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German Military Presence in the United States: The Case of Holloman Air Force Base

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Summary

For four decades, Germany has sent pilots to the United States for training. On May 1, 1996, this bilateral military cooperation took an important step forward when Defense Secretary Perry and German Defense Minister R  he activated the German Air Force Tactical Training Center (TTC) at Holloman Air Force Base (AFB) in New Mexico. By October 1999, the Germans plan to have 24 F-4 Phantom and 42 Tornado jets, together with roughly 900 German Air Force staff members at Holloman. The two governments praised this undertaking as another sign of their continuing, strong alliance. Many analysts argue that the most important benefit of an increasing German military presence in the United States may be to enhance opportunities for cooperation at a time when the United States has dramatically reduced its military presence in Europe. Some observers, however, have raised concerns. For one, they have expressed unease with what they interpret as a permanent foreign military base on U.S. soil. In response, the Pentagon has pointed out that the TTC is a tenant training unit at Holloman AFB which remains under the operational control of the U.S. Air Force 49th Fighter Wing Commander. Critics have also maintained that the United States is shouldering the cost of the TTC. In fact, the Germans are financing the entire operation. Reports also indicate that the increased German presence is providing an economic boost to the region.

Background

The United States has a long history of training with its allies, both here and abroad. Germany first began training its pilots in the United States in 1955.¹ The scope of these training programs has grown ever since. The first extensive bilateral agreement concerning an Air Force training facility in the United States -- Luke AFB in Arizona --

¹"Germany begins pilot training at U.S. base," Reuters, May 1, 1996.

was concluded in 1964. Basic training for jet pilots from the German Air Force and the German Naval Air Arm began at Sheppard AFB in Texas in 1966. Also in 1966, the German Air Force Air Defense School began training on the air defense weapons systems HAWK/NIKE in Fort Bliss, Texas. The range of training offered in the United States by 1966 led to the establishment of the German Air Force Training Command at Fort Bliss, which became the German Air Force Command USA/Canada in 1994. In 1970, German pilots began to receive training for weapons systems on F-4 Phantom jets at George AFB in California; this training was moved to Holloman AFB in 1992 after George AFB closed. Training for RF-4E Phantom crews began in 1973 at Shaw AFB in South Carolina and was moved to Bergstrom AFB in Texas later on. Starting in 1981, German officers began basic flying training for weapons systems operator functions on F-4 Phantom and Tornado jets at Mather AFB in California, then at Randolph AFB in Texas, and, beginning in June 1996, they will train at Pensacola Naval Air Station in Florida. In 1981, German pilots also started participating in the Euro NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training, a program set up for pilots from many NATO members at Sheppard AFB. The German Air Force established a basic flight program with the Airline Training Center in Goodyear, Arizona in 1990.² The German Armed Forces Command, based in Reston, Virginia, is in charge of all German officers training in the United States.

The German Military Presence at Holloman AFB³

In the fall of 1990, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the German Defense Minister agreed to deepen military cooperation. In this context, the United States offered the German Air Force the opportunity to expand training at Holloman AFB. Holloman, in Alamogordo, New Mexico, is the home base of the U.S. Air Force 49th Fighter Wing and its stealth fighters (the F-117).

In addition to the F-4 Phantom jets that had been transferred to Holloman from George AFB, the United States agreed that the Germans could station German Tornado jets there. In May 1994, a memorandum of understanding was signed which covered construction of the German Air Force Tactical Training Element and the stationing of 12 Tornado and roughly 300 military and civilian employees, along with their families. Known as Holloman I, these planes and personnel are part of a weapons instructor and flight training program; the Germans invested about 62 million German marks (\$40 million) for constructing the necessary infrastructure, including hangars and maintenance facilities. On May 1, 1996, U.S. Defense Secretary Perry and German Defense Minister R  he activated the German Tactical Training Center at Holloman AFB.

Starting in October 1999, the German Air Force will send an additional 30 Tornado jets and 600 military and civilian employees to Holloman to further expand training. This will allow the Germans to perform all basic and weapons systems training for Tornados at Holloman AFB and thus ensure "comprehensive training." According to the German Embassy, this program, called Holloman II, "will considerably improve the efficiency and quality of flight training of Tornado crews, because the training duration can be shortened

²Information from the German Defense Ministry and German Embassy Washington.

