

Nikes in the Royal Dutch Airforce (Klu)

Chronological surview

1955 SACEUR plans for joint allied missile air defence of Western Europe. Dutch government accepted US-offer to provide Nike equipment and training for one Dutch Nike bataillon. As the Dutch Nike bataillon should be formed within the framework of the Dutch Royal Airforce (Klu) discussions about reduction of Dutch fighterfleet (200 Hunters, 56 F86K) in favour of missiles arose. Begin of Nike training for future Dutch crews in the USA. SACEUR decided to deploy missiles in a solid air defence belt. The main reasons for this solution were costs, the identification problem and the possible use of tactical nuclear warheads in the defence doctrine of those days. The missile belt and facilities were to be paid by NATO-Budget. After AIRCENT plans for the first 6 NATO-NikeBns had assigned a sector between the River Rhine and the Dutch border to a Dutch Nike Bn it was first discussed to deploy the Dutch batteries on Dutch territory along the border in the Venlo area. Lack of suitable sites and the need to participate in the NATO-funds for an air defence belt on German territory cancelled these plans. Meanwhile HQ AIRCENT had assigned the sectors on the River Rhine to the Belgium airforce and placed the Dutch Nikes in the area of Münster and Osnabrück (Sectors no 7 & 9). Suitable sites were found on former German airfields at Vörden, Rheine-Bentlage, Bramsche-Hesepe and Münster-Handorf. The idea of a central deployment of the Dutch Nike group on Twenthe airforce base near Enschede (NL) and a shuttle service to the missile sites in Germany was rejected (too much personnel required, 24 hours operational readiness). The Nike units had to be completely deployed in Germany with support units, camps, housing and schools and social facilities for the Dutch communities. Plans for a second Nike Bataillon were confirmed.

1959 First firing of a Nike missile in Ft Bliss (Tex.) by Dutch crews of future C-Sqn, 1e GGW. Return of the Dutch airforcemen to Camp Holterhoek near Eibergen. Formation of the first Nike Bataillon as „1e Groep Geleide Wapens“ (1 GGW) at Eibergen. Sites for the future second Bataillon were found near Nordhorn, Schöppingen and Erle.

1960 1e GGW moved to Münster-Handorf and Rheine (Damloup-Kaserne). First Nike equipment was shipped by riverboats to Münster and installed on a temporary site on the former airfield of Handorf.

1961 B-Squadron (later 119 Sqn) at Handorf became the first operational squadron. A NIKE-school was established at Damloup-Kaserne in the town of Rheine, where the C and D Squadron had found a temporary home and training site on the yard.

1962 D-Squadron and A-Squadron (later 223 and 118 Sqn), deployed at Rheine-Bentlage and Vörden, became operational.

1963 C-Squadron (later 120 Sqn) became operational on the site Borgholzhausen. Operational HQ of 1 GGW was established on the site Vörden. This „Groep Operatie Centrum (GOC)“ used a „Tiksi“-1D-radar until 118 Sqn at Vörden received HIPAR-Radar in 1966. In April 1963 the second Nike group was formed from personnel of Nike-School /D-Squadron at Rheine. Support at first came from 1e GGW

1964 For logistic support of the two groups „Groep Techniek en Materieel Geleide Wapens“ (GTMGW) was formed at the central Camp at Bramsche-Hesepe (William Versteegh Camp). Since A-Sqn on the site Vörden had moved from the „Robert Barracks“ at Osnabrück to Versteegh Camp at Hesepe in 1964, the operational HQ had been placed at Vörden and a further squadron should find its site and camp at Hesepe, the administration element of HQ 1e GGW had to stay at Handorf. GTMGW later became also responsible for logistic support of Dutch Hawk units. The support group at Hesepe was supplied with spare parts first by depots at Chateauroux (Nike) and Chatelerault (Hawk) and since 1968 by the central NATO missile depot at Capellen (Luxemburg.)

In May 1964 the new 220 Squadron became operational on its camp and site at Schöppingen, where the HQ 2e GGW was placed in 1967, too. When the first squadrons of 2e GGW became operational in 1964 all Nike squadrons were renamed : A-Sqn, 1e GGW became 118 Sqn (Vörden), B-Sqn, 1eGGW became 119 Sqn (Handorf), C-Sqn, 1e GGW became 120 (Sqn) Borgholzhausen, D-Sqn ,1e GGW (Rheine-Bentlage) became 223 Sqn ,because it was to get under control of 2e GGW.

