The background of the slide is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The flag is positioned on the left side, with the stars in the foreground and the stripes extending towards the right. The right side of the slide is covered by a solid orange rectangle that contains the text.

Remembering American presence in Würzburg

— The Leighton Barracks:
Commemorating German-American
Relations

Lisa Beer, University of Würzburg

American soldiers of the U.S. military were located all over Bavaria to strengthen their presence against a communist regime after World War II. Many Americans stayed in Germany with their family members where they mingled with the German population, integrated American culture in the street life and helped to leave economic, social and institutional traces behind to build up a German- American relationship. But what is happening with our commemoration of Americans stationed in our area when structures should be demolished and the land which was home to 10.000 Americans is repurposed?



fig. 1: former military airfield

HISTORY OF U.S. TROOPS IN WÜRZBURG

- 1945: AMERICAN TROOPS OF THE 12TH INFANTRY DIVISION CONQUERED THE CITY OF WÜRZBURG IN COMBAT
- 1945-: CONSOLIDATION PHASE: MILITARY GOVERNMENT AIMS AT DEMOCRATIZATION, DEMILITARISATION, AND DENAZIFICATION
- 1955: FIRST TROOPS OF THE 10TH INFANTRY DIVISION REPLACED 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION
- 1958-1996: 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION
- 1996: FINAL PHASE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS: 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION REPLACED 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION
- 2006: DEPARTURE CEREMONY: MOVING OF THE DIVISION TO KANSAS

60 YEARS OF AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE CITY OF WÜRZBURG

THE LEIGHTON BARRACKS

- 1947:** MILITARY AIRFIELD WAS DEDICATED TO FALLEN US-AMERICAN CAPTAIN JOHN A. LEIGHTON
- 1950:** CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW AMERICAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL
- 1951:** 14 APPARTMENT BUILDINGS ON FORMER AIRFIELD ("SKYLINE HILL")
- 1955:** CONSTRUCTION OF THE WÜRZBURG AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL
- 1998:** CONSTRUCTION OF THE EXCHANGE SHOPPING MALL
- 2009:** AREA OFFICIALLY RETURNED TO GERMAN OFFICIAL

While the military government in 1945 first settled along the river to conquer the city and confiscated the houses of German citizens, American soldiers and their families were soon in need of a permanent place to stay. For this purpose, a former airfield and parade ground situated on a hill overlooking the city was repurposed for the American military community.

14 apartment buildings were built in 1951, known as "Skyline-Hill", as well as the Lincoln housing area close to the Barracks. It was followed by a continuous expansion: construction of an American elementary, middle and high school, a library, a movie theatre, a Commissary, a casino, a gas station, a chapel and various dining facilities.

fig. 2:
Leighton
Barracks
Würzburg



The process was complemented in 1998 with the construction of the biggest American Exchange shopping mall (PX) in Europe.

John A. Leighton (* 1945 - †2008)

Although the Leighton Barracks got renamed at the present day as part of the conversion process, the name of the fallen US-officer is still in the minds of many Americans who used to call this place their home.



fig. 3: Leightonstraße

The family of John A. Leighton only learned about the naming by accident – 60 years too late. Today only a street name in the new city district commemorates him.

In comparison to other presented memorials, the Leighton Barracks served as a home for foreigners and are therefore historically remembered as a nostalgic connection to Würzburg and the German population. Inhabitants of the Leightons not only belonged to the army: according to a survey of 80 participants precisely 50% identified as soldiers, around 27% as students and almost 24% as civilians. Most of the latter ones were situated in the medical or educational sector or worked as musicians, in the food service or as language specialists. Remarkable 80% of the participants replied they did not feel like a foreigner during their time in Würzburg and further considered the location as their home. At the time a sense of involvement was conveyed through various American newspapers like "The Crusader", "The Point" or "Stars and Stripes", which informed inhabitants about housing issues, traffic or grocery shopping in the foreign country.

Other American developments like the radio station "American Forces Network" (AFN) with its distinctive program customized for US troops, was also enjoyed by German citizens.

