

THE HISTORY OF VERBATIM'S HOME: GREENHAM COMMON

Greenham Common surrounds Greenham Business Park, which has been, for most of its history, a valuable piece of common land. But this has not always been the case...

Early in World War II the War Ministry acquired Greenham Common and transformed into an airbase:

5th June 1944

General Eisenhower visits troops at Greenham.



Dwight D. Eisenhower made his famous 'Eyes of the world' speech in advance of D-Day at Greenham airbase.

The photo shows General Eisenhower talking to camouflaged paratroopers waiting to board C-47 Skytrains, 5th June 1944.

December 12th 1944

33 American servicemen were killed in a glider accident at Greenham Common.

The glider's two pilots, along with 31 paratroopers onboard died at the military airbase, when the glider crashed shortly after take-off. To commemorate this tragedy Greenham Common Trust has a policy of naming new buildings and roads at the business park in honour of those who died in the crash.

December 15th 1944

Just three days later servicemen from the 368th and 423rd squadrons of the 306th Bombing Group were returning from a tough mission in the industrial heartland of Kassel when their two B-17 Flying Fortress Bombers collided, killing all but two of the 18 crew.

Each December a memorial service to remember those that died is held at Greenham Business Park.

Post war 1947 - 1950's

For a brief period after 1947 the military left the Common, but the onset of the Cold War brought it back into military occupation.

During 1950 an agreement was reached between the US and British governments for the US Air Force to redevelop and reactivate four airfields, including Greenham Common. In the late 1950s the runways were extended with two 1,000-foot overruns added at each end of the runway, this was to provide aircrews an increased safety margin in addition to 12,000 feet of runway. At this point the Greenham Common airbase reputedly had the longest runway of any airbase or airport in Europe.

1970's Nuclear weapons come to Greenham



As the Cold War progressed Greenham was home to a variety of tactical aircraft, but in the late 1970's a NATO decision was taken that would bring nuclear weapons to Greenham...

...and make the airbase world famous for the peace protests that it attracted.

1980's and 1990's: Greenham Common and Cruise Missiles

For many, Greenham Common is synonymous with the Cold War and the peace protests against the siting of Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) at the former airbase during the 1980's. At the end of the 1970's, NATO member countries agreed to approve plans to deploy nearly 600 nuclear cruise missiles in Western Europe.

Greenham Common Airbase was identified as one of the first airbases to receive the weapons and it was aimed to have Greenham as an operational cruise missile base by December 1983. In 1980 the British Government announced that Greenham Common would see the deployment of 96 Tomahawk Cruise nuclear missiles and in 1981 work began, preparing the airbase to receive the nuclear weapons.

Protests begin...



Also in 1981 a peace group called "Women for Life on Earth" marched from Cardiff to Greenham at protest against cruise missiles and on arrival a number chained themselves to the perimeter fence at Greenham.

Within a few days they had established the first peace camp. In early 1982 the camp became entirely for women and children only. The photo shows The Women

for Life on Earth march crossing the Seven Bridge.

The world watches the peace women protest.

International media attention was drawn to the protests at Greenham and the site became a world famous icon for protests against nuclear weapons.

In December 1982 around 30,000 women gathered to join hands around the airbase in what was known as the 'Embrace the Base' event. A 14 mile human chain linked Greenham with other nuclear sites.



Protesters and police during "Embrace the Base", December 1982.

But...

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Despite the protests, work continued on site with the construction of the high security area that eventually housed the Cruise Missiles, their transporters and other support vehicles. The area, known as the GAMA site (GLCM Alert and Maintenance Area) can still be seen on Greenham Common.

GAMA remains a very visible reminder of Greenham Common's past and the history of international conflict during the late twentieth century.



The six hardened shelters were constructed to protect the GLCMs from possible nuclear and conventional attack. Each shelter was designed to withstand a thermonuclear airburst explosion above Greenham Common and Newbury or a direct hit from a 500lb conventional bomb.

It is believed that the shelters, that stand around 10 metres high, were built with a reinforced concrete ceiling about two metres thick, below a steel plate, around three metres of sand, a further reinforced concrete slab, all covered with tonnes of soil. Each shelter had six bombproof steel doors, three at each end.

The INF Treaty, signed by presidents Reagan and Gorbachev in 1987, meant that by the Spring 1991 Greenham's role as a base for nuclear weapons would be over and by 1990 the cruise missiles had gone from the airbase.

In 1992 Greenham Common Airbase was declared redundant for military purposes by the Ministry of Defence and the fate of Greenham Common hung in the balance

The Peace Dividend: Late 90's - 2000

Verbatim set up shop in one of the old buildings in 1997 and our colleagues will remember the women who made their home outside the base, continuing with their peace movement with the banner "Iraqi Peace camp 2000"

When you visit us our MD Graham Hill will tell you the history of Venture West - the old command and control centre for the USAF.

Until then... goodbye!