

AFCENT in the mining region

The local impact of Cold War era NATO bases in Limburg province, 1966-1981



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Chapter 1

Introduction

In April 1967, in Limburg in the southern tip of the Netherlands, NATO officers hung sheets of paper in front of the windows of their apartment, displaying the phrase “congratulations, it’s a boy” to passersby celebrating the birth of the new prince, Willem-Alexander. Fast forward fifty years and a month and Willem-Alexander, now king, was present at a ceremony celebration the fiftieth anniversary of the base where these NATO officers had been working, surrounded by generals and dignitaries speaking about the base’s importance, and the debt they owed to the local population for their enduring hospitality.



The base as it looks today

Brunssum, a mid-sized town tucked away in the countryside of South-Limburg and once a center of the Dutch mining industry, now hosts Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC Brunssum). For most of its history though, until 2000, it was known as Allied Forces Central Europe, better known by its acronym AFCENT. France left NATO’s centralized command structure in 1966, forcing several NATO bases in France to relocate to other countries. At the time the mines in Limburg were about to be closed, and so AFCENT was able to move into the

abandoned mining facilities in Brunssum, where it has been ever since, now transformed into a nondescript set of office buildings hidden in practically the middle of town. For half a century thousands of military men and their families made this region their home, fundamentally impacting public life there in numerous ways, and where originally only half a dozen nationalities used to work there are now twenty eight. This thesis endeavors to detail the ways in which the community dealt with its presence during its first fifteen years, investigating facets of reception, reaction and interaction.

1.1 Research questions

The intention of this paper is to answer the relatively straightforward question what kind of impact the presence of AFCENT has had on its host town and region during the Cold War era. This impact does not just include the 'physical' legacy AFCENT has left, but also the framing and image formation that has taken place around it. Research is primarily focused on the town of Brunssum, with occasional forays into other local towns (primarily Heerlen, Schinnen and Maastricht), and focusses on the period 1966-1981. The question is to be divided into three sub questions in order to create more manageable sections and look at the case in a number of constituent elements, namely expectations, physical imprint, and interaction:

- Firstly, what were the responses to AFCENT's arrival, and why? Initial contact and the circumstances of that contact are important in determining the character of that continued contact, and the ways in which perceptions and frames of reference are established. This question focusses mostly on the first few years AFCENT became a topic of discussion, from 1966 to about 1967 or 1968.
- Secondly, what were physical and economic consequences? The presence of the bases had real consequences, in terms of being integrated into the economy, making use of local infrastructure and buildings, and needing to be accommodated.
- Thirdly, in what ways did AFCENT and the local community intersect? This question looks at the ways in which the population of Brunssum and other local towns interacted with the AFCENT community, in terms of social habits, cultural transfer, how both sides looked at each other, and the dominant narratives to emerge from this.

1.2 Approach

Due to a dearth of secondary sources the research made almost exclusively use of various primary sources. This has a profound effect on the nature of the research, as the types of sources used impacted the methods and analytical tools used, the goals set during research for what to look for, and the answers ultimately uncovered.

Historical background

The story of AFCENT's move to Brunssum is located at a temporal nexus of shifting political perspectives and historical trends. For the most part these only marginally enter the frame of the research, but there is value in setting the scene regarding some of the relevant Cold War era developments.

During the sixties the conception of the 'Atlantic community' (which in itself was an ill-defined concept, referring to the realm of transatlantic political, economic and cultural cooperation, and a set of shared norms) was beginning to change, and the balance within this community was in the process of being redressed. On the one hand the United States was willing to take active leadership of this community, while on the other Europe had regained its self-confidence since World War II and national interests began to reassert themselves, best exemplified by the leadership of French president de Gaulle.¹ The interplay between these two extremes characterized much of international relations within the Atlantic sphere during this period of time, and the politics surrounding AFCENT did not escape it either. In the interest of reclaiming its autonomy and to pursue its own global ambitions France withdrew from NATO's centralized military structure in 1966 (though remained a part of the alliance) and ordered foreign military personnel to be evicted from French soil, causing NATO bases such as AFCENT to be relocated.²

Similar tensions played out in the Netherlands. While the Netherlands was one of the United States' most staunchest allies, it occasionally attempted to pursue a more independent course, and domestically anti-Americanism was on the rise. In the Postwar era

¹ Valérie Aubourg, Gérard Bossuat and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *European Community, Atlantic Community? Vol. 1*. (Paris: Soleb, 2008), 9-18; Frédéric Bozo and Susan Emanuel, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 1-7.

² Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher and Garret Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958–1969*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 85-86, 100-104.

Dutch popular culture was saturated with international influences, but most of all oriented towards the United States, in terms of leisure, consumption and youth-culture. The sixties and early seventies are commonly known as the height of counterculture and protest movements, and the Netherlands were no exception to this development. In the Netherlands the youth rebelled against traditional authority, and protested the United States and NATO (which is discussed at length in chapter two) but in some instances the public at large was critical as well, for example with regards to nuclear weapons or the bombings in Vietnam.³ In short, the legitimacy of the established social and political order was under assault.

Historiography

There is a copious amount of literature on the Cold War era, generally relating to geopolitics, or broad cultural developments, as well as a decent quantity on (American) military bases. The base literature revolves in particular around their strategic purpose, their local influence, and the reasons that prompt their creation. For example Kent E. Calder in *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* emphasizes base creation as a somewhat ad-hoc response to changing international circumstances.⁴ However when delving deeper, in search of literature on the bases in the Netherlands, one comes up empty handed. This was a persistent problem, as there was a conspicuous lack of secondary sources concerning AFCENT in Brunssum. Plenty of Limburg guidebooks included a short paragraph or so on the bases' presence, but sadly not much more than that seemed to exist.

Nevertheless, a cluster of literature exists on bases in Germany, touching on many of the same questions that need to be answered about AFCENT. While this knowledge cannot be directly transposed onto AFCENT - although the geographical and cultural distance is relatively small - it provided a useful analytical guide as to what facets to scrutinize. In particular John Lemza's *American Military Communities in West Germany: Life in the Cold War Badlands, 1945–1990* helped provide useful insights for analysis, outlining life in the American military communities in Germany, and the relationship of these communities with the local

³ Hans Loeber, ed., *Dutch-American Relations, 1945-1969: A Partnership: Illusions and Facts* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1992), 51-55, 119-152; Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations: 1609-2009* (Albany: Suny press, 2009), 683-693.

⁴ Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons, Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4-9.

populace, as well as their cultural influence. For example, Lemza tracked the spread of fast food chains in relation to the location of military bases. He also delineated how Germans got a taste of American life through contact with military personnel, which has been researched by other scholars as well, such as Donna Alvah, whose theory in her book *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965* was how soldiers' dependents (their spouses and families) served as unofficial ambassadors for the spread of American values.⁵ Much of this research came in handy in the case of Brunssum, although there the emphasis and activity was more on the soldiers themselves.

Scholarship on the bases in Germany contains another particularly interesting and active subsection, regarding the role of race, mostly from researchers participating in the research project *'The Civil Rights Struggle, African-American GIs and Germany'*: Maria Höhn, Martin Klimke, Maggi Morehouse, Felicitas Jaima and others. Of these Höhn in particular is an authority on the subject, and for the most part their work constitutes the first thrusts into here-to mostly unexplored territory. Their work focusses on the experiences of African-American soldiers in occupied Germany, and the way that racial struggles and segregation in the army intersected with the ongoing Civil Rights Movement back home, the aura of sexuality associated with black men, and the interaction of these elements with the unusual post-war social landscape of Germany. This literature elaborates how both sides influenced each other in different socio-cultural ways (some of which were also applicable to white soldiers) like the transfer of norms and values. The methods and theories used shed a particular light on this material, and offer a variety of analytical insights as to how to interpret it. For example the recent article by Jaima, "Black Wives, White Maids: Social Implications of Black Military Wives in US-Occupied Germany" sets the experiences of the black wives of soldiers in Germany within the wider context and history of racism and civil rights in the United States, and the social transformation Germany was undergoing with regards to the role of women in society and the breakdown of patriarchal authority. It also emphasizes the soldiers' relative economic

⁵ John W. Lemza, *American Military Communities in West Germany: Life in the Cold War Badlands, 1945–1990* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), 3-10, 122-145; Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 1-13.

prosperity, and the social consequences that entailed.⁶ Of considerable interest was a concept formulated by Höhn and Klimke called 'the breath of freedom', denoting how African-American soldiers experienced a sense of (social and economic) freedom - and access to relationships with white women - which they did not experience in the United States, and which for many of them informed their later experiences and participation in the Civil Rights Movement.⁷

Primary sources

The sources fall into three categories: old newspaper articles, archive materials and interviews. As mentioned above, there was a disconcerting lack of secondary material on AFCENT in Limburg. As such it was necessary to start the research by finding all the required material in the primary sources.

Firstly, the bulk of the information came from old newspaper articles, which are relatively easy to access *en masse*, and research for this thesis made use of approximately between two and three thousand articles, concentrated within the core of the Cold War period, spanning from between 1966 to 1981. Some forays are made into material from between 1981 and the present, but only incidentally, generally in support of the prior defined research period (by mapping out established trends to the present). Secondly, there is archival material, which played a relatively minor role in total, being limited to a little over a dozen dossiers from the Schinnen and Brunssum municipal archives. In a strange coincidence, neither of those municipal archives are located in the respective towns anymore, but have moved all archival material from before the eighties to another location. Additionally this aided in determining the exact length of the research period (in addition to being the pleasantly round number fifteen), as these archives contained files up to 1981. This period of time provided a good view at the initial reception of the base, until its local environment had acclimatized to its presence. Thirdly, there were a little over a dozen conversations and full-fledged interviews with local inhabitants, many former defense employees, and a few

⁶ Felicitas R. Jaima, "Black Wives, White Maids: Social Implications of Black Military Wives in US-Occupied Germany." aacvr-germany.org. <http://aacvr-germany.org/index.php/documents-5/black-wives-white-maids-social-implications-of-black-military-wives-in-us-occupied-germany> (accessed 9-12-2016)

⁷ Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A breath of freedom: the civil rights struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-11.

