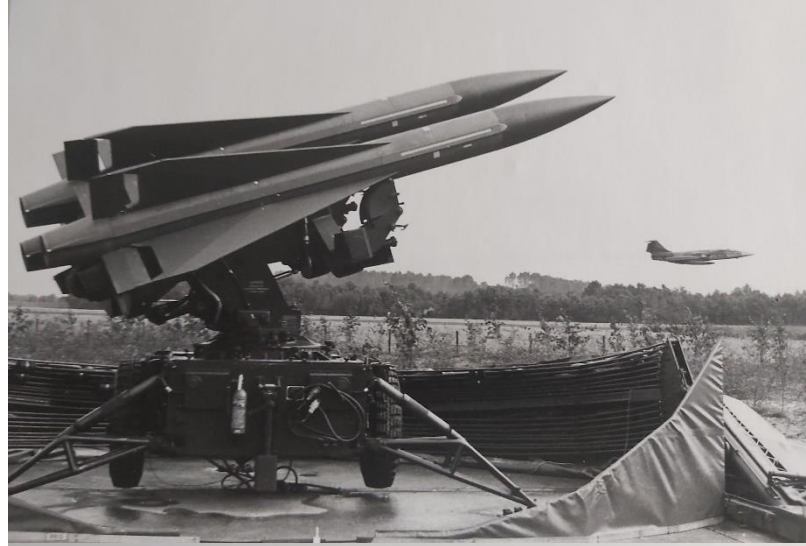


Local Experiences in Volkel

*The U.S. Base Network through
the Eyes of Those Directly Affected*

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Abstract

The United States has a military presence throughout the world via their base network. Some scholars have argued that these bases are a manifestation of the American Empire and its influence on all continents. However, while there tends to be academic focus on the political relationship between the United States and the countries in which they have their bases, there appears to be less interest for the experiences of the local community that is directly impacted by the existence of these bases. Recently, more research has been published on particularly the cultural and environmental impact of bases, as well as the American disregard for the human rights of some local populations, for example in the case of Guam. However, the case of Europe has been quite different from that of Asia and the Pacific. Geir Lundestad famously referred to the existence of U.S. bases in Western Europe as “Empire by Invitation”¹, but is this really true? Has there been little resistance to the presence of bases and American military personnel? How has the local community around Volkel Airbase, one of the largest airbases in the Netherlands, experienced the American presence? This thesis will focus on the local experience, an often-overlooked aspect of the U.S. base network, which is often researched from the national level, rather than the local level. Through interviews, this thesis will provide a more in-depth look into the personal experiences of members of the local community around Volkel Airbase.

¹ Geir Lundestad. *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From Empire by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

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Introduction

American bases have been heavily present all around the world since the end of World War II. The so-called U.S. base network has spread out to all continents, but the bases have not gone uncontested. Activists have been critical of the existence of foreign bases or the presence of American military personnel. The exchange between Americans and the local populations had both positive and negative outcomes. Scholar David Vine, whose research heavily focuses on anti-base movements all around the world, emphasizes that “it is important to explain what anti-base movements are and what they are not: contrary to some popular portrayals, most movements challenging US bases overseas are not anti-American in the sense of being opposed to US citizens and all things from the United States.”² So while there might have been tensions between local populations and the bases themselves, these feelings were often not personal. However, the experiences of local communities are important and interesting to get a better understanding of the impact of U.S. bases abroad. In this master thesis, the experiences of the local community around Volkel Airbase will be highlighted.

Chapter 1 will discuss the academic debate surrounding the U.S. base network and the concept of American Empire. There have been different attitudes towards these concepts and the American influence worldwide. This chapter will also elaborate further on the 1980s protest movements against nuclear weapons in both Europe and the Netherlands specifically. The latter saw a significant increase in protest culture during this decade and these developments were characterized by anti-American sentiment.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the history of Volkel Airbase. This includes the establishment of the first landing strips during World War II, the arrival of American personnel, and the impact on the local community. The latter contains a multitude of elements, such as the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact. These elements have had both positive and negative implications. This chapter will extensively look into media sources describing these interactions.

Chapter 3 consists of interviews conducted with members of the local community. The interviewees had different connections to Volkel Airbase, but the airbase was an element in all of their lives. The interviews deal with three main topics: protests against the airbase, the economic impact of the airbase, and the relationship between the local Dutch population and the Americans stationed at Volkel Airbase.

² David Vine. “No Bases? Assessing the Impact of Social Movements Challenging US Foreign Military Bases.” *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 19 (2019): 161.

This thesis will consist largely of classical historical research through engagement with existing literature. The interviews are an additional factor that will provide this thesis with a more in-depth perception. The interviewees all have different backgrounds, but they are all connected to Volkel Airbase in some way. Two of the interviews have been employees and spend several years working there. Another interviewee is connected to the airbase through the fact that her father worked there almost his entire life, and the last interviewee is the son of an American airman and a Dutch woman; a product of an Dutch-American relationship. These interviewees bring different angles to the foreground. The interviews consisted of conversation of about 20-30 minutes and were recorded with the approval of the interviewees. These recordings were utilized to write down the most important aspects of the conversation into a comprehensible summary. Direct quotes from the interviewees come from these recordings. All the interviews were conducted in the same manner.

This thesis will provide an intimate look into the personal experiences of members of the local community of Volkel Airbase. These experiences will contribute to the academic debate about the U.S. base network and its effect on local populations. The local experience of the population around Volkel Airbase has not been researched and this thesis aims to shine light on this specific topic. While some cases in which US military bases greatly impacted local populations, such as Diego Garcia³ and Guam⁴ have received more attention in the last decade, the experience of Dutch populations near bases has not been subject of much discussion outside of the larger national level. Additionally, it is interesting to see if the experience of the local population of Volkel has been as negative as that of the places that have received more attention recently. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide an intimate inside into the relationship the local population has had with Volkel Airbase and see if these experiences have been largely positive or negative.

³ See David Vine. *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*. (Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴ See Jon Mitchell. *Poisoning the Pacific: The US Military's Secret Dumping of Plutonium, Chemical Weapons, and Agent Orange*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

Chapter 1

U.S. Base Network, American Empire, and Resistance in Europe

Introduction

This chapter will discuss some important theoretical elements in the academic debate related to the American global network of military outposts; the U.S. base network. The focus will be on the European context, because the European experience has been very different from that of other parts of the world. After World War II, Europe was divided into two spheres: an American one and a Russian one. Eastern European countries came under the leadership of communist governments, but communism was not completely absent from Western Europe. A civil war was ensuing in Greece between the Greek government, supported by the United States, and the army of the Communist Party of Greece, supported by the Soviet Union. Similarly, the United States feared Soviet involvement in Turkey. These treats eventually led to the development of the Truman doctrine, which meant that the United States would support governments fighting communist elements within their own countries.⁵ This entangled the Western European countries even more with the United States.

The European experience was also different due to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This set up tight relations between many Western European countries and the United States. As a result of the close cooperation through NATO and the advancement of communism in Europe, the United States and European countries negotiated American involvement in Europe.

Transatlantic relations have had their highs and lows. In his book *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century*, David Ellwood describes how the United States tried to improve the world by heavily investing in multilateral institutions, however, European countries were not always equally enthusiastic. There was disagreement over the role the United States was to play within the reconstruction process of European societies after World War II. The influence of American ideas and culture differed greatly among the different countries. While there was active resistance against the so-called ‘Americanization’ in France, others adopted elements of American culture.⁶ However, there have also been negative feelings from the American side. The most obvious example is the argument that the European countries are not investing as much in their military defense as the United States does. This argument became

⁵ Dennis Merrill. “The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity.” *Presidential Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 27-30.

⁶ Hans Krabbendam “David W. Ellwood. *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century*,” *European Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 11 (2013).

more prominent again during the presidency of Donald Trump, but has been a point of contention within the Transatlantic relationship for decades. This point of view is represented by Robert Kagan in his book *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. He believes that the United States and Europe are too different to properly maintain the Transatlantic relationship: “It is time to stop pretending the Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world.”⁷

The Netherlands was one of the original countries that signed the North Atlantic Treaty and it has always had strong relations with the United States. It does not appear as though the U.S. base network affected this relationship very negatively. As Simon Duke wrote: “The above debate [on the placement of missiles on Dutch soil], centered on the nuclear issue, are exceptions to the traditional support for the Alliance and the US military presence in the Netherlands.”⁸

Several academics have written about the United States’ base network after World War II, however, there is not a particular consensus over the implications of this network. While some believe it has been a very negative development with severe consequences for local populations, other have interpreted the base network and the United States’ subsequent increase of influence worldwide as a very positive development. Cynthia Enloe mentions the normalization of bases abroad, showing how the topic can easily be overlooked by many:

“Most have draped themselves in the camouflage of normalcy. Real estate agents, town officials, charity volunteers, bartenders, school children, local police, local journalist, religious clergy, building contractors, business owners, crime syndicates, tourism companies – all accept the base, its soldiers, and, if a larger base, their civilian spouses and children as unremarkable givens.”⁹

And while most people appear to have accepted the bases as simple facts of life, others have heavily protested their existence in their midst, although with mixed success. As David Vine says: “Anti-base movements have generally faced long odds because of the gaping power

⁷ Robert Kagan. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

⁸ Simon Duke. *United States Military Forces and Installations in Europe*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 22-24.

⁹ Cynthia Enloe. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

imbalances between most movements and the government, corporate, and elite actors arrayed in support of a foreign base presence.”¹⁰

This chapter will more thoroughly discuss the academic debate on the U.S. base network. It will highlight different points of view regarding this topic through the discussion of several different academics and their writings. In addition, it will discuss the specific case of U.S. bases in Europe and the resistance of European populations against these bases and the nuclear weapons which were sometimes installed there. This is a clear local contestation against American influence in Europe, and the Netherlands specifically, and some protests have included clear anti-American sentiment.

Academic debate on the U.S. base network

The United States has an incredibly vast base network all around the world. Undoubtedly, the concept of “empire” is connected to the academic debate on the U.S. base system abroad. However, scholars disagree on the definition of this term and on the extent of which it is a useful concept for the debate on the base system. In their article *The Empire Will Compensate You*, Cooley and Nexon claim that the American base network contains elements that are similar to those of “traditional” empires, but that in large, the two systems cannot be compared. The United States simply does not have the same power over other territories. In the so-called “formal” empires, the core has power over its peripheries and this rule is acknowledged. This is different in so-called “informal” empires, in which the peripheries are legally autonomous. One of the main differences is that the host countries “concede aspects of their sovereignty and allow the presence of American troops on their soil in exchange for some package of benefits, such as security guarantees.” Cooley and Nexon recognize that host countries have to give up part of their sovereignty when they host an American airbase. However, Washington’s control over some aspects of host countries is not comparable to the power traditional empires had over their peripheries. The U.S. control is much more limited compared to the control that European colonial empires had over their overseas territories.¹¹

Sasha Davis has a different view on the concept of empire within the debate of American bases abroad. He does see many similarities between the “traditional” empire and the American base network abroad. The American base network is often described as “stemming from

¹⁰ David Vine. “No Bases? Assessing the Impact of Social Movements Challenging US Foreign Military Bases.” *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 19 (2019): 160.