³Information for this section was taken from: Transcript, News Briefing by Ken Bacon, Defense Department Spokesperson, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1996; and "Holloman I and II," Press Section, German Embassy Washington, April 30, 1996.

and the structure of the training can be designed uniformly."⁴ The Germans will invest another 175 million German marks (about \$114 million) to construct hangars, a noise suppression facility for engine test runs, a flight simulator, and housing for the permanent and training staff. Upon completion of Holloman II in the fall of 1999, 24 F-4 Phantoms, 42 Tornados, and approximately 900 German Air Force staff members will be stationed at the TTC at Holloman AFB.

There are several important reasons for Germany's decision to invest in the TTC. The issue of population density must be mentioned first. Holloman is situated in the state of New Mexico which is about the same size as Germany; however, New Mexico has a population of 1.5 million as compared to Germany's 80 million. The training opportunities permitted by the vast air space are simply not available to German pilots at home. Given New Mexico's sparse population and the existing special use air space, German pilots have a greater opportunity to conduct flying training at low altitudes and high speeds. They can use the full array of radar jamming equipment and conduct live bombing exercises. Second, the weather is much better in New Mexico than in Germany which ensures training continuity because a pilot can fly a much greater number of hours per month or year than he can in Germany. In New Mexico, pilots can train all year long. Finally, Holloman AFB is relatively close to Fort Bliss, Texas, the headquarters for German Air Force operations in North America.

Since the Germans have been training in the United States for decades, some may wonder what is special about the operation at Holloman. First, the German Air Force has assumed responsibility for a flying training program on U.S. soil for the first time. Previously, the German military was essentially buying training courses with U.S. instructors and U.S. aircraft were used. In those cases where the Germans actually owned planes being used in the training courses, those planes were maintained and serviced by the U.S. Air Force or by civilian contractor companies through the Foreign Military Sales program. This will continue to be the case with the F-4 Training Component used for German flying training at Holloman. With the TTC now activated, the Germans both own and maintain the Tornado jets, and German instructors will teach the training courses. The TTC thus may represent a new model under which allies can train beside their U.S. counterparts. While the Germans have full control over the Tornado training program, operational control of the base remains in the hands of the U.S. Air Force.

U.S. INTERESTS AND THE GERMAN PRESENCE AT HOLLOMAN

The official response in the United States to the activation of the German Training Center at Holloman Air Force Base has been overwhelmingly positive. Supporters of German operations at Holloman have stressed the importance of German training in the United States for the strength of the Atlantic Alliance. Others, however, have raised concerns about the command structure at the base and the financing of the project.

Command Issues: A Permanent German Military Base in New Mexico? On May 1, 1996, CNN broadcast a report entitled "German Air Force Invades Holloman in New Mexico." CNN's military affairs correspondent, Jamie McIntyre, described the situation: "As German fighter planes streaked across the New Mexico sky, on the ground

⁴"Holloman I and II," Press Section, German Embassy Washington, April 30, 1996, p. 2.

a German flag was hoisted higher than the American flag, signifying the first time the U.S. has allowed another country to establish a permanent military base on U.S. soil."⁵ Other press reports also suggested that Holloman AFB had been, in essence, taken over by the Germans.⁶ The facts, however, suggest that these reports reflect certain misconceptions.

At a press briefing on May 2, Ken Bacon, the Pentagon spokesperson, said that it was "not quite accurate" to say that the Germans had established a permanent military base on U.S. soil. Rather, he said, "[t]hey are tenants at an American military base.... I think that we should not look at this, this should not be portrayed by anybody as a German invasion or occupation of U.S. space. It's not that. This is an opportunity for two allies to train together."⁷ During the briefing, Bacon was asked again and again about the precise status of the German Air Force at Holloman. The briefing card he used stated: "...Holloman is a U.S. Air Force Base, has been in existence since 1942 and will remain a U.S. Air Force installation....The U.S. Air Force 49th Fighter Wing Commander shall exercise overall responsibility and will have command and control of all base operations. The Germans are a tenant unit under his operational control."⁸

As for the permanence of the German presence, the year 2004 is the end date of the memorandum of understanding covering the two German programs, Holloman I and II. Thus, if for whatever reason either side grew unhappy with the arrangement, it could be terminated or altered in 2004. Both U.S. and German officials view the TTC as a long-term commitment and expect the memorandum of understanding to be extended. Whenever the Germans do decide to stop training at Holloman, the facilities they have built will become part of the U.S. infrastructure at the base.

The Cost of German Operations at Holloman: Who Pays? News reports about the German Training Center at Holloman triggered some questions about which government was bearing the cost for the expansion of German operations. Two points are important here.

