

VISIT TO WWII AIR-RAID SHELTER, STUTTGART, GERMANY
A memorial against war and for peace

by Brigitte Feyh, Schwaikheim, Germany
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In February 2011 I participated in a visit to a concrete air-raid shelter in Stuttgart, as part of a group of teachers and retired teachers. Our guides were Mrs and Mr. Harald Bauer from the Stuttgart Shelter Building Association. The tour was very interesting but also depressing. The bunker is built about 6 meters (~17 feet) under the tramway lines of today. During WWII, people fled into this bunker during the bombing of Stuttgart during which eighty percent of Stuttgart was destroyed.

Built after 1940, the 1st use of the air-raid shelters was to protect against the bombs. When the Allied Forces flew an air-raid over Stuttgart, sirens were wailing and all people had to go into a shelter or an underground shelter to wait for the end of the air-raid. Then they had to leave the shelter. In it there existed only simple wooden benches and only a few beds for more than 1 000 people. At each side of the small floors were about 6m² big cells for 12 persons in case of emergency. The shelters only were planned for short time stays and therefore furnished very needy. The few toilets were not to close. As the raids mostly came at night, people remained two to 5,6 hours in the municipal bunkers. All was totally organized. The inhabitants of Stuttgart used their own cellars as bunker, after the house was destroyed, neighbours used cellars together, then the people who could work (as most men were soldiers) dug connections under the earth between the houses to can come out when the house were thy had lived was destroyed. The more houses were destroyed, the more people went into the municipal shelters. Now they also were used as places to stay longer. Then they also had water and a little place where dry-meals could be prepared for all. Roofless people lived there now.

After the war, fugitives from former eastern parts of Germany and other exiles, and others who were roofless lived in this bunker. Since so much of Stuttgart had been destroyed, not all people who needed a roof over their heads could be placed in the remaining houses. This air raid shelter was used for additional housing. It was small and cold, and problems developed because of the mix of people and the hunger and conditions they suffered.

There was a coin were families could cook on a few kitchen stoves. Nearly all were women, children and old people. More beds were installed. While the daytime all who could work, was up to rubble clearance. Stones were used for rebuilding houses, little rubbles accumulated on certain places. Since those times we have a "Monte Scherbelino" in Stuttgart (a mountain, in Italian = "monte" out of little fragments, in German = "Scherben, 1 Scherbe" and an Italian word end that makes the thing smaller, "lino"), now a green, tree filled hill with a good overview around Stuttgart that lies in a valley. It was the "ruins-women" who rebuilt in the town. Those who got paid work and a room or apartment outside never returned to visit the bunker.

There is no day-light in the bunker and people lost all track of time. It was not adequate to house all the people who found shelter there. Most of the people had only one pair of shoes - some had no shoes at all and wore only socks or cloths on their feet. The ground was very cold, and shoes were needed in order to go out and help with the removal of ruins and the rebuilding of the houses.

From 1955 to 1965 the bunker was used for Italian and Yugoslav people who immigrated to Germany to work. The Germans outside didn't know that people still live beneath the earth in the formal bunker and wondered about the unknown flavours and the bad smell. The flavour was of garlic and other unknown food flavour. Therefore the Italian and Turkish men - at these times there were only men - worked hard and many hours per week to gain much money and to go home as soon as possible, But instead of going home they looked for a payable apartment in

the growing towns and fetched their families as the conditions in their countries even were worse.

Up to 1965, the shelters were no longer needed. But then the Cold War began (the USA with their allied against Russia). Beginning about 1970, the bunker of Stuttgart was re-built into a nuclear radiation fallout shelter. A little kitchen was installed and a construction of air ventilation. The air was led through a filtrations plant. The visited bunker was planned to accommodate 1170 people for 14 days. And all description means this one. The few toilets and wash-basins were not to close. There were only simple curtains. There was a generator powered by diesel, large bags of water were stored sufficient for a 14-day supply, as well as a 14-day supply of food for the 1170 planned capacity. There were 390 beds (1/3 of 1170) and 390 sets of bedding. In one cell were 9 beds. There also were small rooms, or longer floors with fixed chairs.

The schedule:

In case of emergency the people who knew about the shelter flew to it. They were counted in entering while going downstairs. A button was pressed down by the care taker for each person. Half way down they pass a sluice door. The nearer to 1170 persons, the closer shuts the sluice. When the number is reached a bell sounds, the door closes.

Maybe a child is in and the parents still are outside, no chance to change or get out again. Downstairs, a contamination meter, a Geiger, proves the radiological ray-contamination. In case of, a vacuum cleaner - gas sluice - cleans the person via pressure-equalization from the particles. Still contaminated, the person has to undress. Naked still contaminated, persons have to go to the shower - several persons together.

Cold water shower washes up the particles (with warm water, the particles would penetrate the skin). Still contaminated, nails and hairs are cut.

Still contaminated - help is not possible. After the shower, the people get underwear and each one blue Jogging dress. When all contaminated people have left the shower, the room will be closed as he also is contaminated now. Shower no longer is possible. Through the air filtration the quantity of air is sank to 20% of the normal needed sum. This is just enough to survive with less motion. So a man will be exhausted and want to be let alone.

There would be only 4 care takers for all the people. All simply hope, under the inhabitants also would be medical personals, cooks, technicians, nurseries and other needed professions.

A heating was not installed. Architects purposed, heating of the body temperature of 90% of the occupants would be enough to heat the bunker. 10% of the inhabitants surely would die within those two weeks. The people eat and sleep in shifts, and lose all track of time without having natural light. They are divided into three shifts. Each of the three groups is fed only one meal per day - soup containing a few vegetables such as beans, leaks, onions, cabbage - and a bit of bread. The kitchen is very small and there is only one big pot to make the soup. People are served until the pot is empty, then water is refilled and more vegetables are added, and when the next batch of soup will be cooked, the next group could have their meal.

It seems naive to think that the danger would be past after only 14 days and the people could then go back to their homes and use the food and water there.

There also exist multiple purpose shelters, used as parking storey or train station. All planned and re-built shelters of Stuttgart would have accommodated together only 10% of the population. This underground air-raid-shelter and a few other sorts of shelters can be visited by public every last Sunday of a month. Nearly all trail-blazer ducts, the women, old men and youngster beneath 14 years had built short before and during the air-raids are closed. To the re-built, the people had taken the wooden joists and girders out of these shelters. So it is danger of life to go in.

I only hope that one day the threat of war will be in the past.

Photos: 1. The entrance of the visited underground air-raid-shelter, the little white "tower" is a one-man-shelter from Reutlingen, a town not too far from Stuttgart.



2. Downstairs to the sluice

3. The sluice



4. Care taker with nuclear mask and a man in the shower



5. A 9 bed-cabin in case of a nuclear raid



6. Dolls with the jogging that all get after shower



7. The flue, the room for one family up to 5 persons, as tall as the bedroom(No5,6)



9. Stuttgart in 1945



There were 53 air-raids on Stuttgart with 4 590 death and 8 908 wounded people, included 770 forced-laborers. Totally 39125 buildings in the town region were damaged or destroyed. 32 549 of them were dwelling houses. The first air raid was August 25, 1940 with “only” 4 death and 17 destroyed buildings. The worst time of raids was from July 25, 1944 to July 29, 1944.