

Ramstein Air Base

The Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC) is located in the federal state of Rheinland-Pfalz in the southwest corner of the country. This area is the main wine growing region for Germany and also known for the largest connected forest, the Palatinate Forest. K-Town as some call it, is know for being the largest American community outside of the US Over 34,000 Americans share this community with inhabitants from over 70 nations. The city's historical past has been preserved even though it has grown to become one of the largest industrial and marketing cities in Germany.

Ramstein, Kapaun and Sembach, are predominately Air Force communities which share their services with the other military members of the KMC. Vogelweh, Kleber, Panzer, Daenner, Meisau, Pirmasens, Rhein Ordenance Barracks and Landstuhl, the Army's Regional Medical Community, all make up this great community.

The host unit at Ramstein Air Base has been the 86th Airlift Wing (AW) since 1 May 1991 after the inactivation of the 316th Air Division and 377th Combat Support Wing. The 86 AW falls under 3rd Air Force headquartered in the United Kingdom and are further assigned under United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) headquartered, at Ramstein AB. Ramstein is also a North Atlantic Treaty Organization installation. Beside Americans, the installation's population is comprised of Canadian, German, British, French, Belgian, and Dutch forces.

Renovations and upgrades to the primary Air Port of Embarkation [APOE] in Central Region (Ramstein Air Base) are complete and the facilities fully meet the needs of deploying Army forces. An alternate APOE in Central Region has been identified and established in the eastern division's sector and has been upgraded to meet the most significant needs of deploying Army forces. A DPC has been established there.

Ramstein's largest flight-line tenant organization, Air Mobility Command's 621st Air Mobility Support Group, provides Air Mobility Command cargo and maintenance support for Ramstein. Its 623rd Air Mobility Support Squadron, AMC's largest overseas cargo port, moves incoming and outgoing cargo via C-5, C-141, C-130, and C-17 aircraft. They also handle a variety of civilian contract carriers. The squadron has sole responsibility for providing en route, selected home-based aircraft, and scheduled and unscheduled maintenance.

Even though Ramstein switched to an airlift mission in 1994, it still hasn't shed all the trappings that once made it the Air Force's premier fighter base in Europe. Ramstein will take over Rhein-Main's busy passenger terminal. And will assume support of the Patriot Express mission that ferries service members and their families moving to and from Europe. Ramstein will also inherit the Army's receiving and departure point through which flow all soldiers stationed in Germany.

Built in 1952, it was U.S. Air Force's in Europe's "fighter central" for more than 40 years. A Cold War stalwart built for fighter operations. So the need for change is obvious. The Air Force built Ramstein's runway for the lighter fighter. Its taxiways are too small for big cargo aircraft. Plus, it lacks aircraft parking space. So in some cases, the wing's C-130 Hercules aircraft must park in the woods near the old fighter shelters.

Ramstein will get a facelift that will transform it into the Air Force's "super base" in Europe. The list of upcoming changes includes a new runway and taxiways. They'll be able to handle heavy cargo aircraft in any kind of weather. Also coming are two new aircraft parking ramps -- one already build is the size of 60 football fields -- and a hangar for the huge C-5 Galaxy. The base just cut the ribbon on a new passenger terminal. And it will get a passenger terminal annex to handle soldiers assigned to Europe.

Ramstein has one of the finest 18-hole golf courses in Europe. The Aero Club offers membership, flying lessons, and rental planes at reasonable rates. The Ramstein Audio Club and Photo Club are well stocked and offer savings on equipment. Ski gear is available at discount prices during the season through the Ramstein Sport Center. The Kaiserslautern and Ramstein Ski Clubs are very active, with trips and meetings during the season. Landstuhl and Ramstein have indoor and outdoor swimming pools. The Kaiserslautern Rod and Gun Club has several hundred members and offers skeet and target shooting plus fishing. It is also a popular place to eat and features country-western bands about once a week. Western riding is available at a local stable.

Located in the Rheinland-Palatinate, approximately seven miles west of Kaiserslautern, Ramstein Air Base (AB) is the largest North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-controlled air base on the European continent. Designed by French engineers, built by Germans, and operated by Americans, Ramstein maintains its long-standing tradition of international collaboration. Ramstein Air Base is a great example of international collaboration--designed by French engineers, constructed by German contractors, and operated by the US Air Force.

Just as the base's beginning was colorful, so is the history associated with it. That history officially began in 1951 with the base's construction under the provisions of a Franco-American reciprocal agreement. The area was under French postwar occupational control. Sited near the base of the Palatinate highlands' northern slopes, construction of the 3,000-acre base began in April 1951. The building of a major airfield came as no surprise to the local inhabitants who were no strangers to airpower: the Luftwaffe had converted a section of the local autobahn into an airstrip at the beginning of World War II. The airstrip was also used by the advancing U.S. Army Air Forces during the final months of the conflict.

When German building firms completed construction in 1953, the U.S. Air Force initially opened two installations separated by a central dividing road (today's Kisling Memorial Drive). Landstuhl AB on the south side began airfield operations on 5 August 1952. About a year later, 1 June 1953, Ramstein Exempt Air Force Installation opened to the north. Although called an air base, the north side had and still has no hangars or runway. The runway, hangars, control tower, ramps, and other flight-related facilities were located on Landstuhl. In an interesting, but somewhat unorthodox arrangement, Landstuhl AB contained the control tower, flightline, and aircraft hangars, while Ramstein housed the headquarters, administration and support facilities. Finally, on 1 December 1957, the two bases were consolidated into a single entity known as Ramstein-Landstuhl AB. Common usage eventually shortened it to Ramstein AB, its present name. Since its opening, the northern part of the base historically has been the location of various higher echelon headquarters, family housing, dependents' schools, and certain support functions, while the southern area has always been the site of the aerodrome and its various flying units.

