracks to Fort Lewis, Washington.

The evidence shows that Gerszewski Barracks was very involved in the early occupation and rebuilding activities in Karlsruhe after World War II.

The Cold War:

Transition from Occupation to Defense

In the 1950s there was a transition from occupation of western Germany to the defense of Western Europe as the Cold War began. What happened at Gerszewski in the 1950s reflected the changes.

The 12th AAA (AW) Group arrived in Bremerhaven on November 25, 1950. They were stationed at Gerszewski Barracks until at least 1953.

The 73rd AAA Battalion was apparently part of the 12th AAA Group. The 73rd occupied the southwest corner of the kaserne.

The German Labor Service occupied at least one barracks in the southeast corner of the kaserne.

In the early 1950s, troop morale was becoming a problem because of the Korean War, racial integration, and the emerging Cold War. For the first time black and white soldiers had to live together and work together in the same units. The racial integration caused tension between black and white soldiers, and not winning a decisive victory in Korea added to the low morale of the soldiers.

After the Korean War hostilities ended, a new program called "Operation Gyroscope" began as part of a

worldwide restructuring of the army. One of the battalions that moved from Korea to Germany during that time was the 79th Engineer Battalion; once called the “Best Engineer Battalion in the Far East” by General Mark Clark.

When the 79th Engineer Battalion got to Neureut Kaserne in February 1955, the kaserne had been newly renovated. One of the soldiers named Bruce Gearhart said he could “Smell the new paint and stucco”. He said the 79th would go from Neureut Kaserne to Gerszewski Barracks to participate in large parades.

Gearhart said he did not know specifically what went on at Gerszewski Barracks, but he remembered hearing a rumor that it was a headquarters for “Engineer” units. His recollection of the rumor is consistent with the evolution of labor service units becoming engineer units like the 6970th Engineers. However, the rumor might also have been in reference to the German Pioneers of Rhein Kaserne in World War II.

For the entire decade of the 1950s, Gerszewski Barracks was the home of Anti Aircraft Artillery units and Labor Service “Engineers” for the rebuilding and defense of the area.

Cold War Missile Site

The next important change was in 1956 with a weapon upgrade to the Nike-Ajax Missile.

In 1957 a missile site was constructed at Gerszewski Barracks and operated by the 73rd AAA. The 79th Engineer Battalion probably built the site at Gerszewski Barracks. They had three companies building Nike missile sites. The History of the 79th Engineer Battalion says that Company-A completed a Nike missile site in “Karlsruhe” probably meaning Gerszewski Barracks.

In 1960, the army was upgrading missiles again. This time the upgrade was from Nike-Ajax missiles to Nike-Herc missiles.

In 1961 the missile base at Gerszewski Barracks was deactivated and a new Nike-Herc base was opened in Pforzheim.

Triple-A to Medical Units

From 1961 to 1963 the AAA units stationed at the kaserne were replaced by several medical units in the south end of the kaserne.

There was also a major finance detachment in the south end building with a giant safe containing millions of dollars. Dr. Don Morton recalls that he had to certify the burning of 8-million dollars in US Script that had been shipped to Gerszewski Barracks from Lybia.

Floris Wood was stationed at the kaserne with the 556th Medical Company. He recalls that from 1961-63 Gerszewski Barracks was home to Headquarters Company of the 56th Medical Battalion along with two ambulance battalions and a field hospital.

“It seems that some of the units of the 56th were brought in from other units that were disbanded or sent home. Our own company was nearly empty when I arrived.

All the guys that trained as medics with me in Ft. Sam Houston came to Europe with me and 80% came to the 56th Med Bn.

So you can see that the unit was nearly empty when we came.

There were so many new guys that I do not even remember any of the old guys except a few mechanics.” - Floris Wood

Floris said that the 56th Medical Battalion had been stationed at Wiley Barracks in 1958-59. Therefore, apparently they had been moved from there to Gerszewski Barracks.

Floris recalls a signal unit in the north end of the kaserne near the front gate with some engineers. He also recalls German Labor Service living in barracks along the west wall who he says were East Europeans that were mostly middle aged and had lived at the kaserne since the end of World War II.