Former inhabitants still remember queuing up for the first Taco Bell store in the Exchange shopping mall in the Leighton Barracks.



fig. 4: Würzburg American High school (WAHS)

” I LIVED [...] ON LEIGHTON BARRACKS. RIGHT DOWN THE STREET WAS MY HIGH SCHOOL, WUERZBURG AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL. I ATTENDED ALL FOUR YEARS THERE 89-93. I ALSO ATTENDED THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MY FATHER WAS A SGT. STATIONED THERE. WE LEFT IN MAY OF 1994. MY MOTHER, GERMAN, ALSO WORKED AT THE MILITARY HOSPITAL.

Duerschmid 2017, 47.

John D. Skilton
(* 1909 - † 1992)

John D. Skilton is known as the savior of the Residenz of Würzburg. Three months after the city of Würzburg got destroyed during a disastrous bombing raid on 16 March 1945, the US officer from Connecticut arrived in Würzburg devastated by the demolished Residenz: it was exposed to the weather due to its loss of the roofs during the bombing attack. Although it was the country of his enemies and he did not get any support from his own countrymen, he wanted to fulfill the mission of saving the great artworks of Neumann, Tiepolo and Bossi, which would not count as world heritage today without Skilton's effort. While he is still commemorated by Bavarian newspapers and exhibitions, as well as by visitors and citizens of Würzburg, it simultaneously contributes to the shaping of German- American relations in a positive way.

The Bavarian palace department is releasing an article on 26 February 2009: "The 'savior of the residence of Würzburg' - in commemoration of John D. Skilton's 100th birthday anniversary" (Bavarian palace department, 2009).



fig. 6: John-Skilton-Straße

„John-Skilton-street“ born 1909 died 1992 US- art protection officer, ensured the preservation of the frescos in the residence of Würzburg after its destruction:



fig. 7: John Skilton memorial room in the residence

Pressemitteilung

26. Februar 2009

Der "Retter der Residenz Würzburg" – Zum 100. Geburtstag von John D. Skilton

fig. 8: news release commemorating John Skilton

REPURPOSING OF THE FORMER LEIGHTON BARRACKS – ELIMINATING OUR MEMORY OF AMERICANS IN WÜRZBURG?

With a departure ceremony on July 6, 2006, the division was moved to Kansas. The massive mission of vacating Würzburg not only affected the soldiers, but 11000 of their family members, 1000 civilian employees and 1000 host-nation employees at once. The base closing was completed by the year 2007. Fully vacated by 2008, the future of the 334 acres remains uncertain.

About 6,100 troops to leave Würzburg by Sept. 2006

BY CHARLIE COON • JULY 30, 2005

fig. 10: article about the departure, Stars and Stripes 2005

When in 2009 the area was officially returned to German officials, precisely to the federal agency for Real Estate tasks (BlmA), American soldiers lowered the flag one last time at the Leighton Barracks on 14 January 2009. The State of Bavaria also purchased 96 acres for the university. After a relatively slow process of vacating, a quick conversion process of the area started...



fig. 11: American soldiers lowering the flag



fig.9: dismantling Exchange shopping mall

Bulldozing our memory?

- 2011:** BUILDINGS OF US-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE REPURPOSED INTO THE CAMPUS HUBLAND NORD OF THE UNIVERSITY
- 2015:** DISMANTLING OF THE EXCHANGE SHOPPING MALL
- 2016:** CHAPEL IS TORN DOWN TO BUILD A NEW NURSING HOME
- 2018:** CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW CONFERENCE HOTEL ON THE LOCATION OF THE OLD CASINO
- 2019:** GAS STATION IS TORN DOWN

As part of the huge conversion process, 334 acres should be converted into a new district in order to reintegrate the separated area into the city structure with a certain strategy:

1) develop a diverse district (2) create appealing recreational space, (3) implement a lively campus, (4) achieve urban friendly mobility, and (5) ensure high-quality transformation.

