

## ***Nikes in the Royal Belgian Airforce***

Ann.: the abbreviations are usually given in the Flemish language, because the facts have been collected from the Flemish version of J.M de Blende, 30 jaar Nike. As far as possible the English terms are preferred. As the Belgian nation is divided into a French and a Flemish part, the army and airforce attempt to form units in which only one language is spoken. , too. Some units ,of course, must be bilingual. In general 9 Wing was Flemish and 13 Wing was French.

- 1957 first Belgian staff in Redstone Arsenal at Huntsville, Ala. for Nike training
- 1958 future Belgian Nike crews for training in Fort Bliss, formation of **3 WTTGL** (Wing telegeleide tuigen grond-lucht) as first Nike Bn (BE)
- 1959 first Ajax and Nike missiles fired at Mc Gregor range, US-government officially confirmed delivery of Nike equipment to Belgium, temporary deployment of the first Nike units in East Belgium on Camp Elsenborn (Staff) and Camp Mercy at Malmedy (four batteries and Direct Support Unit ). Sqn 51 and 53 ( Smaldeel 51 and 53) were placed on the training site „Roderhöhe“near Elsenborn. Sqn 50 and 52 (Smaldeel 50 and 52) assembled their equipment on the camp yard of Malmedy. A part of the equipment was disposed at Wewelgem. In December 51 and 53 Sqn became operational so that 3 WTTGL was the first non-American Nike bataillon in Europe. By royal decree the bataillon adopted name and tradition of a former 13 fighter wing (1953-58Koksijde) and became **13 WTTGL**.
- 1960 King Baudoin visited 13 WTTGL together with Reza Pahlevi , Emperor from Iran. The staff from 13 WTTGL , the two non-operational batteries (Sqn 50 and 52) and the Direct Support Group moved to Bierset airbase near Liege(Lüttich) and the camp at Malmedy was given up.
- 1961 13 WTTGL was completely deployed at Bierset and Elsenborn. A detachment remained at Elsenborn to support the two operational squadrons at Roderhöhe. Future German sites were examined at Düren, Bedburg-Kaster, Blankenheim-Mulheim and Euskirchen-Billig. The staff of future **9 WTTGL** moved to Fort Bliss for Nike training.
- 1962 Formation of 9 WTTGL with two squadrons (no 54 and 55) as second Nike bataillon at Bierset . It adopted the name and tradition of a former fighter wing at Brustem. The 13 WTTGL units from Bierset moved to Camp Bastin, Düren (GE), west of Cologne. Gradually 50 Sqn and 52 Sqn got their permanent sites Nideggen (near Düren) and Euskirchen-Billig. When 51 and 53 Squadrons followed to Blankenheim and Kaster, the temporary sites at Roderhöhe were taken by the new 55 and 56 Sqns from 9 Wing. A support group named **SETTGL**(Steuneneinheit van Telegeleide Tuigen Grond-Lucht) was formed at Bierset and moved to Camp Bodart,Düren, leaving a detachment at Bierset for 9 Wing until 1964. A Nike depot was planned at Evere (Brussels). Later the NATO-Depot at Capellen (Lux) provided spare part supply. For command and control of the two wings a central command was formed at Camp Bastin, Düren, under the name „Groepering voor Telegeleide Tuigen Grond-Lucht (**GTTGL**)“,
- 1963 BOC 13 WTTGL became operational on the site of Nideggen near Düren, which had also to control 9 Wing Squadrons . 50 and 52 Sqn were designated for nuclear role.
- 1964 GTTGL renamed into Group Missiles **Gp MSL**, 9 WTTGL renamed into **9 Wing Missiles** and 13 WTTGL into **13 Wing Missiles**. 9 Wing left Bierset . Staff and 53 Squadron deployed at Bedburg-Kaster. 53 Sqn had changed into a Flemish speaking sqn under command from 9 Wing. Sqn 55 and 56 stayed at Elsenborn and their sites at Roderhöhe. Formation of 57 Sqn as the last of the eight Nike-squadrons couldn't be realized in the 60ies. 54 Sqn (Bierset) followed 50 Sqn on the temporary site at Soller near the military training area of Düren-Drove , where it performed the function of a training unit. Up to 1964 nearly all units of Gp MSL had moved to Germany with the exception of the two Elsenborn Squadrons 55 and 56.
- In the following years the full operational capacity could not be achieved. The fire control and radar equipment for the two wings suffered from financial problems and not all squadrons got their permanent site. 54 Squadron had to stay on the military training area at Soller south of Düren. There it also kept the equipment for the last Squadron No 57 ,which hadn't been formed yet. 56 Sqn could not leave Camp Elsenborn and the temporary site on Roderhöhe before 1969 when the camp at Grefrath and the sites near Hinsbeck were finished. Further restrictions were caused by lack of manpower, training or special equipment (for ex. launcher rails). The wing operation centres at Nideggen and Grefrath had to wait until 1969 and 1977 to be equipped with high performance radars for surveillance (HIPAR). Sometimes the environment of the sites caused troubles (opencast mining, line of sight in forest areas)
- 1966 SETTGL at Düren became **Steunwing Missiles (W S MSL)**, Ajax out of operational service, remaining missiles used for firing practice. The W S MSL and the two operational wings were supported by Sikorsky S 58 helicopter detachments from 40 Sqn at Koksijde (BE).
- 1967 the defence units of the squadrons were named flights SB
- 1969 HIPAR was installed on the fire control site of 50 Sqn at Nideggen near Düren. Staff Gp MSL from Düren and Staff / BOC 9 Wing from Kaster moved to Grefrath. 56 Sqn left Elsenborn for Grefrath and took permanent sites near Hinsbeck and Wankum