“ I don’t know what other outfits were experiencing at the time but the 56th was badly undermanned and badly equipped. Moral was low and guys were getting into a lot of trouble.

We did get new ambulances sometime when I was over there but they were exactly like the WWII vintage vehicles we had been driving . . . just newer.

Some of our old ones had patches on them where there had been bullet holes from WWII.” - Floris Wood

The dispensary at Gerszewski Barracks was operated by the 761st Medical Detachment.

Eugene Vuillemot was stationed with the engineer unit in the north end of the kaserne. It was the 557th Engineer Company. He recalls that their work consisted of mostly German-American relation jobs, and building roads and a tank-training course in Grafenwoehr.

A Decade of Darkness

On November 22, 1963 President Kennedy was assassinated and America descended into a period of darkness that lasted for more than a decade. The soldiers at Gerszewski Barracks reflected how the social unrest in America affected the military in Germany.

In 1965, the 249th Engineer Battalion (Construction) moved to Gerszewski Barracks from France. For the next 26 years they remained at Gerszewski Barracks in the north end of the kaserne.

By 1967 the kaserne also became a major ammunition storage base run by the Combat Equipment Battalion East, or CEBE.

In 1968, veterans of the 249th recall a place they called “Moms” where the soldiers went to get breakfast. “Moms” was operated by a German woman in her house. She lived in the neighborhood across from the front gate. There was also a Schnell Imbiss (Roadside Snackbar) inside the kaserne near the front gate that was operated by another German woman who married an American soldier.

In 1968 the Finance Detachment had over 100-million dollars in the vault. They shipped money all over Europe and to the Middle East. Major George Hunsaker (retired) recalls the story of a night when 35-million dollars was flown to the kaserne from Frankfurt in five helicopters.

Drug use and racial tension among the soldiers began to become a serious problem.

In 1968 two white brothers got in a fight with some black soldiers in a local Knielingen bar. After chasing one of the black soldiers back to the kaserne the white brothers finally caught him and killed him with a knife in the Parade Field. Here is the recollection from a eyewitness:

“The twin brothers both were UPs (unit police) they were gate guards at the front gate. They had been giving a lot of crap to these black guys when they tried to leave or return.

It was a knife that the one brother used. It belonged to a member of the 77th HEM co. that I belonged to. I used to keep it for him when the Co. had an inspection since I didn’t have to stand for inspection. It was a flip blade that looked like a switch blade. The blade was about six inches long.

It all happened at the A-Bar (I was only there once, not the place I liked to be) The black guys had razor blades sewn in to the bills of there caps, and they started by cutting the one brother.

The other brother went nuts and started stabbing the blacks. I think on in the building and the 2nd one just outside. Then he chased the other one up the street along side the parade grounds and stabbed him in the back.

Melvin Beli used my office to interview witnesses. The brother was tried in Mannheim and Beli got him off. I have an article from our local paper somewhere that my uncle sent to me about the case.

Sgt. Eckhardt was right about the brothers. They were in trouble most of the time. Back in 67-70 the UPs and the fire brigade was were those people were sent.” - Jim Downs

A veteran of the 249th Engineer Battalion recalls an old German bunker and tunnels between the buildings:

“I remember the morning sweep of the long halls while roll call was just outside in those calm summer mornings; third floor; I see my windows from those air shots; right next to the stairwell. I used to go across the hall to Fussy’s room and look down to see the unlucky stiff doing pots-and-pans in the mess hall; I used to pay 10 bucks so it wasn’t me. I don’t remember those large white warehouses in the motorpool because they were not there; but, I do remember the heavy huge blasted bunker in the middle of the park. If you should remember “KOO-KOO” you are most cool

One of the first things that really lites up my wonder is about the very large concrete bunker in the motor park. Right past the 249th mess hall, all the Gerszewski battalion’s motors were lined up in order of there units; the 249th being last and farthest away. From looking at the Aerial shots one of the first things I noticed was no trucks in the lot. And right in the middle of the parking lot was this huge bunker, blasted with, I could tell, placed charges and a lot of them, that basicly, just brought the roof down. The half inch rebar was sticking up out of the concrete all over the broken side walls with 70% of the joint of wall and roof still intact. Looking at the aerial photo I’m sure that the building shown in the motorpark was not there; the best I can tell that is where the bunker was.