In the challenge between repurposing the area and keeping some of the memories of the Leighton barracks alive, only one side can be fully realized. It soon became clear that a reconstruction of the buildings would be too expensive. In the following years after the departure many buildings were torn down. The conversion measures for the Landesgartenschau (LGS) [horticultural show], which took place in the area of the former Leighton barracks, accelerated the process. In 2015, the dismantling of the almost newly built Exchange shopping mall started, followed by an elimination of the chapel in 2016 for the construction of a new nursing home. In 2018, the construction of a new conference hotel to host visitors of the LGS and the university was completed at the place where the old casino was situated. Most recently, the old gas station which was used as an American Diner during the LGS, was demolished in 2019 after great debate.



fig. 13: Facebook post, 26 June 2019

Besides the destruction of the former US garrison, many buildings are used for other purposes at the present day. In 2011, buildings of US educational institutions were repurposed into the campus "Hubland Nord" of the University of Würzburg. Today, the former middle school is used as a language center, the former elementary school serves as an archive, and the high school is also used by university students after a complete makeover. A library is located today in the old tower and buildings of the former theatre were repurposed into supermarkets and other shopping facilities. Not only buildings got a makeover: the American atmosphere of the whole area seems to vanish for example by the renaming of streets after famous citizens of Würzburg.

- Adams Avenue → Gerda-Laufer-Straße
- Jackson Avenue → Emil-Fischer-Straße
- Jefferson Street → Oswald-Külpe-Weg
- Madison Street → Josef-Martin-Weg
- Monroe Street → Klara-Oppenheimer-Weg
- Marne Lane → Beatrice-Edgell-Weg
- Skyline Drive → Emil-Hilb-Weg

fig.12: Facebook post, 26 June 2019.



RELICS OF AMERICAN PRESENCE – A PLACE FOR INDIVIDUAL COMMEMORATION?

During the horticultural show of 2018, a temporary exhibition represented the history of the area. The problem was, it only remained temporarily. With the demolition of the old gas station, the last authentic building, which reminds of American culture, is erased. Despite some of the repurposed buildings, the conversion process is still in progress as the city has to convert it for economic reasons. But how much memory is vital to preserve a sense of American culture in Würzburg?

Americans had a significant impact on the destroyed city. They not only blazed a trail towards democracy, they also characterized the street life in the years after World War II. According to an article in a German newspaper, old gas station could have served to preserve a part American culture. Indeed, we can still find signage commemorates former facilities like the cinema, the shopping mall or American schools in the area today, but individual

«Individual commemoration got eliminated»



fig. 14: Skyline-Hill-Straße

seemed to vanish as part of the conversion process. One could think of many remaining American buildings since many locations of the U.S. army became integrated in the social and economic structure of the city of Würzburg. At this point the question arises: What is forgotten and what still remains and can be visited of the former Leighton Barracks in Würzburg?

«What is forgotten and what can still be visited?»

Besides some remaining American street names, there is not much left what can be visited by former inhabitants. However, we can still find some relics of American presence. Former housing blocks of the Skyline-hill housing are still used by the university and can be visited.

fig. 15: signage American cinema



fig. 16: housing barracks, 2021



Further we can find some vacant houses as some of the last relics. Former inhabitants still share a nostalgic connection to their homes as they remember exactly the building they used to live in.



fig. 17: Facebook post, 5 February 2021

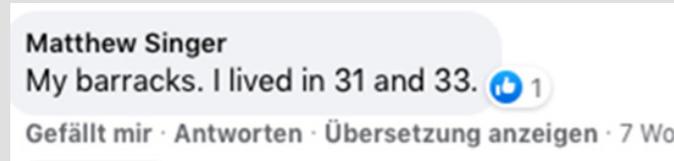


fig. 18: Facebook post, 10 June 2021

A sign in front of the elementary school reminds of its former purpose. The "Rottendorfer Tor" served as an entrance to the area of the Leighton Barracks and is still visible today as the entrance to the new city district called Hubland.



fig. 21: vacant housing block, 2021



[left] fig. 19: Rottendorfer Tor, 2005

[right] fig. 20: Würzburg Elementary School, 2021

GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS – FROM ENNEMIES TO FRIENDS

What has started once with nonfraternization, soon turned the other way round. With the reintegration of Germany into international community and the aggressive implementation of aims like democratization, demilitarization and denazification, the military government was first disliked by citizens of Würzburg. Reintegration and reeducation were realized through strong measures like confiscation and evacuation of munition and everything that belongs to the Nazi regime. Besides raids and confiscation of German homes, the military government tried to teach the democratic system in educational institutions like the "Amerika Haus". However, they soon realized that they were in need of German workers and that a reconstruction would not be possible without mingling with the German population.

