

## **Withdrawal of US troops: how cities in the region benefited In other regions, the farewell could lead to an upswing –**

Nürnberger Nachrichten - 7/31/2020 5:56 a.m.

NUREMBERG - Tens of thousands of apartments, company headquarters, universities: Many cities in the region have benefited from the withdrawal of US troops. Fürth, for example, would otherwise have 10,000 fewer inhabitants.

It is a huge blow for the central Upper Palatinate: 4,500 American soldiers are soon to withdraw from Vilseck (Amberg-Sulzbach district). The Grafenwoehr location will probably also be affected, albeit to a lesser extent. Should the withdrawal plans actually become a reality, the challenge for the structurally weak region would be enormous. Most recently, thanks to the American presence, there were 35 prospering catering establishments in Grafenwoehr despite having only 6,500 inhabitants. After the deduction, this number would probably only be a single digit. And many other companies and civil servants would also be hit hard financially.

The situation would be very different from that in other cities in the region, where the farewell of the Americans after the Cold War led to an unprecedented upswing. When, for example, a US armored division withdrew from the Hindenburg barracks in Ansbach, Ansbach University of Applied Sciences and the Brücken-Center shopping center were established. In Schwabach, 650 people work on the site of the former O'Brien Barracks, more than 700 people live there.

### **"A stroke of luck in history"**

"We had long hoped that the Americans would leave Erlangen," says Siegfried Balleis (CSU), Mayor of Erlangen from 1996 to 2014. "When the news of the withdrawal came on July 1, 1993, the corks almost popped in the city administration," recalls Balleis, who at the time was still responsible for business and real estate.

It was another murderous hour: the invasion of the US Army in Franconia in 1945 cost innumerable lives. But then the war was over. After looting and a few feasts, order was gradually restored. And the occupiers quickly became friends, not only with the coveted "Frolleins".

Heinrich Lades (CSU), his predecessor at the OB, asked several times at the US headquarters in Heidelberg when the Americans would finally disappear. "All of the purchasing power has remained within the barracks. Apart from bars, restaurants and taxi drivers, nobody has benefited from it," says Balleis. It was a "stroke of luck in history" that these 136 hectares in prime downtown location suddenly became vacant.

On the site of the former Ferris Barracks, the Röthelheimpark was a completely new district in which Siemens invested heavily and found a new home for its medical division. Unlike in most other cities, the municipality in Erlangen was able to strike itself and acquire more than 100 hectares of the former barracks area itself.

Around 5,000 people have found their home in the area topped with green spaces and a large nature reserve, especially in the northern part of a

number of listed buildings. "The rings on which the cavalry horses were attached still hang on the outer facades," says Balleis.

"Real estate prices have always been high here. Without the Röthelheimpark, Erlangen would be the most expensive pavement in the republic today," said the former mayor.

### **City of relief for 5000 people**

Fürth benefited even more than Erlangen from the withdrawal of the Americans. There were four large conversion areas here, including three barracks and a housing estate.

"At the beginning of the 1990s, we still believed that the Americans would stay in Fürth and only move out of the Monteith Barracks in Atzenhof," says Joachim Krausse, former construction consultant for the city of Fürth. Because apartments were extremely scarce, a large satellite city was planned in Atzenhof, and the golf course there should also have disappeared. "Urban development was pretty much at an end, there were no more areas. That is why a relief city was planned for 5000 people," says Krauß.

But when it became clear that four areas and 280 hectares would become vacant, the plans were quickly revised and plans in Atzenhof were much more moderate and greener.

"It was an extremely hard time for the city," recalls Mayor Thomas Jung (SPD). Almost at the same time as the US withdrawal, which affected 2,000 civilian employees, the Grundig crisis also hit the city. Suddenly having 1200 additional apartments was not just a blessing.

"There were great fears that welfare recipients and former prisoners would move in," says Jung. They were afraid that vandals would leave chaos in the empty neighborhoods. A security service remedied.

### **Fürth suddenly became interesting**

"But that was also a big advantage over today's large-scale projects. The city had a very free hand to develop the areas. Above all, the population wanted it to be quick," says Krauß. A year after the withdrawal in 1995, a concept for redesigning the city council was approved, ten to twelve years later it was largely implemented.

"Then a knot opened in Fürth. Lack of space and tightness were no longer an issue for years," says Krauß. Several companies had previously left Fürth, but now Fürth was suddenly again interesting for investors.

However, the apartments were initially difficult to market. It was only when buildings were demolished to create the Südstadtpark in the William-O.-Darby barracks that the site suddenly became more attractive and also attracted higher classes to the cloverleaf city. "I would definitely advise everyone to do this with such projects. It is incredibly important to plan enough green and open spaces and rather to forego a few apartments," explains Jung.

Fürth's mayor estimates that Fürth would have 6,000 to 8,000 jobs and at least 10,000 fewer residents without the US troop withdrawal.

## **Apples rolled in front of a tank**

Herzogenaurach was also long shaped by the presence of the Americans. They made a listening station from a former air force base before the artillery settled here in 1972.

"When I was five, I rolled apples onto the street and let the tanks run over them," recalls German Hacker, Mayor of Herzogenaurach since 2008.

The area that the Americans quickly named "Herzo Base" because they could not pronounce "Herzogenaurach" was left in 1992 by the US Army. A company that was 90 percent adidas and 10 percent owned by the city continued to run the business.

Today adidas moved its headquarters from downtown to Herzo Base and spread over half of the site. 1,300 people now live in a newly created residential area. When all houses are occupied in three to four years, there should be 2500.

"The Herzo Base was a huge win for the city, a golden step," said Hacker. This is another reason why Herzogenaurach gained around 9,000 jobs between 2009 and 2019 and can now have 25,000 jobs with 24,000 inhabitants.

Martin Müller Editor Nuremberg and Bavaria Metropolitan Region Email  
Copyright © 2020 - Verlag Nürnberg Press - All rights reserved