- Without a HIPAR of its own BOC 9 Wing depended on the radar from 13 Wing at Nideggen, but no equipment for radar link was provided.
- 1970 507<sup>th</sup> Det US Artillery joined 9 Wing at Grefrath.
- 1973 The operational units of 9 and 13 Wing were incorporated into NADGE, after integration of fire control systems from batteries and BOC had been accomplished (AN-MSQ 18 equipment)  
Interfaces between Battery control trailer and BOC or LOPAR/HIPAR improved reliability in case of damage or electronic warfare.
- 1974 Squadrons received first Vulcan 20mm guns and heavy machine guns for air and ground defence, but these weapons didn't all become operational at once. GpMSL got 40 Nike Mim 14 B and 14 C missiles from disbanded Dutch units. SAMCAP programm to improve missile agility started.  
Plans to form eight squadron were resumed.
- 1975 the project of a new site at Straelen-Vossum was cancelled in favour of a deployment of the future 57 Sqn on abandoned Dutch site at Erle.
- 1977 TPS-1D Radar , which was kept as a reserve for 9 Wing was deactivated, when finally in 1978 the HIPAR of 9 Wing was installed at Hinsbeck near Grefrath and the BOC became operational there.
- 1978 Nike Support Plan started to modify and digitalize electronic components at the German LogRgt 8 (Mechernich) until 1983.
- 1979 new 57 Squadron became operational at last.
- 1980 Longe Range security programm improved security of nuclear squadrons. New antitank weapon LAW for defence flights
- 1983 53 and 57 Squadron disbanded, decision to disband further squadrons (52 and 55 Squadron)
- 1985 Gp MSL, 13 and 9 Wing disbanded and integrated into the new **Wing Missile WMSL** at Camp Handzame, Düren , 13 Wing becomes **13 Gp Op** (Groep Operaties =operational group) to control 50 and 51 Squadron and 9 Wing becomes **9 Gp Op** for 56 and 54 Squadron.  
W S MSL incorporated in WMSL as **Gp Sp MSL**. Gp Sp MSL deinstalled equipment of dismantled units. The missiles were wrecked at Helchteren and Zedelgem.
- 1987 Belgian government decided to disband all Nike units until 1990/1 , replacement by Patriot couldn't be afforded.
- 1988 43<sup>rd</sup> Detachment US Artillery at Düren and 507<sup>th</sup> Det at Grefrath were withdrawn after nuclear warheads had gone according to Montebello agreement, last firing practice on Kreta, last Tactical Evaluation for WMSL.
- 1989 51 Squadron at Blankenheim and 54 Squadron at Xanten disbanded.
- 1990 WMSL with 9 and 13 Groep Operaties and the last Nike batteries in Central Europe, 50 Sqn at Nideggen and 56 Sqn at Grefrath came to an end. In 10/1990 WMSL disbanded. Tradition of 13 GpOp was adapted by CRC Glons and that of 9 GpOp was continued by 9 TrgWing on Brustem airbase.  
Gp Sp MSL survived for a few months to dismantle and guard the Nike facilities until 7/1991.
- After the disbanding of the Hawk bataillons no 43 (Brakel) and 62 (Essentho/Korbach) in Germany, Belgian ground airdefence only relied 35 Bty and 14 Bn equipped with Mistral man-portable AA-missiles.