¹¹ Alexander Cooley & Daniel N. Nexon “‘The Empire Will Compensate You’: The Structural Dynamics of the U.S. Overseas Basing Network,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (2013): 1036-1038.

funneling wealth from “independent” states through indirect means of coercion and exploitive trade practices more than from direct colonial control.” Davis criticizes this attitude as being too simplistic, saying it “overlooks the fact that contemporary imperialism is very dependent on a long history of colonial expansion across the North American continent and strategically placed external military colonies whose political statuses look a lot like the colonies of older forms of domination.” Davis refers to several military bases, more specifically the ones in U.S. territories like Guam and Puerto Rico, as “contemporary colonies.” According to him, these territories become more important for the United States, as the resistance in foreign countries, both by people and governments, increases. One reason for this is the fact that such bases are the sites of contact between U.S. soldiers and the local population. The outcomes can consist of “environmental contamination, sexual violence, or access to resources and land.”¹²

David Vine, who largely agrees with Davis on considering US military outposts abroad as part of a structured empire, is interested in analyzing the importance of social movements that have challenged the U.S. base network. Anti-base movements faced difficulties because of the large power imbalance between the movements and the national government, who are supported by “corporate and elite actors.” But while these actors were often successful at circumventing these movements, material and ideological militarization was being challenged. Naturally, this has led to a varying degree of success for the social movements all around the world. An important note that Vine makes, is that most anti-base movements are not anti-American per se. Similarly, not all anti-base movements are anti-military. The definition of an anti-base movement is therefore a bit complicated, as it can entail many different things.¹³

Joseph Gerson argues that the American base network did not start after World War II, but was actually set up at the end of the 19th century. He put the starting point 1898 during the Spanish-American War, in which Cuba was ‘liberated’ and the United States took over control of the Philippines. Europe came on the radar after World War II and became a very important location within the U.S. base network. In addition, Gerson discusses the difficulties surrounding the definition of a U.S. base. The United States utilized facilities in many different countries, but they do not own the bases. This makes the debate about the base network more complicated.¹⁴

¹² Sasha Davis. “The US base network and contemporary colonialism: Power projection, resistance and the quest for operational unilateralism.” *Political Geography* (2011): 2-7.

¹³ David Vine. “No Bases? Assessing the Impact of Social Movements Challenging US Foreign Military Bases.” *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 19 (2019): 160-161.

¹⁴ Joseph Gerson, “Chapter 1: The Sun Never Sets,” in *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*, ed. Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 3-34.

In his book *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*, Charles Maier discusses American power from the 19th century onward. He puts the United States in line with former empires throughout history and therefore, describes the United States as being an empire. He takes a similar position as Joseph Gerson, emphasizing the United States' imperialistic tendencies before World War II. One cannot understand the current U.S. base network without having an understanding of the past. Maier describes the post-World War II as follows: "Between 1945 and 1947 the United States decided it must take those European states resisting communism and in so doing found that it must establish a European frontier and a Western European region it was committed to defend." Maier implies that the Soviet imperial ambitions were also used as a context for the United States to increase their domain of influence. Maier sets out the importance of nuclear deterrence in the United States' influence in Europa particularly. He mentions how the debate around the concept of American Empire only changed around the 20th century. Before this time, it was considered "poor taste" to refer to the United States as an empire.¹⁵

A much more positive interpretation of American Empire comes from historian Niall Ferguson. In his book *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, he claims that the United States has always been an empire, whether they like to be one or not, which he refers to as "an empire that dare not speak its name." Ferguson disagrees with the notion that the concept of empire is an anachronism. While some scholars have used this as an argument against the idea of American Empire, Ferguson refutes this criticism by pointing out that empires "can be traced back as far as recorded history goes." Empires can be developed and maintained through various power structures and the United States maintains its influence through "a great many small areas of territory within notionally sovereign states that serve as bases for its armed services." The U.S. base network can be considered the framework of the American Empire. According to Ferguson, American imperialism is preferable over other alternatives. What will happen if the Americans decrease their power around the world and no one else fills up the power vacuum? Only the European Union or China are capable of being potential successors to the United States. Ferguson is of the belief that the United States should rule some places in the world, in order for them to be free, as these places appear to be unable to undertake this process on their own.¹⁶

¹⁵ Charles S. Maier. *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors*. (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2007): 24-27.

¹⁶ Niall Ferguson. *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*. (Penguin Books, 2005).

In the European context, the concept of empire is also of significance. One of the most famous uses of the concept comes from Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad, who introduced the idea of “Empire by Invitation.” His argument is that most European countries essentially invited the Americans in for economic assistance and national security reasons. Most European countries had suffered similarly in economic terms and the United States offered to help restore the European economies. This was beneficial to the Americans as well, because they wanted healthy European economies to trade with.¹⁷

The United States’ influence in Europe increased significantly after World War II. The United States had several strengths that made this possible. The country became economically superior after the destructions the war had brought to the European continent and its large military strength.¹⁸ U.S. military and economic supremacy was used to set up NATO, which connected several Western European countries with the United States in an anti-Communist alliance that maintained the post-war status quo in Europe for decades. The United States would play a major role within NATO and use this organization as a means to maintain its influence in Western Europe.

It is important to notice that, besides the ways through which they were established, US military bases abroad always had to cope with their local surroundings. Daniel Immerwahr further elaborates on the impact of U.S. bases on the local community in his book *How to Hide an Empire*. He takes a similar point of view as Davis, comparing America's colonial past with the current base network:

“The United States, in other words, did not abandon empire after the Second world War. Rather, it reshuffled its imperial portfolio, divesting itself of large colonies and investing in military bases, tiny specks of semi-sovereignty strewn around the globe.”¹⁹

The stationing of U.S. troops often meant a boost for the local economy, especially in less-populated areas. Soldiers went out for drinks and food, while locals found work at the base or sold their goods to the newcomers: “The bases and their environs, in other words, were bustling

¹⁷ Geir Lundestad. “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952” *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 268-270.

¹⁸ Geir Lundestad. *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From Empire by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Daniel Immerwahr. *How to Hide an Empire: A History of The Greater United States*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

borderlands where people from the United States came into frequent contact with foreigners.” And while many countries had signed mutual agreements with the United States, the local population did not always experience the presence of U.S. troops positively. In France, some leftists referred to the American presence as “coca-colonization” and especially the issue of nuclear weapons would prove to be problematic to many.²⁰ Local communities had no other choice than to try and design their lives around their proximity to the base. This had several different outcomes. For example, in post-World War II Japan, many women turned to sex work to survive. But even after the American occupation of Japan officially ended, hundreds of thousands of American troops remained stationed in the country. An interesting development was the Japanese willingness to learn some English, with an English phrases book being a best-seller in Japan after World War II. However, the American bases in Japan often functioned as “American towns.” Immerwahr describes them as “sealed-off enclaves of the United States within foreign territory.” These places provided their personnel with all necessities; housing, offices, schools, and shopping centers. These “American towns” made it very difficult for there to be much interaction between American personnel and the local population. In the case of Japan, the interaction was often negative. According to Immerwahr, “murders, rapes, and assaults were not uncommon.” Incidents at the bases also affected local communities, for example in the form of airplane crashes.²¹

U.S. Bases in the Netherlands

The American military presence in the Netherlands started after World War II. The cooperation between the Netherlands and the United States greatly increased after the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The countries signed an agreement in 1950 which guaranteed mutual support in case one of the countries had to defend itself.²²

The United States set up treaties with individual countries. In 1954, the Netherlands and the United States signed a mutual agreement over the stationing of U.S. troops on Dutch soil. This agreement shows that the United States held significant power and the Netherlands wanted their assistance in protecting its security. The agreement states:

²⁰ Daniel Immerwahr. *How to Hide an Empire: A History of The Greater United States*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

²¹ Immerwahr. *How to Hide an Empire*.

²² “Verdrag tussen het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden en de Verenigde Staten van Amerika tot wederzijdse hulpverlening inzake verdediging, Washington, 27-01-1950,” Overheid.nl, accessed 5 June, 2021, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0005675/1950-01-27>.

“The Netherlands Government will, without cost to the United States, provide land areas and utilities connections, including access roads, agreed to be necessary for the purposes of this treaty. The other expenses involved in carrying out this agreement shall be borne by the United States and the Netherlands Governments in proportions to be determined between them.”

The Dutch government was to pay for an amount of the expenses and the U.S. military had to be allowed to use facilities and roads.²³ Lundestad’s “Empire by Invitation” is based on treaties like these. The United States and European governments came to an agreement and the United States was essentially invited to stay in the European countries. This led to the creation of a so-called Euro-Atlantic security community. According to Karl Deutsch, such a community can only come into existence through “compatibility of major values and mutual responsiveness.” Carla Monteleone explains that the United States and Western Europe developed a strong feeling of belonging to a Western community that influenced the collective identity of the member countries. According to Monteleone, international organizations such as NATO, implemented behavioral norms that balanced the relationship between the powerful United States and the smaller European countries. However, this security community framework does not lead to complete inequality; it just makes it impossible for the stronger member to exercise its power indiscriminately.²⁴ It is with NATO, the most influential of these international organizations in the Transatlantic relationship, that the implementation of the U.S. base network starts in the Netherlands.

The stationing of the first American airmen happened in 1954 in Soesterberg. The 512th Fighter-Day Squadron had the task of defending Dutch airspace against intruders from the Warsaw Pact. The Americans occupied a specially designated space of the airbase called “Camp New Amsterdam.” This was not the only place in the Netherlands where the American presence became evident. The same agreement was used to set up an American presence in several Dutch ports, most notably the port of Rotterdam. Through this presence, the United States was able to keep an eye on goods that were destined for the American forces in Europe.²⁵

²³ “Notawisseling tussen de Nederlandse en de Amerikaanse Regering houdende een overeenkomst inzake legering van Amerikaanse troepen in Nederland, ‘s-Gravenhage, 13-08-1954,” Overheid.nl, accessed 15 April 2021, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0005000/1954-11-16>.

²⁴ Carla Monteleone, “The End of the Euro-Atlantic Pluralistic Security Community? The New Agenda of Transatlantic Security Relations in the Global Political System,” in *Perceptions and Policy in Transatlantic Relations: Prospective Visions from the US and Europe*, ed. Natividad Fernández Sola and Michael Smith (London, New York, Routledge, 2009).

²⁵ Jarin Nijhof, ““Mission Possible” Stationering van Amerikaanse strijdkrachten in Nederland,” *Netherlands Military Law Review* (2009): 165-170.