And yes there were tunnels. Right at the bottom of the steps; turn right through the door; CO-D orderly room, second office, was a diamond plate square plate door that led to the second floor sub-basement welded shut. It supposed to lead to the bunker. If anyone went out the rear gate, across and through the houses and in the field they would have seen four smaller pillboxs with zig-zag walling that led to the fighting positions; steel plate fixed in the inner wall right under the gun slits with the clamps still in place to hold the footplates of the tripod. And the entrenchments of the Anti-Aircraft Guns.

And my favorite,”KOO-KOO” -- AAHHH ALL MY faithfuls. We could and would identify one another by chimming the little koo-koo from “Time Has Come Today” by the Chamber Brothers. If you don’t know it, you just don’t know??? “ - Gerald Kearns

By the early 1970s drug use and racism was almost out of control. The period from 1968-1974 was the lowest point for morale in the history of the American military. The leadership was corrupted by self-interest, distrust for each other, and embedded relationships with congress.

“In April, 1970, an organization of racist lifers burned a KKK-style cross at an army base in Karlsruhe, Germany (Rheinland Kaserne, Ettlingen). On April 11, rebellious anti-racist soldiers took the offensive. Black and white GI’s of the 78th Engineers Battalion launched a coordinated,

pre-planned attack on the highly sensitive Atomic Demolition Maintenance Section. Using Molotov cocktails and pickaxes, they decommissioned 23 trucks and burnt the headquarters of the commanding and executive officers to the ground.” - <http://www.plp.org/vietnam/vietsuppl1200.html>

In 1971 the state of the Army reached a distressingly low level. The entire army was wracked by widespread drug use, racial violence, desertion, AWOL, and outright refusal to follow orders, punctuated in some cases by troops assaulting officers. Gerszewski Barracks was no exception.

Perhaps the Army's greatest problem during that time was the negative civilian reaction to the inability to gain a military victory in Vietnam. The strain that the war placed on the nation led to increasing hostility toward the military, particularly toward the Army.

In 1971 the medical units in the south end of Gerszewski Barracks were relocated.

“ I think the 56th (Medical Battalion) or parts of it went to Crailsheim after leaving Knielingen. Later on to Fort Dix. Later to Fort Ord, then to Fort Bragg. I saw somewhere a reference recently to the 56th near Basra in Iraq.” - Floris Wood

The 79th Engineer Battalion moved to the south end of Gerszewski barracks from Wiley Barracks in Neu Ulm. The battalion was feeling the strain of the Vietnam draw-down.

My platoon in Berchtesgaden had an average age of 19; at one point, none of the NCO's had a construction background. I had thought the chronic shortage of experienced NCO's was the biggest problem faced by the 79th. - LT Johnathan Ridgeway

In those days, when soldiers got out of the army they just threw their uniforms in the first dumpster they saw, instead of proudly wearing the uniform home. One soldier from the 79th Engineer Battalion recalls that the dumpsters at Fort Dix, New Jersey, overflowed with the uniforms of disillusioned soldiers.

The former commanding officer of the 79th Engineer Battalion has the following recollection:

“It's been just about 30 years since I relinquished command of the 79th Engr Bn but many of my memories of that period are quite clear. In June 1970, I assumed command of a sister battalion, the 94th in Nelligen. There we experienced severe racial discord which led to some riots (not dissimilar to events occurring widely in the civilian sector in the US) and ultimately led to my re-assignment to the 79th Bn and the former CO of the 79th going to the 94th. This switch in commanders occurred in Sept 1970 and I remained with the 79th until rotation to CONUS in Dec 1971.

The 79th was then based at Neu Ulm and we enjoyed constructing a wide variety of small projects throughout Germany. I can recall some of them, like a tank range at Grafenwohr, a pre-fab school classroom in Bonn, a ski lift at Berchtesgaden, the clean-up of the famous Casa Carioca Night Club-on-Ice in Garmisch after it had been destroyed by fire, a paving project at an airbase outside of Ankara, Turkey (we airlifted a platoon-sized unit with all equipment for that one). We squeezed in some field maneuver training but mainly were very busy building things. The troops were reasonably happy, I guess, because they were busy but there was a strong under-current of unrest throughout the Army due to racial and drug problems and the strong anti-war, anti-government attitudes which were prevalent amongst most of the younger (18-25) US population.