### ***The Nike Squadrons of the Group Missiles (Royal Belgian Airforce)***

#### **13 Wing**

##### **50 Sqn**

- 1959 formed as 50 Smaldeel /Escadrille, Camp Mercy at Malmedy (BE)
- 1960 moved to Bierset (BE)
- 1961 operational since 9-1961
- 1962 moved to Camp Bastin at Düren, temporary site at Soller on military training area south of Düren, then permanent site near Nideggen and Thum. The Soller area was now and then used as alternative site, when equipment in permanent site was deactivated for repairs and modifications.
- 1965 50 Sqn received nuclear warheads under US-control.
- 1969 fire control received anti-ballistic-missile (ATBM) capacity !!
- 1972 last Ajax fired on Souda Bay (Kreta)
- 1978 ATBM configuration deinstalled, replaced by SAMPCAP configuration, first activities of Long Range Security Programme
- 1980 50 Sqn moved to Camp Handzame, Düren, where Staff 13 Wing and elements of Wing Spt MSL were deployed, too.
- 1983 Nike Support Plan modifications finished by German logistic regiment 8 at Mechernich, new watch tower completed, peace demonstrations
- 1988 last annual service practice at Kreta in 5-88, 7-88 withdrawal of nuclear warheads by helicopter
- 1990 in 1-90 begin of dismantling, 6-90 last operational evaluation and end of operational role
- 1991 sites were guarded until 7-91

### 50Sqn BE.gif

The launcher site was at the edge of the military training area of Drove, south of Düren. Düren had been an important garrison of the Belgian forces in Germany. In the 80ies German units ( 533 Tank Bn) were deployed there, after mechanized Belgian troupes had returned to their native country and only the Wing Missile had remained. The different Nike units at Düren (Staff 13 Wing, later Staff WMSL , Support Wing, 50 Sqn ) gradually established themselves in different camps, abandoned by the army (Camp Bastin, Camp Bodart, Camp Handzame).As the operation centre of 13 Wing / 13 Gp Op was deployed on the fire control site near Nideggen,the site had received a HIPAR high performance radar and was one of the two last units which remained until the end of the Nike era in 1990.

### **51 Sqn**

- 1959 formed at Malmedy, temporary site on Roderhöhe
- 1960 moved to Camp Elsenborn
- 1963 51 Sqn left Elsenborn and Roderhöhe for Blankenheim-Mülheim
- 1964 operational since 6-1964
- 1965 nuclear warheads under US-control since 11-1965
- 1988 nuclear warheads withdrawn
- 1989 6-89 end of operational status, until 11-89 the site was dismantled and the personnel withdrawn

### 51Sqn BE.gif

### **52 Sqn**

- 1959 formed at Malmedy, personnel took part in operational role of 53 Sqn on Roderhöhe
- 1960 moved to Bierset airbase
- 1962 moved to Düren in 4-62 and took over permanent site at Euskirchen-Billig in 6-62
- 1964 won Spaak-Trophee
- 1965 received nuclear warheads in 5-65
- 1967 moved to Camp Zelzate,Euskirchen
- 1968 moved to camp Loncin,Euskirchen
- 1972 platform for TRR provided
- 1980 NSP-programm finished
- 1984 52 Sqn lost operational role in 7-84 and became school unit, mobilization exercise for reserve soldiers from 13 Wing in 10-84.
- 1985 3-85 dismantling of squadron began, equipment transported to 25 LogWing (BE) at Meerdaalbos. 6-85 Sqn 52 disbanded

### 52Sqn BE.gif

The site lay in a military training area of the Belgian army (18 TkBrig) at Euskirchen-Billig and was still used for military purposes after the squadron was withdrawn. The Squadron could make use of an army camp at Euskirchen. Like in Düren the German army (535 Bn Artillery and 532 Bn Infantry) came when the Belgian army left and only the airforce remained. Today radio communication facilities for the central German Signal Command can be found there.

