

TRANSLATION, NEWS ARTICLE

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TRANSLATED BY: BRIGITTE O'PRESKA, OCPA

**HEADLINE: US Army construction boom**

The US government is investing millions in Wiesbaden. [US Army Europe] headquarters is to move by 2013.

By Peter Badenhop

Hainerberg is one big construction site. Buildings are being torn down, rubble piled up, construction pits dug, foundations laid and roofs installed in all corners of the housing area. The new main High School building is being built in front of the silhouette of the Hessian state capital. The gym has been completed already and the cafeteria to include the auditorium will be ready in a few weeks. Both new after-school centers are pretty busy already.

The US Forces in Wiesbaden hardly leave any stones unturned. The Department of Defense is investing more than half a billion dollars in the garrison, 90 million of which are allocated for Hainerberg. The housing area built in the 50s on the southeast edge of downtown Wiesbaden is the biggest housing area of the US Army and signs of the impending move of HQ US Army Europe from Heidelberg to Wiesbaden are most visible here: the new hotel, the "Army Lodge" with its 164 rooms has been open since January; a new entertainment center is located across the street and apartments in the old housing units are being renovated, enlarged and receive new metal balconies. A new community center, a day care center and a huge shopping center on 110,000 square meters are planned. The opening is scheduled for the spring of 2014 as is the opening of the new control center in the immediate vicinity. For security reasons, the entire area, which is still publically accessible right now, will then be separated from the rest of the city.

There is construction not only on Hainerberg. Housing units in Aukamm and Crest View are being modernized. On the Army Airfield outside of Erbenheim, trucks have been rolling incessantly across the huge post. In the back of the fenced area, where vegetable fields and an old depot used to be located, single and double homes are being built. The parade field where parades were held and where President George W. Bush gave an emotional speech to his troops in 2005, is now home to a huge, three-storied block of concrete. It will be the heart of US Army Europe – the new command and control center.

The man everybody is waiting for in Wiesbaden is still in Heidelberg in his huge wood-paneled office, in a Kaserne built by the German Wehrmacht. LTG Mark Hertling is the commanding general of US Army Europe. He commands approximately 40,000 soldiers in Germany, Italy and some other European countries. He is well liked with the troops, is considered a down-to-earth, approachable soldiers' general and is tasked with the

fundamental restructuring of US troop presence on the old continent. “We are on the home stretch already”, the three-star general says.

The foundation for the restructuring was laid by the Bush government: Under the impressions of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the predecessor of President Barack Obama announced a comprehensive reorganization of the American troop presence in Europe. As a result, the two remaining Army divisions, the 1 ID in Würzburg and the 1AD in Wiesbaden, were to return to the United States. In addition, most of the 50 large installations that Washington still maintained in Germany in the 90s are to be closed. Hertling, who commanded the Wiesbaden-based armored division in a difficult Iraq deployment a few years ago, has been involved in this large-scale reform since the early stages.

Once this complex process, which has been delayed over and over again by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, will be completed no later than 2015, the presence of US troops in Germany will be completely different from that of the Cold War era: only one sixth of the 250,000 soldiers stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany in the mid 70s will remain. Instead of four complete Army divisions with a total of 100,000 soldiers, Germany will be home to only two Army combat brigades with 4,000 soldiers each. And instead of numerous Kasernes, depots, airfields and support facilities strewn all over southern Germany, there will only be three central garrisons: the headquarters in Wiesbaden, the logistic and medical hub in Kaiserslautern and Ramstein and the huge training area in Grafenwöhr.

In the meantime, preparations are on the way in Wiesbaden for the last step of the move which is to be completed by 2013. While installation in Heidelberg and Mannheim are being closed one by one, the interior construction of the new command center on the airfield has begun. The “Little Pentagon” as it is called by many, does not have the pentagonal shape of the Department of Defense in Washington but it will have a similar function for US Army Europe: the building will consolidate all central services and staff offices of US Army Europe. It houses 1,200 staff members and a 24/7 operation center with up to 130 work stations. Military operations in and outside of Europe - from a small operation to a large combat mission - will be led from this large-screen equipped “war room”. The new command center is to be completed by February 2012 and will be occupied by the generals step by step.

It is not clear yet when the commanding general will be sitting at his new desk in Wiesbaden. But LTG Hertling is exerting pressure. He knows that the commander of a unit must lead. And he knows of the pull his move to Wiesbaden will have on the rest of the troops. He definitely will not be the one to turn off the lights on Heidelberg’s Campbell Barracks.