

British Forces at Dülmen – A short summary

Text: Jürgen Dreifke, November 2019

1959: Plans were considered to establish a central British depot to replace a number of logistic sites which were scattered over the former British occupation zone in Germany.

Originally the British forces in post-war Germany were deployed in the area of their occupation zone between the River Rhine and the Danish border. So were the logistic facilities. When the Federal Republic of Germany became a member of NATO in 1955 and built up a new German army military plans and deployment were rearranged. The British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) focused on defence in a sector from the Inner German border near Hannover to the Rhine Area. A communication zone across Belgium to the UK was needed for enforcements and supply. Logistic sites had to be placed in a base and headquarter area west of River Rhine around Mönchengladbach and a forward area in the rear combat zone east of the Rhine Area towards the garrisons in Westphalia and the south of Lower Saxony.

At Dülmen NATO planned a storage site on the ground of a former wartime German fuel depot next to a railway line between Western and Northern Germany. First the new German army intended to use the planned depot, but then it was chosen as a material depot for the British forces. Forward storage sites for ammunition at Wulfen and fuel at Everswinkel made the region of „Münsterland“ a favourable logistic area to backbone British forces and defence further east. The depot at Dülmen should replace four ordnance depots at Hannover, Münster, Bielefeld and Glinde.

1964: Construction of the new depot at Dülmen began.

May 1969: The first big hall for storage could be used.

August 1969: equipment from British facilities in Belgium was moved to Dülmen.

1973: Headquarter 15 Base Ordnance Depot with General Stores Group, Reserve Stores Group , Camp and Repair Group and RAOC Training Wing were deployed at Dülmen.

1974: The depot was completed with six large halls of 7200 square metres and buildings for headquarters , workshops and accomodation. The depot at Dülmen stored material for the British forces in Germany like spare parts,

furniture and general equipment for military exercises and training (tents, sports equipment etc.). There were special workshops for repairing the stored articles. The staff consisted of up to 650 civilian employees and soldiers. The depot was also a centre in the supply chain from Britain to Germany and distributed military commodities which arrived by trucks or trains. The depot could make use of more than 5000 metres of rails which were linked to the adjacent track between the Industrial Area of Western Germany and the harbours in Northern Germany

2.4.1974: Commander in Chief BAOR General Sir Harry Tuzo officially opened Tower Barracks and Base Ordnance Depot at Dülmen.



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General Sir Harry Tuzo opening the depot on April 2nd 1974, January 2016

April 1976 a partnership between 15 Ordnance Group and the German reservists of the local military district Coesfeld-Borken was established. The commander of 7 Regiment Artillery (GE) from St.-Barbara-Barracks, Dülmen, also took part in the ceremony.



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Exchanging the partnership documents between 15 Ordn Gp and German reservists in 1976

In the following years the military community of Tower Barracks took part in many marches and competitions of the local reservist group „Reservistenkameradschaft Dülmen“. Reservists were invited for social meetings and took part in the open day activities.



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A marching group of Tower Barracks preparing for the annual Reservist marching competition („Münsterlandmarsch“) at Dülmen - Spring 1988

In the early 80ies Dülmen garrison was responsible for 530 soldiers and their families. Accomodation for the families was provided in housing areas along „Ostdamm“ and „Ostlandwehr“ not far from the depot, so that soldiers could quickly move to their unit if security required. Unmarried soldiers found accomodation in the depot area, where also freetime facilities like a cinema were offered. The NAAFI-shop and Tower primary school were placed at „Ostdamm“

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10.9.1983: The City of Dülmen awarded Forward Ordnance Depot the rights and honours of „Freedom of the City“. This British tradition allows soldiers to enter the city with their weapons, which are presented on official celebrations. This tradition is awarded to assure mutual confidence between soldiers and citizens. The local politicians had chosen the year 1983, because the British garrison could celebrate its 15th anniversary of deployment at Dülmen. The decision of the town council was resisted by peace activists from different groups. Especially the guns and swords as part of the ceremony caused resentment. In 1983 the resistance against NATO-Politics, nuclear armament had reached its peak and a few months before on March 31st, 1983, peace activists had blockaded the forward nuclear storage site of Dülmen-Visbeck. The parade of the ceremony on the marketplace on September 10th, 1983 was accompanied by a demonstration with banners and noises on the „Overbergplatz“ nearby. Articles and letters in the local paper „Dülmener Zeitung“ mirrored the controversy in the Dülmen community and citizenship.

