A black and white photograph of a man in a suit and glasses looking out of the cockpit window of a helicopter. The helicopter's rotor blades are visible at the top of the frame. The image is overlaid with a dark green semi-transparent banner containing text.

2014 Keith L. Ware Award Competition

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category B: Program

**U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden**

**NOISE ABATEMENT EFFORTS RESTORE  
HARMONY WITH HOST NATION**

Sensitive host nation issue solved by dedicated and  
consistent communication and engagement



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
UNITED STATES ARMY INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND  
EUROPE REGION  
UNIT 23103  
APO AE 09136

IMEU-PA

13 January 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY  
INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND

SUBJECT: Europe Region endorsement of USAG Wiesbaden community relations program  
entry for Keith L. Ware awards competition

1. In accordance with published guidance on the subject, the enclosed package of information is submitted for due consideration under the DA Community Relations Award Category B: Program. This packet is submitted with the utmost enthusiasm and confidence.
2. U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden experienced a huge transformation beginning with the move of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 214<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment and 16 helicopters there starting in summer 2012 as part of USAREUR HQ relocation from Heidelberg to Wiesbaden. The community outcry in the already densely populated Rhein-Main area of Germany was alarming to garrison officials who had enjoyed a friendly working relationship with local populations. The strategic plan developed and executed by the garrison Public Affairs Office to reassure the population and strengthen relations with host nation partners through transparency at multiple levels resulted in positive press coverage, consistently positive feedback from local officials and citizens, and a 50 percent decrease in noise complaints from 2013 to 2014.
3. The POC for this action is the undersigned at DSN (314) 544-2002.

FOR THE DIRECTOR:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy D. Darr", is positioned above the printed name and title.

TROY D. DARR  
Chief of Public Affairs



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
UNITED STATES ARMY GARRISON WIESBADEN  
UNIT 29623  
APO AE 09005-9623

IMWB-PA

16 JAN 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE, HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION FROM PROJECT SUPERVISOR FOR SUBMISSION TO 2014 KEITH L. WARE COMPETITION, COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

1. Recommendation supporting this nomination by the USAG Wiesbaden Public Affairs Office is provided in accordance with published guidelines for the 2014 Keith L. Ware Competition, Community Relations Awards.
2. USAG Wiesbaden PAO has been challenged with credibly communicating garrison commitment to being a good neighbor at a time when some of the transformation developments coming along with the move of the U.S. Army Europe headquarters assets to Wiesbaden fed dormant concerns in the local population. One of the neighborhood's biggest worries was adding more aviation and unavoidable noise to an already crowded airspace in the Rhine Main Region.
3. The garrison PAO, in close cooperation with the Government Relations Office, countered the trend of biased press and increasing negative sentiment with a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy, clarifying airfield operations, flight safety aspects, adherence to German aviation rules and more, using both personal engagement strategies with host nation leaders carried out by the command, as well as communication strategies through local and regional media.
4. The multi-year efforts paid off visibly and verifiably over the past year with a 50 percent drop in complaints, not only quieting some of the population's greatest concerns, but also demonstrating willingness to adjust within limits set by mission requirements, for the sake of good neighborhood relations. Increased contacts with host nation multipliers eventually led to an increase in quality of life opportunities offered by surrounding towns. This award submission is enthusiastically submitted for consideration as a best-practice ComRel program.



ANEMONE RUEGER  
Public Affairs Officer

# Keith L. Ware Award 2014 Submission

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Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden, Germany

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS CAT B: Program

Program name:

## Noise Abatement Efforts Restore Harmony with Host Nation

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*Sensitive host nation issue solved by dedicated and consistent communications and engagement*

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## Context and Purpose

The move of the headquarters of U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) to Clay Kaserne in Wiesbaden and the consolidation of the 1st Battalion, 214th Aviation Regiment (1-214th) on the Kaserne's airfield over the course of 2012-2014 posed significant challenges in the garrison's relations with the surrounding German Host Nation (HN) communities. Prior to the arrival of the aviation battalion, the airfield had been effectively dormant, and indeed had even spent periods serving as a motor pool to the 1st Armored Division and other units stationed in Wiesbaden. Now the 1-214th presence meant the stationing of 16 UH-60 helicopters and 11 additional C-12 or UC-35 fixed-wing transport aircraft in an area whose airspace was already heavily saturated with commercial aircraft landing or departing from nearby Frankfurt International Airport, one of the busiest airports in the world.

Although the City of Wiesbaden had lobbied to host the USAREUR headquarters, and the local German populace generally welcomed the move of the headquarters to the Wiesbaden area, it was not commonly known by our German neighbors that the headquarters' move would entail the corresponding transfer of the 1-214th to Wiesbaden as well.

Difficulties with the City of Wiesbaden and the adjacent German towns and cities began to increase in 2013 as the 1-214th completed its move and especially after it was announced that the aviation unit would have to carry out its first summer night flying training program from May to August 2013. The number of noise complaints that the garrison received from the German communities sharply climbed. A citizen's initiative group was organized under the name of Citizens' Initiative Against the Noise and Dangers of U.S. Aircraft (in German known under its acronym of "BILGUS") to mobilize public opinion against the U.S. aviation presence in Wiesbaden. BILGUS was instrumental in organizing several citizen demonstrations in front of the gates of Clay Kaserne against U.S. military aviation operations- the first time in institutional memory that there had ever been protests against the U.S. military in

the Wiesbaden area. Local and even national German press coverage increased, zeroing in on the supposed U.S. military noise pollution and the burden it was now imposing on the surrounding German populace, who were already suffering from aircraft noise issues caused by Frankfurt International Airport. These local problems were further complicated by the backdrop of the Snowden scandal that erupted during the course of 2013. With reports of the National Security Agency allegedly collecting massive phone and digital data on individual German citizens and even tapping the phone of German Chancellor Merkel, many German citizens were now questioning whether the U.S. could even be considered an ally and friend, with some even calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Germany.