It is important to note that the American military presence in the Netherlands has decreased significantly in the last decades. This had led to the closure of some bases altogether and the abolishment of some units. During the Cold War, the Netherlands housed a multitude of American military units all around the country. There were U.S. Prepositioned Organizational Material Storage Sets sites ('POMS-sites') in places like Eindhoven, Coevorden, Ter Apel, Vriezenveen, and Brunssum. In addition, the 703rd Munition Support Squadron of the United States Air Force has been stationed at Volkel Airbase. The latter is still present today. The POMS-sites have closed throughout the 1990s and 2000s due to the new safety situation, which also brought along a decrease of the American military presence in Europe.²⁶

While Soesterberg Airbase officially closed down in 2009²⁷, Volkel Airbase still houses a United States Air Force squadron. And while there is a trend of a decreasing American military in, the POMS-site in Eindhoven in Limburg was reopened again in 2016.²⁸ The largest American military presence is currently situated in the province of Limburg. This is an area of the Netherlands that has always housed a large American military presence due to the United States Army Garrison in Schinnen. The American presence is part of a large NATO framework. The province of Limburg is situated in between Germany and Belgium and is therefore a very strategic place for NATO cooperation in Europe. And while there is a trend of a decreasing American military in, the POMS-site in Eindhoven was reopened again in 2016.²⁹ Again, this is a site in Southern Limburg.

The Anti-Nuclear Protests, the Euromissile Crisis, and their Long-Lasting Legacy

In the 1970s and 1980s, nuclear weapons became a more prominent topic within NATO. While the 1970s saw arms control negotiations, the growth of the nuclear weapons arsenal in the Soviet Union greatly worried the West. The Alliance's "Double-Track Decision" in 1979 was met with a lot of criticism in Western Europe. Members of the Warsaw Pact had increased their nuclear deterrence, and these would face a threat to the Western European nations. The Soviet Union had also implemented modernization programs and expanded their long-range missiles, the most significant one being the SS-20 missile. These developments led to large concerns and

²⁶ Nijhof, "'Mission Possible'", 168.

²⁷ Nijhof, "'Mission Possible'", 168.

²⁸ "U.S. Army heropent opslag- en onderhoudsplaats Eindhoven." *Defensiekrant* 4, no. 25, (December 2016). <https://magazines.defensie.nl/defensiekrant/2016/25/eindhoven>.

²⁹ "U.S. Army heropent opslag- en onderhoudsplaats Eindhoven." *Defensiekrant* 4, no. 25, (December 2016). <https://magazines.defensie.nl/defensiekrant/2016/25/eindhoven>.

a continuation might lead to NATO being unable to challenge the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. As a result, NATO decided to upgrade its own capabilities. New missiles would be placed in selected countries, one of them being the Netherlands. Volkel Airbase was not one of the locations, but Woensdrecht was. Interestingly, the document simultaneously mentioned the importance of arms control in improving the relationship between the East and the West. Arms control negotiations are of great significance, but NATO will only limit its systems and missions if the Soviet Union does the same.³⁰

This decision met with a lot of resistance in many Western European countries. However, this resistance did not come out of nowhere. Many Western European nations had been dealing with economic recessions resulting from the Oil Crisis of 1973, and the growing unemployment rates. Unemployment especially hit young people, many of whom were stricken by a feeling of disappointment.³¹ Protests were often organized by organizations, some of whom had existed for decades already. These organizations gained much more popularity during the 1970s and 1980s. In the U.K., the first organizations against nuclear development were set up in the 1950s. As opposed to the Netherlands, the United Kingdom actually developed nuclear weapons itself. This makes the situation there a bit different, as the Netherlands only stored such weapons and did not actively try to create them. The British organization Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had its first meeting in 1958 and in that same year, they organized a large march against nuclear weapons. This shows that the fear of nuclear weapons was already present long before it became a hot topic in the 1980s.³²

The situation in the Netherlands in the 1980s was similar to that of many other Western European countries. Unemployment was hitting young people hard and disillusionment with life was large. The protest movements in the Netherlands were organized loosely and were decentralized. However, some longer-lasting organizations came out of these more loosely organized movements. Hanspieter Kriesi and Philip van Praag argue that the Netherlands has had a long history of peace movements, pacifism, and anti-militarism. The Christian pacifist tradition could be found in the Catholic Pax Christi Organization and the Interdenominational Peace Council (“Inter-Kerkelijk Vredesberaad”, IKV). Pax Christi was originally established

³⁰ “NATO press communiqué on the ‘Double-Track’ Decision on theatre nuclear forces (Brussels, 12 December 1979),” CVCE.eu, University of Luxembourg, accessed 15 April, 2021, https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/nato_press_communique_on_the_double_track_decision_on_theatre_nuclear_forces_brussels_12_december_1979-en-7d068b4c-63b6-4248-9167-fe9085a0032b.html.

³¹ Remco van Diepen. *Hollanditis: Nederland en het kernwapendeбат 1977-1987*. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2004): 83.

³² “The History of CND,” Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://cnduk.org/who/the-history-of-cnd/>.

in post-WWII France and a Dutch department was established in 1948. The main goal of Pax Christi was to prevent war to ever happen again. Nuclear weapons would become one of the most important topics for this organization. In 2014, Pax Christi and IKV merged into one organization called PAX.³³ Socialist elements were also present at anti-nuclear protests in the Netherlands. Women were also represented, for example in the protest group *Women for Peace* (“Vrouwen voor Vrede”, VVV). More radical groups had fewer members, but often made the news through their more extreme actions. The beginning of the 1980s saw enormous demonstrations in large Dutch cities like Amsterdam and The Hague.³⁴

The Netherlands was an interesting case with regards to the protest movements in Western Europe. While the Netherlands had always had good relations with the United States, some protests showed clear anti-American sentiment. For example, a protest in 1981 at the Museumplein in Amsterdam included a fake Statue of Liberty with a skull as its face and in its hand, it was holding a missile. A photo of the scene was even featured in the *New York Times*. In 1983, radical activists took an American flag from the U.S. embassy and burned it. Remco van Diepen points out that these anti-American actions were not limited to radical factions of the protest movements. Many intellectuals were very critical of American foreign policy, and sometimes even expressed positive attitudes towards communism. Dutch chess player Jan Hein Donner, who had a column in the large Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* wrote: “American foreign policy seems to be led by no other ideology than that of extermination [...] Meanwhile the communist world strategy appears to be a real spread of civilization and at least they do not practice torture.” Interestingly, anti-American elements were also present within the Christian pacifist movement. Many believed that the United States and the Soviet Union had more commonalities than differences. This also meant that many viewed both countries equally as imperialistic states that merely wanted to extend their political, military, and economic power.³⁵ However, not everyone shared the ideals of the protest movement. Some people viewed the peace protesters as naïve idealists and arrogant. *NRC Handelsblad* columnist J.L. Heldring wrote that the Interdenominational Peace Council united the moral arrogance of the ‘Left’ with that of the Christians. He was of the opinion that nuclear deterrence was the main reason no new war broke out in Europe after 1945.³⁶

³³ “Pax Christ,” Pax voor Vrede, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://paxvoorvrede.nl/wie-wij-zijn/pax-christi>.

³⁴ Hanspeter Kriesi and Philip van Praag, “Old and New Politics: the Dutch Peace Movement and the Traditional Political Organizations,” *European Journal of Political Research* 15, no. 3 (May 2006): 323-329.

³⁵ Remco van Diepen, *Hollanditis: Nederland en het kernwapendebat 1977-1987*. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2004): 159-160.

³⁶ Van Diepen, *Hollanditis*, 162-167.

This debate between proponents and opponents ties in with the concept of “Hollanditis”, the so-called Dutch disease of protest. This term was coined by historian Walter Z. Laqueur, and became a much-used term to describe the mass protests in the Netherlands. He claimed that the Netherlands became a pioneer of a ‘new neutralism’, and soon similar movements followed in other countries, like neighboring Belgium and West Germany. Laqueur dived deep into Dutch history, exploring its early attitude of neutrality and its forced diversion from it during World War II. Afterwards, the Netherlands was a leading example of Western European alliance with the United States. Laqueur saw a radical renewed interest in neutralism in the country, even though this neutrality and unwillingness to invest in defense had led to its very rapid downfall in 1940 when it was invaded by Nazi Germany. The cooperation between the (radical) left and the churches is of particular interest to Laqueur. He believes the churches started to focus on the peace movement to stay relevant with younger generations, who were increasingly turning away from religion. In addition, political parties such as the Labor Party (PvdA) slowly became dominated by the so-called ‘New Left’, which was much more radical in its beliefs. Anti-NATO sentiment started to become more prominent and the party even proposed the Netherlands would leave NATO. It was rejected only after Joop den Uyl, the leader of the party and a very popular politician, threatened to resign.³⁷

Laqueur was highly critical of the developments in the Netherlands, saying: “It is not certain, in brief, that unilateral disarmament is a better avenue than multilateral efforts to prevent war. Of course, no such argument will impress a pacifist *tout court*.” Laqueur was of the opinion that the protesters are naïve and should learn from the Dutch past of neutralism.³⁸

The end of the Cold War saw a significant decrease in military spending in many Western European countries; the peace movement was not a particularly important factor in this development. It was during this time that the peace movement started to decline and smaller groups turned their attention to international military conflicts, such as the wars in the Balkans and the Gulf War. The 1990s saw a decrease of interest from the Dutch population in the peace movement. Political scientist Philip van Praag concluded that the peace movement was a one-off phenomenon of the 1980s. However, the debates regarding U.S. foreign policy still exist today. There was resistance against the invasion of Iraq led to large-scale demonstrations in

³⁷ Walter Z. Laqueur. “Hollanditis: A New Stage in European Neutralism.” *Commentary Magazine*, August 1981. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/walter-laqueur/hollanditis-a-new-stage-in-european-neutralism/>.

³⁸ Walter Z. Laqueur. “Hollanditis: A New Stage in European Neutralism.” *Commentary Magazine*, August 1981. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/walter-laqueur/hollanditis-a-new-stage-in-european-neutralism/>.

many European cities.³⁹ This means that there has been resistance to military interference from the United States, but that it is not centered on Europe itself anymore.

Conclusion

The U.S. base network has been the topic of much academic discussion. The concept of American Empire is often connected to this debate. Scholars have written extensively about the enormous influence of the United States abroad and the U.S. base network is often seen as the frame work of the American Empire. And while the network might not be completely comparable to 19th and 20th century European colonialism, many scholars see striking resemblances in the execution of power all over the world and the large influence sphere that has been created. While some people experience the U.S. base network as of form of empire, others believe this comparison is not correct, as there is permission from the hosting countries. While the debate has received a lot of attention on the international and national level, the experiences of the local communities living near such bases has been underexposed. However, these are exactly the experiences that can shine a new and different light on this debate. It is clear that the experience of Europeans has been different from that of many other regions. The European resistance against U.S. bases has been focused much more on environmental aspects and, more particularly, the storage of nuclear weapons and pacifist sentiments. The resistance against nuclear weapons saw an enormous rise during the 1980s in the Netherlands; it was even branded “Hollanditis” by scholar and journalist Walter Laqueur.⁴⁰ The Dutch public was heavily divided between proponents and opponents of the peace movement and Dutch politics got drawn into the debate regarding nuclear weapons and the relationship with the United States. This was an interesting development due to the fact that the Netherlands had always been exemplary in its cooperation with the United States and was now facing resistance against the influence of the United States in the Netherlands in the form of nuclear weapons.

The protests in the Netherlands in the 1980s took place at many different sites of American military presence in the country, one of which was Volkel Airbase. This place saw many protests and is still occasionally the site of demonstrations against nuclear weapons. And just like on the national level, there have been proponent and opponents of the protests in and around Volkel.

³⁹ Van Diepen, *Hollanditis*, 396-404.