1989: At the end of the Cold War Era the Headquarters of 15th Ordnance Group at Tower Barracks, Dülmen controlled Forward Stores Depot (Royal Army Ordnance Corps RAOC) Dülmen, Forward Vehicle Depot (RAOC)

Recklinghausen-Hillerheide, 4th Petrol Depot (RAOC) Everswinkel-Mehringen, 154th Forward Ammunition Depot (RAOC) Wulfen, Ordnance Services (RAOC) Viersen and Inventory Control Point (RAOC) Viersen. At Tower Barracks were also placed a military police detachment and an element of 6 PLSU (Pioneer Labour Support Unit).

1991: The process of force reductions within NATO began. The British Army of the Rhine was involved, too, but the Dülmen Depot still remained a central logistic element and had to replace the functions of smaller logistic units and sites which were disbanded and closed. During the process of reduction the depot at Dülmen played a central role in the drawdown of material. Equipment was returned to stocks in the UK or redivided among the units which stayed in the order of battle.

5.4.1993: At Forward Ordnance Depot Dülmen 14 Supply Regiment was formed with 140 Headquarters Squadron and 141 Material Squadron. The staff element of former 15 Ordnance Group returned to the UK. In 1993 army logistics were reorganized by merging the Royal Corps of Transport, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Royal Pioneer Corps, Royal Engineer Postal and Courier Services and Army Catering corps in the new frame of the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC). The Corps of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) was not involved.

1996: Forward Ordnance Depot Dülmen became Base Ordnance Depot. After the threat of Warsaw Pact Forces at the Inner German Border had disappeared since 1990, a geographic distinction between forward and base logistics didn't make sense any longer. NATO operations were no longer focused on defence sectors in Germany. On August 23rd, 1996 the local paper of Dülmen reported, that 14 Supply Regiment RLC deployed 173 soldiers and 432 civilian employees. The storage of spare parts was going to be replaced by an immediate supply chain from the United Kingdom to the British forces in Germany. The depot still had the function of a distribution centre. The storage and repair of equipment for accommodation and training continued.

April 1998: The ammunition site of Wulfen, run by 12 supply regiment RLC, was transferred to the German forces. The German „Bundeswehr“ now owned the biggest ammunition site in Europe. In a limited extend the British Army continued storage of ammunition at the Wulfen facility and deployed a small detachment of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency there. This will stay even after the withdrawal of BAOR.

October 1998: 14 Supply Regiment (RLC) disbanded. Base Ordnance Depot and two subunits were put under command of 6 Supply Regiment, Mansergh Barracks, Gütersloh. In 1994 the Harrier Wing of Royal Airforce had left Gütersloh airbase. A helicopter unit and three logistic units (no 1, 2 and 6 regiment) were placed instead.

6 Supply Regiment RLC comprised 600 Headquarters Squadron, 61 Ammunition Squadron, 62 Stores Squadron at Gütersloh and 67 Supply Services Squadron plus 68 Logistic Brigade Support Squadron at Tower Barracks, Dülmen. The regiment formed part of 102 Logistic Brigade. The storage and distribution of material (spare parts etc.) was reorganised and provided by a direct supply chain from the UK to Germany. Spare parts were no longer stored at Dülmen. The Depot was still responsible for storage and maintainance of accomodation (for example furmiture) and general equipment needed for different military activities and training(tents, sports equipment etc.)

1999: Defence Storage and Distribution Agency was formed to replace military personnel and units in the supply chain of material, where combatants were not needed. The site at Dülmen continued its central logistic function for the remaining British Forces in Germany: distribution of material delivered from the UK, storage and maintainance of general equipment .

4.7.1998: Parade of 14 Supply Regiment in the City of Dülmen to say farewell. According to the award „Freedom of the City“ from 1983, the soldiers under command of Lt Col Frere were allowed to march through the city centre and present their weapons.



„Freedom of the City“ - Parade on July 4th, 1998 ©Ramberg, Dülmener Zeitung

1999, 2000 and 2001 public relation activities at Tower Barracks and ties to the Dülmen community were enforced by open days combined with a shooting

competition of the local „Schützenvereine“, clubs with a long tradition of organizing citizenship and local defence.

An annual highlight were the Christmas Carols in the City with local choruses and RLC Army Band.

Citizens could also join the traditional bonfires at Guy Fawkes Day. British marching teams of Tower Barracks took part in the annual reservists' march in spring.



27.4 2002: A marching team of Dülmen garrison joined the local „Münsterlandmarsch“ for training. In the British Army all soldiers have to be fully trained infantry fighters.

2003: 6 supply regiment deployed to Iraq, 64 Fuel Squadron moved to 8 Regiment RLC, Portsmouth Barracks, Münster-Coerde.