Faced with this popular outcry, it was not long before local German politicians started denouncing U.S. military aircraft noise; U.S. military aircraft noise certainly played a factor in the surprise victory of the Social Democratic candidate, Herr Sven Gerich, in the Wiesbaden mayoral elections of March 2013. Herr Gerich defeated the Christian Social Democratic incumbent, Dr. Helmut Mueller, who had championed the move of USAREUR to Wiesbaden. Herr Gerich in his campaign platform had promised to directly address the noise issue with the Americans and to take substantive measures to reduce it; soon after taking office in June 2013 he met the Wiesbaden garrison commander and adamantly requested that concrete steps be taken to reduce the noise burden on his citizens.

In the face of mounting German citizen, press and political pressure, the garrison had to come up with a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the potential negative effects of USAREUR's new presence in the area, especially in terms of reducing the perceived noise burden on the neighboring German communities. If the noise issue were allowed to deteriorate further, it could potentially lead to uncooperative local governments and an unreceptive German population that could seriously affect the ability of USAREUR, the garrison and the airfield to accomplish their full range of missions.

The garrison consequently developed a multi-faceted community relations approach based on the principles of transparency and inclusive open communications that have yielded dramatic results. By the end of 2014 noise complaints received by the Garrison had been reduced by fifty percent; U.S. military aircraft noise was no longer in media headlines, and the Lord Mayor of Wiesbaden felt comfortable enough to go on vacation and allow his deputy to represent him in the last noise abatement commission held in October 2014. The garrison's community relations strategy had succeeded beyond expectations; it can certainly serve as a model for other U.S. bases facing similar challenges with their surrounding host nation communities.

## Research

### *Platforms Used*

The PAO, jointly with the GRO, used a number of platforms, many developed through successful community engagement over the years, to determine the scope of the aviation noise issue; these included the following:

**ESTABLISHED NETWORKS** -- A tight network of public affairs practitioners at the garrison, other units in the garrison's footprint, as well as public affairs counterparts from official host nation government entities and private partners. Open and trusting communication lines were built through everyday cooperation and in particular through the highly effective semi-annual public affairs networking sessions that brought together 30-40 participants from the U.S. Military and Frankfurt Consulate, German military (*the Bundeswehr*) counterparts, host city and surrounding towns, police etc.

**NOISE ABATEMENT COMMISSION (NAC)**-- The semi-annual NAC meetings, which are chaired by the garrison commander and feature the airfield commander and manager, as well as the civil and military German aviation authorities, to provide current information on local aviation issues and to discuss and answer questions brought up by the HN invitees.

**GARRISON COMMANDER (GC) COMMUNICATIONS** -- Direct meetings and phone conversations between the GC, city and district mayors, and through numerous spontaneous information exchanges at local HN events.

**LOCAL PRESS** -- Intensely monitoring media reporting on matters concerning U.S. military air operations in the region, paying special attention to "uncensored" online discussion forums linked to subject articles.

**COMPLAINTS** -- Scrutinizing HN noise-related email and phone complaints directed to the garrison and the airfield.

**AIRFIELD BUY-IN**—Closely working with the 1-214th Aviation Battalion and the airfield, investigating what specific measures could be taken by the battalion and the airfield to reduce the noise signature. The garrison has been fortunate over the past four years to have aviation battalion commanders, first Lt. Col. Brouse and now Lt. Col. Kappelmann, who are genuinely interested in doing everything possible to reduce noise aggravations on the surrounding German communities.

### *Key Findings*

Through these forums, the Garrison gained a good understanding of the peculiarities of the region and of those aviation-related issues that are particularly sensitive in the surrounding HN communities; these considerations included:

**CROWDED AREA** -- USAG Wiesbaden and its airfield on Clay Kaserne happen to be located in the middle of Germany's most densely populated area, the Rhine-Main Region with a population of about 5.5 million residents mostly concentrated within the city boundaries of Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Mainz and Darmstadt.

**CROWDED AIRSPACE** -- This same region also claims Germany's most densely populated airspace. Frankfurt International Airport, Germany's biggest airport, operates over a half a million flight movements serving 60 million passengers a year. About half of the passengers are international travelers who use

Frankfurt for connection flights due to its central location in Europe.

**MOUNTING PUBLIC PROTEST** -- Discussions over achieving the right balance between maintaining or even increasing Frankfurt's position as the main economic and business motor in the region (providing over 70,000 jobs), while protecting the interests of local residents for a better quality of life have been running high over the past few years as Frankfurt Airport has been steadily expanding its capacity. In 2011, the airport opened a fourth runway, which has significantly increased the noise burden on the city of Mainz and the towns along the Main River; Frankfurt has now begun constructing a third terminal to handle the estimated 90 million passengers it projects it will have to move by 2020. Not surprisingly, over the last years there have been regular demonstrations by residents, citizen initiatives and political groups to stop, or limit, the growth of Frankfurt Airport and to maximize the number of quiet night hours.

**COURT RULING** -- In a ruling by the Federal German Administrative Court in early 2012, night flights at Frankfurt International Airport were severely limited between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

**HIGHWAY HUB** -- Clay Kaserne and its airfield are also located by Europe's most highly used motorway interchange, creating an additional noise signature for local residents.

**NOISE SENSITIVITY** -- On average, residents in the Rhine-Main Area and in the centrally located state of Hesse enjoy a high standard of living; basic needs are met; thus, non-material needs have gained a higher priority among the residents, most notably the ability to enjoy quiet surroundings and quality sleep during the night hours, as well as the opportunity to take advantage of relaxed outdoor leisure activities during the summer.