In about June 1971, the 79th was ordered to relocate from Neu Ulm to Karlsruhe. This was a major task, not in moving the TO&E Bn but because of all the families which had to be uprooted from their quarters at one time and get them re-settled in Karlsruhe. It caused a lot of disruption in normal activities but in a couple of months we were back in the groove at Karlsruhe.

I look back upon my time with the 79thBn with great fondness because of the fine officers and

NCO's who performed so very well. However, it was a time of great upheaval in the Army. Time-tested concepts of chain-of-command were strained as we sought to deal with problems of race relations and drug abuse. We, the unit leaders, had virtually no real in-sights how to deal with these twin scourges; we simply adapted as best we could. It was a difficult time for the Army and the USA." - LTC Eugene Stokes

For the next 24 years the 79th Engineer Battalion and the 249th Engineer Battalion were the dominant units at Gerszewski Barracks. The 249th was located in the north end of the kaserne. The 79th was located in the south end of the kaserne. The facility also continued to be a major storage facility for ammunition and equipment for "Reforger".

Both engineer battalions from Gerszewski Barracks had construction projects all over Germany. Some jobs lasted for several months. From 1972-1974 the 79th Engineer Battalion's big projects were located in Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels.

In response to the observation that the NCOs were not very visible on the jobsite, I can only recall that there were not many there in the first place.

In the post-Vietnam draw-down, the Army was having a hard time convincing career soldiers that they should stay in, especially after twenty years. Europe came lower in priority than Asian assignments, or apparently than stateside duty for that matter.

B Company had First Sergeant Givens, a number of earthmoving NCOs, and several experienced vertical construction leaders like 1st Platoon's SFC Crawford out on the line. They were good NCOs, but they were spread plenty thin.

In general, things got done because some special young fellows like Mike Bridge and Gary Burdett got picked to be acting NCOs.

They took the challenge, and stepped up and got more done with fewer resources than anyone could reasonably have expected of them. - LT John McConaghy

In 1973 the 79th Engineer's B-Company had a race riot on the 4th of July in Grafenwoehr. Here is a funny recollection of the 79th in Grafenwoehr that reveals some of the sobering realities of life in the army in those days; like smoking dope with officers. This only touches the hard truth of those times. I know because I was there and much of the following is talking about me.

1. You drove the 3/4-ton truck over the cliff after narrowly missing the old man and destroying his apple cart. I only had 21 days left in the army and you almost killed Mark and I;
2. You showed up the first day in the 79th with lumps on your head from the incident with the German Police the night before. (I recall something about you and your friends moving VWs into the middle of the street);
3. Tompkins lost the tire with Mark and I and I smashed his head against the door of my bus. Mark wanted me to hit him, but I thought it would be more humanitarian to smash his head against the door;
4. Tompkins drove the Captain's jeep, with the Captain in the jeep, off the road and into a ditch. The Captain then drove him to a hospital where they concluded that Tompkins had to be on drugs. We knew that was not true, he was just a idiot;
5. Mark and I rescued Tompkins when he let a 2 1/2 ton truck, which he had been driving, roll on

his foot and the front tire was resting on his foot;

6. Your incident with the knife robbery happened in the Graf Disco and we went out to get the machetes in the van to even the score, but those guys were gone when we got back;

7. Were you there in Graf when we destroyed the office furniture and blamed it on the medics, Nord and Kerry? As I recall, we had a moped and tried to drive it through the doorways, but our coordination was impaired by wine and Mandrax. That led to the officers barring all of us from the office. However, Shelly was too smart for them and he made the wall partition flexible so we could get into the office to use the phone;

8. Remember the huge bonfire that you and Mark set and the MPs came and watched it burn? (That was the bar we operated in our barracks. The battalion XO, Major Thomas, personally stopped by, had a few beers with us, and then told us to rip it out. So the next day we ripped it out and burned it. I guess the fire got too big.)