1965 the second squadron of 2e GGW became operational as 221 Sqn on its site and camp at Erle.

1966 223 Squadron at Bentlage got under command and control of 2e GGW. Originally a new fourth squadron for 1e GGW had been planned at Hesepe, where the old airfield should have been used for a missile site. The vicinity of an ammunition site there made it necessary to look for a new site which was found at Bad Essen on the mountain range of „Wiehengebirge“. The future 121 Sqn was deployed in a camp at Bohmte and became operational on its site near Bad Essen in the following year.

1967 The HQ 2e GGW was deployed at Schöppingen and got the ER-438 Radar from the disbanded air control station G at Appingedam , now placed in the fire control area of 220 Sqn on the top of „Schöppinger Berg“. There it became a distinctive landmark for the rural area around Münster.

For command and control the TSQ-38-system was provided. The formation of the two last squadrons suffered from short defence budgets and shortage of manpower. The Klu didn't only have to form the two Nike groups , but had also to establish three Hawk Bataillons (3e,4e,5e GGW) for the forward air defence missile belt in the 1960ies. So the new 222 Sqn had to stay on Twenthe airforce base until 1967 before it could take a permanent site near Nordhorn, but like 121 Sqn it was forced to reduce its strength and operational readiness several times. A detachment of the Dutch military police („Koninklijke Marechaussee“) and an engineer support unit were placed at Greven near Münster.

At the end of the sixties the Dutch Nike and Hawk units in Germany comprised about 4000 people.

In 1967 six Dutch Nike squadrons got a nuclear capacity when Detachments of 509th US Army Artillery Groups were added to the Nike formations to guard and control nuclear warheads on the missile sites of 118,119,120, 220, 221and 223 Sqn. The warheads were provided by a special ammunition Depot at Büren near Paderborn, which became a multinational unit. Dutch and Belgium infantry units cared for the security of this central facility. The nuclear capacity of Nike should keep „red“ bomber fleets under risk and should enable NATO to give politically controlled „signals“ by nuclear explosions with less damage on its own territory in case of war.

The formation of 1e and 2e GGW had not been finished when allied improvement programmes for the Nike-System started. Until the 80ies the reliability and performance of Nike was improved by different modifications of missiles, fire control and infrastructure. But these activities could not dispose of the principle deficiencies i.e. little mobility, low firing rate , too much equipment and manpower requirements . Central improvements were the replacement of the Ajax missile by the Hercules, the introduction of a target ranging radar in 1965 and new high power acquisition radars (HIPAR) for the two GOCs at Vörden and Schöppingen in 1977/78. Finally from 1980-83 the old fashioned electronic systems for fire control were replaced by digital computers during the Nike Support Plan . This final improvement was performed for the remaining Nike Users in Central and Northern Europe (GE,NL,BE,NO) by 8 Logistic Rgt (German Airforce) at Mechernich.

1968 The annual fire training was removed from McGregor Range Texas to Souda Bay (GR) in the Mediterreanean.

1975 According to the White Paper of Dutch Government in 1974 the Nike and Hawk Units were reduced.

In spring 1975 the following units were disbanded : HQ1eGGW,HQ2e GGW , HQ GTMGW and 4eGGW(Hawk),the Nike Squadrons 121 (Bd Essen), 119 (Handorf), 221 (Erle) and 222 (Nordhorn) .

The four remaining Nike batteries and the HQ and Logistic Units from Bramsche-Hesepe and Schöppingen formed a new group named 12e GGW at Hesepe.

The facilities of 221 Sqn at Erle were taken over by the Belgium 57 Sqn . This Nike unit had not got a permanent site of its own and stayed at Erle until itself was disbanded in 1983.

1981 he reductions in the missile belt in Germany had enabled the Dutch airforce to establish airdefence units for the airforce bases in the Netherlands, which were equipped with Hawk-Fire Units and anti-air guns 40L70. In 1981 these units adopted the names and traditions of the disbanded Nike Sqns in Germany.