**THE LAST STRAW** -- Considering the significant flight noise signature already existing in this area, the (comparably small – 10,000 flight movements a year) noise pollution caused by U.S. military aircraft taking off or landing from the airfield was considered as the last

straw, triggering a disproportionately frustrated response by the surrounding population.

**PERCEIVED OCCUPATION MENTALITY** -- Additionally, 70 years after the end of World War II, there is a strong current of German opinion, especially among the younger generation that did not experience the war, the reconstruction of Germany, or even the Cold War years, that questions why U.S. Forces are still in the country. This stream of thought was further reinforced by the Snowden-related controversies of 2013. The term "occupation mentality" has consequently been heard more frequently as frustration has risen and the perception has become more wide-spread that "the Americans" can apparently do what they want: They can spy on Germans and they can fly unencumbered by the rules governing aircraft operating in/out of Frankfurt International Airport.

**WE CAN OPERATE SMARTER**-- Although by its nature an airfield can be a noisy place, there were relatively easy measures, policies and rules that could be implemented on the airfield or in the conduct of air operations on Clay Kaserne that could mitigate some of the noise, and yet not impact the battalion's or the airfield's ability to accomplish its assigned missions.

## Planning

### *The Planning Process*

The PAO/GRO team took advantage of the garrison's yearly strategic planning process to focus on improving the garrison's image among the German populace seriously eroded by all the factors that have been detailed previously, and particularly the consolidation of the 1-214<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion on the airfield.

The issue of noise mitigation was given such importance that the GC ordered the formation of a special working group led by the PAO/GRO and made up of representatives of those garrison directorates with a role in community relations and/or noise mitigation. The mission of the working group was to develop a concrete strategy on how the garrison could best communicate with the surrounding German

communities in order to effectively convey the garrison's command messages.

The working group came up with the following recommendations:

**MAXIMIZE EXISTING FORUMS** -- Make use of, and even expand existing communication forums, the most prominent being the NAC, which convenes semi-annually, and include additional communities affected by flight noise, as well as more HN partners who could reinforce our communication efforts.

**OUR GERMAN MILITARY PARTNERS** -- Take advantage of our German military partner unit, the German Armed Forces State Command Hesse (known in German as the *Landeskommando Hessen*), as a source of assistance and advice to craft our communication strategy; also get them to serve as an advocate on our behalf, especially with Hessian state and local governmental authorities.

**MEDIA DAYS** -- Institute regular media days and invite German media outlets on-post for the purpose of efficiently conveying information, answering their queries and satisfying their interests, and in the process demonstrating our openness and transparency.

**NOISE EMAIL AND PHONE HOTLINE** -- Establish a system easily accessible to the German general public that provides user-friendly venues to voice concerns and complaints, and that ensures timely follow-up and feedback.

**AIRFIELD TOURS** -- Initiate a well-planned visiting program for groups of HN governmental authorities (mayors, city councilmen, administrative officials) with command participation, to educate them on our airfield operations and provide them the information necessary so that they can inform their respective constituencies.

**GET OUT, MINGLE AND COMMUNICATE** -- Provide the GC with opportunities to visit the surrounding city/town halls for informal discussions with host nation counterparts. Moreover, when feasible make the GC and/or airfield representatives available to answer questions in town hall meetings.

## *Communication Objectives*

The objectives of this focused engagement effort were as follows:

**ATTAIN UNDERSTANDING** -- Bring the surrounding HN communities to a reasonable level of understanding of the airfield's mission and its need to maintain pilot proficiency for the sake of mission accomplishment and flight safety.

**ACHIEVE AWARENESS OF OUR EFFORTS** -- Achieve local awareness of the garrison's and airfield's continuing efforts to do everything possible to reduce the noise impact of our air operations on our German neighbors.

**CONVEY TRANSPARENCY** -- Use the present difficulties as an opportunity to convey the garrison's commitment to transparency and host nation partnerships.

## *Command Messages*

In order to communicate effectively and in unison with our HN partners, the following key messages were developed for public engagements and garrison-issued media products:

- USAG Wiesbaden and its tenant units want to be good neighbors.
- We live here, too; we share local residents' concerns.
- We are constantly striving to adopt all sensible measures that can reduce the noise burden on our surrounding German communities.
- We strictly follow all German federal aviation rules and guidelines, both civil and military.
- We are committed to transparency and we welcome the opportunities to show and explain how we fly in accordance with all German legislation.
- We are willing to entertain all reasonable ideas that can reduce the flight noise aggravations on our German neighboring communities, as long as they do not affect our ability to accomplish our military mission.
- We try to be good neighbors, but we are a U.S. military command and airfield within NATO. When

the mission requires it, we will fly within the full extent of what is permitted by the German Federal Government.

## Execution

EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN THE NOISE ABATEMENT COMMISSION (NAC) – After the 2010 announcement of the transfer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 214<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment from Mannheim to Wiesbaden in conjunction with the pending move of USAREUR headquarters, discussions began on how to increase the scope and make-up of the NAC to best handle the challenges of potentially 27 additional aircraft on the airfield. The legacy “core group,” then consisting merely of officials from the garrison, the airfield and a small number of representatives of the central Wiesbaden city administration was simply deemed inadequate and not sufficiently inclusive.



a) SURROUNDING INDEPENDENT TOWNS -- It was decided that the commission, which convenes twice a year, would in the future also include representatives of the nearby city of Hofheim (affected by the eastern fixed-wing approach/take-off route), as well as the cities of Hochheim and Mainz affected primarily by helicopter overflights. This change met with an immediate positive response as the smaller surrounding towns now felt that their voices were being heard by their American neighbors. It also created a new momentum in other areas of German-American cooperation.