⁴⁰ Walter Z. Laqueur. “Hollanditis: A New Stage in European Neutralism.” *Commentary Magazine*, August 1981. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/walter-laqueur/hollanditis-a-new-stage-in-european-neutralism/>.

Chapter 2

Volkel Airbase: History, Media, and Current Times

Introduction

This chapter will zoom in on Volkel Airbase and answer the question how Volkel Airbase came to be. How did the airbase become connected with the United States and, therefore, develop into an important place of Transatlantic interaction? The history of the airbase is older than one might expect, as its construction was started by Nazi Germany during World War II. It was only in the 1950s that the United States got involved and American personnel was stationed at the airbase. This started an interaction between people who represented to different cultures and brought about some cultural exchange. However, Volkel Airbase had more than just a cultural impact on the adjacent towns. This chapter will introduce the story of and experience of Volkel Airbase and it will focus on the overall impact the airbase has had on the local community from a socio-cultural point of view. The contacts between the airbase and the inhabitants of the adjacent towns have had positive and negative implications. The towns grew, the airbase provided a lot of employment and local businesses gained more clients. However, the nuclear weapons at the airbase attracted a large multitude of demonstrations, especially in the 1980s. Anti-airbase and anti-nuclear weapons activists were often present at the airbase and this had its effects on the local population. In addition, the environmental impact has been significant, and the adjacent towns have to take into account the existence of the airbase with nearly every decision they make. The inhabitants have dealt with these issues in a variety of ways. The media coverage of these events can tell us a lot about the experiences of the local community. Additionally, this chapter will look at the current relationship between Volkel Airbase and the local community.

History of Volkel Airbase

Volkel Airbase has had a large impact on the local community. Especially the municipality of Uden has gone through significant changes since the establishment of the airbase within its area.⁴¹ Volkel Airbase was constructed originally during the Nazi German occupation of the Netherlands. The Germans were looking for a place to build an airbase and eventually chose the land near the village of Volkel in the province of North Brabant. Laborers from all around

⁴¹ R.H. Wildekamp et al. *Gestaag Gespannen, 50 jaar Vliegbasis Volkel: Van 1e Tactische Jachtgroep tot First Fighter Wing* ('s-Gravenhage: Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, 2000), 265.

the country were sent to work on the construction of the airbase. The buildings were often camouflaged and a large fence was put around the area. People could only enter with a special pass. Approximately 40 farms in the villages of Volkel, Zeeland, and Odiliapeel were destroyed for the construction of Volkel Airbase.⁴²

The south of the Netherlands was liberated by the Allied forces in 1944. Uden and the surrounding villages were liberated in September by British troops. The Allied forces wanted to restore the airbase and asked for volunteers to help them reach this goal. The local population was much more willing to help the Allies as opposed to the Nazi occupiers. Runways were being restored predominantly by Dutch laborers and Allied planes were able to land there. Operation *Bodenplatte*, a German attack on the now Allied airfields in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, did not mean the destruction of Volkel Airbase. Several German pilots mistook Heesch airfield for Volkel and the 401 Squadron in Heesch attacked the German planes. The chaos made it impossible to attack Volkel. Volkel Airbase was of great importance to the Allied forces for the last half of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. The front line had moved further away from Volkel by the spring of 1945. This meant that the importance of the airbase started to fade.⁴³

Volkel Airbase was officially established April 1, 1950, and was put under the command of the Royal Dutch Airforce. Originally, the airbase had a rather negative reputation, because it was established by the Nazi German army during the occupation of the Netherlands. Many inhabitants of the adjacent villages had witnessed the allied bombardments of the airbase and some had been forced to rebuild the airbase afterwards. For a small period of time, the airbase's main occupation was with the training of Dutch mariners.⁴⁴ The establishment of NATO would change the destiny of the airbase. Initially, NATO had planned for a total of 21 air fields to be utilized in the Netherlands, but due to a compromise with the Dutch government this number was brought back to 13. The Dutch Ministry of War recommended Volkel as one of these air fields and the training of mariners was removed from Volkel. NATO and the Dutch Royal Air Forces designed a build-up plan for the airbase. It was to house a total of 17 squadrons. In 1949, U.S. Congress had accepted an aid program for European allies who did not have enough military equipment and Volkel Airbase received much of its equipment and planes. The so-

⁴² Wildekamp et al. *Gestaag Gespannen, 50 jaar Vliegbasis Volkel: Van 1e Tactische Jachtgroep tot First Fighter Wing*, 17-19.

⁴³ Wildekamp et al. *Gestaag Gespannen, 50 jaar Vliegbasis Volkel: Van 1e Tactische Jachtgroep tot First Fighter Wing*, 43-45.

⁴⁴ Wildekamp et al. *Gestaag Gespannen, 50 jaar Vliegbasis Volkel: Van 1e Tactische Jachtgroep tot First Fighter Wing*, 65-78.

called *Mutual Defense Aid Program* (MDAP) provided Volkel Airbase with Thunder Jets, which were sent from the United States in their packages; the airbase depended on an American technician to help set them up. The first U.S. airmen came to Volkel in May 1951. Like the American flight instructors and technicians, they were part of the *Military Aid and Assistance Group* (MAAG). The Americans who came to Volkel through MAAG and the local Dutch air force leadership had some high-tension clashes over the organization of the air base. The Americans were of the opinion that the Dutch had too little knowledge regarding organization, efficiency, and management skills, and they were considered to be too bureaucratic. The supplements coming from the United States was quite scarce and much of the Dutch personnel was not educated properly for the airbase to be very operational in 1951. The MDAP provided a total of 40 T-Birds to Volkel airbase between 1952 and 1957. The Dutch government accepted an American offer to educate airmen in the United States, but many needed extra training once they were back in the Netherlands, because they were not knowledgeable enough about European procedures. Therefore, a flight school was constructed with the name 'Jachtschool 2'. The Thunder Jets participated in the NATO operation 'Blue Alliance' in August and September 1952.⁴⁵ The influence of the American airmen, technicians, and instructors was significant in this period, even though the Dutch Air Force was still officially in control of the airbase. The 1950s was the beginning of the American presence in Volkel.

The impact of Volkel Airbase on the local community

In the 1950s, Uden was predominantly agrarian. The growing airbase meant one important thing: employment opportunities. Many people in the adjacent towns found work at the airbase. In addition, the U.S. soldiers who were stationed at the airbase also meant a boost for the local economy. They bought their groceries in the town and went to the local bars. The municipality of Uden received subsidies to build new houses, of which a certain percentage was reserved for U.S. soldiers and their families. However, the other houses were available for locals. In the beginning of the 1950s, 132 houses were built in Uden, of which 72 were reserved for airbase personnel. The speedy construction of these houses was mentioned in several Dutch newspapers. One of them, *de Volkskrant*, referred to the process as “lightning construction.”⁴⁶

The official opening of the airbase in 1950 was met with a lot of media attention. Newspaper articles mostly explained which jets were to be stationed at Volkel. The articles in

⁴⁵ Wildekamp et al. *Gestaag Gespannen, 50 jaar Vliegbasis Volkel: Van 1e Tactische Jachtgroep tot First Fighter Wing*, 73-100.

⁴⁶ *Volkskrant*, ““Bliksem-nieuwbouw” in 3 Brabantse gemeenten.” November 28, 1950, 3.

the 1960s are often related to visits of Air Force personnel to the base, the accessibility of religious institutions for the soldiers stationed at the airbase⁴⁷, and accidents. One family was nearly hit by a fighter jet when it failed to land properly. A wall of their house was heavily damaged, but no one was hurt.⁴⁸ The airbase brought along other changes to the local community. The noise from the planes meant a disruption in everyday life for many living in the vicinity of the airbase.

In 1990, inhabitants of the village of Volkel spoke up against an imminent building stop. The noise pollution would make it impossible for the village to expand and inhabitants feared the complete extinction of the town. While the airbase was a source of employment, the same airbase might be the reason that Volkel would disappear altogether. The town lost its only bus connection and only had two elementary schools left. Many inhabitants expressed feeling ambiguous about the airbase and its enormous influence over the town. As one inhabitant said: "For too long we have been content with just talks. But you know how we Brabantians are, we do not fight on the barricades so easily."⁴⁹ A year later, in 1991, inhabitants of Volkel blocked several entrances of Volkel Airbase with cars and tractors to protest the building stop.⁵⁰ The protests against the building stop continued in 1992 in the form of blockades.⁵¹ The protestors united themselves in a group called "Action Committee Building Stop Volkel No."⁵²

An interesting development happened within the local population. The municipality of Uden has historically been a very Roman Catholic area, but with the growing industry and airbase, many new people arrived. A number of the new inhabitants were Protestant Christians and this led to the construction of a Protestant elementary school, which was quite a big happening.⁵³

The first articles about the presence of nuclear weapons were published in the 1960s. For example, a spokesperson of the Ministry of Defense made clear that there were repositories with American warheads "somewhere in the Netherlands."⁵⁴ The first demonstrations started during this decade, for example, in the form of bicycle tours with Volkel Airbase as their destinations.⁵⁵ In the 1970s, the articles related to Volkel were not abundant. *De Waarheid* reports on some small demonstrations against nuclear weapons, like a demonstration by youths

⁴⁷ *Trouw*. "Geestelijke zorg op Volkel krijgt kerkelijk karakter." June 6, 1960, 2.

⁴⁸ *Het Vrije Volk*. "Straaljager komt tot stilstand tegen slaapkamermuur." November 29, 1960, 1.

⁴⁹ Hans Horsten. "Volkel vreest van de landkaart te verdwijnen." *Volkskrant*, March 21, 1990, 10.

⁵⁰ *Limburgsch Dagblad*. "Geblokkeerd." July 4, 1991, 3.

⁵¹ *Het Parool*. "Blokade Volkel." June 26, 1992, 1.

⁵² *Trouw*. "Volkel in actie tegen basis die dorp doet leegbloeden." June 24, 1992, 3.

⁵³ *Het Parool*. "Protestantse lagere school voor Uden." July 11, 1960, 5.

⁵⁴ *De Tijd / De Maasbode*. "Atoomkoppen in ons land." December 1, 1960, 1.