2007: A reserve unit was formed to be twinned with 6 supply regiment: 159 Regiment RLC with headquarter squadron at Coventry. With six sub units in the Midland area, manned by 623 voluntary reservists, it became one of the biggest regiments in the Royal Army.

December 2008: Disbanding(??) of 67 Supply Services Squadron (Dülmen) and 68 Logistic Brigade Squadron(Dülmen) of 6 Supply Regiment. The regiment took part in the Afghanistan mission. After this deployment it was named 6 Regiment RLC.

2010: Defence and Distribution Agency ceased to exist and Defence and Equipment Support (DE6&S) was formed instead. In the long run Ministry of Defence planned to outsource the storage and distribution of military material in the supply chain to the private sector .

November 2011: Most British soldiers had left Tower Barracks, only about 20 military stayed. The logistic site in Dülmen was now run by the Logistics

Delivery Operating Centre, a part of DE&S organisation. The remaining logistic tasks were performed by the civilian staff under control of DE&S or were transferred to 6 Regiment RLC at Mansergh Bks Gütersloh. Tower Barracks now were part of Gütersloh Garrison. The facilities for the British military community , Tower primary School and NAAFI-Shop, were closed and the housing areas at Ostdamm and Ostlandwehr found new inhabitants.



The logo of the new logistic provider DE&S and an old medium howitzer decorated the entrance to the headquarters building. © Michalak, Dülmener Zeitung

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2013: In Tower Barracks were still working about 250 civilian and 10 military personnel. In October military signposts along the motorway suggested training activities of 159 Regiment RLC Reserve at Dülmen.

April 2015: After a contract between the British government and Team Leidos the defence supply chain is going to be outsourced and transferred to the private sector.

July 2016: The last lorry with equipment to clear the storage site of Dülmen was dispatched. The mayoress of Dülmen, Mrs. Stremlau, and other officials of the community witnessed the end of British logistics at Dülmen. The Logistics Delivery Operating Centre (LDOC) from DE&S and their teams at Abbey Wood had done their job.



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Local community government and LDOC team give a farewell to the last lorry load.

October 2016: The British forces transferred responsibility for Tower Barracks to the US-Army. A small number of military and civilian personnel still perform logistic tasks for the remaining British forces until their complete withdrawal in 2020. 6 Regiment RLC moved from Gütersloh to Dishforth (UK). It became part of 102 Logistic Brigade which has a role in the adaptable forces which have to support and backbone first line reaction forces . 6 Regiment RLC is still paired with Army Reserve's 159 Regiment (RLC) from the Midlands (Headquarter Squadron at Coventry). In 2019 6 Force Logistic Regiment (RLC) at Dishforth comprises 600 Headquarter Squadron, 62 Support Squadron, 64 Fuel and General Support Squadron REME light aid detachment.

10.5.2017: US-Forces and the local community celebrated the inauguration ceremony of Army Prepositioned Stocks-2 Site Dülmen belonging to Army Field Support Bataillon BENELUX (US). Tower Barracks is now one of the locations of 405th Army Field Support Brigade (Kaiserslautern). The site at Dülmen stores and maintains equipment for a division headquarters and a division artillery brigade. According to the NATO-Politics of strengthening and backboning defence in Eastern Europe US, equipment is stocked on sites in many different European countries. In crisis and war these stocks can equip reinforcements from the USA. In 2020 these procedures are going to be tested in the exercise Defender 2020, when a US-Division is going to be transferred to Europa, equipped in Germany and the BENELUX area and moved on to Poland.



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10.5.2017 Inauguration ceremony at the US-Army depot in Tower Barracks, Dülmen

2020: The return of British Forces Germany to the UK will be accomplished. A limited military British presence in Germany will continue even after 2020. A detachment of British military logistics will stay at the huge German ammunition site at Wulfen, where ammunition for the British Army further on will be stored, facing the growing threat at the Eastern edge of NATO. The British Army will also continue military training at Sennelager and stocks of equipment and vehicles will be stored in Ayshire Barracks, Mönchengladbach. At Minden German engineers and 23 Amphibious Engineer Squadron will maintain joint bridging facilities with M3 amphibious vehicles, an urgently needed capability in NATO.

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The aerial view from 2014 gives an impression of the facility at Dülmen with vast storage capabilities and traffic links by the adjacent railway from Western Germany to the harbours of Bremen and Hamburg. Since the early 80ies the depot is also linked to the German motorway net via A 43. The traffic links were an important issue for the US-Army to choose the Dülmen site for its prepositioned stocks.



Tower Barracks Dülmen
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Summer 2019: Train with US-Trucks at Dülmen train station waiting for traction into the depot.

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