b) DISTRICTS SUBORDINATE TO WIESBADEN CITY -- Through close media monitoring and having their ears

on the pulse of the surrounding German neighborhoods, the GRO and PAO recognized that the individual Wiesbaden district mayors subordinate to the City of Wiesbaden were frustrated by the lack of timely information coming from their own city hall on U.S. transformation and airfield plans and activities. They felt that they did not have sufficient information to answer their constituents' questions and complaints. The garrison tried to convince the then-lord mayor of Wiesbaden to allow the district mayors to take part in the NACs, but the request was turned down as the city believed it was not the role of subordinate mayors to participate in this forum. With the election of Herr Gerich as the new Lord Mayor of Wiesbaden in March 2013, the Garrison was finally able to convince the city to allow the district mayors a seat at the NAC table. The inclusion of the district mayors in the commission proved a turning point in the noise mitigation campaign. It demonstrated transparency and inclusiveness, and it created the opportunity to “hear from the horse’s mouth”– those first-line local politicians with immediate contact with the citizenry. The success of this measure is clearly evident in the positive local press articles that are posted at the end of this document.

c) SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS -- In order to provide a wider range of subject matter experts at the NAC, the Garrison also brought on a number of highly knowledgeable HN experts, to include Frankfurt Air Traffic Control, which controls Wiesbaden’s airspace; Frankfurt Airport officials and the representatives from the German Military’s Aviation Authority. Since the Bundeswehr oversees all military aviation operations over Germany, the presentations provided by their representative at the NAC provided invaluable content to the discussions, being able to show solid statistics and radar tracks on U.S. military flight movements, and most importantly, able to substantiate our assertions that the U.S. was firmly abiding by all German federal aviation rules and regulations -- a key element in the Garrison's command messages.

d) BRINGING IN THE CITIZENS INITIATIVE GROUP –The last and certainly the most controversial addition to the NAC was the inclusion of the “*BILGUS*” citizens initiative.

The lord mayor requested their participation in the NAC, but the GC had to weigh the concern of giving too much of a platform to a self-styled group of dubious legitimacy that often lacked a rational approach to the noise issue, against the opportunity of demonstrating openness and respect for a group that did, after all, represent a certain group of angry citizens suffering under aircraft noise caused by U.S. aircraft. The GC opted to take the risk and allow their participation, believing that open communications were always the better option, and that integrating BILGUS into the discussions offered the opportunity to turn suspicion and opposition into understanding. The spokesman for BILGUS was therefore allowed to take part in the proceedings and present his group's concerns and proposals, as well as to have his questions addressed. The decision turned out, unexpectedly, to be one of the smartest moves taken in our noise mitigation efforts: BILGUS' participation over the course of the last year has turned a fierce opponent of local military aviation into a witness to the U.S. efforts to minimize disturbances to German neighborhoods. The BILGUS representative has expressed his appreciation for now having a voice in the forum and of being equipped with verifiable facts that help to overcome some German citizens' perception that "there is nothing we can do" against the noise.

Allowing BILGUS to take part in the NAC was only the first step. The GC later invited BILGUS leadership to a meeting at the Airfield to discuss their concerns. In a cordial and candid conversation, the BILGUS representatives voiced their preoccupations, but they also offered some reasonable suggestions on how the Airfield could improve their flight operations to further lessen noise aggravations. Some of their suggestions have been subsequently adopted. As a result of these two measures, BILGUS now felt that they were being heard, this in turn significantly reduced their fervor, especially in relation to the press.

e) ENHANCING THE SCOPE OF THE NAC– The NAC is the essential forum for the garrison and for the airfield to present a summary of what has occurred on the airfield over the past six months, and to detail what steps and

measures have been taken to lessen the impact of our air operations on the surrounding German communities. As part of the engagement plan, the garrison expanded its scope to include HN representatives as much as possible in the decisions involving noise mitigation measures. In the late 2013 NAC, for example, the Bundeswehr proposed altering the western instrument flight route (IFR) so that aircraft would not fly over the "INFRASERV" chemical-industrial complex, a constant source of concern by the BILGUS citizen initiative. The alternative option, however, would have shifted the flight path slightly north, placing it then directly over the Rhine district town of Biebrich. Not surprisingly, the lord mayor of Wiesbaden (a resident of Biebrich) opted not to alter the current flight path, realizing that the alternative, bringing more noise to Biebrich, would be worse; the current route with its acceptable risk factors was indeed preferable.

PRO-ACTIVE PRESS RELEASES AND GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATIONS – Following the NACs, the PAO regularly provided press releases on the significant issues discussed during the NAC and any decisions taken. Another very useful procedure was to forewarn the local HN governments of any event or exercise on-post that could potentially generate substantial noise. These could range from artillery gun salutes during a ceremony, or up to a major NATO exercise, such as JACKAL STONE 14, which involved multiple landings/take-offs of C-17s and V-22 aircraft. These prior notifications were very much appreciated and although difficult to measure, they certainly reduced the number of potential complaints; people forewarned are less likely to complain.

HOST NATION PARTNERS – As the garrison's network of HN partnerships expanded, the garrison focused on incorporating a very special asset in the communications process- the German military. The assumption of command of German Brig. Gen. Klink as commander of the *Landeskommando Hessen* now gave the garrison access to a brilliant and articulate flag officer, with exceptional expertise in community relations, and at the same time enthusiastic about supporting the garrison communications efforts in

regards to the noise problematic. Klink complemented the garrison's efforts by giving the press the German military's perspectives and by advocating on our behalf with local governmental officials in their own language. Likewise, he significantly helped us to understand the concerns and sensitivities of the local German population. Under his direction, his staff became our trusted advisors in all the garrison's aviation-related forums.

The public relations staff at Frankfurt International Airport also became a unique garrison partner. Garrison PAO took advantage of several networking opportunities provided by Installation Management Command – Europe, including a tour of Frankfurt Airport with local media operations staff, an emergency exercise discussion via VTC, and a 5-day conference learning from the airport's vast experience in dealing with similar community noise issues, although on a vastly greater scale.



