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INFORMATION ON GERMAN CASERNES IN REPLY TO US SEVENTH ARMY INQUIRIES

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INFORMATION ON GERMAN CASERNES

IN REPLY TO US SEVENTH ARMY INQUIRIES

by

Hellmuth Reinhardt, Generalmajor a.D.

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Hellmuth REINHARDT
Generalmajor a.D.
Date of Birth: 27 June 1900
Place of Birth: Stuttgart

After studying forestry at Tuebingen University, REINHARDT underwent training in the Munich and Wuensdorff infantry schools from May to November 1920 and from January to July 1921 respectively. In addition he received training in the Berlin War College from October 1932 to April 1935.

In World War II REINHARDT served as Supply Officer and later as Operations Officer at Deputy Headquarters of V Infantry Corps, in Stuttgart, as Operations Officer of the 25th Infantry Division in the Westwall and in the French Campaign, and was then transferred to Army High Command Headquarters at Fontainebleau as Branch Chief in the Organization Division of the Army General Staff. In March 1941 he was appointed Chief of Staff in the Army General Office, Berlin. On 1 November 1943 he was relieved of his post and placed in the Army High Command Officer Reserve. In March 1944 he was assigned to the Eighth Army as Chief of Staff and in June of that year promoted Generalmajor. He was transferred from the Eighth Army to the Staff of the Wehrmacht Commander in Chief in Denmark (Lindemann Army) as Chief of Staff on 28 December 1944 and remained in Silkeborg, Denmark, until 6 June 1945.

INFORMATION ON GERMAN CASERNES

I. INTRODUCTION

The information given in the following pages is based for the most part on the personal knowledge and the personal recollections of the writer. Apart from some of the records used in the preparation of former studies — MS # P-036, German Caserne and MS # P-079, Space Standards For Wehrmacht Billeting, and which were of assistance in answering the questions involved in this present manuscript, very few official records were available.

II. REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS ASKED

1. <u>The General Standard Housing Capacities of Caserne and the Types of Units for Which They Were Intended.</u> Owing to the varying circumstances under which they had been built, and particularly to the different periods at which they were built, the housing capacities of the caserne used by the German army prior to the war varied widely.

In the case of the older caserne, which had been built prior to 1914, the general rule was to billet one battalion in one building. Usually, a number of these buildings were grouped together to form a caserne for a regiment, so that a caserne of this type consisted of three or four buildings. However, local circumstances, the use of buildings originally intended for other purposes, the time at which a caserne had been built, or other reasons, frequently necessitated a departure from this rule. Thus, as far as the number of men billeted in individual

casernes is concerned, there was no uniformity in their use by the new Wehrmacht from 1935 on.

Conditions were different in the case of casernes built later than 1935. Here, the rule applied that each building was to house one unit, a company or a battery, a group of such buildings forming a caserne for one battalion. Regimental headquarters personnel and the headquarters units were distributed among the battalions. Thus, the number of buildings per caserne varied between three and eight according to the arm to which the unit concerned belonged, since the number of units composing a battalion differed in the various arms. The number of headquarters units assigned to the regiment concerned also varied. The principle of housing one battalion in one caserne, with a building for each company or battery, was adhered to in the construction of all casernes from 1935 on.

2. Types of Canteens or Clubs in Casernes. As a rule, each caserne had at least one combined canteen and day room. The commander of the unit billeted in the caserne, normally the battalion commander, was responsible for the management of the canteen day room, and was authorized either to let it to some concessionaire or to manage it as an undertaking of his unit. If the canteen was leased, which was usually the case, the commander, acting as "the personally responsible representative of all members of the unit" signed the contract with the lessee. If the canteen was not let, it was considered a private

installation of the unit. In this case, the commander, "In protecting the interests of all members of his unit, acted personally and in his own name; in doing so, he assumed personal responsibility."[1] Any profits accruing from the management of the canteen in the form of rentals or profits on business transacted were at the disposal of the commander for welfare purposes for the enlisted men, both NCOs and privates, of his unit. However, the distribution of cash sums to soldiers was prohibited.

The recreation space provided in modern casernes comprised

a. premises for the canteen;

b. guest rooms (frequently the NCO and privates' mess rooms were also used for this purpose);

c. living quarters for the canteen lessee.

Usually, and always in the case of casernes constructed after 1935, this space was provided in the so-called housekeeping building, which building was available in all modern casernes in addition to the billet buildings and in which the kitchen, canteen, mess rooms and so forth were located.

(Further information in Subsection 6, page 11.)

Officers' clubs were usually, and in the case of casernes constructed after 1935 always, located in separate buildings. Sometimes these

[1] Quoted verbatim from the Army Administration Manual for 1939/40 (Heeresverwaltungs-Taschenbuch 1939/40).

buildings were within and sometimes outside of the caserne grounds. In some of the old casernes, for instance in cases where the entire caserne consisted of only one building, the officers' clubs were in the billet buildings.

The management of the officers' clubs was the private responsibility of the officers of the unit concerned, and was handled in the same manner as the canteens, namely, either the club was leased to a manager under contract or it was managed by the officers corps itself.

