



# EINBLICK

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS



Came to Frankfurt as a young US soldier: Keith Williams, American Football Coach of the »Frankfurt Pirates«. (© hjü)



Picture above: Horst Hudek in his party basement.



Picture below: »Barber & Beauty Shop« in the mess hall. (© hjü)

## CORRIDORS OF POWER

LIVING HISTORY – THE IG FARBEN COMPLEX AS US HEADQUARTERS

To some, it was the centre of power of the occupying US forces, Europe's Pentagon or simply the General Creighton W. Abrams Building – now a protected complex known as the Poelzig Building – and the 14 hectares of park around it as headquarters of US troops meant different things to different people, both positive and negative. After the Second World War, from 1945 to 1995, it was the heart of the military community with all its facilities and housing areas. Nothing got done in Frankfurt without the Americans' approval and nowhere else have they left so many traces. Especially on the people who went in and out of the complex almost every day.

Germany was the last place Keith Williams wanted to go to. He was just 17 when he was drafted into the military. To this young man who had never been away from his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, Germany was a dark and forbidding place. »I had no idea and no international experience whatsoever«, says the 63-year-old Williams. But he had to do three years of compulsory

military service and in 1975, he was sent to Frankfurt, as one of the 20,000 troops stationed there. The teenager was pleasantly surprised. »Everything was so nice here. The people spoke English and were very friendly. The trains and busses came on time, life was easy and straightforward. We played with German children and gave them candy. I liked the architecture from the start.« He was still unaware of the notorious role played by IG Farben under the National Socialist regime. To him, it was simply his base as a soldier of Signal Battalion 143.

### A US MILITARY BASE IN THE CITY OF FRANKFURT

Horst Hudek, on the other hand, couldn't wait to go to Frankfurt. Especially because of the Americans. The young barber from the town of Korbach, in the federal state of Hesse, liked pretty much everything the US brought to Germany: the cars, rock 'n' roll, the music radio station AFN, Elvis Presley. After his apprenticeship, he got a job working in a US base in northern Hesse. And he

felt at home there right away. »The dollar was worth four Deutschmarks and the tips were great.« So he did not hesitate for a second when got the chance to work as a barber at the US officers' mess in Frankfurt in 1963. Henceforth, he would give soldiers the standard crew cut or flat top for just 4 US dollars. The price of the haircut was mandatory and the rent he had to pay for the barber shop was ten percent of his sales. Before long, Horst Hudek had four people working for him in his »Community Beauty and Barber Shop« in the basement of the building housing the officers' mess, now called the »Terrace Club«. At weekends, the officers' wives would come to get their hair done for the military balls. »It was like a production line.«

The »Terrace Club« was the hub of the US military community's social life. This is where the balls and receptions were held. The building was also home to the »Officers and Civilians Open Club«. There was a little mall in the



The Poelzig building in 1975: Headquarters of the US military in Europe. (© Klaus Meier-Ude)

lobby of the building with several small shops and a casino. Beside the barber shop was a night club called »Down Under«. Keith Williams was the Friday night DJ. »We partied a lot«, recalls Horst Hudek. »After-work drinks at the mess were commonplace.«

### THE HISTORY OF THE US HEADQUARTERS

The head offices of chemicals giant IG Farben served their original purpose for just 14 years. The US army stayed for more than 40. In 1945, when US forces advanced to the building, which had survived the devastating ariel bombardments of the Second World War, they found more than 2,000 refugees of various nationalities huddled together in total chaos and deprivation. Having secured accommodation for the refugees, the US military commandeered the complex for its own use. Dwight D. Eisenhower, commanding officer of the US army in Europe, set up his office in a conference room on the first floor overlooking the rotunda of the Poelzig Building. A post office and a bank moved into the ground floor. The largest and most impressive conference room in Q1 was converted into racquetball courts and a number of fitness studios were installed in the surrounding rooms. There was a snack bar in the rotunda. »As normal soldiers, we were not in the building very often«, says Keith Williams. »I was there a few times for briefings or to pick up something at the snack bar.«

Up until December 1994, about 3,000 personnel, mostly officers, went to work at the IG Farben Building. Military service in Germany was considered a professional highlight and a springboard to promotion. The late Colin L. Powell, for example, the former Joint Chief of Staffs chairman, once commanded the V Corps in Frankfurt, albeit briefly.

### AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

Horst Hudek came and went from US Headquarters for some 30 years. The IG Farben Building was like a city within a city. Between Grüneburgweg and Miquelallee was a cinema, the »Idle House Theater«, the »Ambassador Arms Hotel«, a church and a Kindergarten. The Philipp-Holzmann-Schule was called The Frankfurt American High School back then, attended by a total of about 66.000 pupils. Young German women were welcome guests at the »Terrace Club«. The huge bowling alley was always busy and local children would play in the park. Many residents used the park as a short cut through town. And sometimes, like in the student revolt of 1968, a few students would drop in from nearby Brockenheim, too. »Every now and again you would hear these 'Ami go home' slogans being chanted by demonstrators«, recalls Horst Hudek, who prefers to honour the Americans' contribution to the reconstruction of Germany after the war. He still shakes his head when he thinks back to the student protests. He always has and always will love the Americans' casual approach. The entire complex was always open to the public.

and another, bigger one at the entrance to the »Terrace Club«. Horst Hudek was in his barber shop when the bomb went off and the ceiling caved in. »We were not hurt but 17 people were wounded and a lieutenant colonel was killed.« Further attacks led to the complex being cordoned off entirely. Keith Williams remains traumatised. »To this day, I would never get into a car with a stranger.« From then on, military commanders would emphasise time and again the importance of vigilance and caution. Security was drastically tightened and henceforth, only those with special permits were allowed to enter the complex until the US forces withdrew in 1995.

### HERE TO STAY

Despite his traumatic experiences with terrorism, Keith Williams stayed in Germany. He visited his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, one more time. He was homesick but the prospects of employment were poor. He had a job offer in Frankfurt with an annual salary of 30,000 US dollars as director of sports at the American High School. Word of his voluntary work coaching the kids of US servicemen had got around. And as a DJ in the Officer Clubs of US barracks, he was widely known. In 1990, Keith Williams founded the American Football Club »Frankfurt Pirates«. »Many kids have no opportunity to play sports and have a proper social life.« Williams is a man on a mission. In Germany, he says, sport is all about performance. For Americans, on the other hand, he says it is more about social cohesion. »It means a lot to me to be able to make a difference to children's lives.« He and Horst Hudek have one thing in common: neither of them has ever returned to the complex, which is now Campus Westend of the Goethe-Universität. They don't want to. (Editing & text: Heike Jüngst | Translation: Don Mac Coitir) ■



After the terrorist attacks by the Baader Meinhof Gang (»RAF«) in 1972, security was tightened at the former IG Farben complex. Horst Hudek also had to carry a special pass.

### THE TERRORIST THREAT

That changed in 1972. On the evening of 11 May, members of the terrorist Rote Armee Fraktion, also known as the Baader Meinhof gang, detonated two bombs in the foyer of the Poelzig Building