Americans (active and retired) living in Brunssum. In many cases these interviews helped point the way to new information, provided verification for speculation, or helped to uncover new viewpoints on old information. Some supplementary material comes from various sources, such as the central bureau for statistics, and in particular a documentary on the subject made by Frederieke Jochems in 2013.⁸

Challenges

This research began as part of a research project during a research internship at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg, investigating the local impact of small Cold War bases in the Netherlands. During the first few months of this research we found exceedingly little information as we had focused our efforts on the small base in Schinnen, and so for this thesis its boundaries were slightly adjusted and somewhat extended, in order to better conform to the greater availability of information around the base in Brunssum.

The great hurdle of this research was the lack of secondary material, and difficulties early on in identifying useful caches of material. It took time to find fresh springs of information, but once they were tapped the potential for research material would suddenly come in irresistible waves, and the search would then dry up again just as quickly. During the very first months a strikingly banal obstacle turned out to be the particular keywords used to search through databases. “American base Limburg” seemed to miss the mark, but by using the term “AFCENT” (even though the base has been called JFC HQ Brunssum for over a decade now) a lot of the most useful materials revealed themselves. Weeks of research in various archives appears to have been almost entirely fruitless, because to a large extent the municipalities did not have direct contacts with the bases, and certainly no insight to their internal matters. Cross referencing notable dates from newspaper records with council meetings in the archive of Schinnen didn’t produce any connections at all, and so this archival material plays a relatively small role in the research, although there were a few dossiers of use. Finally there were the interviews, and it was certainly exciting to be able to practice historical research in a way I hadn’t been able to do much over the course of my studies: in

⁸ Jochems, Frederieke, *Militairen in de mijnstreek*, directed by Frederieke Jochems. Valkenburg: Mezzia media productions, 2013.

the field. But oral history is a major endeavor in and of itself, and can often be hampered in numerous ways outside of one's control. Foremost is the difficulty in finding and contacting the people you wish to interview, to convince them to agree to an interview, and to try and properly plan these interviews. There were many dead-ends, unanswered emails and lost contact, and Limburg is a two-and-a-half hour train ride from my place of residence, so a few times I had to consign myself to five hours of travelling for a single interview. In total I took five trips down to Limburg, spending the better part of six days there almost entirely for interviews. I have to wholeheartedly thank Fried Terwee, a Dutch former defense employee, who helped me out immensely with setting up contact with many of the people I got to speak to, and without whose assistance those interviews would likely not have been possible.

Hard data from periods before the nineties is tough to gather, for in many cases that data hasn't been properly digitized yet, for example with crime statistics. There were also additional hurdles; for example in the case of crime incidents involving AFCENT personnel were generally handed off to the Marechaussee, and so it is unclear where this would be recorded or whether crime related to AFCENT would properly translate into the statistics. An entire quantitative study might be extracted from such data if amply available and accessible, with some potentially scandalous findings, but for now the necessary effort to find this data falls mostly beyond the scope of this paper. Some tentatively surveyed data from the late sixties seemed inconclusive, or in line with national trends, or possibly a reflection of unemployment and economic anxiety due to the closure of the mines, and the available old CBS (Central Bureau for Statistics) data tended to be subdivided into the provincial level or focus on the Netherlands' largest cities, so the numbers from Limburg as a whole would smoothen out and obscure any noteworthy spikes in the Brunssum area. In addition, AFCENT personnel was spread out across the region, living individually or in enclaves across a multitude of towns, diluting their presence and making their contribution to the statistics in most cases imperceptible. Data on almost any topic suffers from similar pitfalls. For example, statistics on children born out of wedlock in Brunssum consistently hovered between zero and two. Data on the number of registered unemployed in Brunssum drops from roughly eight hundred mid-1965 to a little over three hundred by 1968, and then halving by the end of 1969, but without more details there is simply no way to tell to what degree AFCENT was

responsible for such a drop - through either direct employment or the economic activity it was indirectly responsible for - and what can be attributed to the general economic recovery in the region.⁹

Methods

The three categories of primary material (archival, newspapers and interviews) each required their own methods of analysis. Archival material is generally used as supporting hard data, to back up conclusions drawn from other sources. Dutch newspapers have a tradition of neutral impartiality, but some definitely demonstrated biases, to be viewed through the lens of framing theory, in order to dissect their intent. Media uses forms of framing in order to set the agenda for the way it wishes the audience to react, and the media plays a major role in determining which issues are featured most prominently in the public debate (and subsequently which issues the public sees as important) so an awareness of such framing and who the prospective audience for respective newspapers was is key, in order to assess what perspectives the media attempted to push forward.¹⁰

I quickly realized that for a variety of reasons would be impractical and infeasible to do enough interviews for a quantitative study. Rather, the interviews formed a backbone of supporting data, to further elaborate the data gained from the other sources, verify hypotheses, and gain a better understanding of the human perspectives at work. As Lynn Abrams put it in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* interviews are an opportunity for “a revelation of the self”, rather than the revelation of information. This entails the chance to learn about the subjective experience of the interviewee.¹¹ As such, the interviews were semi-structured, allowing room for the conversation to lead to new lines of enquiry and generate new insights flowing from conversational context. The structural element of the interviews concerned a selection of topics to which I wished to get, ranging from their own experiences

⁹ CBS. (1965). *Sociale en economische maandstatistiek 1965 editie Juni*, 211; CBS. (1968). *Sociale en economische maandstatistiek 1968 editie December*, 649; CBS. (1969). *Sociale en economische maandstatistiek 1969 editie Oktober*, 504.

¹⁰ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The agenda-setting function of mass media", *Public opinion quarterly* 36.2 (1972): 176-187.

¹¹ Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat, *The voice of the past: Oral history* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2017) 132-135.

with AFCENT to the public perception on a whole host of topics (every question essentially corresponds with a subchapter), such as the economy, sports, culture and race, and two of the most fruitful questions to start off with early were “what was your first interaction with AFCENT in any form” and “what do you associate with AFCENT”, as these questions often led the interviewee to forge ahead on a path of their own, without me determining a specific direction. However where too inflexible an interviewing structure (such as a questionnaire) can choke the line of conversation and prevent new information from being gathered, too flexible a conversation can lead to the reverse, where each separate interview differs so wildly in its subject matter, that they amount to singular uncorroborated anecdotes.¹² Because of this it was important during the interviews to properly shepherd the line of conversation in such a manner that all the relevant topics were covered to a satisfactory degree, to allow for cross referencing on these topics between interviews. The concept of the ‘availability heuristic’ is particularly important for analyzing the interviews. What this essentially means is that people’s minds use mental shortcuts when dealing with memory, in order to form a judgement. If a person can recall a certain memory or example easily, it is likely to carry greater weight than a memory that was harder to recall, and from this conclusions can be deduced. Similarly, new conclusions can be drawn from the ways in which memory and recorded data conflict with each other.¹³

The circumstances for interviews often differed, and some are more accurately described as conversations, rather than interviews. For example at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary in Brunssum I had the opportunity to have a few quick chats with people in the crowd at the festivities in the park. Aside from these incidental interviews, ‘full Fledged’ interviews (generally lasting an hour or more) were held with the following people: Rita Hoefnagels (public relations manager at the Schinnen base, on April 11th), Fried Terwee (former defense employee, on May 21st), Jim Poteat and William Adams (former American soldiers living in the Netherlands, a joint interview on May 21st, and another short chat with Jim on May 31st, where I also spoke for a few minutes with other Americans), Sjaak Heersen

¹² Roy Hay, *The use and abuse of oral evidence* (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1986), 8; Thompson and Bornat, *The voice of the past: Oral history*, 311-313.

¹³ David Groome and Michael Eysenck, *An introduction to applied cognitive psychology* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2016), 206.

(former defense employee, on June 14th, at a meeting of other former employees, with whom I also spoke) and Peter Gommans (former defense employee and local archivist, on June 15th).

Chapter 2

Anticipation, expectation and arrival

Over the course of 1966 NATO had to deal with one of its most major challenges as it tried to work through the fallout of France's decision to pull out of NATO's centralized military structure. In February of 1966 President de Gaulle had thrown down the gauntlet, and was evicting NATO forces and bases from French soil, and so during the rest of the year NATO scrambled to find new homes for these bases in other member states. After a month's long public process of speculation and anticipation one of these bases - the headquarters structure collectively known as AFCENT - finally settled down in the southern Netherlands, in Limburg province. When reviewing reporting during this period of time it appears to be at the genesis of many of the cognitive lenses through which AFCENT has come to be perceived by the population. Analysis of newspaper clippings does not only provide a thorough overview of events, it also offered an ideal field to put framing theory into practice and parse out the different narratives and thematic associations that developed with AFCENT's presence. Mass media has an agenda setting role, and is important in determining the dimensions of the debate and public consensus.¹⁴ How did people in Limburg (and the Netherlands as a whole) respond to the moving of AFCENT, and why? Coverage revolved around a number of issues which would repeatedly return on all sides of the debate, and some made their way to the national stage. Communists and socialists opposed NATO and militarization (voicing their displeasure in parliamentary motions, the press, and public protests), and apprehension over nuclear weapons fell within the scope of that frame.¹⁵ Additionally, there was concern over the growing German influence and position within NATO, and the appointment of German general Kielmansegg blossomed to involve the opinions of the government and political parties. Of greater interest to the local population were matters such as the adequate availability of housing (as the Netherlands was facing a housing shortage), and the economic impact that might result from moving in these bases. Finally, the narrative entangled itself with the closure of the mining industry in Limburg. There is ample evidence to deduce the ways in which different groups emphasized very different priorities.

¹⁴ McCombs and Shaw, "The agenda-setting function of mass media", 176-187.

¹⁵ Netherlands. Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1966-1967 kamerstuknummer 8851 ondernummer 1.