1982 After the Dutch government had decided to introduce the Patriot missile system for the replacement for the Nike and some Hawk units in Germany , 120 Sqn at Borgholzhausen was disbanded in advance to save costs in favour of a speedy introduction of Patriot. The disbanding of Nike had to keep pace with the formation of the first Dutch Patriot units.

1984 223 Sqn disbanded at Rheine-Bentlage

1986 5e GGW received their first Patriots in a ceremony at Hesepe.

1987 In spring 220 Sqn disbanded at Schöppingen. The last US-Detachments and nuclear warheads werewithdrawn.

With the disbanding of 118 Sqn at Vörden and 12e GGW at Hesepe the era of Dutch Nikes had come to an end. After 12e GGW had disappeared and four Patriot squadrons of 3e and 5e GGW were placed on the sites of disbanded or withdrawn Hawk units in the forward missile belt, there was no use for the Nike sites any longer. Many German and US-Sites were converted into Patriot sites, but the Dutch airforce had also reduced their Hawk-Batteries and wanted to deploy the new Patriot and remaining Hawks in the same „cluster“ areas. Until 1994 the Dutch missile units were completely concentrated on the former airbase in De Peel (NL) as „GGW“, where they formed four mixed „Triad“-squadrons equipped with Patriot, Hawk and Stinger (801, 802, 803, 804 Sqn + 120(?) TrgSqn). The tradition of the „geleide wapens“ is continued by the de Peel SAM Wing „GGW“ (Patriot/Hawk/Stinger) and the SHORAD-units on Dutch airfields with Hawk, 40 L70 guns and Stinger, but the traditional names disappeared when in 1994 the mixed TRIAD-Squadrons at de Peel got the numbers 801, 802, 803 and 804 and the OLVD-Sqns on the airbases were reorganized. In 1996 no 222 Sqn at Twenthe became 620 Sqn , 119 Sqn at Leeuwarden became 630 Sqn and 420 Sqn* at Volkel became 640 Sqn . The Squadrons no 221at Soesterberg and and no 121 at Gilze-Rijn became ground-defence squadrons no 650 and 670.

Former no 420 Hawk Sqn , disbanded at Barsinghausen in 1972, and OLVD Sqn at Volkel since 1981

The former camps at Hesepe, Schöppingen and Erle became immigration centres. The camps at Bohmte and Rheine were temporarily used by the German Bundeswehr.

It was difficult to find a new function for the sites. The deserted buildings and shelters are a danger for unpermitted vistors like playing children and still must be protected by fences. The remainig sites are in a situation of decay, now and then used as disposal areas for private firms . Suspected pollution of the ground will always be an obstacle for conversion into non-military use. The plan for the conversion of the Bentlage site into a WHNS-Depot was cancelled after the political changes of 1989. In Schöppingen it is discussed to install a windmotor park on the area of former 220 Sqn. Next to the former fire control mounds a TV tower has replaced the radar as landmark on „Schöppinger Berg“. The fire contral area of Vörden became a military facility for small arms training. The sites at Handorf,Bad Essen and Erle have been cleared. At the moment some of the mysterious shelters and empty radar

mounds are more and more recovered by nature, but still can be identified in the landscape and remind us of a time when Western countries tried to prevent that the cold war became „hot“ by joint activities.

Information about squadrons see below.

Dutch Nike-Squadrons from 1960-88

118 Squadron

1959 formed as future A-Squadron from 1e GGW at Fort Bliss and return to camp Holterhoek, Eibergen.

1961 placed on former German airfield at Vörden north of Osnabrück, staff accommodated at Robert Barracks, Osnabrück, later in 1964 at William-Versteegh camp, Bramsche-Hesepe.

1963 operational HQ (GOC) 1e GGW also placed on the Vörden Site

1964 renamed into 118 Sqn

5/1975 under command and control of the new Dutch Nike missile group 12e GGW

3/1988 disbanded as last operational Dutch Nike unit

118 Sqn was placed on a former airfield. The operational HQ of 1e GGW was also placed on the same site at Vörden, so that fire control site was equipped with high performance surveillance radar. The fire control area now is used as a small arms shooting range. The Squadron was accommodated at the central Nike camp at Hesepe so that there was no squadron camp to be built at Vörden.

