

A Salute to Wiesbaden

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Soon the Air Force will say goodbye to Wiesbaden as we know it, the largest Air Force medical center outside the continental United States. Wiesbaden, with its rich and active past, is slated to cease active patient care and convert to a contingency hospital in October 1993. On many occasions during the past decades, Wiesbaden has served as a focal point of international news, opening its doors to victims of such crises as the Beirut Marine barracks bombing and many Middle Eastern hostage incidents. As the United States pulls out of Europe and closes many institutions and facilities that provided troop support, the Air Force pays tribute to Wiesbaden, one of its great medical centers.

Development of the Hospital under German Control

In the 1930s, the expanding German war machine crept to an inevitable clash with Britain and France by continuing to usurp portions of weaker European nations and establish hegemony over others. German military planners recognized the need for additional medical facilities because of expected fighting, and in 1938, the German Wehrmacht began constructing a 250-bed hospital, plus a 50-bed psychiatric facility, for the troops in the Wiesbaden area.

Amazingly, the largest portion of the structural work, excluding floor coverings and painting, was completed within a year. In fact, a ceremony on Jan. 29, 1939, celebrated the completion of the major buildings. When Nazi Germany attacked Poland in September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. As a result of the war, critical building materials, such as iron, steel, wood, cement and asphalt, became scarce in late 1939 and 1940, prolonging the completion of the hospital.

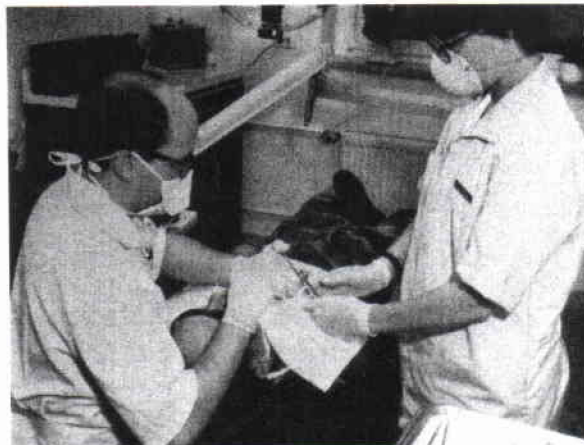
Although the facility was not officially finished until 1942, it began accepting patients as early as February 1941. More than 100 French prisoners from the Blitzkrieg campaign of June 1940 were sequestered from a local prisoner of war camp to work on the hospital (1). Soon after becoming operational, the hospital felt the effects of war once again. Medical equipment was often taken from the hospital for more needy medical facilities, perhaps those at the front. Also, bed capacity was in-

creased by simply doubling the number of beds per room. Bed capacity eventually reached 1,800 by using some of the outlying buildings on the compound.

Increased allied bombing, although not directed against the hospital, created a problem for the staff. Providing adequate care under the tumultuous nature of air raids proved a real challenge. Adequate shelters had been constructed in the basement of the main building, but moving patients down three floors each time the siren beckoned ominously proved a formidable task. In 1944, the hospital resolved the issue by shifting all the patients to the cellar. Fortunately, allied bombers made no direct hits on any buildings in the hospital complex throughout the entire war (1).

Expansion of the Hospital under American Control

By March 1945, the Nazi regime and its armies were being attacked on both east and west by the allies. It was only a matter of time before Hitler's tyrannical reign breathed its last. On March 28, 1945, a 10-man American patrol occupied the hospital gate house, and the group was soon reinforced by other officers and men. Soon, a 36-man military police unit was quartered in one of the buildings and then, with control fully established



When the 7100 CSW Medical Center, Wiesbaden, Germany, converts to a contingency hospital in October 1993, active patient care, such as this routine dental procedure, will be discontinued.



A member of MAC's 2nd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron speaks with one of 25 Afghan civilians transported to the 7100 CSW Medical Center, Weisbaden, Germany, May 9-11, 1986, to receive specialized treatment for war-related injuries.

by the U.S. Army, efforts were made to evacuate German patients to other hospitals. This was accomplished by the end of May 1945 (1).

On June 7, 1945, members of the 317th Station Hospital staffed the Wiesbaden hospital, and just 13 days later, the first American patients arrived. Wiesbaden remained the 317th Station Hospital until it was re-assigned to the U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) in January 1948 and redesignated the 495th Medical Group. On Oct. 14, 1953, the hospital received the name of the 7100th USAF Hospital, and on July 1, 1958, the unit designation was dropped and it became known as the USAF Hospital Wiesbaden. The hospital became a regional medical center in December 1982, and in September 1988, it was redesignated the 7100th Combat Support Wing (CSW) Medical Center.

Following the war, the United States began to shoulder the major responsibility for NATO, which resulted in the simultaneous growth of U.S. forces. As the forces grew, so did the Wiesbaden complex because U.S. Air Force members and their families needed services, including medical care. In 1947, an auditorium and dining hall were added to the complex. New dormitories were built in 1953, and an outpatient clinic was added in 1957.

Over the years, many improvements were made to the buildings in addition to the normal replacement and updating of equipment. Eventually, the complex included 27 buildings on 18 acres, with a 50-bed aeromedical staging facility and a 36-chair dental clinic. The authorized total for beds was 185 (2).