⁵⁵ *Het Parool*. "Protest-tocht op de fiets tegen atoomwapens." May 23, 1961, 2.

in the province of North Brabant in September 1978. The protesters came to Volkel from several surrounding villages by bicycle, car, and tractor. They were part of the General Dutch Youth Association (ANJV) in North Brabant, a communist political organization.⁵⁶

Many of the articles in this time period deal with disturbances the local community experienced from the airbase. Several newspapers report in 1972 about a remarkable situation. Fighter jets stationed at Volkel Airbase will not fly off five minutes each day, so that farmers in the vicinity can listen to the radio. At noon, many fighter jets would fly off, but this was around the same time many farmers listen to the so-called “agriculture news.” However, they often could not understand a word amidst the loud noises of the planes flying over. After talks with representatives of the airbase, they came to a solution: the airbase would respect a five-minute silence every day.⁵⁷ Another example was the mandatory building stop in Mill, a village near the airbase, which was demanded by the Minister of Health. The sound pollution made it impossible to build more houses, as the village is located directly within the flight path of the fighter jets. Many inhabitants of Mill protested against this decision, as this meant that many young people would be forced out of the village due to the limited number of houses available. A protest group, called “Mill must build”, was formed. They wrote a dramatic letter to all inhabitants, describing a situation in which all the young people were forced out of the village and the inhabitants would become older and older. The important roads to the village would be neglected and the elderly would end up unable to feed themselves. Though many inhabitants deemed this to be rather over-the-top, they did agree that the decision was undemocratic. The municipal administration also objected against the decision; they were particularly worried about the commercial impact.⁵⁸

An interesting incident related to the discussion on nuclear weapons was the decision of the Protestant Reformed Church to replace Pastor Harry Zeldenrust, who was working in the area of Uden-Veghel. He was known for his pacifist stance and it is claimed that this was the main reason for his sudden departure. *Trouw* cites the monthly magazine *Militia Christi*:

“Difference in political insight between the preacher and a large number of congregation members in Uden began to manifest itself more and more. The preacher’s persuasive pacifism played a large role and a large part of the

⁵⁶ *De Waarheid*. “Brabantse jongeren demonstreren.” September 26, 1978, 6.

⁵⁷ *Trouw*. “Straaljagers stil voor boeren.” January 21 1972, 1.

⁵⁸ Karel Passier, “Dorp bij vliegbasis verzet zich tegen bouwverbod.” *De Telegraaf*, July 15, 1978, 9.

municipality, especially in Uden and Volkel (so the airbase) consist of families of professional soldiers.”⁵⁹

The news coverage increased significantly in the 1980s, which correlates with the growing peace movement in the Netherlands. A large number of demonstrations were organized against the stationing of American nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase. While “bicycle tours” in protest of nuclear weapons were being held annually since the 1960s, large demonstrations and manifestations started to emerge in this decade. The debate was situated both in the national and local sphere, especially in the political arena. In 1981, the party leader of the GPV (Reformed Political Union, which became part of the Christian Union in 2003) visited Uden. The mayor and the municipality secretary discuss the challenges they were facing, such as growth, employment, and noise pollution from Volkel Airbase.⁶⁰ The same year, the debate about cruise missiles became more prominent. Many people were critical of the idea of stationing cruise missiles in the Netherlands.⁶¹

The protests near Volkel Airbase have been part of a larger national movement against nuclear weapons. In September 1980, thousands of people demonstrated around the Netherlands during “Peace Week”. People went to Volkel by bicycle from several towns in North Brabant.⁶² In 1982, *Pax Christi*, the *Interdenominational Peace Council* (IKV), the *Association of Conscientious Objectors*, *Women for Peace*, and *Stop the N-Bomb* published an ad in the *Volkskrant* announcing a demonstration near Volkel Airbase. Protestors would bike to the airbase from six different cities nearby: Nijmegen, Venray, Helmond, Eindhoven, Den Bosch, and Oss. In addition, a demonstration by foot was to take place at the Market Square (Marktplaats) in Uden. Volkel Airbase was again the destination. A large manifestation in the local Market Hall in Uden would start around 16:00 and would include speeches.⁶³ The many demonstrations led to conscripted soldiers getting involved in dealing with such protests. They were taught how to assist the police when breaking up demonstrations.⁶⁴ In 1984, the so-called “women’s camp” was erected. It consisted of a small peace camp near the airbase and was permanently inhabited by a small group of women. The camp tried to involve local women in their actions, for example by publishing a small ad in *De Waarheid* to ask other women to join.

⁵⁹ *Trouw*. “Pacifistische dominee moet weg uit Volkel.” 27 November, 1976, 13.

⁶⁰ *Nederlands Dagblad*. “Felle Kritiek van Schutte op CDA-plan voor zuidelijk Afrika.” April 14, 1981, 5.

⁶¹ *Volkskrant*. “Raket louter politieke kwestie.” August 15, 1981, 13.

⁶² *De Waarheid*. “Duizenden betogen tegen kernbewapening.” September 30, 1980, 3.

⁶³ *Volkskrant*. “Demonstratie bij Vliegbasis Volkel: Tweede Paasdag.” April 3, 1982, 24.

⁶⁴ *Het Vrije Volk*. “Zo moet je optreden tegen demonstranten.” March 25, 1983, 3.

This ad included the telephone numbers of some of the women involved.⁶⁵ However, the women's camp was challenged by some wives of air force soldiers. They called upon the locals to refuse to buy anything in the municipality of Uden, as a protest against the "weak attitude" of mayor B.E. Schellekens, who refused to break up the women's camp. This meant local businesses were being targeted as a result of the situation at the airbase.⁶⁶ The female peace protesters did not limit themselves to the airbase; they also protested in front of the city hall in the center of Uden.⁶⁷ In 1988, some demonstrators were arrested when they blocked the main entrance of the airbase and refused to leave. This protest was part of "siren Monday."⁶⁸ That same year, Volkel Airbase was the site of a large commemoration of the American bombing of Hiroshima by peace activists.⁶⁹ Interestingly, demonstrations were not completely limited to the peace movements. In 1986, many pilots of F16 fighter jets went on a strike against the poor salaries and the bad working environment. More and more pilots were leaving the airbase, turning to commercial aviation.⁷⁰

At the local level political parties in Uden protested the stationing of cruise missiles at Volkel Airbase. The Labor Party submitted a motion that had to aim to make the municipality nuclear weapons free in 1981.⁷¹ This motion was rejected in January 1982 by the municipality council.⁷²

Anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations continued into the 1990s. Demonstrations occasionally led to the destruction of property, for example in July 1990, when protesters cut thirty cables of landing lights, making it impossible for planes to fly off or land safely.⁷³ Later that year, demonstrators organized a peace camp near the airbase. This time the protests had a more anti-American sentiment, because the Gulf War was one of the main reasons protesters had come to the airbase. They carried banners with the following slogan: "No blood for oil."⁷⁴ Some individual activists were sentenced for their involvement in the destruction of property related to Volkel Airbase. Activists Mariëtte M. from Geldrop and Kees K. from Eindhoven had dismantled aerial masts of the air force.⁷⁵

⁶⁵ *De Waarheid*. "Vrouwen in Volkel." March 31, 1984, 2.

⁶⁶ *De Telegraaf*. "Vrouwen van militairen op Volkel willen koopboycot." May 30, 1984, 9.

⁶⁷ *De Telegraaf*. "Demonstrateren mag." November 7, 1984, 9.

⁶⁸ *NRC Handelsblad*. "Arrestaties bij Vliegbasis Volkel." May 2, 1988, 3.

⁶⁹ *Volkskrant*. "„Hiroshima" herdacht in Volkel en Woensdrecht." August 8, 1988, 3.

⁷⁰ *Volkskrant*. "Kamer geschrokken van „staking" piloten F16-straaljagers." February 27, 1986, 3.

⁷¹ *Volkskrant*. "Fracties van PvdA willen opslag kernkoppen weren." December 5, 1981, 8.

⁷² *Volkskrant*. "Opslag kernwapens." March 6, 1982, 9.

⁷³ *Het Parool*. "Vernielingen Volkel." July 17, 1990, 2.

⁷⁴ *Volkskrant*. "Verscholen bivak tegen Golfoorlog." December 24, 1990, 8.

⁷⁵ Fred Soeteman. "Eis 1,5 jaar voor aandeel sabotage." *De Telegraaf*, February 7, 1992, 7.

The Euromissile Protests renewed the attention for environmental issues that originated from the airbase. The environmental pollution started to gain more media attention. This aligns with the more national debate about environmental issues that has grown a lot in the last decades. In 1990, Volkel Airbase started the sanitation of contaminated soil in the adjacent municipality of Zeeland. Additionally, the airbase started to invest in replacing loading installations that were leaking fuel and oil.⁷⁶ This issue reappeared in 1993, when the Public Ministry demanded a fine of 25,000 guilders against the Dutch state for the kerosine contamination of the soil.⁷⁷ The state was convicted, but not ordered to pay a fine to itself.⁷⁸

Contemporary Developments

The nuclear weapons remain a contested subject for many, even in the 21st century. While the stationing of U.S. nuclear weapons has been a ‘public secret’, the actual confirmation of their existence still stirred some controversy. Former Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers confirmed the presence of nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase in 2013 in a documentary series called “Time Flies: The Cold War.” Lubbers expresses surprise about the fact that these nuclear weapons are still present in the Netherlands, saying: “I never expected these silly things to still be there, because according to me, it is absolutely pointless.”⁷⁹ Lubbers’ statements were confirmed by former Prime Minister Dries van Agt.⁸⁰ The Dutch Court decided to investigate Lubbers’ statements, because they were considered state secret, and former politicians are required to keep state secrets secret.⁸¹ In the end, Lubbers was not prosecuted.

The issue received renewed attention in 2019, when NATO documents leaked which confirmed the presence of nuclear weapons at several European bases, one of which being Volkel.⁸² *Zembla*, an investigative television program broadcasted on one of the national TV channels, produced a documentary about the nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase.⁸³ An American expert, Hans Kristensen, claimed that 9,000 people would pass away and 38,000

⁷⁶ *NRC Handelsblad*. “Sanering van vliegbasis Volkel begint in september.” July 7, 1990, 3.

⁷⁷ *NRC Handelsblad*. “Boete van 25.000 gulden tegen Rijk geëist.” January 19, 1993, 3.

⁷⁸ *Algemeen Dagblad*. “Staat veroordeeld.” February 2, 1993, 3.

⁷⁹ *Het Parool*. “Lubbers bevestigt Amerikaanse kernwapens Volkel.” June 10, 2013.

<https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/lubbers-bevestigt-amerikaanse-kernwapens-volkel~b878a237/>.

⁸⁰ NOS. “Ook Van Agt: kernwapens in Volkel.” June 12, 2013. <https://nos.nl/artikel/517308-ook-van-agt-kernwapens-in-volkel.html>.

⁸¹ *RTL Nieuws*. “OM bekijkt uitspraken Lubbers over kernwapens.” June 13, 2013.

<https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/2345606/om-bekijkt-uitspraken-lubbers-over-kernwapens>.

⁸² NOS. “Publiek geheim na blunder zwart-op-wit: kernwapens in Volkel.” July 16, 2019.

<https://nos.nl/artikel/2293723-publiek-geheim-na-blunder-zwart-op-wit-kernwapens-in-volkel.html>.