In the 1950s, name changes accompanied the growing pains of the new bases. On 1 December 1957, the two bases were consolidated into the largest NATO controlled air base on the continent. It was awkwardly called Ramstein-Landstuhl AB, but later, through common usage, by its present name, Ramstein.

When it opened in 1952, the base served as the home for the 86th Fighter-Bomber Wing and its fleet of F-84F Thunderstreaks. Three months later, however, the wing began receiving all-weather F-86D Sabre Jets to replace its aging F-84s. In January 1953, the base housed the 86th Fighter Bomber Wing with its F-84F aircraft, and later all-weather F-86D "Sabre" jets, and in August 1954, the name of the wing was changed to reflect a new mission. It became the 86th Fighter Interceptor Wing.

Headquarters Seventeenth Air Force moved from Wheelus AB, Libya to Ramstein on 15 November 1959.

The base changed landlords on 5 October 1966, when the 26th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing and its RF-4C aircraft arrived from France. Later in November 1968, the 86th Fighter Interceptor Wing was inactivated and activated a year later as the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing at Zweibrücken Air Base. The 86th returned again to Ramstein AB, Germany, in January 1973 under 17th Air Force. AMC strategic airlift has operated at Ramstein since late fall 1971.

Seventeenth Air Force headquarters moved to Sembach Air Base, Germany, in November 1972 to make room for United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE). Headquarters USAFE moved to Ramstein AB, in March 1973 from Lindsay Air Station, Wiesbaden. With USAFE's arrival, Ramstein entered a period of expansion unsurpassed in the base's history, as it became the hub of the largest community of Americans outside the United States. Since then, the military community has fluctuated slightly with the American, NATO, and Host Nation population within the KMC in 1997 at 51,855 personnel.

In June 1985, the 316th Air Division was activated, centralizing command authority at Ramstein. The 86th Tactical Fighter Wing became the division's flight operations arm, while the newly formed 377th Combat Support Wing, became responsible for the logistical and administrative support on base.

The 316th Air Division was deactivated 1 May 1991, and the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing merged with the 377 Combat Support Wing to form the 86th Fighter Wing. In July 1994 the 86th Fighter Wing's last F-16 departed Ramstein AB, thereby, completing its transfer from the F-16 aircraft to the C-130 aircraft. The wing was re-designated the 86th Airlift Wing on 1 October 1994, with three flying squadrons. The 37th Airlift Squadron

operates C-130 aircraft equipped with the Adverse Weather Aerial Delivery System and Air Defense System.

Ramstein AB's east gate is about 16 kilometers, or 10 miles, from Kaiserslautern [K-Town]. Other nearby civilian communities include Ramstein-Miesenbach, just outside the base's west gate, and Landstuhl, about five kilometers from the west gate. More than 16,400 American service members and more the 5,400 US civilian employees live and work in the KMC. KMC organizations also employ the services of more than 6,200 German workers. Air Force units in the KMC alone employ almost 9,800 military members, bringing with them nearly 11,100 family members.

Ramstein, host community for Ramstein AB, was first mentioned in historical documents in 1215. Surviving several occupations through the years, the town was completely destroyed during the Thirty Years' War in the early to mid-17th century.

For more than a century, the village grew steadily. During the Napoleonic Wars, it was occupied by the French in 1792. When Napoleon was defeated, Ramstein and neighboring villages were annexed by the kingdom of Bavaria in 1816. Gradually the village regained its identity as European monarch began to lose power in the late 19th century. Ramstein became a station stop on the Landstuhl-Kusel Railroad in 1868 and, by then, the village numbered about 1,300 residents. In 1898, the village's first factory, a textile mill near the railroad station, was constructed, creating more jobs and increasing the population to more than 2,000.

After World War II, Ramstein village entered a period of continuous and accelerating economic growth, accented by the construction of Ramstein AB. In 1969, the village incorporated neighboring Miesenbach. Nine surrounding villages were consolidated in 1973 into the present "union community," which bears the name of Ramstein-Miesenbach. Ramstein received its city status in May 1991. Today, this community has a combined population of more than 18,000. The relationship Americans enjoy with their German hosts continues to generate goodwill, friendship, and understanding between the base populace and city residents.

Overlooking the city is the Nanstein Castle built by Emperor Fredrick I in 1160. Knight Franz von Sickingen received the castle when he was married in 1475. The castle was destroyed in 1518. Reconstruction didn't begin until 1543 and continued until 1600. The castle was destroyed a final time by the French in 1689. Kaiserslautern is a busy industrial and marketing city, yet its rich historical past has been preserved. It is the home of iron, furniture, automobiles, and other industrial plants, as well as several breweries.

The US military is the largest employer here, where the labor force is primarily blue collar. Approximately 15 percent of the force is employed in agriculture and forestry. Military installations also play an important economic role for not only employment but for construction and service-related opportunities.

