

Status report march 2019 of former Air Base Oldenburg

For months, there has been extensive excavation work going on at the air base. Preparing the ground for future construction of apartment buildings, the Ordnance Removal Agency (German abbreviation: KBD) of the State of Lower Saxony has been surveying the ground for ammunition. In the area between our association headquarters and Alexander Street, aerial photos show more than 60 bomb craters, which, like in other places at the air base, were filled with debris and with ammunition from World War II (hand grenades, anti-aircraft ammunition). That is why all the filling material has first to be removed from the craters detected, then sifted through and finally used for refilling. It is estimated that about 10% of bombs dropped did not detonate, and consequently a considerable number of unexploded devices can still be presumed remaining in the ground. The last dud found about 4 weeks ago was detected and defused not far from our association building.

As it cannot be ruled out that unexploded devices have "dug" their way into the ground below the basements of then existing buildings, there is a strong possibility that all of those buildings (staff building block 40, barracks 32 – 35, 36 – 39, the officers' mess hall, the air control tower, and the former mess building, e.g.) will have to be taken down as a consequence of the current ammunition probe. Alternative methods, piercing the bottom and probing underneath the building, e.g., would entail a mid-five-digit expenditure and thus go way beyond the financial limits – unless a potential investor was willing to spend that amount of money. No such person has yet been found! As things look right now, none of those old buildings can be expected to be spared, and nothing will remain to serve as a reminder of what things used to be like. Unfortunately, that is true of our association headquarters, too.

As the analysis of aerial photographs has shown, our building, erected in the 1960s, sits on top of at least three impact craters backfilled. That is why it cannot be ruled out that there are remains of ammunition in the ground, at worst even unexploded bombs. These coming weeks the KBD will further survey the situation and then make a recommendation of how to proceed. We are, at present, at a dead loss.

During a meeting with Jürgen Krogmann, the Mayor of Oldenburg, to which he had asked the members of our steering committee, he affirmed that whatever might happen he intended to keep our exhibition in the grounds of the former air base – exact place and dimension to be decided on later. He repeated that plan of his in his '*Salvatorabend*' welcome address at the Weser-Ems-Halle. In an article of the *Nordwest Zeitung (NWZ)*, viewable as a pdf attachment of this mail, the city administration even speaks of a pledge.

If we really have to clear out of our present association premises, we consider the former medical service building as the only viable alternative because – as it was built after the war with a basement underneath – the ground was probed at the time, the building enjoys protection against demolition and will thus remain standing. The building is currently and will continue to be used by the municipal administration. However, an official decision concerning joint use of the building has yet to be made.