2.1 The press

The Dutch press first began reporting on AFCENT in March of 1966, at the height of the crisis. At that point NATO was ordered to vacate France by April 1967. Speculation as to the destination of the bases would last for nearly six months, but at this very early stage rumors already circulated about potential hosts; in early April it was reported that some bases (AFCENT, and SHAPE, another headquarters) might go to Belgium, and the Netherlands "might have a shot" at a small site as well. Right from the start it is possible to identify sides who were opposed, and those who were either indifferent or positive, some quite a lot more vocally than others. Out of about a dozen newspapers the coverage of two stands out in particular: *De Waarheid* (which translates as 'the truth'), a prominent Dutch communist newspaper, and *Limburgs Dagblad*, affiliated with the catholic people's party (KVP), published from Limburg province where AFCENT would eventually be settled. *De Waarheid* was always critical of NATO, in line with the position of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN), and straight from the get-go its reporting on these bases potentially being moved to the Netherlands made use of language intended to alarm readers. They characterized inviting NATO would be "a wasps nest", so they warned in April, because of the costs and the political machinations of other NATO members.¹⁶ Most papers covered the issue with dry neutrality, if not mild indifference, while on the other end of the spectrum *Limburgs Dagblad* occasionally traded its professional neutral tone for positivity (implicitly - and a few times explicitly - rebuking some of the communists' talking points). They began doing so with increasing frequency over the course of the year and their coverage began growing more personally involved as the likelihood of AFCENT moving to Limburg grew. According to journalist Joep Dohmen the Limburg press at the time was still defined by societal pillarization, although depillarization had started to set in across the country during the sixties: the KVP utterly dominated Limburg politics (at their peak in the late fifties receiving nearly eighty percent of the votes compared to thirty percent nationally, though dropping quite precipitously in the seventies), and the catholic church continued to hold a strong grip over institutions and social life in Limburg. This meant they largely determined the editorial

¹⁶ "geheimzinnigheid rond verhuizing NAVO-centrum", *De Waarheid*, April 9, 1966.

direction of the newspapers.¹⁷ For example KVP-mayor Marcel Grunsven - a shareholder in *Limburgs Dagblad* - would allegedly call the paper's editor whenever an article wasn't to his liking, and the papers often had provisions that journalists or editors had to be catholic and follow catholic principles in their work. The Limburg press was expected to be the mouthpiece of the authorities and be supportive rather than critical. *Limburgs Dagblad* went through a period where its reporting was more critical under chief editor Jules van Neerven, from 1966 to 1972 (until he was forced out by the conservative Limburg establishment due to his critical tone), but in most of the AFCENT-related articles analyzed below the loyalty to authority is still very much on display.¹⁸ The *Friese Koerier* often joined *Limburgs Dagblad* in providing a positive slant to its reporting, despite being from the province of Friesland on the other side of the country, while *De Waarheid* found a modicum of support in other left-leaning papers such as *Het Vrije Volk* and *Vrij Nederland*. Dutch papers were usually committed to neutral fact-centered reporting, which makes them valued sources for solid facts. Yet the key players in the following analysis are generally *Limburgs Dagblad* and *De Waarheid* because their respective sympathies were often more noticeable, which renders them important objects for the analysis of perception. They were also by far the most active papers in reporting about AFCENT, although *De Waarheid* began to lose interest in the matter after the late seventies.

2.2 Opposition to NATO

De Waarheid originated as a communist resistance newspaper during World War II, and since then served as the party newspaper of the CPN. Its views can essentially be considered to be those of the communist party, and throughout the paper's existence its editors were leading members of the party such as Joop Wolff, CPN parliamentarian from 1967 to 1982, who edited the paper from 1958 to 1978. The arrival of AFCENT also coincided with the peak of the 'Provo' movement, a youth counterculture movement influenced by anarchism, pacifism and the provocation of authorities, and communist and Provo opposition to NATO frequently mixed, protesting in concert with one another. Additionally they were regularly supported by efforts

¹⁷ Joep Dohmen, *De vriendenrepubliek: Limburgse kringen* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1997), 67-68; "Tweede-Kamerverkiezingen - 12 maart 1959." [nlverkiezingen.com](http://www.nlverkiezingen.com). <http://www.nlverkiezingen.com/TK1959P.html> (accessed June 10, 2017).

¹⁸ Dohmen, *De vriendenrepubliek*, 67-73.

by members of the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP). Opposition also extended itself to some degree to the general political left, with involvement by for example the Labor Party (PvdA), though with not nearly as single minded a determination as the CPN. This coalition's rhetoric hinged on opposition to NATO as an entity, a somewhat murkily defined notion of militarization of the region, and the person of von Kielmansegg, AFCENT's first commander (as well as several of the German generals succeeding him).

As previously mentioned *De Waarheid* warned about the dangers of the Netherlands' candidacy to host any NATO bases (initially it wasn't certain which NATO commands might be moved to the Netherlands) as early as April 1966. According to the paper German "revanchists in Bonn" were using France's withdrawal to strengthen their own position in NATO, facilitated by Dutch "NATO worshippers", and it would result in an "invasion of foreign officers". The use of this type of language makes it impossible to miss the paper's particular bias. Hosting such bases would mean the Netherlands would become a target for long range missiles and endanger the civilian population. In addition, it warned about factors such as the lack of housing and labor, and that thirty to forty square kilometers of land used for nature and agriculture would need to be repurposed to place the base (though considering the size the base turned out to be, this seems like a gross overestimation, the size of two-thirds of Manhattan).¹⁹ The referenced article is a prime, and somewhat blatant, example of media framing of an issue. *De Waarheid* presented their case solely in terms of cost and danger, without discussing the potential benefits to hosting the bases. One paragraph in the article can be considered a good example of a type of framing called equivalency framing, in which *De Waarheid* portrays an issue in a negative light playing on an aversion to loss by the reader, when it could just as well be portrayed in terms of gains based on the same facts (as it most certainly was by most other newspapers). Both portrayals are equivalent to each other, but the different terms in which they are framed are intended to invoke different feelings.²⁰ *De Waarheid* claimed the NATO bases would pull thousands of desperately needed workers out of the labor market to be used on the bases, while almost every other paper talked in terms of new jobs gained. Where *De Waarheid* only published the downsides, the *Friese Koerier*

¹⁹ "geheimzinnigheid rond verhuizing NAVO-centrum", *De Waarheid*, April 9, 1966.

²⁰ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing theory." *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 10 (2007): 103-126.

took an opposite route, noting a set of four arguments in favor of offering to host AFCENT, but none in opposition.²¹ These modes of framing are representative of the ways in which the different newspapers demonstrated their respective biases, and articles in which such framing is particularly prominent should be treated with a layer of additional skepticism, because they are trying to advance an agenda. *De Waarheid* in particular, because of its status as a prominent opposition newspaper in close contact with the priorities of the CPN. However such framing was used to some extent by all sides.

Algemeen Handelsblad was one of the first to bring up German general Graf Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg, who was to be in command of AFCENT. When he was assigned to succeed the French NATO-general Crépin (who would be pulled out of the NATO command structure July first) the paper published a profile on Kielmansegg where they described him as a "modern German general". Kielmansegg was a general staff officer during World War II, and he had apparently made statements at the start of the war supporting national-socialism. However, *Algemeen Handelsblad* makes an effort to recount how Kielmansegg was suspected of participating in colonel Stauffenberg's 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler and had been arrested by the Gestapo, presenting them as a set of mitigating factors.²² Kielmansegg's appointment quite rapidly became a major source of controversy and a talking point for opponents. Within days of his appointment *Vrij Nederland*, a prominent left-leaning magazine, quoted damning anti-Semitic passages from the book *Panzer zwischen Warschau und Atlantik* which the general had written in 1941.²³ *Algemeen Handelsblad* soon made a slight adjustment, referring to Kielmansegg as a man with "a dubious military past", and *De Tijd* published a political cartoon emphasizing the book and his Nazi past. *De Waarheid* was fiercely critical in ways large and small: they went so far as to republish a letter submitted to *Het Parool* which criticized *Het Parool's* positive take on Kielmansegg.²⁴ The escalating controversy led to a rapid back and forth. German politicians were forced to make statements, while in late August the PvdA made official objections to minister of foreign affairs Luns to Kielmansegg coming to the Netherlands, though remaining in favor of hosting

²¹ "NAVO-vestiging dreigt", *Friese Koerier*, June 29, 1966.

²² "Graf von Kielmansegg, modern generaal van 60", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, June 29, 1966.

²³ "Kielmansegg", *De Waarheid*, July 11, 1966.

²⁴ "Het Parool en von Kielmansegg", *De Waarheid*, September 7, 1966; "Z.-Limburg", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, August 3, 1966; "NAVO zoekt haar Waterloo", *De Tijd*, August 3, 1966.

AFCENT.²⁵ In turn the west-German *Der Spiegel* criticized the PvdA and speculated as to their political motives, while the Limburg chairmen of the KVP simply called it a political stunt.²⁶ In September the NATO-members collectively requested a guarantee from the Netherlands that they wouldn't take actions against Kielmansegg once he got to his post, or try to force him into retirement beforehand.²⁷ A turning point in the debate appears to be a VPRO tv documentary by Dick Verkijk about 'the true von Kielmansegg', which painted a positive picture of the general and interviewed him about his resistance to the Nazis; the PvdA began to waver on their objections, relegating the blame to incomplete information received from Bonn and minister Luns. In an editorial opinion piece *Limburgs Dagblad* excoriated the PvdA over their weak excuse and that it was disgraceful they hadn't changed their stance yet after the documentary had cleared the general's slandered name.²⁸ The PvdA retracting its opposition was of great significance for the final decision to accept the general's appointment, as they were a part of the governing coalition, while the CPN and PSP were not, and the PvdA objection began to dissipate halfway into October. The communists dismissively called Verkijk's defense "fairytales" and remained committed to seeking Kielmansegg's replacement, supporting an investigative student committee which was looking into new charges of war crimes in Poland and which spoke with witnesses and the general himself. However, this pursuit never seems to have really gone anywhere in the end, as the general's retirement age came up anyway, so the general retired in peace in 1968 without the process resulting in any new conclusions or accusations.²⁹

Despite the vigor with which this debate was waged on the political stage, interviews suggest it mattered exceedingly little to the ordinary citizens living in Brunssum, although some allowance should be made for the fact that in 1966 all the interviewees were children, or adolescents at most. On one occasion an interviewee, a Dutch former defense employee, referenced that people in Brunssum did have certain mixed feelings over the impending

²⁵ "In Nederland geen plaats voor Kielmansegg", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, August 21, 1966.

