

"Off Limits" signs stop most unwanted visitors from poking around several World War II era bunkers still standing at Rivers Barracks in Giessen, Germany.

Scarred with the passage of time, the old buildings and a network of tunnels were once used as headquarters for the German special signal forces in the campaign against France.

Spokesmen at the 532nd Signal Company in Giessen said the underground command post reportedly contained a 1,200 line telephone exchange, a teletype system for 200 subscribers, a large switchboard and an internal communications setup for the Rivers Barracks area.

The military gear was located four stories underground on what was at that time known as Verdun Kaserne.

However, since the French operation was shortlived, the German signal soldiers most likely had a chance only to install their special equipment, not to use it for staging battles against their foes to the west.

The communications centers have been flooded out and are now closed to visitors. After the war ended, the equipment was destroyed, and spokesmen said the federal government is currently re-evaluating future uses of the bunkers.

Of the four bunkers standing in a rear corner of Rivers Barracks, only one is in use today, containing a recreation center, small post exchange, photo craft shop and barbershop. The others remain as testimony to the past.

Information on the old bunkers is hard to come by. Erich Mueller, chief technician at the 532nd's dial central office in Giessen, said he pieced some of the story together after talking with friends and acquaintances who either



Blackened window holes stare out from off limit bunkers at Rivers Barracks in Giessen, Germany. During the 1940's, the buildings, above ground and four floors below, were set up as communications centers for German military forces. (U.S. Army Photo by Margot Desannoy)

Silent Signals

by Margot Desannoy

were familiar with Verdun Kaserne in the 1940's or knew someone who was.

Unfortunately the city of Giessen lacks historical data for the years 1935-51, according to Capt. David Fitzsimmons, commander of the 532nd, a 5th Signal Command unit.

However, the surrounding area abounds in history too. Mueller said another part of the German military headquarters was located in railroad cars at Arnsberg, near Lich, a town south of Giessen.

Adolf Hitler's western front headquarters were established at Ziegenberg, about 35 kilometers south of Giessen, on the site of an old castle.

The compound featured an extensive underground complex and a country home which no doubt fooled some passersby into believing nothing else was there.

The only American facility at Ziegenberg now is home to V Corps 68th Medical Group. Currently called Ziegenberg Installation, the area will soon be renamed Camp Paul Bloomquist, after Lt. Col. Bloomquist, an aviator and former member of the 68th Medical Group, who was killed in a May 1972 terrorist attack at V Corps headquarters in Frankfurt.

Another castle, this one about 10 kilometers from Hitler's country compound, once held the headquarters of the German Luftwaffe (Air Force) for the French campaign. The building, in Kransberg, now houses the 3rd Armored Division NCO Academy.

Spokesmen said Kransberg was one of the Luftwaffe's centers of operation, the main headquarters being at Lindsey Air Station near Wiesbaden.



Unwanted visitors are discouraged from poking around several World War II vintage bunkers in Giessen, Germany. Though ajar, the ominous doors do not open to guests. (U.S. Army Photo by Margot Desannoy)