The relationship slowly improved in the removal of the nonfraternization policy and the support of German citizens by the US army with "good will" gestures. Organized trips and presents for children as well as CARE packages for European countries supported the local population who had lost all their belongings in the war. Later the Hoover program was founded to provide 700.000 schoolchildren one meal per day. The foundation of clubs like the German- American women 's club contributed to a development of friendship between the enemies. As an occasion to mingle with the local population, inhabitants of Würzburg were invited to visit the Leighton Barracks on the first German- American friendship fest with celebrations like sport competitions, weapon exhibitions and concerts



Although Americans were not welcomed at first in Germany, the military government had a positive influence over the area. By taking control over the destroyed city and the Franconian area, they made the transition from dictatorship to democracy possible and ensured successful denazification of the country.

1946: REMOVAL OF THE NONFRATERNIZATION BETWEEN AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND THE GERMAN POPULATION

1946: "GOOD WILL" GESTURES

1947-1950 HOOVER PROGRAM

1949: PARTNERSHIP WITH FARIBAULT (MINNESOTA)

1950: FOUNDING OF THE GERMAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S CLUB

1954: FIRST GERMAN-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP FEST

1974: MILITARY FORCES AS THE TENTH LARGEST EMPLOYER IN WÜRZBURG

Further, the US army posed a strong economic factor in the post-war area for the city and its citizens. Members of the military community spent their money in the city and contributed to economic stabilization. Being the tenth largest employer in the city back in 1974, the US army offered around 1587 jobs for civilians in around 120 different professions. Many Germans enjoyed working for the Americans and remember them in a positive way. Hildegard Schätzlein still remembers her workplace from 1958 until 1968 and again from 1981 until 1996 at the American Express Bank, which was situated in an annex to the tower that does not exist anymore.

As another economic factor, German women tried to secure their economic stabilization with relationships to American soldiers. Many children were born in Würzburg and wish to visit the place of their childhood. In the same way, Hannelore Huber from Würzburg and her husband Basil Hobar, former US officer, wanted to take a picture in front of the chapel where their marriage took place 55 years ago. Sadly, they had to realize that it got torn down in 2016. The couple got to know each other during his stay at the Leighton Barracks and serve as a nostalgic example of individual commemoration of the German- American relationship in connection with the Leighton Barracks.

In return, the Americans are not only remembered as an important source of income for the city, but rather as protective power for German inhabitants.



fig. 22: Hildegard Schätzlein (center) in front of the American Express Bank



fig. 23: marriage in the chapel at Leighton Barracks 1962

”