⁸³ Zembla. “Nederland heeft niks te zeggen over Amerikaanse kernwapens in Volkel.” YouTube video, 37:17. November 18, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu1eGjt2hoU>.

people would be wounded if the nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase would explode. The reactions in the village of Volkel was mixed. One woman stated: “If we go, we all go together.” Another inhabitant was more worried, saying: “I am a bit shocked by what the Americans are allowed to do. I think all nuclear weapons should disappear from the world.”⁸⁴

Demonstrations in the 21st century do not receive as much attention in the media, being mostly confined to local news outlets, and they also do not attract the same number of attendants as they did in the 1980s. An interesting development is the current involvement of environmental organizations such as *Greenpeace*, which shows that environmentalism has become a more important aspect of the protest against nuclear weapons in our modern times. In 2003, a large demonstration led to over one hundred arrests. The demonstrators, part of “Platform Against the New War” protested against nuclear weapons, but also against the invasion of Iraq.⁸⁵

In 2020, demonstrations near Volkel Airbase were focused on the suspicion that the United States were going to renew the already existing nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase. These weapons had been stationed there for decades and needed to be modernized. In September 2020, the demonstrations were organized by *PAX*, *Doctors for Peace* (NVMP/Artsen voor Vrede) and *Greenpeace*.⁸⁶ There is a continuation; the protesters still appear to mostly come from other parts of the country and not from the local community itself. The local community is less involved, the demonstrators often come to Volkel Airbase from large cities, like Amsterdam. An example of this was a small protest at Volkel in 2019 during the so-called “Air Force Days” (“Luchtmachtdagen”), which are organized every year at a different airbase in the Netherlands. The main organizer was an activist from Amsterdam. The small group of protesters handed out flyers against nuclear weapons.⁸⁷ The absence of the local community was also highly visible during one of the latest demonstrations near Volkel Airbase in January 2021. The approximately twenty demonstrators came to Volkel from Amsterdam. There is no mention of local participation in this demonstration.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Rebecca Seunis. “Als het misgaat in Volkel, vallen er vanwege de kernwapens die daar liggen 9000 doden.” Omroep Brabant, November 2014, 2019. <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/3104569/als-het-misgaat-in-volkel-vallen-er-vanwege-de-kernwapens-die-daar-liggen-9000-doden>.

⁸⁵ *Reformatisch Dagblad*. “Ruim honderd arrestaties op vliegbasis Volkel.” January 20, 2003, 3.

⁸⁶ Iris van den Berg. “Actiegroepen protesteren volgende week bij Vliegbasis Volkel tegen ‘nieuwe kernwapens’.” *Brabants Dagblad*, September 18, 2020. <https://www.bd.nl/uden-veghel-e-o/actiegroepen-protesteren-volgende-week-bij-vliegbasis-volkel-tegen-nieuwe-kernwapens~a4c32121/>.

⁸⁷ Tom Vos. “Mooi dat we hier mogen staan om te protesteren tegen de aanwezigheid van kernwapens.” *Eindhovens Dagblad*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.ed.nl/brabant/mooi-dat-we-hier-mogen-staan-om-te-protesteren-tegen-de-aanwezigheid-van-kernwapens~acb91ad5/>.

⁸⁸ Hans van Alebeek. “Demonstratie tegen kernwapens op vliegbasis Volkel.” *Brabants Dagblad*, January 21, 2021. <https://www.bd.nl/uden-veghel-e-o/demonstratie-tegen-kernwapens-op-vliegbasis-volkel~a507c74d/>.

The complaints related to noise pollution have not disappeared either. 2020 saw a record of complaints: the noise wakes babies up, talking on the phone is impossible, and the kerosine smell can be very heavy.⁸⁹

Currently, noise pollution is still a problem, but the communication between the local community and the airbase is much clearer. There is a special phone number for complaints and the Commission Consultation and Environmental Information (“Commissie Overleg en Voorlichting Milieu”, COWM), consists of representatives of the airbase and the local community. In addition, flights are not allowed on Saturdays, Sundays, national holidays, and on working days between 12:00 AM and half an hour before sunrise.⁹⁰ However, the year 2020 saw a record number of complaints about noise pollution coming from Volkel Airbase. While there was a total of 315 complaints in 2019, there were 1277 in 2020. This means there were 926 more complaints in 2020. The commander at Volkel Airbase, Marcel van Egmond, expressed his concern about this development. He believes the increase was the result of unfortunate circumstances. There were no exercises abroad due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and planes from Leeuwarden Airbase also practiced at Volkel regularly. However, van Egmond believes the increase in complaints can be explained by the fact that people spend a lot more time at home. For example, the airbase received complaints about the F-35 at the moment other planes were flying. However, according to Marius Wijdeven, a commission representative from Volkel, it is clear that the F-35 produces more sound than the F-16. Therefore, Wijdeven hopes there will be more communication between the airbase and the local population. This bring along more mutual understanding.⁹¹ This shows that the communication has improved significantly, but that there still are disruptions from the airbase that hit the local community.

Conclusion

The foundations of Volkel Airbase were laid during the Nazi German occupation of the Netherlands. The first constructions were done by forced laborers and it was not clear what the future of these foundations was going to be. The Cold War was to determine that Volkel was

⁸⁹ Hans van Alebeek. “Recordaantal klachten over lawaai Vliegbasis Volkel: ‘Meer overleg zou helpen’.” *Brabants Dagblad*, October 21, 2020. <https://www.bd.nl/uden-veghel-e-o/recordaantal-klachten-over-lawaa-vliegbasis-volkel-meer-overleg-zou-helpen~a595f973/>.

⁹⁰ “Omgeving Vliegbasis Volkel,” Koninklijke Luchtmacht, Defensie.nl, accessed 16 April, 2021, <https://www.defensie.nl/organisatie/luchtmacht/vliegbases-en-luchtmachtonderdelen/volkel/omgeving>.

⁹¹ Hans van Alebeek. “Overlast vliegbasis Volkel leidt tot vier keer zoveel klachten: ‘Dit is zorgelijk’.” *De Gelderlander*, April 18, 2021. <https://www.gelderlander.nl/maasland/overlast-vliegbasis-volkel-leidt-tot-vier-keer-zo-veel-klachten-dit-is-zorgelijk~a6d50833/>.

going to be the site of one of the largest airbases in the Netherlands and would intensify the relationship between the Netherlands and the United States.

Volkel Airbase had a large impact on the local community, especially in terms of economic prosperity, cultural exchange, and its environmental impact. Inhabitants of the towns nearby found work at the airbase, personnel bought their necessities at the local stores and drank in the local bars and cafés, and many suffered from the noise pollution that the planes created. The growing employment opportunities also attracted many people from other parts of the country, which changed the demography of the local populations, especially in the town of Uden. The construction of a protestant elementary school in the historically Roman Catholic municipality was a clear example of this.

The impact of the storage of nuclear weapons has been interpreted differently by many. While some find it worrisome, many have simply gone on with their lives without paying much attention to this. The protests against the nuclear weapons that occurred near Volkel Airbase were often organized by people from outside the local community and these demonstrations simply became a commodity to many inhabitants of the adjacent towns.

The most negative impacts of the airbase have been connected to the environment, predominantly in the form of noise and ground pollution. This has been affecting many people in the surrounding area. Some villages have struggled with difficulty to expand, while the inhabitants of these towns have to take measures in order not to suffer from the noise pollution. However, while the description of these interactions in the media is interesting and gives an insight into the experiences of the local community, it is even more interesting to look at personal experiences of individuals. The next chapter will further explore the experiences of members of the local population through the means of short interviews.

Chapter 3

Personal Experiences

Introduction

This chapter will discuss several interviews that were conducted with members of the local community. All interviewees have or had a tie with Volkel Airbase. The person might have worked at the airbase or a close family member was an employee there. Obviously, these experiences might differ significantly from one another, as a family member has less access to the airbase. However, these different experiences will give a more complete and diverse idea of people's opinion on the airbase and its impact. This chapter will try to discover how people with different connections to the airbase have viewed it and if their experience has been largely negative or positive.

I contacted interviewees in different ways. Through e-mail, I was able to get in touch with a representative of Volkel Airbase who further helped me to get into contact with current employees. The employees that were interviewed all grew up in the vicinity of Volkel Airbase and, therefore, have been part of the local community most of their lives. The other interviewees were also contacted through the internet, either via e-mail or LinkedIn. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all the interviews were conducted online.

The questions were divided into several different topics. The first question was always "what is your connection to Volkel Airbase?" Depending on the age of the interviewee, the 1980s protests were discussed elaborately. Did the interviewee participate in these protests? Or did any family members or friends? Did they actively agree or disagree with the protesters? In the case of younger interviewees, the focus would be on more recent protests and their opinions on these demonstrations. Other topics included the impact they thought the airbase had on the local community and the relationship with the Americans. In the case of the latter, it was interesting to find out if there is much contact between Dutch people and American personnel at the airbase. Are American holidays celebrated with Dutch people for example? And what are the reasons for a lot or very little contact? In the case of cultural exchange, the question was how this exchanged manifested itself and what impact it had on the interviewee.

This chapter will discuss four different interviews that were conducted. The first interviewee is a former employee of Volkel Airbase, who worked there between the 1970s and the 2000s. The second interviewee is the daughter of a former employee, who worked there between the 1950s and the 1980s. The third interviewee is a current employee of Volkel

Airbase. This person offers a more recent point of view regarding the airbase. The fourth and last interviewee is the son of an American airman and a Dutch woman. He is the product of American-Dutch relationship and spent much of his childhood at Volkel Airbase. All these interviewees represent different parts of the local community and had different interactions with the airbase throughout their lives. They can showcase both the economic and cultural impact that the airbase has had on the local population.

Interview 1: Former Employee

The first interviewee is a former employee of the airbase. He worked a total of 24 years (1977-2001) as a jet engine mechanic before switching jobs. The interviewee is originally from the city of Oss, which is close to Volkel. After he left Volkel Airbase, he continued teaching mechanics until he retired. The main reason he left Volkel Airbase after 24 years was the need for something else.

Obviously, the interviewee was exposed to the protests against nuclear weapons that occurred frequently in the 1980s. The protests happened very frequently and became a regular sight for most of the airbase's personnel. The interviewee estimated that there was a protest at least every month. At first, the interviewee was quite surprised by the size of the protests. He distinctly remembers the activist Mariëtte Moors, who demonstrated near Volkel on many occasions. She was even imprisoned multiple times for her activities.⁹² The interviewee initially had no problem with the protests saying: "That is the democracy that we have in the Netherlands. You are free to say whatever you want, within the boundaries of the law." The protests started with small groups, but they grew quite rapidly in size, and some protesters even came from other European countries. These protests made him uncomfortable at times, because some of the Dutch employees were instructed to deal with the protesters. They had to carry weapons, but were instructed to never actually shoot them. The interviewee mentions that many people might think soldiers like shooting people, but this is simply not the case. Shooting is a last resort that should be avoided at all costs. They sometimes had to stand guard at night to prevent people from cutting the fences, which did not only pose a security threat, but also cost a lot of money to repair. Protesters regularly attempted to cut the fences, although the interviewee mentions that it was quite obvious that the protesters knew exactly where to do this.

⁹² Paul Driessen. "Klimaatjeugd maakt 75-jarige 'moeder aller vredesactivisten' wakker: Het kriebelt weer." *Eindhovens Dagblad*, February 9, 2019. <https://www.ed.nl/geldrop-mierlo-nuenen/klimaatjeugd-maakt-75-jarige-moeder-aller-vredesactivisten-wakker-het-kriebelt-weer~a4aedd3d/>.