²⁶ "Drs. H. Veringa: 'PvdA-kritiek op von Kielmansegg is stuntwerk'", *Het Vrije Volk: Democratisch-Socialistisch Dagblad*, September 2, 1966; "Der Spiegel kritiseert brief van PvdA: Kielmansegg moet dienst doen als stemtrekker", *Het Vrije Volk*, September 13, 1966.

²⁷ "NAVO eist garanties van Nederlandse regering", *Leeuwarder courant*, September 22, 1966.

²⁸ "Von Kielmansegg was nooit nazi of anti-semiet", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 5, 1966; "Von Kielmansegg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 5, 1966; "PvdA aarzelt over von Kielmansegg", *Friese Koerier*, October 5, 1966.

²⁹ "Vele honderden protesten tegen von Kielmansegg", *De Waarheid*, April 25, 1967.

arrival of German officers because of the legacy of the war, but no one at the time seems to have been consumed by their feelings about Kielmansegg, and hardly any of the interviewees expressed more than peripheral recognition at the mention of the general's name.³⁰ Locally the debate centered around different issues instead. According to the aforementioned defense employee people were more worried about having Germans (but not Kielmansegg specifically) in charge of nuclear weapons and they spoke about this fear openly (despite the fact it was always stringently denied there were any nuclear weapons stored at AFCENT), but most of all there was interest in the potential for job creation. Based on this and other data we can infer the ways in which the different talking points appealed to different constituencies: the Kielmansegg controversy played out on the national (and international stage), and made for a useful talking point for various political parties. But as they say 'all politics is local' and while there was national attention for the economic situation in Limburg the closer the stage moved to the municipal level the more the attention was directed towards issues like jobs, housing and safety. All of the statements made by Brunssum mayor J.W. Quint or council members that were printed in the newspapers addressed these particular concerns, and Quint never did more than diplomatically dodge answering the issue of Kielmansegg a single time.³¹ The widespread anti-German sentiments in the public sphere at this time could be the result of another high-profile controversy relating to Nazis, which took place over the course of 1966. Willy Lages, a former Nazi official who was in charge of deporting seventy thousand Jews from the Netherlands during World War II (one of four Nazi war criminals imprisoned for life in Breda) was to be released because of terminal illness, sparking significant protests. Bringing this wartime history back to the fore of the public consciousness may have helped to stoke further anti-German sentiment, bleeding over into the debate regarding Kielmansegg.³²

AFCENT's move took place at the height of the Cold War, a few years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and so it was quite natural for nuclear weapons to be part of the conversation.

³⁰ Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017.

³¹ "Fons Hermans: 'het uur van het grote verraad'", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, September 9, 1966.

³² van der Heiden, Peter, and Alexander van Kessel, *Rondom de Nacht van Schmelzer. De kabinetten-Marijnen,-Cals en-Zijlstra 1963-1967* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 248-261. The four were also known as 'the four of Breda', subsequently 'the three of Breda' after Lages was released, and eventually 'the two of Breda' after one of them died in 1979. The remaining two were released in 1989 and died that same year.

The communists opposed having nuclear missiles in the Netherlands, least of all under the control of Germans, and newspapers took pains to mention early on that the headquarters was a 'nuclear free' base.³³ Of course this never prevented the existence of the urban rumor that there are nuclear weapons stored within the mine shaft, and based on how for several years people protested Germans having their hands on nuclear weapons it evidently persisted. The debate was mostly about being on the receiving end of nuclear missiles, and here the picture of people's responses gets muddled, though not entirely devoid of points of consensus. All of the people I interviewed who lived in Brunssum at the time were very young when AFCENT came to Brunssum, and most expressed that the concept of being the potential target of a nuclear strike was a scary thought to them as a child. The subject wasn't taboo but was openly discussed by their parents, at the dinner table as it were, and their parents were often fearful of the possibility, specifically in light of the Cuban Missile Crisis just a couple years before which had exposed the very present possibility of a new war breaking out. But the interviewees weren't universally scared of it, or only just a little; they often quickly grew out of that fear, and one woman articulated that she'd rationalized it away as highly unlikely because the principle of Mutually Assured Destruction. Another woman I spoke with shortly told me she'd in fact felt safer because of the presence of the base - but while this was her reply within the confines of a conversation about the initial arrival of AFCENT she may have been referring to how she's felt about the base's presence over its fifty-year existence, for example as a crime deterrent.³⁴ Mayor Quint and general Kielmansegg assured on separate occasions that the headquarters was highly mobile so wouldn't be in Brunssum anymore if a war were to break out, so there was little to worry about.³⁵ What was noticeable is how several interviewees spoke in remarkably similar terms about if a nuclear strike were to happen they'd rather just be hit in the initial blast than be a little further away and die to radiation poisoning, describing it as a 'sober' line of thought. Better to die instantly - even if that's bad too - than suffer lengthily and die a little later.³⁶

³³ "NAVO overweegt hoofdkwartier in Brunssum", *Leeuwarder Courant*, August 2, 1966.

³⁴ These were incidental conversations with locals at a bus stop, while on the way to the final interview on June 15, 2017.

³⁵ "Fons Hermans: 'het uur van het grote verraad'", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, September 9, 1966.

³⁶ Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017; Gommans, Peter, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 15, 2017.

2.3 Protests

In this early stage protests were somewhat of a regular occurrence, most notably drawing participation from communists, pacifists and Provos. These protests were particularly prevalent in the first few years, until about 1970 (this coincides with the general surge of protest movements in the sixties, such as the resistance to the Vietnam War). After that they tended to be smaller and occur significantly further apart. It is hard to gage what kind of impact these protests may have had on official policy, especially considering AFCENT was moved to Brunssum without any real delay, but each of these protests was covered quite widely by the papers. In each case different papers often reported slightly different facts and wrote articles of considerably different length, meaning the protests were high-profile enough for these papers to have sent out their own reporters or contacted various sources rather than writing nearly identical articles, as they did in a great many cases of the analyzed coverage (by copying the same government statement or press release, most likely).

The first recorded protest against the coming of AFCENT happened quite quickly after it became clear the base would be coming to Limburg. In September 1966 Fons Hermans, a writer and member of the PSP, denounced the decision to invite NATO as ‘the historic hour of betrayal’ and declared he would begin organizing students for a protest march.³⁷ The license was quickly approved, and a few hundred protesters marched in Maastricht on September the 26th, watched by large crowds. Some of the responses to the protest in the papers showed considerable bias in their framing of the event. *Algemeen Handelsblad* wrote a short blurb about the march, which it started by noting that while Hermans said six hundred people participated experts estimated it to be about three hundred and fifty.³⁸ While that would still be quite a large group the phrasing (particularly the use of the word “merely”) is a framing tool intended to diminish the scope of the march to the reader, making it seem far less impressive than if the disparity between the estimates had not been mentioned. *Algemeen Handelsblad* was positively restrained compared to *Limburgs Dagblad*, which seemingly came within inches of openly mocking the march:

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ “Limburg PSP demonstreerde tegen komst NATO”, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, September 26, 1966.

Several hundred teens and tweens, largely hailing from the north-west of our country, made a brisk walk through the center of Maastricht between 4 and 5 o'clock past Saturday-afternoon. The demonstration clearly missed a spontaneous character. Particularly because the youths carried about twenty banners with them, which were evidently crafted by the same hand and originated from the same container. While forming up these had been pushed into their hands and it occasionally seemed like many of them didn't grasp the deeper meaning of their demonstrating.³⁹

Furthermore *Limburgs Dagblad* described the onlookers' reaction as bemused indifference, and made a comparison to the carnival processions with which the inhabitants of Maastricht were well acquainted. From the condescending language it is obvious the journalist who wrote the piece had a low regard for the protest.

Another protest took place on the 24th of October, this time in Heerlen south of Brunssum where about five hundred protesters marched against Kielmansegg, NATO and nuclear weapons, and held a meeting afterwards where a number of speeches were given. *Limburgs Dagblad* again struck a bit of a condescending tone, such as denigrating the participants as 'peace apostles', pointing out how they used a slogan that hadn't been permitted ('make love not war'), and recounting a joke by one of the speakers - local swimming pools would no longer be accessible because they'd be occupied by the NATO officers' wives - that even this crowd did not appreciate. During the march a seventeen-year-old from Heerlen threw a firecracker or smoke bomb at the protesters and was arrested. Just like with the prior protest *Limburgs Dagblad* felt the need to point out that 80-90% of the protesters came from other parts of the Netherlands, perhaps intending to put distance between them and Limburg and implicitly painting them as outside agitators. The "shabby Limburg cohort" consisted of the organizers, and Provos from Maastricht. In

³⁹ "Anti-NAVO betoging in Maastricht verliep orderlijk", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 26, 1966; Despite making a determined effort in locating it there either does not appear to be an article by *De Waarheid* on the protest, or a few issues aren't included in the archive.



Hermans' September protest in Maastricht and the on looking crowds.⁴⁰

the coverage of both these cases the paper seemed to be sending the message that the protests did not represent the sentiments of Limburg. The next week the paper also published a letter it had received from a reader who attempted to refute arguments made by the speakers at the protest.⁴¹

Probably the most newsworthy and provocative of these initial incidents were the events of January 1967. On the sixteenth a few dozen Provos demonstrated in front of the Tapijnkazerne in Maastricht, a barracks where some AFCENT personnel would be housed, and antagonized the Marechaussee guarding the building, resulting in a few arrests. *Limburgs Dagblad* in particular went into significant detail about the Provos' disrespectful behavior such as swatting the hat of one of the Marechaussee into the mud and lighting firebombs at the gate of the barracks, and used the dramatic headline "Provos laid siege to barracks" along

⁴⁰ "Anti-NAVO betoging in Maastricht verliep orderlijk", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 26, 1966.