119 Squadron

1959 formed as future B-Squadron from 1e GGW at Fort Bliss, returned to Camp Holterhoek, Eibergen (NL)

2/1960 placed on a former German airfield at Münster-Handorf using an old RAF-Camp and installing a temporary training site, permanent site built in 1961

10/1961 first operational Dutch Nike-Battery

10/1964 renamed 119 Squadron adopting the tradition of former 19 Sqn Klu

3/1967 nuclear capacity provided by A-Team/ 509th US Army Artillery Detachment

5/1975 disbanded

12/1981 name and tradition adopted by SHORAD-Unit (AVLD) on Leeuwarden airforce base, since 1996

630 Sqn OLVD (object air defence)

The launching and fire control sites were established on the former German airfield at Handorf east of Münster, which after 1959 has been used as a training area for the units of 19th mechanized Brigade (GE) in the Lützw-Barracks. In the 80ies the buildings and shelters of the sites were pulled down, but the concrete planes and roads can still be seen. The small squadron camp was south of the area, not far from the barracks of 570th Arty Group (US). The Arty Group was not responsible for Nikes, but for a nuclear ammunition camp near Telgte. They left in the 1990ies. Lützw-Barracks today are used by a School for non-commissioned officers (HUS I). The small camp for 119 Sqn has become a place for fire brigade training. Its popular name „Holländer-Camp“ still reminds of the original function as home for Dutch Nike-Teams until 1975.

120 Squadron

1959 formed as future C-Squadron from 1.GGW at Fort Bliss, returned to Camp Holterhoek, Eibergen (NL)

1960 moved to Damloup-Kaserne in Rheine installing a training site on the yard, which later became Nike-School

1963 deployed at Borgholzhausen in a permanent site

1964 renamed 120 Sqn

5/1975 under command and control of the new Dutch Nike missile group 12e GGW
3/1983 disbanded in advance to save costs in favour of a speedy introduction of Patriot
1995 name adopted by training squadron (Patriot,Hawk,Stinger) of the new GGW on de Peel airforce base

The site still existed in the end 90ies. After the withdrawal of the Dutch unit at 1983, the fire control site was used temporarily by a British radar unit. In the 90ies a windmotor was erected .The launcher site seems to be used by a construction firm.(?)

121 Squadron

3/1966 formation of the fourth Nike-Squadron of 1 GGW began, personnel transferred from 118 Sqn and other units,originally planned deployment at Bramsche- Hesepe rejected.

12/1967 operational Nike Unit on a new site at Bad Essen, suffered from lack of personnel

7/1970 – 10/72 temporarily deactivated

1/1975 disbanded

5/1981 name and tradition adopted by the SHORAD-Unit (ALVD) on Gilze-Rijen airforce base near Eindhoven. In 1996 it became 670 Sqn ground defence.

First it was planned to install the sites for 121 Sqn on a former airfield of Bramsche Hesepe next to the central camp of the Dutch Nike Group at Hesepe The existence of an ammunition site made it impossible to use the area for a missile site. 121 Sqn was then established at Bad Essen on the Mittellandkanal north of Osnabrück. A camp for the Dutch aircorcemen of 121 Sqn was provided at Bohmte (Tiling-Kaserne) north of Bad Essen. In the 1980ies the camp was used by a German ambulance training unit (SanZ 800) . The real position of the Nike-Sites on present Satellite-Pictures can only be suspected, because there can't be found shelters or buildings any longer. The firecontrol site must have been on the „Westerberg“ in the mountain-range „Wiehengebirge“ south of Bad Essen. Today a hostel can be found on top of the mountain. The launcher site must have been south west on a cleared area in the forest. On the present satellite photo you see a clearing. A satellite photo from the 70ies shows an object in the forest at the same place.

220 Squadron

1963 formed as A-Sqn from 2 GGW and deployed at Schöppingen, operational HQ of 2 GGW placed on the same site, fire control Site equipped with high performance surveillance radars(HIPAR)

1964 renamed into 220 Sqn

5/1975 under command and control of the new Dutch Nike missile group 12e GGW

3/1987 disbanded

The site was placed on a plain height north-west of Münster where the radar dome of the HIPAR for the bataillon operation centre became a landmark which could be seen from far away. Today a TV tower can be seen there. The further use of the launcher site is uncertain. The place would be favourable for windmotors.The Dutch community from 220 Sqn and HQ 2e GGW became a well-accepted part of Schöppingen and their return to the Netherlands was regretted by the local population. The place Schöppingen became famous in the early 90ies when the former army camp was converted into a centre for immigrants and fugitives, which it is still today. The local authorities at Schöppingen have established a „Künstlerdorf“ for artisans to use the housing eras of the former Dutch community.