He said they never tried to cut the fences near the then American section of the airbase: the weapon storages and the so-called QRA (Quick Response Area). According to the interviewee, the Americans were a lot more rigorous in their instructions to deal with the protesters. People could stand near the fence, and if they would touch the fence, they would receive a firm warning. If they would climb or cut the fence, the Americans were allowed to shoot. Therefore, the protesters did not try to cut the fences near these areas; they knew that could potentially be dangerous. At some point, around eighty protesters cut the fences and some actually made it onto the airbase ground and had to be removed by the military police. A large portion of these protesters were students. Especially the law students made use of their knowledge, and the interviewee remembers that one time a soldier punched one of the demonstrators. A week later he had to show up in court. This resulted in personnel putting tape over their name tags to avoid such situations.

The interviewee saw how the groups of protesters grew steadily and looks back at them rather negatively. He mentions that most protesters did not come from the direct environment. According to him, this can be explained by the fact that many people from the local community had found employment at the airbase or traded with it. Maintenance workers, store owners, and retail companies are good examples of this. The lack of local community presence implies that most of the local community was not involved with the protests. It is clear that some also completely disagreed with the protests. The interviewee mentions an event which shows active antipathy towards the protest movement from a small group within the local community: a few local farmers dumped a large tractor full of animal feces near the site of a protest and the demonstrators had to endure the foul smell. Another time, farmers drove to the camp sites of protesters at night and played loud, often American, music from their cars. It shows that there were locals who got irritated with the protests or simply did not agree with them.

With regards to the question of nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase, the interviewee stated that he is cautious about making any statements. While influential politicians might be able to make such public statements, it is a bit more complicated for (former) employees. Therefore, the topic of the actual existence of nuclear weapons at Volkel Airbase was not discussed further.

However, the interviewee does not deny that there were some irritations regarding the airbase for the local community. This had a lot to do with noise pollution. In the past, this might have been a lot worse, as there simply used to be many more planes. At one point during the interviewee's employment at Volkel Airbase, there were around 102 F-16 aircrafts. In comparison, currently the Royal Netherlands Air Force only has 68, of which about 24 are

stationed in Volkel. The interviewee mentions that one time, the airbase received a request to not fly on a certain time due to a funeral taking place in the village of Volkel. The airbase accepted the request and the planes stayed on the ground. However, it turned out that there was no funeral. The request had been made by an estate agent who wanted to sell a house in Volkel. He figured people might be turned off by the noise from the planes and therefore tried to find a way to prevent any planes from flying over during a viewing.

The interviewee also emphasized the economic importance of Volkel Airbase on the surrounding villages. Volkel Airbase was one of the three major employers in the 1970s and 1980s, together with Philips in Eindhoven, and EMI, a manufacturer of cassettes, LP records, and later CDs, in Uden. In this time, Volkel Airbase had approximately 2500 employees. In addition, local business profited from the existence of the airbase. Bakeries, milkmen, and greengrocers all sold their goods to the airbase.

Employees of the airbase were also represented in local organizations and the airbase sometimes organized events for the local community, like concerts, which means that there was a strong interconnectedness between Volkel Airbase and the local populations in villages like Uden and Zeeland.

The interviewee was not in contact with many Americans during his time at the airbase. Typically American holidays were not celebrated on the airbase. He mentions that through his work at the airbase, he simply did not encounter American personnel much.

The interviewee describes the Americans as being quite secluded and to themselves. This can partly be explained by the fact that many Americans did not speak Dutch. One of the few Americans the interviewee was in contact with was a representative of an American company who spoke Dutch. This man eventually married a female employee at Volkel Airbase and still lives in the Netherlands.

However, according to the interviewee, the contact with the Americans was not frequent, because the Americans had a tendency to keep among themselves. Contact was generally restricted to joint practices which took place around once a month. The interviewee has experienced this behavior as rather negative; it came across as disinterest and arrogance. The interviewee got the impression that many Americans think the United States is the center of the world. He implies that the Americans seemed to have their own way of living and did not appear to be very interested in integrating into Dutch society. However, he also mentions that there were exceptions. A small group of Americans did engage with Dutch colleagues and the local population, for example by joining a local football club. According to the interviewee, the fact that many Americans did not stay at one specific base abroad for a long period of time

might have fostered the tendency to keep to oneself. If you have to leave again to stay in another country, it might take away the urgency to learn the language and actively engage with the population.

Interview 2: Daughter of a former employee

The interviewee is the daughter of a former employee of Volkel Airbase. The father had been drafted to fight in the Indonesian Independence War on the Dutch side when he was approximately 19 years old in 1947 or 1948. He always stayed in the Dutch army and started working at the airbase from the beginning stages. This was due to his connection with the Dutch army, but also the fact that he lived in Uden. For the interviewee's father, this was a great opportunity after he returned from war. Many soldiers who returned from fighter in the former colony had difficulty re-entering Dutch society due to trauma and found it difficult to find work. Therefore, the father was very content to find employment at the airbase.

His rank was corporal First Class and he fulfilled different tasks. The interviewee is not completely sure what exactly her father did, but she remembers that he fueled the airplanes and did maintenance work, and supposedly even built a bar at the airbase. When the father developed heart problems, he was moved to the storage area. The interviewee remembers how her father used to go to work in working clothes. From time to time, the father went to work in a suit. The interviewee remembers that this was only occasionally, so this was likely during special events.

The interviewee visited the airbase several times. She specifically remembers the yearly occasion of "Pasar Malam", an Indonesian themed market where people could try typical Indonesian food. Pasar Malam translates to "Night Market", but the interviewee is not sure if the market was actually at night, as she was very young. This market was organized at the airbase, but for an unknown reason it stopped somewhere in the end of the 1960s. It was again organized in a park in Uden, but after that, it disappeared completely. The interviewee thinks these markets were organized by former soldiers who had fought in the war in Indonesia. Such markets are still organized in the Netherlands, the largest one being in Den Haag, but they have not been organized at Volkel Airbase or in Uden ever since the 1960s.

The interviewee also visited the airbase during anniversaries. An example of this was the moment the father had worked at the airbase for a certain number of year or the moment he retired. They would go with the whole family. The interviewee showed pictures of the retirement celebration at the airbase, which occurred in the mid-1980s. These pictures are being

kept in a special photo album that was gifted to the father by the Volkel Airbase. The pictures show a large celebration, with many employees and family members present. One picture shows the father clearly being emotional and happy about the fact that so many people came to this celebration of his retirement. It shows that the father was appreciated as an employee and, according to the daughter, he was very happy working at the airbase. The daughter said that her mother was often ill and spent a lot of time in the hospital. This forced her father to do a lot of caring next to his work, but she never heard that this was a problem at his work. This implies that the airbase was understanding of the situation.

Overall, the interviewee did not visit the airbase often. If they did visit, they were obviously not allowed to go to certain areas of the airbase. Therefore, the interviewee did not see that much of the airbase during the few visits she made.

The interviewee remembers the many demonstrations that took place during the 1980s. She distinctly remembers Mariëtte Moors, the woman who became the face of the anti-nuclear protests. However, due to the frequency of the protests, they became somewhat of a normality to her. And while the local population was aware of these protests, they were often limited to the area directly surrounding Volkel Airbase. Therefore, as an inhabitant of Uden, she did not witness them firsthand.

The interviewee is neutral on the demonstrations, saying that everyone knows that the nuclear weapons are there, but that she herself never felt the need to protest against this. It is a fact and she does not have a very strong opinion on this. She never knew anyone who actually protested there from her own environment, again indicating that the local community was not actively involved with the protests.

The father of the interviewee retired around the mid-1980s, so he did not experience all the protests that occurred during this decade. Over all, she cannot remember him speaking about them much. He took the point of view that people have the right to protest, but that some protesters crossed a line by destroying property of the airbase. This type of behavior was criticized by the interviewee as well. She emphasizes that people in the Netherlands are free to express their opinions and grievances, but that it is not needed to destroy property or to act aggressively towards employees of the airbase.

She was surprised by the fact that there were still occasional protests at the airbase. These protests are not thoroughly discussed in newspapers and it does not appear to bother people living close by. Perhaps there were some articles in the local newspaper, however, it did not reach the interviewee.

According to the interviewee, the airbase rented houses for the American soldiers (often whole streets). Therefore, the American presence was there, but the interviewee only experienced this from a distance, as she never had any personal contact with Americans. This again implicated that there was not a lot of contact between American personnel and the local population. Again, this could perhaps be explained by the fact that the Americans formed their own community within the local community and because of the fact that many of them did not speak Dutch. However, the interviewee distinctly remembers one incident that occurred somewhere in the 1980s. She worked at a local clothing store when a woman was caught stealing. This woman was American and the wife of an American employee at Volkel Airbase. The interviewee was quite surprised when she learned that both the wife and the soldier were sent back to the United States after the incident. On the one hand, the interviewee was quite impressed by the fact that the American leadership at the airbase reacted firmly to the fact that the woman stole from the store. To the interviewee, this showed that the Americans had great respect for the local community. On the other hand, the fact that the husband was sent back to the United States due to his wife's actions, seemed a bit over the top. She felt bad for him, as it was not his fault.

The interviewee never heard about Dutch employees participating in the celebration of American holidays, such as Memorial Day or the Fourth of July.

Interview 3: Current Employee

The interviewee was raised in Uden and used to work at the fire department at Volkel Airbase over a decade ago. He only recently returned to the fire department at Volkel Airbase. However, he was raised in Uden and thus grew up in the vicinity of the airbase.

The interviewee expressed that the presence of the airbase was never a big deal for him; it was simply a fact. He mentions that family might be an important factor in the way someone from the local community views the airbase. His grandfather worked there most of his life and for him, the airbase had always had positive connotations. It provided employment to his grandfather, his father spent some time there during his mandatory military service and as a member of the fire department in Uden, which closely cooperated with Volkel Airbase. To him, the airbase is part of Uden and it is something he never really thought about much.

The first time the interviewee worked at the airbase, in the beginning of the 2000s, he experienced some protests that happened near the entrance of the airbase. Again, the name of Mariëtte Moors is mentioned. The interviewee remembers her regular presence at the gates of

Volkel Airbase during the first time her worked there. He has a memory of Mrs. Moors even camping near the airbase in protest against nuclear weapons with a small group of protesters. The interviewee also mentions Kees Koning, who was an active participant during the protests in 1980s. While the interviewee was not yet born during this time period, the name past by during conversations about the 1980s protests. Mr. Koning was a Roman Catholic priest and an almoner in for the Dutch Army. However, he became more and more pacifistic and anti-militaristic. These convictions eventually led him to care out sensational protests actions, like breaking into an arms company.⁹³ The interviewee mentions how he heard that the protesters in the 1980s occasionally even brought their own camera crews and had lawyers ready in case a skirmish would occur. It shows that the events of the 1980s made an impact on people and many stories were told to generations after.

However, it is clear that the protests that have taken place in the 21st century, and still occasionally occur, have been a lot more peaceful than the ones that were organized in the 1980s. Though there were still some camps in the beginning of the 21st century, these protests were not nearly as large. The interviewee thinks the demonstrations started to decrease with the closure of an American unit on the side of the village of Odiliapeel. To the interviewee it seemed as though once there were fewer Americans present at the airbase, the number of protests also decreased. Most of the protests he personally experienced were very peaceful and often consisted of a banner and a small group of people at the gates.

The interviewee viewed the protests he witnessed himself from a neutral point of view. People exercise their right to protest, but the interviewee did not see the point of these protests, as they will not change anything. It is easier to accept reality. However, he emphasizes that that is just his personal opinion. People are free two disagree.