⁴¹ "Protestmars tegen komst van AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 24, 1966; "Mars anti-Kielmansegg door Heerlen", *Algemeen Dagblad*, October 24, 1966; "Atoombom", *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 2, 1966.

with half a dozen photographs of the event.⁴² The next day an incident took place which captured the attention of newspapers up and down the Netherlands. General Kielmansegg and several other high-ranking officers visited the barracks, where they held a press conference. Drs Hans Mol, editor of a Provo magazine, managed to infiltrate the event with a fake press card and saw the opportunity to ask Kielmansegg whether he had seen any of the pamphlets that had been put up all over Maastricht personally addressing him. When the general replied he hadn't, Drs Mol pulled a number of the pamphlets from his bag and handed them out to the generals and journalists. The pamphlet, headlined 'warning' in big bold letters, attacked Kielmansegg over war crimes and his Nazi past. Provo was known for



Kielmansegg reading Mol's pamphlet, the bolded headline 'warning' clearly legible through the back.⁴³

these kinds of antics; just a few months earlier a Provo got close enough to Queen Juliana to shake her hand. Caught off guard the general politely put the pamphlet aside, declined to answer, and the press conference was abruptly cut short. The rest of the day was marked by demonstrations and disturbances across the route of the NATO officials' visit to the governor's mansion, and seven students of the Amsterdam fraternity 'Perikles' were

⁴² "Provo's belegerden kazerne", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 16, 1967; "Komst AFCENT leidde tot demonstraties", *Algemeen Dagblad*, January 16, 1967.

⁴³ "Provo-"Warning" voor Graf von Kielmansegg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 18, 1967.

arrested.⁴⁴ That night activists also secretly painted peace symbols and swastikas all over the German consulate in Maastricht, though the police managed to quickly apprehend them in a scene reminiscent of a cartoon by following the literal trail of paint leading to their apartment, where they found pots filled with paint and people with paint still covering their clothes.⁴⁵

On the 25th of March 1967 eight protestors stood outside the base with signs for a few days, protesting in shifts - apparently the first protest ever held in Brunssum - and in May of 1967 the largest of all the protest marches took place, organized by the ANJV (a youth league with ties to the communists).⁴⁶ About a thousand young people began marching from the north of the country and made their way down to Brunssum over the span of three days, visiting military installations along the way. They protested against the appointment of Kielmansegg and the prospect of nuclear weapons in German hands, and then ended the march in an orderly fashion. As always *Limburgs Dagblad* did not miss the opportunity to add that participation by Limburgers was minimal.⁴⁷ After this event followed nearly a year of relative inactivity, as AFCENT began to integrate into the local communities and national headlines began to die down. The ANJV continued organizing such marches every year during Pentecost, with about six hundred participants in 1968 and 1969, but between each of these marches there was essentially no activity, apart from a burst in April 1968, outlined below. The lack of news related to AFCENT likely was determinative of the lack of protest activities, as so many protestors came from outside the region.

Attention was seemingly revived when Kielmansegg retired and his replacement general Bennecke (also German) arrived in April of 1968. A dozen Amsterdam students were arrested in front of the base as they were protesting without a license.⁴⁸ The major protest which occurred later in April was undoubtedly the most violent one of all. Three Hundred protesters (yet again hailing almost exclusively from the north-west, and including students from Berlin) made their way to Brunssum, where mayor Quint decided to terminate the protesters' license because of disorderly conduct when the protesters attempted to force

⁴⁴ "Provo-"Warning" voor Graf von Kielmansegg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 18, 1967.

⁴⁵ "Kielsmansegg en Lemnitzer zagen Limburg", *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, January 18, 1967.

⁴⁶ "protestwacht voor AFCENT-hoofdkwartier", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 25, 1967.

⁴⁷ "Massaal jongerenprotest tegen von Kielmansegg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 16, 1967.

⁴⁸ "Bennecke op post" *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 2, 1968.

their way through the gates of the bases. The group moved towards Maastricht, and without permission spent the night in a small run-down castle which they draped in Vietcong and protest banners. The next day they weren't granted a license in Maastricht either but began demonstrating anyway, and got into clashes with the police. *Limburgs Dagblad* admitted the police response to be relatively harsh, but the locals apparently did not take too kindly to the protesters as they aided the police in catching fleeing protesters. Some of the language used by the paper was rather gratuitous, describing the protesters as a 'horde' which had armed itself with wood from the terrain of a local company to use as clubs. Where *Limburgs Dagblad* recounted the protesters' misdeeds *De Waarheid* instead focused primarily on the police's violent response with almost no attention spent on the actions of the students, demonstrating the power of framing to present a qualitatively different story out of the same set of facts.⁴⁹

In each of these cases the newspaper coverage stuck to the roles we've established for the respective papers. *De Waarheid* generally played up the amount of opposition to AFCENT, claiming 'widespread resistance all across Limburg'. In truth this is quite likely exaggerated, and it directly contradicts with reporting by various other sources. Similarly the perceptible bias of the articles of *Limburgs Dagblad* means there is reason to doubt their veracity to some extent as well, but their claims about scant Limburg participation are often backed up by several other newspapers (including even *De Waarheid*), and because it's a regional newspaper it was in many ways 'closer to the action'. According to municipal secretary Houben and deputy mayor Borger in an interview with *De Tijd* the response in Brunssum to AFCENT had been very sober.⁵⁰ Most of the noteworthy protests focused on Maastricht rather than in Brunssum, and in each case a significant proportion of the protesters came from other parts of the country - particularly Holland, where the CPN had a much greater electoral footprint than in Limburg. At the 16th of April 1968 protest a few hundred Belgians were supposed to be bussed to Maastricht, but they were stopped at the border. There isn't even any record of protests originating in Brunssum, while Maastricht was the center of Provo activities by a relatively small group, such as the 'Luuksbeweging' (which

⁴⁹ "Politie veegt Vrijthof schoon", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 16, 1968; "Gewelddadig optreden van politie", *De Waarheid*, April 16, 1968.

⁵⁰ "Nuchter Brunssum wacht op details NAVO-verhuizing", *De Tijd*, September 28, 1966.

included drs Mol) who published the Provo magazine *Ontbijt op Bed*. As such these protests cannot really be considered to reflect the widespread existence of similar sentiments among the Limburg population, least of all in Brunssum. This could possibly be the result of the lingering catholic pillarization which emphasized a sense of deference to the church and authorities, meaning they did not look favorably on criticism and provocations against them, as evidenced by the public helping to catch protesters in Maastricht, and common descriptions of the protesters as troublemakers. That's not to say push-back was entirely absent: when he was young one of the interviewees was part of a local music society, which had a socialist affiliation (their instruments were red) and participated in some protest activities.⁵¹ However, all the aforementioned major anti-NATO protests occurred within the frame the involved parties' national priorities, rather than emerging from the prevailing mood of the province. In a 1986 VPRO documentary former Provo-members talk about how they did not really become active around the issue until Kielmansegg came to visit. They saw an opportunity and seized it, but it does not appear to be indicative of a deep involvement in local politics.⁵² By comparison a Heerlen demonstration by the unemployed against government policy in early 1967 drew about fifteen hundred participants, dwarfing most of the anti-NATO protests. Many anti-NATO protests also took place in other parts of the country (such as a 1966 march from Groningen to Drenthe) but it is telling how the ones in Limburg almost always originated from the outside, and focused on issues far broader than the localized impact of the base.⁵³

2.4 Local responses: economy and housing

The Dutch commonly ascribe a sense of entrepreneurship to their national sense of identity, and AFCENT certainly elicited a lot of entrepreneurial stirrings. The coming of AFCENT may have been politicized on the national stage, but locally it was primarily debated in terms of costs and benefits. The region was in the process of economic restructuring due to the closing

⁵¹ Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017.

⁵² Omroepvereniging VPRO, "De jaren zestig, 2: Provo Maastricht - het spoor terug - VPRO." VPRO.nl. https://www.vpro.nl/speel~POMS_VPRO_377652~de-jaren-zestig-2-provo-maastricht-het-spoor-terug~.html (accessed July 3, 2017).

⁵³ "getolereerde demonstratiekreten", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 20th, 1967; "jongerengroep houdt op 26 november protestmars", *Nieuwsblad van het noorden*, November 11, 1966.

of the coal mines, and the base would bring in hundreds of jobs to replace some of those that had been lost. Additionally, the arrival of thousands of well-paid NATO-employees and their families was perceived as an influx of consumers for the local economy.