**MEDIA DAYS** – Identifying local media as the key player in communicating with the HN public, PAO decided to address aircraft operations and airfield procedures on Clay Kaserne as part of its regularly scheduled information briefs to the German media on the progress of Army transformation projects. This concept had been previously developed at the semi-annual PAO-hosted networking days with our HN counterparts. The media days, which would typically include expert briefings, question and answer sessions with the GC and a guided tour of Clay Kaserne proved extremely effective. They offered an efficient forum to provide condensed, high quality information to a combined group of media outlets. By proactively offering these opportunities, the

garrison was consequently able to present its command messages to information multipliers and garner positive feedback and appreciation for its openness from HN officials and media.



**NOISE HOTLINE** – With the arrival of the aviation battalion and its additional complement of aircraft to the airfield, complaints and public anxiety increased about what else may be coming. PAO was thus faced with an overwhelming number of public calls and emails, without adequate resources or technical information to respond appropriately. A comprehensive noise complaint phone and email management system therefore had to be developed, starting with the creation of a bilingual noise complaint form on the German page of the garrison website. The form ensured responders would have the most complete information to address the complainant's issue. The form also offered contact information for the German Military Aviation Authority, reinforcing the message of the garrison's close cooperation with the responsible German aviation authorities.

The Environmental Office in the garrison's Directorate of Public Works then appointed a staff member to serve as the garrison's noise complaint manager. PAO crafted an initial response email for the noise manager to use for interim responses to complainants. Depending on the character of the complaint, the noise manager would then contact the airfield to inquire about the specific flight details. The answer could range from informing the submitter that the subject flight did not involve a U.S. military aircraft at all, to explaining the

necessity of a particular flight, to referring the complainant to the German Aviation Authority for a detailed flight analysis and radar track. In nearly all cases, complaints and inquiries ended with the confirmation that U.S. pilots were adhering to prescribed routes and flight hours. The hotline additionally helped the GRO and PAO identify complaint trends, which were then addressed with the airfield. Some hotline submissions actually contained constructive proposals for adjustment of flight operations, some required clarification with HN officials. The noise manager meticulously tracked every complaint and could therefore provide solid noise complaint data for each NAC meeting, further adding to the garrison's transparency and credibility.



**AIRFIELD TOURS** – As a consequence of examining the opinions voiced in local media, characterized by underlying suspicions, ill-informed assumptions and actual fears, PAO proposed to develop a visit program, focused on bringing elected HN representatives on-post with the goal of building trust and understanding with key HN officials that interact with the concerned local residents on a daily basis. The program became an immediate success, judged by the enthusiastic feedback of participants, and the resulting positive press. Typically, Clay Kaserne tours would involve hosting a group of up to 30 officials. The tours are tailored to address each town's particular concerns; the group provides their own transportation, thus minimizing costs on the garrison. The typical tour begins with a windshield tour of Clay Kaserne led by the director of the Transformation Stationing Management Office who

explains the active construction sites and recently completed projects. The bus tour is followed by a visit to the airfield where the group receives an information briefing and gets to see the battalion's aircraft up close, with the battalion commander and the pilots available to answer any questions. The tour concludes with a small reception at the garrison's community activity center, hosted by the GC. The presence of the GC serves as a demonstration of the high importance given to the surrounding communities' concerns. There have been many cases where the visiting officials have contacted their local press afterward and praised the openness and dialogue they enjoyed with their American counterparts during the tour.

**GETTING OUT TO COMMUNICATE** – While good relations between the USAG Wiesbaden and the City of Wiesbaden have long existed, GRO/PAO arranged for the GC to visit other affected communities in the region as a way of taking the initiative and reaching out, rather than waiting for the level of frustration to reach the garrison in the form of a query or complaint. In those office calls, officials would also at times ask for garrison participation in local town hall meetings. Those joint events, together with the German military, were successfully conducted several times. On another occasion, the GC participated in a press conference hosted by Wiesbaden's lord mayor to explain a noise study commissioned by the city to provide residents hard data on aircraft noise levels. The participation and input by the garrison was reflected positively in press coverage included at the end of this document.

**FLYING SMARTER**-- None of the communication strategies detailed previously would have been effective without the close cooperation of the aviation battalion and the airfield. The aviation commander has been sensitive to the complaints of the adjacent German communities and has taken pro-active and tangible steps to the reduce the noise coming from the airfield: concentrating proficiency flights on two instead of five weekdays; requiring commanders' approval for evening flights after a certain hour; maximizing the use of other airfields in less populated areas for pilot proficiency flights; considering the wind direction and varying the

location on the airfield when conducting engine test run-ups; among other actions. These measures are regularly briefed in the NAC. Moreover, open dialogue with local participants in the NAC has brought forth some valuable ideas that have been taken up by aviation battalion. After the occurrence of random individual “training” flights at odd hours of the night was brought up by local mayors, for instance, the battalion took a close look at the flight schedules of its units. While those flight schedules had all been within allowable flight hours, the battalion undertook a major re-scheduling effort, combining multiple flights into the same time window. As a result, the pilots were able to accomplish their night flying training in half of the authorized training nights, and in so doing lessen the number of nights that they were producing noise.