9. Then there was my classic move of attempting to get justice for the American Indian from Sgt. Laidlaw's platoon by going into a barracks of black guys, with Laidlaw, while drunk, to demand that they produce the black guy, I think his name was Bailey. I received a black eye, broken molar, and lost my front tooth cap for my effort. Why didn't Mark go with me on that move? Maybe he wasn't as drunk as me;

10. Another classic on the Tompkins' saga was the time when he got lost in the woods and he was not more than 30 yards away from us. That was the time we used the cigars to ward off those damn horse flies;

11. Shelly was a classic. They gave him to us because he was always getting drunk on the Karlsruhe base (Gerszewski) and he was too loud and he believed he knew everything. Sgt Rewis sent him with us to get him off the base;

12. Were you with us the night we took the West Pointer out into the woods to get stoned? (Yes, and after Earle left he tried to buy dope from me at Gerszewski. I said I didn't know anybody who had it.)

13. Do you remember Sgt Ashbaugh? He looked like Captain Kangaroo and he always us up in the formation until he had his clerk type up the piss test requests for our room;

14. Were you involved with the Christmas tree caper? We were stopped by the German Police after we cut down some trees in Graf for Sgt Rewis and the HHC Barracks, but the van was so dirty, they could not see inside;

15. Then there were the trips into France for the wine and meals and the German searches on the way back;

16. In Amsterdam we had the bar experience where we thought they were females and they were guys, we beat it out of there pretty damn quick; the good part was the free bikes and jazz clubs;

17. Were you with us in Graf when we almost got blown up by the ordinance guys who set charges on unexploded shells and did not tell us? I came within 50 feet of getting blown up;

18. One of the best stories (happened in Hohenfels) is when we almost accidentally killed Mark while trying to tow a 3/4 ton truck with a six foot chain attached to a 290 bobtail (earthmover).

That was crazy. I elected to ride on the top of the 290. Bruce Cornish from B-Company was the driver and Mark elected to "drive" the 3/4 ton truck. Needless to say, the truck was thrown all over the place and Mark was getting thrown all over in the cab. He even tried to jump out but was thrown back into the truck. It was snowing, the road was gravel and mud was flying and there was no way to see and the 3/4 ton truck kept hitting the back of the 290 bobtail. Mark did survive, as you know;

19. Mark had a sword fight with Kaup. Mark had a machete, Kaup had a broom stick. kaup wound up with a hand wound and fainted and had to be taken to the hospital. - James C Earle

Despite the craziness of the early 70s, the engineers of Gerszewski Barracks did their jobs well, despite all of the internal problems with racism and out of control alcohol and drug abuse.

Beginning in 1974 those problems would start changing for the better.

Make that: Things began to turn around.

At the lowest point in American military history, and when America was in a political turmoil, today's neo-conservatives in the George W Bush administration began to infiltrate the government and particularly the defense department.

Rebirth of the US Army

By 1974 the absolute bottom had been reached.

Watergate Casualties and Convictions

one presidential resignation

one vice-presidential resignation

40 government officials indicted or jailed

H.R. Haldeman & John Erlichman (White House staff) resigned 30 April 1973, subsequently jailed

John Dean (White House legal counsel) sacked 30 April 1973, subsequently jailed

John Mitchell, Attorney-General and Chairman of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP) jailed

Howard Hunt & G. Gordon Liddy (ex-White House staff), planned the Watergate break-in, both jailed

Charles Colson, special counsel to the President jailed

James McCord (Security Director of CREEP) jailed

In 1974 Gerszewski Barracks began to undergo another transition. This time the change did not come by replacing entire units, but by replacing the type of soldier in the units. I guess you could say that it all

started at the top. Fruit from the old diseased tree would start to become less and less, and the new tree would start to grow and develop fruit of it's kind. In other words, the army we have now began with the changes made then. Maybe a better analogy could be made by calling it "curative pest control". The old tree was weakened by disease and pests and the fruit was all rotten; so the army cut the diseased branches out, sprayed it, and fertilized it. Then it began to be fruitful again.

Women soldiers began appearing at Gerszewski Barracks in 1974. The WACs of Gerszewski from every unit lived together on the third floor of a building near the front gate known as the "Wac Shack".