In general each regiment (if it was stationed with all its units in one garrison), each administratively independent battalion, and each battalion garrisoned separately from its regiment, had its own officers' club. Some garrisons, particularly smaller garrisons, had a garrison instead of a unit club. This was usually the case in the time of the 100 000-man army [2].

Usually, the club building contained an apartment for the manager of the club and one or a number of apartments for unmarried officers in addition to the housekeeping premises and the mess and recreation rooms.

3. Special Services for Troops in Casernes. To a great extent it was left to the initiative of unit commanders, primarily company, battery, and battalion commanders, in the German Army to arrange the special services for the troops. This included all measures to ameliorate

[2] The reduced army Germany was allowed to maintain in terms of the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Translator

the off-duty life of soldiers in casernes, the provision of amenities, of facilities for intellectual, athletic or other activities and at the same time the promotion a feeling of solidarity. Therefore, the nature and the extent of the special services provided varied in the individual units according to the personal character of the unit commanders but also in accordance with the characteristics and regional origin of the personnel composing the unit, local circumstances (city or small town conditions) and so forth.

A large part of the special services activities took place outside of the casernes, for example, organized sight-seeing hikes, ski training, visits to museums, theaters, movies and so forth. In each billet building, a recreation room, usually of the same size as a squad room, was set aside for special service purposes. To a large extent it was left to the initiative of the unit concerned to provide comfortable furniture, attractive curtains, table covers and so forth. As a rule, this room was not to be used for duty purposes, separate rooms being available for service instruction and so forth. The procurement of entertainment facilities, such as chess and other board games, table tennis sets, libraries, radio receivers and so forth, was also a responsibility of the unit. For these purposes each unit had a special housekeeping fund, which was administered by the battalion, and could also use profits accruing from the canteen (Subsection 2, page 2).

In addition to the recreation rooms mentioned above, use could also be made of the canteen premises and the mess rooms for unit parties, off-duty lectures and similar events. However, larger social functions held by a company, to which relatives of the company personnel and other guests were invited, very often were held in halls leased for the purpose from municipalities, hotels and so forth.

The forming of off-duty activities groups by soldiers was promoted and very frequently legally registered clubs were constituted within units for this purpose. The most popular clubs, apart from sport and athletic clubs (light athletics, football, skiing and so forth), were the choral clubs, which were formed in many units.

The athletic equipment, gymnasium halls and the sport fields used in training were available to the troops for off-duty athletics, and additional equipment could be bought in limited quantities at the discretion of the commander and paid for out of the housekeeping funds administered by the unit. Furthermore, equipment was bought with funds accruing from the membership fees of the clubs mentioned above. If a soldier was injured during off-duty athletics, the incident could be recorded as "injured in line of duty" if the time at which the athletics were to take place had been set by an appropriate superior and a suitable person had been expressly appointed as a supervisor.

The unit buglers or the unit band were also employed for entertainment purposes, and regular after-duty musical concerts were arranged within the caserne. In many units it was standing practice to have a small band play light music in the canteen premises on certain evenings of the week. At company parties or similar functions, music was provided either by the entire unit band or by small orchestras formed by members of the band. Furthermore, suitable unit buglers or members of the unit band frequently acted as instructors and conductors in the unit choirs. However, civilian singing instructors were also quite frequently employed, particularly in units in which choral clubs had been formed.

On suitable occasions and when suitable lecturers were available, lectures on general educational subjects were held in the recreation or mess rooms of the caserne. Limited means were also available for this purpose in the unit housekeeping fund.

The religious needs of the troops were ministered to by the garrison chaplains of both faiths, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, at regular intervals in "caserne evenings" held in the recreation rooms; attendance was voluntary. In garrisons which had no garrison chapel and in large towns where the garrison chapel was far from the caserne, church furnishings, such as altar cloths, crosses, chalices and so forth were standard caserne equipment. They were used to furnish suitable rooms, such as the drill halls or mess rooms, for religious services

on Sundays and religious holidays. These religious services within the casernes, at which attendance was voluntary, took place at regular, prearranged intervals, in most cases once or twice monthly, and were held alternately by the garrison chaplains of both faiths. The families of soldiers were also allowed to attend.

4. Strength of Infantry Companies, Battalions and Divisions. It has not been possible to obtain the peacetime infantry tables of organization, so that precise figures for authorized strengths cannot be given.

The following approximate figures are given only as a guide:

Unit	Approximate authorized strength
Infantry Rifle Company	175
Infantry Battalion	7-800
Infantry Regiment	2,500 - 3,000

The peacetime strength of infantry divisions varied during the prewar period but a strength of 15,000 per division can probably be accepted as an approximate average.