Development of the Hospital's Mission

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wiesbaden furnished medical aid and hospitalization for U.S. military

and civilian personnel and U.S. military dependents of the Wiesbaden Military Post, and performed duties as directed by the chief surgeon. The hospital also treated patients from the entire U.S. European Command (EUCOM) for various illnesses, such as neuropsychiatric diseases. Former Air Force surgeon general Robert A. Patterson affirms this. Patterson, commander of the 7600th USAF Hospital in Madrid, Spain, in the early 1950s, said that his facility was unequipped to take care of some serious cases and often flew patients to the larger facility at Wiesbaden (3).

By 1990, the mission of the hospital had expanded considerably to provide medical readiness and operational support through quality health care services; to supply consultant services and other special programs and operations in support of USAFE, EUCOM, DOD and other government agencies; to furnish special humanitarian services; and to maintain special medical readiness capabilities.

The area supported by the 7100th CSW Medical Center extended beyond Europe and USAFE to Africa and the Middle East. The center's location near Rhein Main AB, the airlift and aeromedical evacuation focal point of Europe, made it a key player in any U.S. medical response to contingencies in that part of the world. In 1990, the center's staff included 236 officers, 475 en-



Above: Joseph Ciclippio, kidnapped from Lebanon in 1986, is welcomed at Wiesbaden in late 1991. Left: After more than six years as a hostage, Terry Anderson arrives at Wiesbaden. Right: Thomas Sutherland, shakes hands with Capt. Daniel Moore, charge nurse.

listed and 190 civilians. On the average, the staff attend 170 inpatients and 780 outpatients per day, and deliver approximately 100 babies every month. The Wiesbaden Regional Medical Center, as it is commonly known, also provides primary dental care for service members throughout Europe (1).

Notable Events

Perhaps the most famous event that the medical center supported was the return of 52 hostages captured in the takeover of the American Embassy in Iran. For 14 months, from Nov. 11, 1979, through Jan. 25, 1981, worldwide interest was focused on the hospital as it prepared for the reception of hostages. This mission required unique preparations under difficult conditions. Indeed, the operation called for the immediate care of up to 75 inpatients with a broad spectrum of diseases, with as little as six to 12 hours' notice.

Because any patient movement within the hospital would suggest to the ever-present press that a release of the hostages was imminent, activity within the hospital had to be balanced against the possibilities of upsetting the delicate negotiations for the release of hostages. While these events were taking place, the hospital continued providing patient care to military and civilian government employees throughout Europe, including Greece, Italy and Turkey, with no degradation of care (4).

When the release of the 52 hostages became imminent, seven press vehicles with remote-controlled television equipment stayed on the edge of the hospital compound for five months. Crews of up to 100 were in daily attendance, each person seeking a human interest story. After the liberation, more than 800 press members were on the hospital compound attempting to capture and record the significant event for history.

When 52 patients arrived from Teheran, Iran, on Jan. 21, 1981, they were assigned to various wards in the hospital or discharged. None of the patients already in the hospital were transferred to other facilities, and basic



The 52 hostages released from Iran received a warm welcome and many cheers as they arrived at Wiesbaden on Jan. 21, 1981. They stayed at the hospital for a few days before leaving for the United States.

services were maintained. The 52 former hostages spent five days recovering at the Wiesbaden complex before continuing to the United States (5). They named the third floor of the west wing, where they stayed, Freedom Hall, and later presented a plaque that hangs in the hall. Freedom Hall has also seen 12 of the 13 American hostages released from Lebanon. The last six hostages were released between August and December 1991.

The most tragic event to involve the hospital was the October 1984 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Thirty-six wounded Marines were transferred to the Wiesbaden center for treatment. The staff was also involved in identifying the remains of the 246 Marines killed in the blast. Then secretary of state George Schultz lauded the work of the center, stating that "There are not enough superlatives to describe the support provided by the Air Force's 7100th CSW and Regional Medical Center." (5)

The hospital also treated 1,200 refugees from the Afghanistan War, through more than 100 flights. Every two months, starting in 1985, a planeload of men, women and children was flown to the Wiesbaden hospital for treatment of war-related injuries. From May to August 1986, the center supported medical rescue and other efforts at the Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union. The center's bioenvironmental lab analyzed soil and other samples for radioactivity, and biophysicists provided technical assistance to the Soviets.



In addition, the medical center's flying ambulance surgical trauma team, or FAST team, has the capability to establish surgical facilities within minutes of arriving at their destination. This team deployed to Ethiopia in August 1989 to provide medical backing for the search effort for congressman Mickey Leland, whose plane was lost.

The 7100th CSW also provided medical support for Operation Desert Shield/Storm. During that operation, in addition to providing services to all eligible beneficiaries, the medical center had 500 beds ready and had the capability to set up 250 more if needed. They treated 3,000 Desert Shield/Storm patients, about one-third of all patients evacuated from the Middle East. The center continues to provide many types of medical expertise to assist in crises and humanitarian missions (5).

Conclusion

Wiesbaden has played an important part in the history of the Air Force Medical Service, and its closing will be a definite loss. However, now that the Russian threat to central Europe has receded with the reunion of East and West Germany and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, American forces are phasing out of the area. These events, coupled with DOD reorganization efforts, mean Wiesbaden must soon take its place in military medical history.

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Wiesbaden's flying ambulance surgical trauma (FAST) team responds immediately to casualties worldwide.

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2. Anonymous. Mission brief. Provided by Captain Michelle Jewell of Wiesbaden and kept on file in medical history office.
3. Interview — Lt. Gen. Robert A. Patterson. Oct 1, 1991.
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Staff members at Wiesbaden regularly participate in mass casualty exercises, honing their skills to deal with serious catastrophes on short notice.