It is again the case that family members of the interviewee did not participate in the protests. This strengthens the idea that the local population was not very actively involved in the demonstrations and that the protesters mostly came from other parts of the country.

The interviewee has never seen a celebration of specifically American holidays at the airbase. Occasionally, the fire department has joined exercises with American personnel, but over all there is not particularly that much contact between Americans and Dutch people. However, contrary to the former employee, this interviewee believes the main reason for the little amount of contact between the Dutch and the Americans is due to the behavior of the Dutch. In his experience, Americans are very open people who like to engage with strangers.

⁹³ Toine van Corven. "Kees Koning: van legeraalmoezenier tot 'Profeet van de Vrede'." *Trouw*, December 23, 2002. <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/kees-koning-van-legeraalmoezenier-tot-profeet-van-de-vrede-b9022721/>.

When the interviewee was on a mission in Kosovo, his unit cooperated with Americans and this was an incredibly welcoming experience. The Americans showed great interest in the Dutch and their lives, and the Dutch unit was allowed to use necessities from the Americans. The interviewee believes that if the roles were reversed, this would have gone very differently, with the Dutch not allowing the Americans to use their goods without examining and checking everything. The interviewee had similarly good experiences American colleagues at Volkel Airbase. He has been invited by Americans to sit with them and have a conversation to get to know each other. He distinctly remembers one occasion where an American colleague showed him a photo album and told him about his journeys. The interviewee really liked this and said Dutch people would not do something like that, as Dutch people generally are more distant and do not open up to strangers that easily. Therefore, the interviewee believes that the Dutch are the ones that keep to themselves more and make it more difficult for the Americans to engage with them. In addition, the contact is not actively stimulated. The interviewee mentioned that there might be more contact if employees exercise together for example, however, it seems to be the case that these sorts of activities are not stimulated for the airbase itself. People can engage with each other without the active stimulation of the airbase itself, but this does not appear to occur naturally. There might also be more opportunity to get into contact with one another if there was more cooperation. Some departments are almost completely independent and therefore do not often cooperate with other departments. This hampers the interaction between American and Dutch employees.

In daily life in Uden, the interviewee also encountered Americans. Certain neighborhoods had rental houses which were designated for American employees of the airbase. As a child, the interviewee liked passing through these areas, because the Americans often had different cars and uniforms. He also encountered Americans at the local Rugby club. In general, the interviewee thinks that the Americans who spend much of their free time in the surrounding villages are the ones that are more open to contact with the local population.

In the interviewee's experience, Americans do not learn the Dutch language, unless they become romantically involved with a Dutch person. However, it is clear that the interviewee believes that the main reason for the little contact between Americans and Dutch employees is the Dutch reluctance to open up to strangers.

Interview 4: Son of an American airman and a Dutch woman

The interviewee was born in Uden at the end of the 1960s to an American airman who worked at Volkel Airbase and a Dutch woman from the village of Gemert. They met around 1966 or 1967 in “Moeke’s Bar”, a very well-known bar at the time, located near the village of Volkel. American personnel often visited this bar due to its vicinity to the airbase, and it was a location that saw much interaction between American personnel from the airbase and Dutch locals. The interviewee’s parents still live in Uden to this day.

The interviewee spent much of his childhood at Volkel Airbase. He remembers the American community as very tight-knit; the families spent a lot of time together and gathered at the airbase almost every weekend. They would watch movies, play sports, and eat together with all American personnel and their families. In addition, the interviewee went to the American school from the age of 5 until the age of 11. This makes it that his early childhood was dominated by the American community around Volkel, and his contact with Dutch children was rather limited. This changed when he went to a Dutch school in Uden around the age of 12. While the American community was very close and the children at the American school knew each other very well, the interviewee did not experience the change to a Dutch school as difficult. It was different, because the Dutch children would often play together after school, and he and his siblings lived relatively far away from the school. This made it a bit more difficult to interact, but the children would also play at the local sports clubs. The interviewee played football at the local football club Udi ’19, where children from all over Uden, Dutch, American, or both, came together and played. This shows that, especially from the age of 11 onwards, the interviewee largely grew up in both the local American community and the local Dutch community.

The interviewee did not spend his entire childhood in Uden, as his American father was also stationed at other U.S. airbases in West Germany and the United States. The family would follow the father, but eventually, they settled in the Netherlands indefinitely.

Overall, the interviewee believes that there was not that much contact between American personnel at Volkel Airbase and the local Dutch population, because the American community itself was incredibly tight-knit and they spent a lot of time together, especially at the base. This, together with the fact that many Americans were only stationed at Volkel for around 18 to 24 months, resulted in the Americans not feeling a strong need to socialize outside of their own community.

The interviewee struggled with his own identity as a Dutch-American man. He regularly asked himself the question “who am I?” As a football player, he represented the United States national team, and he was often asked why he choose the U.S. over the Netherlands. However, this was not really a choice he made. He had been on the reserve’s bench of the Netherlands’ youth team, but he was able to actually play games for the United States. Therefore, the decision was made for him, and the interviewee made clear he would have loved to play for the Netherlands just as much. The question whether he felt more Dutch or American is still present to this day. The interviewee currently lives in the United States, where it becomes clear to him that he has a very Dutch way of thinking and expresses some stereotypical Dutch behavior. However, when he is in the Netherlands, his American ways become clearer too. The interviewee considers himself to be a mix and cannot choose of the nationalities, as they are both part of him.

The story of this interviewee gives a better insight into the relationship between American personnel and their families, and the local Dutch population. It shows that there was a very close American community that always looked out for each other and spent much time together. However, this closeness resulted in limited need for contact with the local population. This was strengthened by the fact that many American only spent a limited time at the airbase before moving to the next one, resulting in many Americans not learning the Dutch language. An additional factor that might have complicated the interaction were the availabilities at Volkel Airbase for the Americans. They could eat there, exercise, and could let their children play with other children there. This also limited the necessity to engage with local sport clubs and restaurants.

Conclusion

None of the interviewees appear to have a negative attitude towards the American presence at Volkel. Their opinion is mostly neutral, although some of them are much more positive. The existence of the airbase does not spark particular feelings with most of the interviewees. The airbase is mostly seen as a large source of employment for many locals, and, in the case of the interviewee from the village of Volkel, as a means of pride.

The interviewees appeared to be quite indifferent towards the protests. The second interviewee said that she simply got used to the protest happening and did not pay much attention to them. The first interviewee was quite irritated by the protests, but this was mostly due to the fact that he had to deal with the protesters first-hand. It put him in an uncomfortable position he did not want to be in.

What also becomes clear from the conversations with these members of the local community is that locals were not participants of these protests in the 1980s. None of the interviewees state that their family members or friends had ever participated in the protests. This again supports the idea that the 1980s protests were dominated by people from outside the local community.

All interviewees imply that there was and there is not a lot of contact with the Americans. However, they express different opinions about the reasons behind this. While the former employee is of the opinion that the Americans had a tendency to stay among themselves and were not very open to contact with Dutch employees, the employee who currently works with the fire department, has a completely different view. He believes that the main reason is the Dutch unwillingness to engage. According to him, the Americans are much more open than most of the Dutch employees and are much more comfortable engaging in conversations. His experience with the Americans over all is very positive. Perhaps this can be explained by time, as the former employee worked at the airbase in a different period than the current employees. However, this would need further research that focuses much more on generational differences.

None of the Dutch employees at Volkel Airbase ever experienced the celebration of typical American holidays. This is interesting, as there are examples of American soldiers abroad who engaged with the local community to celebrate each other's festivities. This does not appear to be the case for Volkel Airbase. The Americans seem to mostly celebrate their holidays at home and might sometimes invite locals to join them. This means that there is some interaction, but it is not a large exchange. Perhaps there is room for more cultural exchange, both on Volkel Airbase itself and with the local population. The celebration of American and Dutch holidays can be used as a way to foster cultural exchange. This gives both groups the opportunity to learn from one another. In addition, the Dutch-American interviewee also implies that the Americans organized a lot of activities within their own community, making the celebration of U.S. holidays more restricted to the American community itself.

While the interviewees all had a different connection to the airbase, their experiences were quite similar to one another. None of them had participated in the large-scale protests of the 1980s, nor did they know anyone in their direct environment who did. While such a small group of interviews does not account for conclusions, it does indicate that there was little local involvement with the demonstrations, and that most people adopted a neutral attitude towards them. Some even actively opposed the protests by organizing counter actions against the protesters. It shows that there was quite a stark difference between the national image of

enormous groups protesting at Volkel Airbase, and the lack of local representation in this movement.

Conclusion

The U.S. base network can be considered a vital aspect of the American Empire, a concept that has stirred a lot of debate within the academic world. Some are of the opinion that the American Empire has mostly had negative effects on the local populations that are affected by the U.S. base network and the American influence worldwide. The U.S. base network has been contested often throughout its existence. Local communities have different interactions with American personnel at the bases and this largely decides the attitude towards a base. Scholars have extensively debated the aspect of international relations and the national experiences with regards to the U.S. base network, but there is a lack of research of the local experience of U.S. bases abroad. This thesis has provided a look into the local experience of representatives of the community surrounding Volkel Airbase in the Netherlands. All the interviewees had a connection with the airbase and grew up in its vicinity. A conclusion that can be drawn from these interviews is that while the protest movement in the Netherlands gained significant media attention and was even internationally described as “Hollanditis”, the local population around Volkel Airbase was not very present in this movement. None of the interviews knew anyone who actively protested against the airbase and the overall consensus seems to be that the airbase brought more good than bad to the region. This is especially the case for employment opportunities and local business. And while noise pollution is still a problem to this day, most of the interviewees are of the opinion that when you grow up in the vicinity of the airbase, you simply get used to these noises and are not bothered by them much. All in all, the interviewees did not have negative experiences with the airbase or its American personnel. While the interaction appears to have been quite limited, there was not experience of active dislike against the presence of Americans, rather the opposite; their presence and that of the airbase was a boost for the local economy.

This thesis has provided interviews with people between their 30s and 60s, however, due to the limitations of this thesis, there has not been a focus on the experiences of younger generations within the local community. Therefore, an interesting angle for further research into this topic is the potential generational difference. Do younger generations have very different opinions regarding the airbase? Do younger generations hold overall positive or negative views? Do younger generations hear much about the protests in the 1980s or have they themselves been involved in protests against nuclear weapons, especially since younger generations show more concern about environmental change? This will give an even more in-

depth look into the experiences of local communities and the possible intergenerational differences.

Overall, this thesis has shown that the experience of the local community with Volkel Airbase has been predominantly positive. There were obvious cases of nuisance, especially in the form of noise pollution, but the base has been a symbol of economic development of the region. The relationship with the Americans has been negative, rather, it has been quite restricted. The Americans formed their own tight-knit community and did not interact much with the local Dutch population. This means that there was relatively little cultural exchange, however, there was also little negative interaction. Therefore, it seems clear that in the case of Volkel, the experiences of the local community have been largely positive, despite the fact that there has been quite some media attention for the negative aspects. The interviews show an overall positive experience that was dominated by boosting economic developments and little intercultural contact.

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