### **53 Sqn**

- 1959 formed at Malmedy
- 1960 moved to Elsenborn and took temporary site at Roderhöhe
- 1963 left Elsenborn and Roderhöhe for Bedburg-Kaster (GE), temporary camp at Ichendorf
- 1964 moved to Camp Kaster, 52 Sqn now under control from 9 Wing, which deployed its staff at Kaster,too.
- 1967 US-authorities wanted to deny nuclear equipment after squadron had failed evaluation test, but shortcomings were soon overcome and the nuclear warheads stayed at Kaster.
- 1972 new platform for TTR finished
- 1975 SAMCAP-improvements were carried out.
- 1977 majority of the Flemish speaking squadron moved to Erle to form 57 Squadron, a new French speaking squadron was established by 13 Wing at Düren.
- 1983 squadron disbanded, troubles with opencast mining area and distance between Kaster and Düren as the home of the squadron crew contributed to the decision .

### 53Sqn BE.gif

The sites of the squadron on a height between Bedburg and Mönchengladbach were placed on the edge of a wide opencast mining area. The excavators often caused troubles for radar performance. Although the mining areas in that area gradually extended, the shelters of 53 Sqn still could be seen from the highway passing the site in 1997. The former fire control area near the village of Kirchherten was used as a military communication site until the early 90ies. In the late 1970ies the Flemish speaking personnel of the squadron had to form the new 57 squadron at Erle and French speaking personnel, which belonged to the military community of Düren, filled the gaps at Kaster.

## **9 Wing**

### **54 Sqn**

- 1962 formed at Bierset airbase, used as a school unit
- 1964 moved to Soller where the facilities for Nike training had been installed, came under command from 13 Wing
- 1969 under command from 9 Wing again, but not operational
- 1971 moved to Xanten, shortage of manpower
- 1973 after the line of sight between radars and launchers had been cleared, 54 Sqn became operational as conventional unit.
- 1978 after long discussions and delay 54 Sqn received nuclear equipment.
- 1988 last annual service practice at Souda Bay with 99,5 %!!
- 1989 Sqn left operational role in June and disbanded in November.

### 54Sqn BE.gif

The facilities between Sonsbeck and Xanten were last new permanent Nike site of the NATO airdefence belt, when 54 Sqn finally was deployed there in 1974. It became involved into the Long Range Security Programm during the time of nuclear debates in the early 80ies like the sites at Grefrath, Nideggen, Kapellen and Blankenheim(?). These sites can be identified by a concrete watch tower in the launcher area and special wired and walled sections inside the launcher area. The camp became an immigrant centre.

At present (July 2000) the fire control and the launcher sites still show the shape of a typical Nike place. The areas are protected by fences. The former fire control area seems to be used for disaster relief training (Technisches Hilfswerk). In the launcher area the watch towers are still in a solid condition. The facilities for improving nuclear security from the early 80ies with a concrete watch tower and double fences haven't been scrapped. The road towards the launcher site west of Xanten is closed for public motor traffic and only open for local farmers, but it is only a 15-minutes walk from the road Xanten-Sonsbeck to the site. The fire control site is accessible by a small road from a little car park to the top of „Sonsbecker Berg“. The camp site is no longer used for immigrants but has been rebuilt into an official workshop area for services which maintain historical monuments.

### **55 Sqn**

- 1962 formed at Bierset airbase
- 1963 moved to Elsenborn and site Roderhöhe, operational in 10-1963
- 1966 sqn took over launcher site near Grevenbroich-Kapellen/Erft
- 1967 sqn took over fire control site and camp at Kapellen, 55Sqn left Elsenborn and Roderhöhe for Kapellen, received nuclear warheads in 9-67.
- 1974 SAMPCAP improvement until 1-1976.
- 1984 nuclear warheads withdrawn in spring 1984.
- 1985 Sqn left operational role in 1-1985 and disbanded in 6-85.