I LIKED TO WORK FOR THE AMERICANS

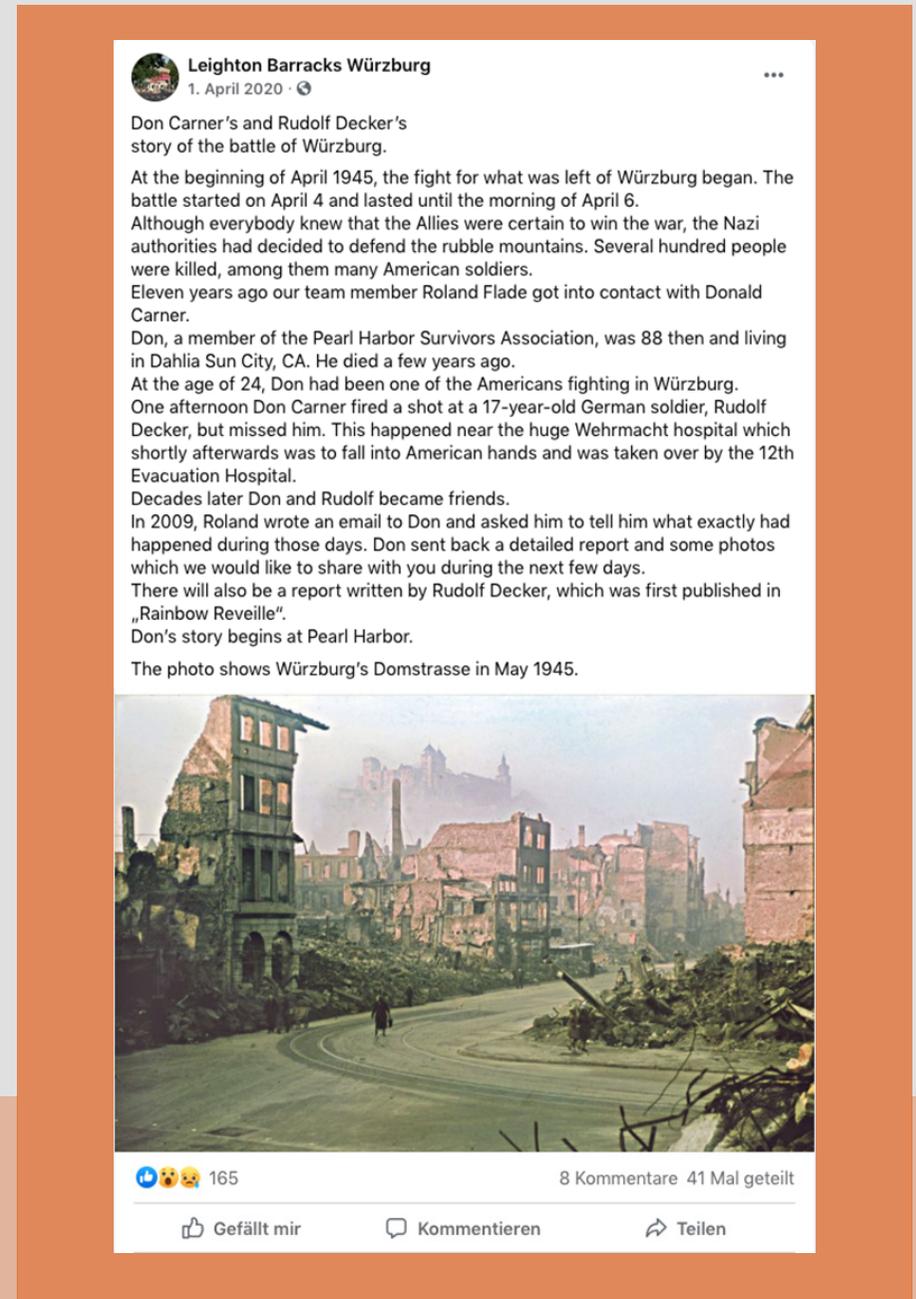
Hildegard Schätzlein

RECONNECTION AS PART OF REMEMBRANCE

Because of the conversion of the Leighton Barracks and with it an elimination of space for commemorating American culture, reconnection forms a main part of individual commemoration. A shift in the social structures with personal and cultural exchange between the two nations let us remember them as partners and friends. Commemorating mutual support and partnership is vital for the future of the German- American relationship. Although the circumstances of American presence seem at first sight not positive, it is vital to remember the great impact of Americans on a regional basis.

Being connected through the shared circumstances of the time and the historical background of the Leightons, members of the two nations share a wish of remembrance. In social media networks like the private group on Facebook called "Leighton barracks Würzburg", former inhabitants share personal stories or get informed over the conversion process of their former home. On a personal level, the "Würzburg alumni association- home of the wolfpack" is organizing reunions since 1990 for former students attending the Würzburg American high school.

fig. 24: Facebook, Don Carner's and Rudolf Decker's story



CONCLUSION

However, it is visible during this exhibition that although the city constructed some information panels for commemorating the presence of Americans in the former area of the Leighton Barracks, most of the buildings are torn down and therefore eliminated the last physical traces of U.S. presence. The statement “You can’t go back, but you can visit” refers in conclusion only to the city of Würzburg and not to a revisiting and commemoration of what many Americans called once their home. There is still space for improvement for future developments to commemorate especially the history of German American relations in exhibiting past experiences of Germans and Americans to underline the nostalgic connection between the two countries.

**NO MATTER HOW MUCH IS TORN DOWN,
THE TOP OF THAT HILL WILL ALWAYS BE
LEIGHTON BARRACKS**

”

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- fig. 3: taken by Lisa Beer, 22 July 2021, Leightonstraße, Würzburg
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