But the biggest change the army made was with the new "All Volunteer" army. The draft was done away with and the rotation to a new type of soldier began. From 1974 onward, everybody who was in the military "wanted" to be in the military. It made a big difference.

Racial tensions began to improve as well. It was mandatory for soldiers to go to Race Relations classes.

Life at Gerszewski Barracks was like living in a small city on 215 acres.

There were 1737 soldiers, 75 US civilians, and 352 German civilians working and living there every day, except when the engineers were away on a project.

Gerszewski Barracks had something for everybody and everything a soldier needed to live a comfortable life.

There were several Mess Halls, a Snack Bar, a Commissary, and a Tailor Shop. There was a Courtroom for military trials and a guarded vault with millions of dollars in it. There was a Swimming Pool, a Movie Theater, a Bowling Alley, a Library, an Art and Craft Shop, and a Chapel for Church services. There were Automotive Shops. There was a Gymnasium for Volleyball and Basketball; and there was a big Parade Field with a running track and a baseball field and an occasional company Bar-B-Q. There was an Infirmary with Doctors and Dentists. And at night, there was a NCO Club with live entertainment on the weekends.

In 1975 NATO funded large warehouses which were built on the kaserne for equipment storage.

In 1975 both the 79th and 249th Engineer Battalions were redesignated from "Construction" to "Combat Heavy".

The problems at Gerszewski Barracks didn't clear up overnight. There was another murder on post in 1976. The following account of the murder is from two eyewitnesses. It come from a e-mail correspondence they had through Gerszewski Barracks Yahoo!Group. The names are withheld:

Former Smiley MP:

It has been very strange to see photos from this area again. And to find out that the area is being taken down. I was an Military Policeman in the 66th MP Co, 95th MP Bn on Smiley. 1976 to 1979. I had to spend a lot of time on Gerszewski. A lot of it at the 517 Maints. But I did my time at the Engr Bn. 249th had a darn good 1st sgt. I liked him a lot. Need help with the troops and he would jump in. Short E-8 black man, wish I could remember his name. Darn good man.

My first dead person I ever had anything to do with was at the NCO club on that post, OCT 1976. It was only the first of a whole lot as, after 6 yrs in the Army MP's. I went into Civ. Police work for 17 yrs total and was also a vol. Firefighter EMT for 10 yrs at the same time.

But in all I do have to say the 3 yrs in Germany was fun. Has any one seen or read what has happened to Smiley. After a bit I did become the Traffic Accident Investigator for the area. Long hours and more DEATH.

Gerszewski Veteran:

I saw your message posted on the Yahoo! Gerszewski site and it has prompted me to inquire about you comment regarding the first dead person you had anything to do with.

I remember one night when, as I was entering the double-door airlock at the NCO Club, I had to step over a guy who was laying face-down on the floor. While it didn't seem unusual to see someone passed out in the front door (considering how much and how cheap the beer was inside) I mentioned it to an employee who went to check on the guy.

As I stood in the doorway the employee turned the guy over and we saw that his throat had been cut and he was no longer alive. He had soaked the rug with his blood.

That shook me quite badly and I had to down a couple of hard drinks while waiting for the M.P.'s to arrive. I don't remember if I was required to fill out a statement but I was interviewed about what I had seen.

I heard a rumor later that 2 soldiers, one a black NCO and the other a white enlisted man, had been arrested for his murder. I understand that they had been robbing drunken soldiers as they left the club and this one they cut badly, He managed to crawl into the vestibule before death.

Is this the same incident you mentioned?

Former Smiley MP:

If the body you stepped over was in the month of Oct. 1976 yes I was the first MP on the Scene and I was 19 at the time. Had only been in Germany less than a month. If you remember that night I was the tallest MP there. The two that did it were from 517th Mains. Yes we did get them. The guy was still alive when we got there and able to tell us some things before he died.

Long time Ago.

The same correspondence talks about a soldier committing suicide from the 79th Engineer Battalion, and the drug related murders of three soldiers one night outside the Piccadilli Bar in downtown Karlsruhe.