During the first half of the twentieth century south-Limburg was dominated by coal mining - particularly the area around Brunssum, Geleen and Heerlen. Brunssum itself was regularly referred to as 'the pearl of the mining region'. About two-thirds of these mines were privately owned, and the remaining third were owned by the state (Dutch State Mines – DSM). Mining was a fairly well-paid profession, so the coal mines caused a massive increase in population through migration and immigration (for example Heerlen's population increased over six fold in a very short time) and the region was home to tens of thousands of miners.⁵⁴ The parents of two of the interviewees had worked in the mines as well. In some ways the mines were like a social institution and defined the identity of these communities. However, in the sixties coal began to become unprofitable, particularly after gas was found in Groningen province, and so Finance Minister Joop den Uyl announced in December of 1965 that the mines would be closed over the following ten years, mere months before de Gaulle ordered the eviction of NATO from French soil. Part of the process of closing the mines was to bring in companies, industry and government branches to provide substitute employment, and AFCENT would potentially move there as well.⁵⁵

NATO officials visited Brunssum for the first time in August of 1966, and it became known that the buildings of state mine Hendrik were being considered as a possible location for the base.⁵⁶ For about two months it was in doubt whether the base would go to Brunssum or to Aachen in Germany, but Brunssum won out in late September due to its proximity to SHAPE (in Belgium) and in order to divvy up NATO bases more equitably among the NATO-members. As an indication of the importance given to this base Limburg governor Charles van Rooy was personally involved with the process - escorting the visiting NATO officials to try and persuade them to settle in Brunssum - while in Aachen German government officials remained hands-off because they were apparently too occupied with other matters. Though

⁵⁴ J. Kasper et al., "Na de mijnsluiting, herstructurering en reconversie in internationaal perspectief." (2013) 11-12, 19-21.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ "Voor Brunssum veel interesse bij NAVO", *Leeuwarder Courant*, August 3, 1966.

news of the decision reached the front page of *Limburgs Dagblad* it only garnered a small article in the corner. Most of the page was taken up by an article about the state of the economy, and finance Minister den Uyl's reassurances there was no need for pessimism.⁵⁷ AFCENT's move took place so quickly after the announcement of the closing of the mines, with the region undergoing 'restructuring' to offset the loss of mining jobs, that this may very well have played into strengthening the association of the base with its economic potential. During these years the newspapers were full of articles about the state of industry in Limburg and discussions of government plans to offset the job loss. The association that the base functioned as replacement may possibly have been strengthened further because the base moved into one of the actual mining facilities, and at the exact moment that it ceased operation. In the late sixties the attention of the region was firmly



Miners on the left, and the visiting NATO officials on the right - the story of AFCENT distilled in one photo.⁵⁸ placed on the onset of large scale unemployment, meaning AFCENT entered people's field of vision as a solution to an ongoing problem. Had the move taken place at a different point in time when the local economy was in less jeopardy the emphasis might have been placed on other topics instead, such as the consequences on crime, security and the pressure it would put on public utilities.

⁵⁷ "Parijs besluit: AFCENT naar Zuid-Limburg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 27, 1966.

⁵⁸ "NAVO-officieren bezochten Hendrik-gebouwencomplex", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 1, 1966.

Because of the concern due to the mine closures there was quite a palpable excitement in the papers as to the employment AFCENT would bring, and even *De Waarheid* found it difficult to sustain a convincing coherent argument against the base on economic grounds. AFCENT was often mentioned as a silver lining within the frame of the ongoing restructuring of the mining region, as it was expected to create several hundred jobs locally. The Limburg branch of the KVP explicitly articulated that if they wanted the jobs from AFCENT, which they were really keen on, they would have to reconcile themselves with Kielmansegg as its commander.⁵⁹ In advance of the decision mayor Quint had expressed he'd welcome the base because of the jobs it would bring in, however, after a few months he did occasionally let slip that although he was happy with the base he'd have preferred to have housed heavy industry on the site instead. That would have suited the character of the site (and recently laid off workers) better and produced more jobs. *De Waarheid* occasionally proceeded with a line of attack on a similar basis, and argued that either the anticipated economic injection would fail to materialize or that the presence of the base would actually be to the detriment of local businesses. They preferred industry to military, and they mocked that there wouldn't be any jobs apart from maybe the need for someone to maintain a NATO-officer's garden. Of course not all their arguments were facetious: they rightly pointed out that a radiator company had been interested in one of the mining facilities, but it had been reserved for NATO instead. There also was to be a shop on the base where AFCENT personnel could buy products more cheaply and tax free (not just groceries, but a wide range of articles), which instilled the worry in some local small business owners that a black market would emerge and hurt their bottom line. *Het Vrije Volk*, a socialist-leaning newspaper, highlighted a café owner who told the regional chamber of commerce that AFCENT would trigger 'illegal cafés'. However, according to *De Tijd* the prices in the AFCENT shop were comparable to Dutch prices, and aside from that NATO personnel would be spread out across Limburg, so the AFCENT shop wouldn't dominate their purchasing habits anyway.⁶⁰ Yet *De Waarheid's* stance was supported in a handful of cases by business owners (like the café owner) voicing these concerns to the municipal government, and multiple municipal council members took up

⁵⁹ "Sterke antipathie tegen komst von Kielmansegg", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, September 1, 1966.

⁶⁰ "Limburgs bezoek in Fontainebleau", *De Tijd*, November 18, 1966.

these matters during a council meeting as well, so these anxieties indeed existed within the broader community.⁶¹ For the most part the communists (and pacifists) oriented their arguments in terms of the aforementioned anti-NATO sentiment and against von Kielmansegg, against whom they continued to agitate right up until he retired. What's worth mentioning is that while *De Waarheid* had been joined to some extent by other left-leaning publications in opposing NATO and Kielmansegg, their attempt to oppose the base on economic grounds was a relatively solitary endeavor, except for two or three articles by *Het Vrije Volk*.

AFCENT in Fontainebleau consisted of about four thousand personnel, which would be reduced to three thousand when it moved to Limburg. All the expected numbers tended to change between newspapers, and between the official estimates given by the NATO-spokesman colonel G.K. Moon, sometimes quite drastically: the most consistent number mentioned was that three thousand NATO personnel would be working on the base, and there was reference to an increase to Brunssum's population of around ten thousand people with the 'dependents' (families) included. The personnel would consist of twenty five percent Americans, Englishmen and Germans each, with the remaining quarter being made up of Canadians, Dutchmen, Belgians and Luxembourgers.⁶² Estimates as to how many new jobs would be created locally varied between three hundred, five hundred and a thousand. Many of these were mundane service jobs such as chauffeurs, tailors, shopkeepers, hairdressers, cooks and cantina personnel, because the base would have a lot of facilities for internal use.⁶³ There were significant hopes the raw purchasing power of the personnel would boost the local economy and these estimates were based on numbers from Fontainebleau, ranging from 5.7 million guilders monthly (most of which would be spent at the base's own facilities), to between 30 million and 50 million a year.⁶⁴ At this time there is a great deal of attention for Fontainebleau, and to examine how AFCENT had been integrated into the local economy there. A delegation of small business owners from Limburg went down to Fontainebleau to

⁶¹ "kritiek op AFCENT-komst", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 12, 1966.

⁶² Postma, Ivo, "Fontainebleau zoekt rijke burgers, Brunssum krijgt een zakengolf", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 15, 1966.

⁶³ "Bij Afcent-Limburg werk voor duizend man", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 14, 1966.

⁶⁴ "N.A.V.O. levert Zuid-Limburg 50 miljoen extra koopkracht", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 21, 1966; "Fontainebleau ziet AFCENT met leedwezen vertrekken", *De Tijd*, September 27, 1966; "Afcen: jaarlijks 30 miljoen in het Zuid-Limburgse laatje", *Leeuwarder Courant*, October 13, 1966.

do research into the structure of the local market, products and purchasing habits and issue a report. They were even accompanied by Limburg governor van Rooy, as an indication of how seriously this was being taken, and this was followed up by a flurry of reporting with a strong entrepreneurial bent extolling the economic opportunities the base presented. There was also an discernible undercurrent of pity towards the inhabitants of Fontainebleau, because the base represented a huge chunk of their economy as it involved one in five of their population, was estimated at 11% of their income, and up to 20-40% of municipal revenue. *Limburgs Dagblad* described Fontainebleau mayor Serámy turning sad and downcast while sighing “I’m in favor of NATO”, an image that makes one feel a profound sympathy for the man, whose town was about to head into economic deprivation.⁶⁵

Limburg meanwhile had to worry over how to handle housing so many extra people. Take note of the subtle framing in how *Het Vrije Volk* characterized the issue in an article title, projecting the sense of a forcible demand: “AFCENT means: build 1500 new houses”.⁶⁶ Luckily for Limburg the housing shortage wasn’t as much of an issue there in comparison to elsewhere in the Netherlands (possibly due to people moving away after the mines began to close). Nevertheless, from late 1966 onwards the papers were absolutely smothered with stories about municipal schemes to build hundreds of new houses and newly arrived AFCENT personnel moving into various apartment buildings or boarding houses, and there were scores of advertisements from NATO personnel looking to rent a home. Though it is hard to determine exactly how much traction the incident got, there seems to have been a mild outcry at the news that AFCENT was being offered public housing for low rents. A member of parliament wrote the minister of housing to ask whether it was true and whether they’d be subsidized too, and *De Waarheid* and *Het Vrije Volk* managed to make quite a lot of hay out of it, damning that Brunssum was reserving housing for NATO personnel instead of its own citizens and that AFCENT was getting cheap housing at taxpayers’ expense.⁶⁷ Additionally there was considerable concern over the impact the base might have on prices in the regular

⁶⁵ “Limburgs bezoek in Fontainebleau”, *De Tijd*, November 18, 1966; “Brunssum kan volledig aan wensen AFCENT-kopers voldoen”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 24, 1966; Postma, Ivo “Fontainebleau zoekt rijke burgers, Brunssum krijgt een zakengolf”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 15, 1966.

⁶⁶ “AFCENT betekent voor Limburg: 1500 woningen leveren”, *Het Vrije Volk*, October 14, 1966.

⁶⁷ “AFCENT krijgt woning-wet woningen”, *Het Vrije Volk*, January 13, 1967; “Vragen over woningen voor afcent-personeel”, *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad*, January 10, 1967; “woningnood voor eigen bevolking”, *De Waarheid*, November 25, 1966.

housing market, as the influx of thousands of well-off NATO employees would drive up housing prices and squeeze an already thin housing supply. Apparently some landlords refrained from renting out homes in anticipation of the impending arrival of NATO. Mayor Quint specifically felt the need to address the worries over housing prices in remarks during a council session: according to him the municipal government and the advisory committee on rent possessed adequate means to curb price inflation.⁶⁸ People widely attempted to seize the opportunity the base presented. AFCENT felt the need to state publicly that they were being overwhelmed by offers by private persons and real-estate agents, but that they wouldn't be buying any houses (personnel would on average only stay in Brunssum for three years, so buying a home would make little sense) - and that they certainly would not be renting at some of the extortion rates being offered (in some cases rates of up to seven hundred guilders a month, nearly three times what rent would reasonably be).⁶⁹

These kinds of price increases were not just a concern in the housing market. A colonel made a stern warning during a press conference for retailers not to hike their prices, or AFCENT personnel would start doing their shopping out of town.⁷⁰ While thinking back to this period one of the interviewees made a causal interpretation in the opening of the shop for AFCENT personnel, attributing the opening of the shop as being prompted by price gouging by locals.⁷¹ In truth the shop had always been intended to be moved there from Fontainebleau and it is discussed a number of times in the papers before AFCENT's move was even confirmed, so people already knew about the shop's existence. However, this mental swap of the sequencing in the interviewee's memory does tell us that price gouging was part of the public discourse at the time, and at the very least *perceived* as a problem - enough so to supposedly trigger the opening of a special shop to combat it. On the whole interviewees tended to have very positive associations with these early days, and - often unprompted - told examples of events and incidents that they looked back on with some fondness. One man was an adolescent at the time and worked as a mechanic. He did maintenance on the car of one of the Americans living nearby (despite the language barrier the interactions were pleasant)

⁶⁸ "Brunssum bouwt versneld aan AFCENT-toekomst", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 12, 1966.