First, the Germans are bearing the entire cost for expanding their training programs at Holloman, including about \$40 million for construction of new buildings for Holloman I and an anticipated \$114 million for additional facilities for Holloman II. The Germans

⁵Quoted from Transcript #1347-7, Cable News Network, May 1, 1996. According to the Pentagon, both the U.S. and German flags were displayed at the TTC activation ceremony on May 1; the U.S. flag was properly displayed, on the proper side, and higher than the German flag. The U.S. flag is the only flag flown on the base.

⁶See, for instance, John Roper, "Perry, German counterpart christen base," UPI, May 1, 1996; "German defence for talks in Washington — opens air base," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 26, 1996.

⁷News Briefing by Ken Bacon.

⁸"Tactical Training Center for German Air Force," Briefing Card, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), May 2, 1996.

must pay for all supplies used (from fuel to pencils), and for a proportionate share of the operating costs of the base.⁹

Second, many argue that the increasing German presence offers direct financial benefits to the community around the base. The Pentagon maintains that the "expansion of mission and facilities at Holloman is an economic windfall to the city of Alamogordo and the state of New Mexico."¹⁰ Currently, German air crews and their families are living in the community of Alamogordo, not on the base. A reporter from the *Wall Street Journal* went to Alamogordo last summer to cover the story of the growing German presence, which he interpreted as a financial boon:

With base closings threatening other military towns, this desert outpost is thrilled about the buildup planned for nearby Holloman Air Force Base....They [the 300 German personnel] are expected to bring a \$12 million payroll and as many as 800 dependents to the area, where most will live off-base....For a struggling military town that hasn't built so much as a new apartment complex in 20 years, this German invasion means boom times.¹¹

The one point of tension the article mentioned may be competition for good housing -- which is in short supply -- between German military personnel and their American counterparts, who receive smaller housing allowances.

Bolstering the Atlantic Alliance. While the German presence at Holloman may bring tangible financial gains for Alamogordo and New Mexico as a whole, the benefit highlighted by both U.S. and German officials relates to the much broader aim of strengthening the Atlantic Alliance. First, the type of joint training which is taking place at Holloman is seen as directly improving the readiness of NATO. In the words of the Pentagon spokesman, "by training in the United States, they are increasing the capability of their Air Force and therefore increasing the capability of the alliance, and this alliance remains an extremely important alliance as we are demonstrating in Bosnia today....We are always looking for ways to operate more closely with our allies so that should a combat situation ever come we can operate as a seamless unit."¹²

Second, the importance of deepening transatlantic military cooperation and increasing joint training in the United States was felt keenly with the end of the Cold War as the United States dramatically reduced its troop presence in Europe. Both the Bush and Clinton Administrations deemed it valuable to increase contacts with the closest allies of the United States as this military drawdown was occurring.

Third, officials cite a direct benefit for U.S.-German relations. The German facility at Holloman represents a step forward for bilateral friendship and cooperation. It also

⁹News Briefing by Ken Bacon; and "German military are 'tenants' at U.S. base, Pentagon says," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, May 2, 1996.

¹⁰"Tactical Training Center for German Air Force," Pentagon Briefing Card, May 2, 1996.

¹¹Robert Tomsho, "Alamogordo Braces Itself for an Invasion By the Luftwaffe," *Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 1995, p. 1.

¹²News Briefing by Ken Bacon.

underscores a growing reciprocity in the relationship. The United States stations about 100,000 troops in Europe (down from over 300,000 at the height of the Cold War), and the lion's share of those troops was and is based in Germany. Over 100 U.S. Air Force planes are stationed in Germany. The Pentagon spokesman described the German training facility as "an opportunity for us to actually return 40 years of training that we have performed on German soil. This is not a complicated operation. We train extensively around the world on other people's soil without much controversy. I would expect the Germans to be able to train on our soil with no controversy whatsoever as allies, friends and neighbors."¹³

Finally, there has been some interest in whether the Pentagon is considering making similar arrangements with other allies either at Holloman AFB or other U.S. bases. The Pentagon has responded that no requests have been received from other countries, but it would seriously consider any that were submitted. In this context, the Pentagon spokesman pointed out that the U.S. Air Force has provided training to NATO pilots -- not just German pilots -- in the United States for years.

¹³Ibid; see also Remarks by Defense Secretary Perry at TTC Activation Ceremony, Holloman AFB, May 1, 1996.

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