In 1977 both Gerszewski engineer battalions were assigned to the 18th Engineer Brigade. Construction projects suddenly became mostly field training and bridge training for Gerszewski's engineers to prepare them for a new role coming in the future.

In the early 1980s, with the election of Ronald Reagan the military underwent a Renaissance. The US Army grew from 13 Divisions to 18, new equipment such as the M1 Abrams tank, M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, Multiple Launch Rocket System, and the AH-64 Apache were but a few of the systems integrated into the force structure.

For the individual soldier, new uniforms, kevlar helmets, better pay and realistic training had much improved the situation. All this along with determined leadership created an entirely new image for the US Army.

No longer was the Army a haven for drugs and alcohol. A new breed of soldier was emerging and with it the pride and esprit de corps that had been so long neglected. This was one of many legacies of the 1980's, the re-birth of the US Army.

In 1987 Gerszewski Barracks completed a facilities modernization program, and the 18th Engineer Brigade served as the principle construction brigade for the United States Army Europe and the 7th Army. During this period, the Brigade performed numerous construction, rehabilitation and renovation missions in military communities and training areas throughout USAREUR.

Most noteworthy were the massive range upgrade of the Grafenwohr Major Training Area in the early 80's and the construction of the Range 23 complex at the Wildflecken Major Training Area in 1989 and 1990. Both the 79th and 249th Engineer Battalions from Gerszewski Barracks were heavily involved.

The End Days and Final Chapter

In 1988, something quite unusual happened at the kaserne. For decades the soldiers of Gerszewski Barracks had come and gone without giving any thought about Sgt Adolph C. Gerszewski. His heroism had fallen to the level of a urban legend. I remember hearing that he had jumped on a hand grenade to save his buddies. That's not what happened.

Not many people knew anything about Sgt Gerszewski at all. The name wasn't even pronounced correctly. It was supposed to be pronounced Gar-schev-ski, but for decades everybody called it Ger-zoo-ski, or simply the zoo. The soldiers stationed at Gerszewski Barracks were often jokingly called the "animals at the zoo".

But then, one day in 1988, a portrait of Sgt Gerszewski was hung in the ballroom of the former German Officer's Club on the kaserne during a ceremony. John Hoffman, a distant cousin of the Gerszewski family, donated it to the army.

And all of the sudden there he was - the likeness of Sgt Gerszewski himself - after all those years. Almost as if he somehow knew it would all be over soon and he was giving his approval for a job well done like a team owner congratulating his team after winning a big game. The things he had fought and died for had been actually achieved.

The Cold War Ends

Then suddenly the Cold War ended. Gerszewski Barracks had played a vital role. Former enemies had worked together with the hope of making the world a better place. And the Germans tore the wall down.

When the Cold War ended in 1989 Gerszewski Barracks consisted of Gerszewski Barracks Kaserne, Stag Kaserne, 3rd CEC POMCUS site, and the "Back 40" local training area. What happened to the soldiers?

In 1990, the 249th Engineers took the best soldiers of the 79th Engineers and went to Southwest Asia in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm where they received the Meritorious Unit Commendation.

On April 29th 1991 they returned to Gerszewski Barracks.

In October the army inactivated the 249th Engineer Battalion.

In 1993 the 79th Engineer Battalion was redesignated as the 94th Engineer Battalion (Combat Heavy). Companies A and B moved from Gerszewski Barracks to Hohenfels and Wildflecken; and, Headquarters and Support Company along with Company C moved to Vilseck.

The new 94th Engineer Battalion - born at Gerszewski Barracks - is the only Combat Heavy Engineer Battalion in Europe. They fought in the Bosnian War, they have been to Kosovo, Africa, and they recently

fought in the Iraq War.

Slowly the life at Gerszewski Barracks just withered away, and in 1995 the kaserne was given back to the German Government.

The portrait of Sgt Gerszewski was given to the Knielingen Museum.

In 2000, the movie “Buffalo Soldiers” by Mirimax was filmed at Gerszewski Barracks in the south end of the kaserne.

In 2003 the demolition of Gerszewski Barracks started.

By 2004, the former Rhein Kaserne, Black Hawk Kaserne, and Gerszewski Barracks was a pile of rubble.

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