### 55Sqn BE.gif

The site was placed on a plain height between Neuss and Grevenbroich next to a busy motorway. After the withdrawal of 55 Sqn the camp and the sites were used by a US-Army unit which was responsible to store equipment for American reserve units. For some time lorries and trailers were parked on the areas. Meanwhile the US-units have been withdrawn.

### **56 Sqn**

- 1963 formed in 11-1963 at Elsenborn, followed 51 Sqn, which had moved to Germany, on site Roderhöhe
- 1964 assigned to NATO
- 1968 completion of permanent site at Hinsbeck delayed by lack of launcher rails.
- 1969 Left Elsenborn and Roderhöhe for Camp Grefrath and sites at Hinsbeck and Müllem, operational in 8-1969.

- 1970 line of sight improved by clearing bushes, electric short-circuit in 9-1970 damaged radars and interrupted operational role until 1-1971. Deficiencies delayed nuclear equipment .
- 1973 nuclear warheads deployed in 7-1973.
- 1975 site Hinsbeck finally received HIPAR for BOC 9 Wing .
- 1986 royal visit by Baudoïn I.
- 1988 last annual service practice , result 99,25 % . Nuclear weapons left in 6-1988.
- 1990 begin of dismantling in 1-1990, end of operational role in June and disbanded in October. Sites guarded by GpSpMSL from Düren until 7-1991.

### 56Sqn\_BE.gif

The sites were to be found at three different local communities , east of a beautiful lake area on the Dutch border: the town of Grefrath, the villages of Hinsbeck and Wankum.

The distance between fire control and launcher area was unusually far and it is reported that trees caused some problems for the line of sights between radars and launcher section. The fire control site on a height between Hinsbeck and Grefrath had received the HIPAR in the 1970ies which had been missed by 9 Wing for a long time. The launcher site was at the edge of a forest near the small settlement of Müllem. The areas still seemed to be untouched in 1997. The camp at Grefrath was temporarily by US supply units which cared for the stores of the US-Reservecorps III in the areas on River Rhine and the Netherlands.

### **57 Sqn**

- 1964 original plan to form last Belgium Nike Sqn in 1964 delayed. Equipment deposited at Soller.
- 1971 since 1971 a deployment on a new site near Straelen-Vossum was considered, although the vicinity of the sites at Grefrath and Xanten didn't favour that place.
- 1974 The realization of the Vossum site seemed to be forthcoming, when the Dutch decision to reduce the number of Nike squadrons offered the opportunity to take over the site from 221Sqn (NL) at Erle. NATO and Belgium agreed on adopting the site in 7-1975
- 1975 57 Sqn was formed at Düren in 10-1975. GpMSL took over the Erle site in 11-1975. 13 Wing had to guard the object and prepare the facilities for 57 Sqn. US authorities denied nuclear equipment after close inspection . An F-section for nuclear weapons should not be prepared on the launcher site, so that 57 Sqn only received a conventional role.
- 1976 in 1-1976 the defence flight of 57 Sqn deployed at Erle, equipment was SAMCAP-improved, in 5-1976 only C-section of launcher site was finished . Lack of equipment (rails) and personnel delayed formation.
- 1978 decision in 2-78 to form 57 Sqn with personnel from 53 Sqn and fill the gap at Kaster with French crews from Düren.
- 1979 first TacEval in 1-1979
- 1983 in 9-1983 the short-living squadron disbanded. The equipment was de-installed by W S Msl and used for training or as reserve at Camp Bodart , Düren. Missiles were transported to 25 Logistic Wing at Meerdaalbosch (BE).

map see „221Sqn\_NL“

Erle is a small village on the motorway between Borken and Essen. The site had been used by the Dutch 221 Sqn before and was taken over by 57 Sqn which hadn't found a suitable site before and hadn't been really formed yet. The Sqn left NATO-airdefence in 1983, but it is reported that the radars remained operational until 4-85. After the retreat the site was untouched for a long time (see photos „Erle.gif“). The camp became an immigrant centre. In the late 90ies the launcher site was complete cleared. The radar mounds of the fire control site are gradually exploited by a construction firm.

Summary by Jürgen Dreifke, 48249 Dülmen, all information taken from the following source: „ *J.M. de Blende, 30 jaar Nike*, published by the Belgian forces in Germany in 1990.“