THE TURNING POINT IN PUBLIC OPINION – Despite all the garrison’s efforts to turn around local German public opinion regarding flight noise, for a long time it seemed like the garrison was fighting a losing battle. In the spring of 2014, with all the aviation battalion’s full complement of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft consolidated on the airfield, and the unit on the verge of commencing its summer night flying program, public focus on the aircraft noise generated by the Americans reached a crescendo. Long dormant concerns seemed to be magnified and manipulated by local political groups that were seeking media coverage to leverage their interests. Several local media outlets ran multiple stories on a weekly basis discussing the existing and imagined side effects of aviation noise on individuals and whole communities. A momentum of ever more negative online comments was evident. Then an unexpected incident occurred. The major local Wiesbaden paper ran a weekend story entitled “Rotary wings instead of Easter Eggs,” supposedly detailing flights of U.S. helicopters blatantly flying over the center of the City of Wiesbaden on Easter Sunday; but the story was erroneous. The article attributed two late-night flights over the city to willful deviation from designated flight routes by U.S. pilots. Research with the German Military Aviation Authority showed that the flights were both conducted by German agencies; one of them was in fact a rescue flight transporting a

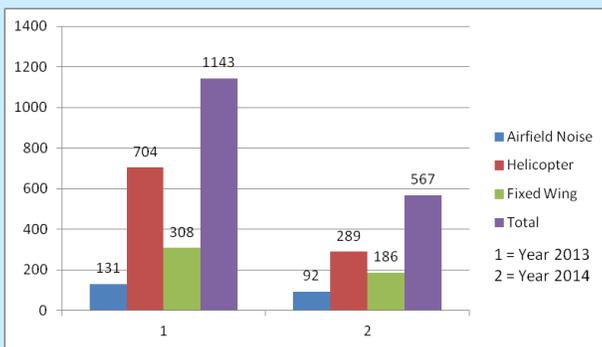
seriously injured person to a local hospital. PAO called the chief editor and enjoyed frank but constructive discussion over garrison expectations of quality and factual reporting. The newspaper was embarrassed and printed not only a correction, but also an apology for attributing the flights to U.S. Forces. The correction release was run by several additional papers. Even *BILGUS* stood up and defended the garrison in this case.



As a follow-up, PAO hosted a special information meeting with the newspaper’s leadership at the airfield, along with experts from USAREUR PAO, Airfield Management and the German Aviation Agency. The constructive dialogue was appreciated by all and resulted in better media understanding of airfield operations, pilots’ requirements and the relationships between U.S. and German stakeholders. The editors also suggested bringing their junior reporters to the airfield as a regular training program to learn about airfield operations on site. This meeting proved to be decisive in building mutually respectful relations with media leadership, and it put an end to biased negative reporting in the local press.

## Effectiveness and overall value to the Army

THE NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES -- The best indicator of the Garrison's success in reducing the population's anxiety and increasing understanding of the airfield's mission were the statistics that were provided to the participants in the most recent NAC session of October 2014, as well as in the final yearly statistics of 2014. The Garrison was able to produce a stunning 50 percent reduction in the number of noise complaints received from German citizens compared to the previous year.



These numbers are even skewed, since 56 percent of the 567 noise complaints received in 2014 (compared to 1,143 in 2013) were from eight individuals long identified as chronic complainants. Interestingly, the months with the smallest registered complaints were June-August 2014, during the peak of the Summer Night Flying Program. In 2013 the opposite was the case, with the summer months producing the most noise complaints. Even the German military aviation authority, which also receives and records noise complaints from the German populace noted a 45 percent drop in noise complaints from the Wiesbaden-Mainz region in 2014.

THE FRINGE BENEFITS OF ENHANCED RELATIONS -- Due to the intense cooperation with HN counterparts developed by working through this extended and complex communications crisis, relationships with HN officials have deepened to a point that they benefit all the garrison's current operations. The garrison has learned about the anxieties of local residents and how to best address them, and local neighborhoods have been given a host of information about the garrison's

operations, values and commitment to being a good neighbor. The information provided to the public media contained valuable command messages, which continues to receive high interest to this day. Since many of these venues are available online, the garrison's positions reference flight noise will be available for an indefinite period of time.

A recent example of the garrison's interaction with the nearby City of Hofheim demonstrates, how an outreach attempt, initially motivated by the need to discuss aviation issues, has generated lasting benefits for the garrison's overall German-American relations program. When the GC made the an office call to the mayor of the Hofheim, the mayor not only expressed her deep appreciation for the importance the garrison attached to good HN relations, but also requested PAO's help to pass on what Hofheim had to offer. The mayor warmly welcomed U.S. military community members to explore her German city and surrounding region. The effort started with free tourism brochures distributed to American newcomers and has led to many joint events thereafter, including American participation in Hofheim festivals, Hofheim tourism presentations at garrison information fairs and a recent PAO networking day with over 30 U.S. and German communicators hosted by the Hofheim city hall.

### *Budgetary analysis*

The multi-faceted communications program was carried out as part of the GC's overall community relations program, requiring only minor additional resources in the form of personnel overtime. A small amount of overtime and/or compensation time had to be granted to handle the base tours since most local German mayors and city/town councilmen carry out their responsibilities on a volunteer basis; most work in other full-time jobs. The tours therefore have to be conducted after normal German work hours, in the late afternoon to the early evening. The installation tours, which are conducted on about a quarterly basis, typically end with a small commander's reception to enhance dialogue and to answer questions, and are paid for by Official Representation Funds. Those expenditures, however, are kept to a minimum, i.e.

under \$300 for a group of 30 authorized officials. Each tour is also hosted at a Directorate of Family, Morale and Welfare facility to keep the revenue in-house. Overall, the return on investment of these tours and follow-on receptions cannot be overestimated for their lasting value to German-American relations in the region.

## Press coverage & Feedback



**Landeskommando Hessen  
(Hessian Forces Command)  
65189 Wiesbaden, Moltkering 9**

Chief, PAO – LTC Wolf-Teja v. Rabenau

- *Courtesy translation from German* -

The German Armed Forces State Command Hesse (*Landeskommando Hessen*) was established in March 2007. It was the State of Hesse's youngest garrison in the German Armed Forces (the *Bundeswehr*). From the very beginning, the German Army in Wiesbaden has been involved in the discussions concerning the aircraft noise generated by the use of the former transport airfield in Wiesbaden-Erbenheim by the U.S. Armed Forces since 1945; mostly because the complainants did not know or were insufficiently aware of the exact procedure for submitting such complaints. The *Bundeswehr* itself does not conduct any military flight operations from the Wiesbaden Airfield.