⁶⁹ "AFCENT koopt geen woningen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 14, 1967.

⁷⁰ "Hub Palmen chef personeel van burgers bij AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 25, 1967.

⁷¹ Short conversation with Jean Vankan, a former defense employee, during the meeting on June 14, 2017.

and initially the American kept paying him in Dollars.⁷² The perception that generally came across from the interviews was that when AFCENT arrived it was exciting if not a little bit awe inspiring (particularly for children to see soldiers and military vehicles), and though the personnel wasn't exactly throwing money into the street they were well-off and never particularly stingy, so locals salivated at the potential profits to be made through inflated prices for housing and shopping.

2.5 Conclusion

The Netherlands reacted to the coming of AFCENT in a number of distinct ways on a few select topics, and there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the overview of the responses. Firstly, there were very distinct sides within the debate: Communists and pacifists on the far left were heavily opposed to NATO coming to Limburg, while almost every other party was seemingly more supportive of NATO the further to the right they were on the political spectrum. Secondly, there was a notable split between the national debate and the local debate. National attention revolved around the ongoing controversies concerning general von Kielmansegg, while local politics focused on matters such as the economic impact. This is likely because the economic dimension would impact them far more directly, and because they had some measure of control to determine how to handle the expected associated problems, like housing shortages and prices. Brunssum was seemingly left out of the decision-making process altogether as to whether AFCENT would come to Brunssum, at least according to public statements by mayor Quint, so all that was left to them was to decide how to prepare for its coming.⁷³ Not only that, but the debate on AFCENT played out within the context of the closing of the mines in Limburg and the ongoing economic restructuring, and that frame of reference was expanded to subsume AFCENT's coming. Had there been no strong economic anxiety at that time AFCENT might have been debated radically differently. This is not to say that the people locally did not look at issues beyond the economic incentives, but those issues were of a less specific nature than the personal past of the commander that was being discussed in politics: instead people were worried about nuclear weapons, in

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ "Brunssum weet (nog) van niets", *De Telegraaf*, September 28, 1966.

resonance with the general existing fear of nuclear war which perpetually hung over daily life during the Cold War, and there was a sense of displeasure over the German involvement in general (and especially if they potentially had access to nuclear weapons). At roughly the same time Kielmansegg was being debated, passions were also being aroused by other German controversies, like the decision to release from prison Willy Lages, further stoking anti-German sentiments.

Chapter 3

Physical impact

What were the physical and economic consequences of AFCENT for the region? The move to Brunssum had a lot of material repercussions and required a lot of investment in order to accommodate the functioning of the base and to handle the added inflow of people. AFCENT's physical impact was profound, mostly irrespective of the cultural idiosyncrasies of the various nationalities (which are handled in chapter four). With 'physical' we roughly distinguish the two categories of structural accommodation and economic effects. Structural accommodation refers to topics such as building facilities for AFCENT, housing the personnel, and adjusting roads, while the economic effects category surveys the impact of the base on the local economy, based on newspaper sources and a number of files from local municipal archives. Both categories include various subjects adjacent to them, such as the effects on traffic, the housing market and issues relating to municipal budgets. It is these physical aspects that ultimately made up the material balance sheet of whether AFCENT has had a positive contribution on the local community, as their relative discursive importance can be derived from which discussion topics were originally locally most prominent, as noted in the previous section. We know these topics mattered considerably as they formed the core of several of the main narratives about AFCENT that withstood several decades. In the public sphere the value of AFCENT was largely to be determined by its economic potential for the former mining region, and in this regard it was alternatively found lacking or considered the life vest of the region by the different sides of the debate. Nevertheless relatively consistent sets of facts emerge from reporting and the archives, as to the physical and economic consequences of AFCENT for the region.

3.1 Structural accommodation

First and foremost among the accommodation AFCENT received were obviously the terrain and buildings of the Hendrik mine, and NATO began moving in at the same time the miners were leaving, even occupying the site concurrently for a little while, and quickly set to work adjusting and rebuilding the interior of the structures. Before the base was officially operational in March of 1967 its presence was already widely felt. In order to house all the

soldiers and facilities the base gained possession of a host of buildings in a multitude of locations. They acquired the use of a number of boarding houses, such as 'de Hanenhof' in Brunssum. Many of these had in the past been used to house miners and foreign laborers, and AFCENT used them primarily to house its unwedded service members (the married men looked for private housing). Many of the spaces transferred to AFCENT were owned or had been built by DSM, indicating the centrality the mines had had in structuring most people's daily lives. AFCENT also made use of the Tapijnkazerne (the barracks in Maastricht) and a number of recreation centers, the most noteworthy example of which is the 'casino' in the Treebeek neighborhood, which became home to an officer's club for many years and a bit of a fixture in public life. Additionally, AFCENT took over several sporting fields and a swimming pool. These acquisitions naturally disrupted the capacity of all kinds of local hobby and sporting clubs to meet by depriving them of their usual spaces, and some had to wait many months to gain an adequate replacement. The casino alone had housed over thirty different clubs.⁷⁴ There is some confused reporting with regards to the casino, as *De Telegraaf* reported in 1968 that AFCENT was returning the building to the government (after fixing ten thousand guilders worth of damage the building had suffered from vandalism and burglary) because it didn't suit their needs and they had plans to build another building from scratch. However, job advertisements for servers and bartenders for the AFCENT club pop up repeatedly in 1968-1970 and the club is repeatedly recorded using the casino in the early seventies, while according to the building's description in the monuments list it hosted the AFCENT officers' club from 1975 to 1995. The new building to be constructed that *De Telegraaf* mentioned is presumably the officer's hotel built on the Rimburgerweg in Brunssum just behind the base, officially opened by John S. Eisenhower in 1970.⁷⁵

Complaints quickly followed the annexation of so many communal spaces, from both ordinary citizens and within the municipal council. *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* declared

⁷⁴ "Limburg heeft nu al een AFCENT-kater", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, April 1, 1967.

⁷⁵ "In dank terug...", *De Telegraaf*, May 24, 1968; "John Eisenhower opende officiersmess Afcent" *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 17, 1970; "Rijksmonument 518601: Beambtencasino Treebeek."

Monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl.

<https://monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl/monuments/518601?DescriptionSearch=beambtencasino> (accessed July 22, 2017). There are numerous job advertisements over the years for servers and bartenders and the like for a whole host of clubs in many different towns. Several of these refer to a club variously in Treebeek or Brunssum, which is presumably the club in the casino.

Limburg to be suffering from an 'AFCENT-hangover' within less than three weeks of the base being officially operational; an unflattering assessment, which can be seen to be a reflection of optimistic expectations not yet being met.⁷⁶ The large number of buildings and facilities diverted for NATO use within just the first few months provides a pretty good indication of the scope of the move and of its impact on some pretty basic elements of daily life, far removed from military matters. There were prospects for a youth demonstration against the transfer of the recreation centers (though it never seems to have taken place), and sixty youngsters in Kerkrade sent a letter of protest to the municipal council against renting out an old school building to AFCENT.⁷⁷ Despite the grumblings most of the buildings and facilities were handed over, but they were returned or replaced after a relatively short time, once AFCENT finished building its own accommodations. For example, the construction of a new recreation center to replace the casino had been announced by June 1967 and it opened in December, and not long after the local tennis club 'Hendrik' would receive a brand new tennis complex double the size of the previous one, after failing to reach an agreement with AFCENT to share the old court.⁷⁸ There is no indication of animosity in the correspondence between handball club 'Limburgia', korfbal club 'Brunssum', the municipality and AFCENT, who quite easily managed to strike a temporary arrangement to share the fields for the 1968 competition season until their new sporting fields were finished, and in one of the letters the clubs' chairman explicitly signaled being understanding of AFCENT's use of the sporting fields.⁷⁹ In total the tab for moving AFCENT from Fontainebleau to Brunssum came down to about 183 million guilders, of which six million was to be paid by the Netherlands as per the agreed division of costs within NATO between all the member nations, though according to some other sources and internal papers from Brunssum the government spent somewhere between forty to sixty million. This six million figure probably did not include the 'free' structures AFCENT was granted use of by the local municipalities and the DSM facilities

⁷⁶ "Limburg heeft nu al een AFCENT-kater", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, April 1, 1967.

⁷⁷ "Protestmars tegen verlies jeugthuizen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 12, 1967; "Kerkradse jongeren in protest tegen verhuur van school aan AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 9, 1967.

⁷⁸ "Gemeenschapshuis te Treebeek krijgt ruime accommodatie", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 1, 1967; "Brunssumse tennisvereniging nu spoedig uit de brand?", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 23, 1967.