221 Squadron

4/1963 formed as B-Squadron 1 GGW on a new site at Erle (between Borken and Essen)

2/1965 operational unit, renamed 221 Squadron

3/1975 disbanded, Nike facilities at Erle were afterwards used by 57 Squadron of the Belgium airforce, which was deployed there from 1977-1983

12/1981 name and tradition adopted by the SHORAD unit on Soesterberg airforce base, in 1996 it became no 650 ground defence sqn

Unlike the first squadrons of 1eGGW the units of 2e GGW were placed on non-military ground where land had to be acquired. The site at Erle was placed on the northern edge of a big forest („Scherambecker Wald“). After the withdrawal of the Dutch Nikes the missile station at Erle was used by the 57 Sqn of the Belgium airforce until 1983. Being the last of the eight Belgium Nike units it had suffered from shortages in funds and problems to find a place for a site.

222 Squadron

1963 begin of formation on Twenthe airbase, but no squadron size achieved .

1967 deactivated although permanent site near Nordhorn Range was finished,

1970 reactivated as subunit from 223 Sqn at Rheine as 222 vlucht (=flight)

1975 disbanded

1981 name and tradition adapted by ALVD-Sqn at Twenthe, since 1996 : 620 Sqn (object air defence)

The formation and operational readiness of 222Sqn suffered from shortage in manpower and money.

At first the squadron was deployed at Twenthe airforce base before it could take over a permanent site not far from the RAF training area of Nordhorn Range. It can be doubted if the vicinity of a firing range for fighters was really favourable for a missile unit with highly explosive weapons. 222 Sqn/flight didn't get a nuclear capacity.

If the satellite-photo has really been taken at about 1990, the site must have remained empty and untouched for more than 15 years ! No information is available if there had been a camp for the Dutch crews at Nordhorn or if they had been accommodated on Twenthe airbase near Enschede. The name of this troubled Nike unit survived until 1996, because its name was adopted by a unit which is one of the three Klu remaining units for local airdefence of airbases (OLVD-Sqns 119,420,222). In 1996 the ground defence of Dutch Airbases was reorganized and renamed (see above)

223 Squadron

1959 formed as future D-Squadron 1 GGW at Fort Bliss (USA), returned to Camp Holterhoek, Eibergen (NL)

1960 temporarily placed at Münster-Handorf together with A-Squadron, then in 4/60 moved to Damloup-Kaserne in the town of Rheine together with C-Squadron and installed a training site on the yard of Damloup-Kaserne

10/1961 D-Squadron deployed on the new Nike site on the area of the airfield at Rheine Bentlage, training site at Damloup-Kaserne further used by Nike-School/C-Squadron

1963 Ajax missiles completely replaced by Hercules

8/1964 renamed 223 Squadron under command and under control of the new 2 GGW since 1966.

5/1975 under command and control of the new 12e GGW

1984 disbanded

223 Sqn found a permanent site on an airfield , which which up to now is used by „HeeresfliegerRgt 15“ a German aviation unit equipped with CH 53G-helicopters . Transportation bataillon no 170, now be reduced to a training unit, is also deployed at Theodor-Blank-Kaserne,Rheine.The Dutch camp was north of the German barracks. Rheine is one of the bigger German garrisons and the home of 72 Fighter wing on Hopsten airbase , army aviation and logistic units. The site is still untouched after plans of a WHNS-depot for the equipment of US-Army had to be cancelled.

Abr.:

Klu = Koninklijke Luchtmacht , Royal Dutch Airforce

GGW = Groep Geleide Wapens, Missile Group, Dutch term for Nike Bataillons
SHORAD = ShortAirDefence, Dutch: Actieve Luchtverdediging (ALVD), equipped with Hawk
and 40L70 anti air guns

Facts collected by Jürgen Dreifke, 48249 Dülmen, from the following sources:

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