The operator of the Airfield, the US Army Garrison Wiesbaden, has a Noise Abatement Commission, which was established years ago to mutually exchange information concerning flight operations, and that includes German and American authorities and representatives from the communities around the airfield. It has only been since 2014, however, that a significant reduction of complaints against aircraft noises, by about 50%, has been noted.

From the perspective of the Landeskommando Hessen this has been due mostly to a change in the U.S. Army Garrison's communications strategy. By opening the Noise Abatement Commission to representatives of local and regional stakeholders, and by a greater

involvement of local and national press and media, a significantly greater transparency was achieved that in turn has led to a greater understanding of the Army's flight requirements. In addition, the Garrison was able to better convey the organizational and technical measures involved in carrying out training programs for the U.S. military pilots. Most notably, the tone of press coverage in the German media has also become more objective. This is due in no small part to the efforts of the Public Affairs Section of the US Army Garrison, which has intensified the dialogue between the U.S. Army and the German public.

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**From: MAJ Sascha Greuel**  
SaschaGreuel@Bundeswehr.org  
**German Forces Aviation Office**  
**Luftwaffenkaserne Wahn, 51127 Köln**

- *Courtesy translation from German* -

As the operations officer of the Central Aviation Authority of the German Army (*Bundeswehr*) and public affairs officer for military aviation in the *Bundeswehr's* Aviation Office, I have been working with the U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden Public Affairs Office since 2012.

The announcement of the relocation of helicopters to the Wiesbaden-Erbenheim Army Airfield back then led to great anxiety among the residents of surrounding communities as the public was not sure how the noise situation generated by the airfield would develop. In numerous joint public and non-public information events, meetings of the noise abatement commission, airfield tours as well as meetings with the local citizens initiative against flight noise, the garrison succeeded in convincing the affected citizens of the necessity of military aviation operations, as well as the genuine efforts of all stakeholders to adjust aviation operations to the degree possible to accommodate the residents' desires for quiet night hours. During all these engagements, I had the opportunity to convince myself of the very dedicated and professional work of the PAO.

As a result of our cooperation, we were able to cut into half the initially high complaint level throughout the year 2014.

The professional and open communication and trusting cooperation that has been established between all stakeholders can be attributed, to a large degree, to the efforts of the PAO and may serve as an example for other military airfields in Germany.

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### Coverage by garrison

#### Noise Abatement Commission gives officials forum to address issues of concern

U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden Public Affairs Office

<http://www.wiesbaden.army.mil/hunion/Archive/May0814/NACforWeb.htm>



“This is a forum where we can exchange ideas and discuss suggestions,” said Col. David Carstens, U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden commander, welcoming

Wiesbaden Lord Mayor Sven Gerich, members of the U.S. Army Europe aviation staff and fellow area mayors to the forum in the Community Activity Center May 6. [...]

Gerich underscored the importance of the semi-annual NAC meeting saying, “You can see through the extended circle of participation that we’ve already achieved quite a lot.” [...]

“Overall we can attest that the U.S. Army is complying with the (host nation’s) rules and regulations regarding flights,” said Bundeswehr Maj. Sascha Greuel, flight operations officer for the Air Force Support Forces Command, explaining that every flight in Germany can be tracked. [...]

“The U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden is committed to studying the noise challenge on the airfield,” said the garrison commander, mentioning noise testing that was set to take place May 12-16 on behalf of the city of Wiesbaden. “Our commitment to continue to extend an

open hand to the city of Wiesbaden, local communities and the citizens’ initiative remains.”

“I ask the participants of this forum to take back the message of how hard the U.S. military is working to reduce required flights to a minimum,” added Gerich, thanking all attendees for their close working relationship to help resolve issues.

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### Coverage by host nation media (translated from German)

#### Erbenheim Airfield: local town officials receive seat in noise abatement committee

Wiesbadener Kurier, 03 April 2014

Local officials of the six affected suburbs have received a seat in the German-American noise abatement committee; the German-American committee was informed accordingly during a Tuesday meeting by Lord Mayor Sven Gerich (SPD) and Colonel David Carstens, Commander of the Wiesbaden garrison. [...]

Robert Buchroth (SPD), town official from Delkenheim, views the news a positive sign of the U.S. Army towards the citizens. Christa Gabriel (SPD) town official from Kastel, agrees with him: “It is great to be able to express and represent the citizens’ interests exactly where they need to be heard – in the noise abatement commission. [...]

[http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/airfield-erbenheim-ortsvorsteher-erhalten-sitz-in-fluglaermkommission\\_14024836.htm](http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/airfield-erbenheim-ortsvorsteher-erhalten-sitz-in-fluglaermkommission_14024836.htm)

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#### If it remains the way it is, I can live with it.

#### Reduced night flying by the US Army has positive resonance with residents.

Wiesbadener Kurier, Oct. 24, 2014



Complaints about aircraft noise originating on the Erbenheim airfield have decreased drastically. During the recent meeting of the noise abatement commission with reps of the neighboring communities, the administration and the citizens' initiative group, it was reported that there were 14 nights in 2013 where helicopters circled the night sky. In 2014, that number had decreased to seven. 25 so-called compensation days were given instead of the required seven (one compensation day per night flying day) ending air traffic during regular hours. The Army furthermore reported that the 10,000 air traffic movements are clearly below the permitted 20,000 flights per year. We talked to Lisa Fiedler, a resident from Erbenheim who had suffered considerably from the nightly exercises of the summer night flying program in 2013.

**Frau Fiedler, a year ago you complained about the terrible noise caused by nightly helicopter flights from the Erbenheim airfield. How is the situation now?**

In the summer of last year, the helicopter noise was extremely loud on several days during the week. With the constant coming and going of the helicopters, it was hard to get any sleep between 2300 and 0200 hrs. This year, helicopter traffic was apparently reduced and even on the flying days, the constant nightly departing and returning of helicopters did not take place. The gap between departure and return was considerably longer and gave you the opportunity to fall asleep. [...]