The peacetime tables of organization for artillery and engineer units are available so that the following precise figures can be given for these two arms:

Arm	Unit	Strength				
		Officers	Officials	NCOs	Privates	Horses
Artillery	Light Howitzer Battery (horse-drawn)	6	-	29	111	84
	Light Arty Bn (horse-drawn): Hq staff, sig plat survey sec, 3 light how batteries	24	3	111	405	324
	100-mm Gun or Hv How Battery (horse-drawn)	6	-	32	124	110
	Hv Arty Bn (horse-drawn): Hq staff, sig pl, survey sec, 1 100-mm gun battery, 2 Hv How Batteries	24	3	120	444	402
	Arty Regt (horse-drawn): Hq staff, sig pl, printing sec, meteorological sec, 1 Hv and 3 Lt Bns, band	87	14	500	1855	1437
	Observation Bn (mts): Hq staff, sig pl, meteorological pl, 1 survey, 1 flash ranging, 1 sound ranging and 1 balloon observation battery	28	8	133	472	-
Engineers	Engineer Company	5	-	32	152	16
	Mts Engineer Company	5	-	35	164	-
	Engineer Battalion: Hq staff, 1 mts, 2 foot companies, band	24	6	145	517	45

During the years immediately preceding the war, the actual strength of all units was higher than their authorized strength, because, in view of the continued build-up of the army, a certain percentage more recruits were assigned than the authorized number. As far as the author can recollect, the additional number of recruits assigned to the infantry company fluctuated between twenty and thirty, so that the actual strength of an infantry company was roughly 200 and that of the battalion, regiment and division correspondingly higher than the figures given on page 9. However, the casernes were built in accordance with the authorized strengths according to the tables of organization. The additional recruits were billeted by exceeding the authorized billeting capacities.

5. Other Services Rendered in Typical Casernes. The medical and hygienic facilities available in casernes will be treated here.

In modern casernes, toilets and wash rooms were installed on each floor of the billet buildings. In the cellar, each company had a shower room, with hot water available at specified times. In addition, the cellar contained a laundry room, in which those soldiers who did not have their washing done by approved laundries or washerwomen at their own expense could wash their clothing. In old casernes, the wash and shower rooms and toilets were in separate buildings and usually troughs were set up in the yards for the washing of body linen and other clothing. However, wherever possible, wash rooms and toilets were subsequently installed within the billet buildings.

Most casernes had a barber shop.

Each caserne had a dispensary consisting of a room where medical examinations were carried out, a waiting room and a number of ward rooms for patients who did not require hospitalization. In garrisons which had no hospital, the casernes had so-called extended dispensaries with more extensive medical facilities and increased bed space.

6. Further Information which Might Be of Value. In addition to the billet buildings, modern casernes included the following:

A headquarters building in which the offices of the staff or staffs, the dispensary office, the telephone exchange, the guard room and prisoner cells, and the tailor and shoe repair workshops were located;

One or more housekeeping buildings containing kitchens, mess rooms, canteens, storage rooms, a music room and usually a barber shop. The number of housekeeping buildings depended on the number of kitchens required. Normally a kitchen was provided for every two companies or batteries, but this arrangement varied in accordance with local circumstances.

An ordnance building and workshops according to the arm of the units billeted in the caserne;

A drill hall building which included a gymnasium hall;

A gas chamber in which gas masks were tested;

An ammunition store at the legally prescribed distance from the billet buildings.

Casernes for units which had horses also had stables with large lofts for the storage of fodder and straw, a farrier shop, a hospital stable, one or more riding halls, one or more riding courses with or without hurdles, and vehicle sheds.

The casernes for motorized units had vehicle sheds, repair shops, tanking facilities and driveways for practice driving.

Finally, sport fields, with dirt tracks for racing, jumping ditches, and so forth, were laid out either within the caserne grounds or in the vicinity. If local conditions required, a number of casernes would share a garrison sport field. Wherever local conditions permitted — in the vicinity of lakes and rivers, for example — garrison swimming baths and pools were provided, in addition to facilities for off-duty activities such as sailing and rowing.

A further point that deserves mention is the fact that soldiers were allowed to keep their privately owned bicycles, motorcycles or automobiles at the casernes. No charge was made for bicycles; a fixed rental was charged for the housing of motorcycles and automobiles.

Usually, the cellars served as air raid shelters. In newly constructed casernes, the cellar ceilings were particularly well reinforced for this purpose. Following experience gained during the war, reservoirs were built in the yards of casernes for the storage of water for fire-fighting purposes. In some cases, these reservoirs were used by the units as swimming pools.

The casernes were intended to accomodate privates and unmarried NCOs, but a certain number of apartments were also built in for married NCOs and young unmarried first and second lieutenants. The occupants of these apartments were required to pay a monthly rent. In the case of new casernes, one separate apartment was provided for an NCO, usually the company first sergeant, and one for an unmarried first or second lieutenant, but in the older constructions the number of apartments varied. The majority of the married NCOs lived in apartments in so-called NCO houses owned by the Reich government, for which they were required to pay rent. In the case of older casernes, these houses sometimes were within the caserne grounds. Usually, however, and always in the case of newly constructed casernes, they were outside of the caserne grounds. Married officers, and unmarried officers for whom no billets were available in the casernes, had to find their own quarters in the town, and in many garrison towns houses owned by the Reich government or built with the aid of government subsidies were available for this purpose. Only officers in particularly high positions were assigned official apartments or houses.

/s/ Hellmuth Reinhardt