

RAF Hambühren

by SAC Peter Jackson

One of the smallest stations in the RAF was in existence in Germany for just five years from 1952 to 1957 when it was handed over to the Luftwaffe. It was close to the picturesque village of Hambühren and four miles from the beautiful baroque town of Celle. There were no facilities for aircraft - it was far too small — and flying never featured in the life of the station, even though nearly all the officers wore wings showing that they had flown in the Second World War. Two of them had been awarded the DFC. Please note that at no time were there more than seven officers on the strength.

To describe what the station did would be to break the Official Secrets Act but perhaps it would be enough to say that there was an aerial farm at the station which was right next to the main road which went through the camp.

In September 1957 a bomb was dropped, not a real bomb but nevertheless it hit the personnel with a thud. The RAF was to leave in November. The NAAFI buzzed. Didn't the Air Ministry or 2nd TAF know that we liked it there? It was a friendly place, discipline was functional and the CO was the right man for the job. It was comfortable and there were country walks surrounding the base and Celle was a wonderful town for off duty leisure facilities and easy to reach by bus, train or on foot. Friendships were struck up with local people and a few of the airmen gave English lessons to children in the local school. The camp's football team played occasional matches against the local team but of course the cricket and rugby teams had to restrict their opposition to teams from other RAF and Army bases. Two of the senior NCOs - one was a Scot and the other English - took part in the annual local Schützenfest. There was a pub in the village, or rather there were two but one was out of bounds.

Returning to the grim news of September, neither the Air Ministry or 2nd TAF took any notice so the die was cast and we had to start packing. My job was that of clerk/typist working in the Top Secret Registry housed on the first floor of the Operations Block, also known as Block 10. I can't say it was 100 % fascinating but it was quiet and there was time for me to continue my work on qualifying in my civilian occupation, particularly as the other occupant of the office was just a sergeant, an amiable man who was often away, leaving me on my own. Those who worked in Block 10 were told, or found out in other ways, that they would be departing towards the end of October and the rest a month later when the handover would be finalised.

In the final few days I became important as I had to check and then transfer all the paperwork into the filing cabinets or cardboard boxes and label all of them. There was a final parade of everyone available (I was not as I had to be on duty in the Top Secret Registry but I watched it from my window) and to round everything off there was a dinner in the Airmen's Mess on 21st October.

The first convoy for Butzweilerhof left on 24th at 10.00 a.m. and the following day the second convoy departed also at 10.00 a.m. with me in a sealed wagon and all the secret documents in locked filing cabinets for company. I was quite happy as there was an armchair provided for me and I probably dozed from time to time as we set off on the long journey from Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) to North Rhine Westphalia (Nord Rhein Westfalen). After a while I sensed that the convoy was pulling off the Autobahn, presumably for a rest stop for obvious reasons. My wagon was unlocked and I jumped out into the fresh air looking forward to a tea and a bun. Not yet, though, but an officer approached me with a pistol and ammunition and instructions to guard the wagon with my life and I was ordered to put these into separate pockets and never use. I guess that after a while someone came to relieve me and I could have my much deserved lunch. This duly happened and I felt refreshed and ready to re-enter my wagon. This was where we re-charged our batteries, unique in Germany and refreshingly different.