**Have you come to terms with living next to the airfield? Can you live the current volume of air traffic?**

If the number of flights does not increase, I can live with it but the limit has been reached already.

[http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/bleibt-es-so-kann-ich-damit-leben\\_14717964.htm](http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/bleibt-es-so-kann-ich-damit-leben_14717964.htm)

**Wiesbaden: Anger over air noise – rescue and police helicopters aside from U.S. helicopters**



*Wiesbadener Kurier, 09 April 2014*

Not every single helicopter that can be heard at night over the city originates from the U.S. airfield. It could be rescue or police helicopters as well, according to Anemone Rüger, spokeswoman of USAG Wiesbaden. [...]

That news that the town officials of the six most affected suburbs may now participate in the German-American noise abatement commission is welcomed by BILGUS. Apparently, the U.S. Army shows understanding and “is looking for constructive dialogue with those residents near the airfield who are forcefully burdened with noise”, says Bern Wulf, spokesperson of the citizens initiative.

[http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/wiesbaden-aerger-ueber-laerm-in-der-luft-neben-us-hubschraubern-auch-rettungs-und-polizeinsatze\\_14040461.htm](http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/wiesbaden-aerger-ueber-laerm-in-der-luft-neben-us-hubschraubern-auch-rettungs-und-polizeinsatze_14040461.htm)

**Airfield Erbenheim: On behalf of the city, Cologne institute to compile data on ground noise.**

*Wiesbadener Kurier, 16 April 2014*

How loud are the engine tests on the airfield in all reality? A survey is to find out and analyze which ground



noise originates from the U.S. airfield. The city commissioned the institute for emission protection, ADU Cologne.

The first noise level test took place on Tuesday in the Nordenstadt town administration. “We receive many complaints about noise from Nordenstadt and Erbenheim. But so far, those are personal opinions. The expertise is to provide objective data”, according to Carl-Michael Baum, town advisor. The city provides €10,000 for that expertise. [...]

“We welcome the testing and will provide support”, Colonel David Carstens, USAG Wiesbaden commander,

emphasized. The ADU team will also be given access to the airfield if necessary for the testing. And as soon as results are available, “we will in all seriousness look into the resulting suggestions”. The U.S. Army already does a lot to reduce noise: engine tests are being conducted on the western end of the airfield; many training flights have been relocated to Mannheim and Brühl thanks to Bundeswehr cooperation. Only 27 of the approved 40 aircraft are stationed in Wiesbaden at this time. In 2013, only about half of the 20,000 approved flight movements took place and not more than 10,000 flight movements are to occur in 2014.

[http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/stadtteile-wiesbaden/nordenstadt/flugplatz-erbenheim-koelner-institut-erstellt-im-auftrag-der-stadt-gutachten-ueber-bodenlaerm\\_14061147.htm](http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/stadtteile-wiesbaden/nordenstadt/flugplatz-erbenheim-koelner-institut-erstellt-im-auftrag-der-stadt-gutachten-ueber-bodenlaerm_14061147.htm)

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**a) Wiesbaden: rotors instead of Easter eggs; military helicopters rumble at low altitudes across the city early Easter Sunday.**

*Wiesbadener Kurier, 24 April 2014*

WIESBADEN-- It is Easter Sunday morning at 06:45 hrs. A dull, pulsating noise comes from the Taunusstein direction. Those still asleep are immediately awake. A heavy helicopter buzzes at 2,000 feet at first, with a declining tendency, along Lahnstrasse (L3037) and Wellritztal – now at 500 meters above sea level or 350 meters flying altitude above the roofs. [...]

This is not the only flight movement above the roofs this Easter Sunday morning. Those about going back to sleep will be startled again only a short while later by helicopter noise. This time, around 07:10 hrs a small military helicopter with red doors flies along Lahnstrasse [...]

As of yesterday, there was no response from the Americans as to why the sightseeing over the city center was necessary at such an early time and how the loop across the museum was of “military necessity”.

**→ b) Correction: Helicopter flight on Easter Sunday over Wiesbaden was a Bundeswehr rescue mission and not a sightseeing flight.**

*Wiesbadener Kurier, 24 April 2014*

The military helicopter that flew across the city on Easter Sunday morning at 06:45 hrs was not a sightseeing flight as was erroneously assumed but a rescue mission. As was



learned on Thursday, it was a Bundeswehr rescue helicopter which transported two people with smoke inhalation injuries to the Paulinenstift hospital. [...]

The reason for the low altitude as well as the big “loop” of the rescue helicopter was based on the type of injury of the patients as a higher altitude would have led to additional health problems. In addition, they had to recon a landing site with subsequent landing. Gudenoge said that “our pilots are non-locals and have to recon the landing possibilities”. Take-off took place approximately 30 minutes after admission of the patients.

Regarding flights over the city area, the garrison makes the following statement: “The U.S. pilots strictly follow the rules of the military aviation field manual Germany of the Bundeswehr. Flight routes, altitudes and all other procedures of air traffic are determined by German agencies”. The U.S. garrison strives to keep noise burdening of the population as low as possible.

We apologize for the impression that this was a sightseeing flight of the U.S. Army.

[http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/korrektur-hubschrauberflug-am-ostersonntag-ueber-wiesbaden-war-ein-rettungseinsatz-der-bundeswehr-und-kein-spazierflug\\_14081398.htm](http://www.wiesbadener-kurier.de/lokales/wiesbaden/nachrichten-wiesbaden/korrektur-hubschrauberflug-am-ostersonntag-ueber-wiesbaden-war-ein-rettungseinsatz-der-bundeswehr-und-kein-spazierflug_14081398.htm)