⁷⁹ Correspondentie mbt problemen rond de overdracht van de OVS sportvelden van de staatsmijnen aan de Venweg, alhier aan Afcent, 'diverse gedeponeerde archieven', inventory number 6011, T302 Gemeente Brunssum, 1938-1981, Rijckheyt, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

transferred to them by the state, or the construction of the AFCENT international school buildings, which the government financed. The move would also require Brunssum itself to invest a little over six million guilders to properly accommodate the base, such as broadening roads and expanding various municipal services. There was also mention in the press of a project planned to construct 933 new homes, five hundred of which were intended to be rented out to AFCENT, though it is unclear to what extent it was ever carried out. Archival material from 1973 appears to imply at least some of these were built, as it references two hundred and fifty units of social housing occupied by AFCENT families, which required additional expenditure in order to be built in a shortened timeframe, presumably in order to be finished on time to house some of the incoming military families. The plan required the government to be guarantor for ten years in case AFCENT were to leave to avoid saddling Brunssum and real-estate developers with the burden of hundreds of unoccupied homes. Most of the six-and-a-half million guilders in investment was used for road improvements on a couple of important thoroughfares around the base, in order to handle the extra traffic. A quarter of a million went into traffic lights alone.⁸⁰

The most immediate effect was the introduction of many additional vehicles into the area. NATO personnel, specifically the Americans, were very recognizable because of their cars, which multiple interviewees referred to with the term ‘battleships’ because of their considerable size. Because all these families were so well-off the move of the base meant there were two to three thousand additional cars on the road around Brunssum. According to one of the interviewees who was a child at the time he and his peers would look at the AFCENT cars passing by and try to note down their license plate numbers (AFCENT vehicles were recognizable because of their own unique license plate code for many years), and see if they could keep track of their comings and goings.⁸¹ From this we can also infer a relative density, as AFCENT vehicles would pass by often enough to keep children busy and entertained. By housing so much military personnel in the region, almost all of whom drove

⁸⁰ “komst van Afcnt naar Brunssum kost 183 miljoen”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 18, 1969; “komst AFCENT gaat Brunssum 6 miljoen kosten”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 25, 1967; Aantekening in verband met mogelijk vertrek van Afcnt en diverse gevolgen voor de Oostelijke Mijnstreek en de gemeente Brunssum in het bijzonder, 1973, 2.07.281, inventory number 96, T302 Gemeente Brunssum, 1938-1981, Rijckheydt, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

⁸¹ Gommans, Peter, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 15, 2017.

their (large) cars to the base each day, Brunssum had to deal with an influx of vehicles which nearly doubled the flow of traffic in some areas. According to a five-yearly count done in 1971 the traffic flow in Limburg province had increased by eight percent since 1965. Car usage had been steadily growing all across the Netherlands at the time, but on the other hand in the late sixties the local population had contracted. Between 1967 and 1969 the population of the eastern mining region had decreased by 3412, and Brunssum's population in particular continued to steadily drop, shrinking during eight of the sixteen years between 1965 and 1981 (and continuing to shrink a majority of years up to the very present).⁸² As such there would normally have been little expectation of a drastic increase in traffic - with the increased usage and the decreasing population and economic activity presumably cancelling each other out to some extent - had it not been for the large influx of additional drivers, so we can ascribe a large proportion of this increase to AFCENT. The road between Heerlen and Brunssum is the most striking example, as it saw an increase in daily average from 6500 to approximately 11000 in just a handful of years, despite the mine closures.⁸³ So many extra vehicles was bound to result in accidents (especially with many drivers used to different traffic rules), and many of these made the newspapers. Between 1966 and 1971 there are reports of at least thirty-four accidents which involved AFCENT personnel, and seven of these were fatal. This is likely not even remotely close to the full total of accidents, as according to an article from July 1967 there had been 39 accidents involving AFCENT that month alone, prompting AFCENT to take action to try to increase traffic safety among its service members.

3.2 Economic effects

The attraction of hosting the base in Brunssum was essentially entirely derived from the expected economic injection it would provide, and had it failed to materialize the base would on balance have been more of a burden than a blessing for Brunssum. However, after a few years the base was considered vital to the local economic health. Whispers regularly made

⁸² CBS, "CBS Statline - Bevolkingsontwikkeling; levendgeborenen, overledenen en migratie per regio." statline.cbs.nl.

<http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37259ned&D1=22&D2=0&D3=222&D4=a&HDR=G3%2cG1&STB=G2%2cT&VW=G> (accessed July 8, 2017)

⁸³ "wegverkeer in Limburg met 8 pct toegenomen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 26, 1971; "inwonertal weer sterk gegroeid", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 7, 1970.

the rounds of an imminent departure, but the rumor really grew legs in 1973 and very nearly came true within the cauldron of NATO politicking. This set off a bit of a panic; the municipality and businesses lobbied the government to fight to keep AFCENT, and the head editor of *Limburgs Dagblad* called for protest in favor of AFCENT to remain. The provincial administration, regional labor market board, chamber of commerce, and even the Limburg Labor Party all let their voices be heard as to the economic importance of the base.⁸⁴ When the definitive news came AFCENT would stay the flag was flown at city hall - a far cry from the days when Quint said he'd have preferred some heavy industry.⁸⁵

During this panic the municipality made a summary of the economic effects of the base, likely to put their arguments in a row to help make their case to retain the base - sure enough many of the figures made an appearance in an interview by Quint with *De Tijd*, and they are the most comprehensive numbers we have regarding AFCENT-spending. Apart from the military personnel AFCENT employed about a thousand people: three quarters directly, and the remainder indirectly via employment at companies contracted by AFCENT (for example eighty five people at a cleaning-company).⁸⁶ This is an impressive number, but to put it into perspective and within the context of the process of regional economic restructuring the government had aided creating 12300 jobs, either through direct creation or by facilitating institutions and companies to settle in Limburg, and the government moved multiple of its own government agencies into southern Limburg (for a total of 3900 jobs).⁸⁷ Additionally, although former employees from the mines were supposed to get preferential treatment for these jobs, only a relatively small number of them was taken on. Care needs to be taken when ascribing any particular effects on the regional economy purely to the base because of the economic trends resulting from the larger policy package within which AFCENT played a smaller part, and national economic upticks. However, AFCENT didn't only employ, it also spent a great deal of money every year. According to AFCENT its personnel spent seventy million guilders a year on consumption outside of their own tax-free shops, despite

⁸⁴ "Afcen blijft vrijwel zeker", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 29, 1973.

⁸⁵ "Afcen blijft", *Limburgs Dagblad*, December 8, 1973.

⁸⁶ Aantekening in verband met mogelijk vertrek van Afcen en diverse gevolgen voor de Oostelijke Mijnstreek en de gemeente Brunssum in het bijzonder, 1973, 2.07.281, inventory number 96, T302 Gemeente Brunssum, 1938-1981, Rijckheyt, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

⁸⁷ Kasper et al., "Na de mijnsluiting", 60-61.

the insistence of the CPN that most of their money would disappear into the AFCENT stores. The base also hosted twenty five businesses of various sorts (such as banks) on the base grounds, and maintained contracts with over two hundred local companies, some of which were for hundreds of thousands of guilders a year; transport for students to the international school was the most expensive contract, costing a million guilders annually. Additionally, the salaries for the employed civilians topped twenty million. In total AFCENT was spending in the vicinity of a hundred million guilders a year. To put this into perspective, over the 1967-1977 ten-year period this spending equaled as much as a third of the size of governmental support spending during that same period for the economic restructuring of the region.⁸⁸

Because of various exemptions afforded to NATO the municipalities had to contend with some unusual consequences for their budgets. AFCENT personnel wasn't just exempt from taxes in their own shops, but they were exempted from practically all taxes (though the Dutch military personnel was not, because they were stationed in their country of origin). Additionally, all of the foreign personnel wasn't included in the population registry, which created all kinds of problems. The municipalities quite quickly realized in 1967 that because all this personnel wasn't registered towns were officially considered to have smaller populations than the number of people actually living there, meaning they received less money from the governmental fund than warranted. These deficits could be quite considerable, so regulations were issued over the course of the following year to compensate; for example in 1973 Brunssum received an extra quarter of a million for the twelve hundred non-registered people living there.⁸⁹ This non-registered population caused other problems as well, such as that the municipalities did not have access to some basic information on these inhabitants, associated with registering.⁹⁰ It also meant that in some cases members of the municipal administration would have lower salaries, as this was determined by what population bracket their municipality was in and this invisible population could push it down into a lower bracket. Fallout from these matters indicate a certain degree of local frustration,

⁸⁸ "vertrek Afcent gaat 100 miljoen kosten", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 3, 1973.

⁸⁹ "Hogere uitkering voor enkele Zuidlimburgse gemeenten en Budel", *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 8, 1967; "Meer geld voor gemeenten waar buitenlandse militairen gelegerd zijn", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 20, 1968. Aantekening in verband met mogelijk vertrek van Afcent en diverse gevolgen voor de Oostelijke Mijnstreek en de gemeente Brunssum in het bijzonder, 1973, 2.07.281, inventory number 96, T302 Gemeente Brunssum, 1938-1981, Rijckheydt, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

⁹⁰ "Beek wil Afcent-families in bevolkingsregisters", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 11, 1967.

as exemplified by the town of Beek which pressed the government on these issues multiple times, and in particular in a case from 1968, when Beek unilaterally decided to increase these salaries up to a higher bracket in order to force the government to issue a ruling on how to handle this issue, which it eventually did by approving most of the increases. By 1972 Beek and the provincial government were still arguing over the issue, regarding a former tax official in Beek who objected to having his salary exempted from the increase. The primary line of argument in all these budgetary cases was that the added population put more strain on municipal services and employees, so the municipalities should receive additional funding.⁹¹

Things flared up again after 1977, this time with regards to property taxes. AFCENT did in principle agree to pay some taxes for specific 'services rendered', such as garbage disposal, but claimed exemption for all other taxes on the basis of agreements made with the Dutch government in 1969. Their case wasn't sufficiently conclusive to stop multiple municipalities from trying to impose the property taxes (including also taxes for sewer maintenance and water purification, technically services rendered). For Brunssum the property taxes the base claimed to be exempted from totaled fifty to sixty thousand guilders a year, and thirteen other towns were missing out on thousands, some several tens of thousands, in revenue.⁹² AFCENT did pay Brunssum a single time, but did so under protest (there is some ambiguity in the sources, as some mentioned fifty-sixty thousand guilders while others hundred to hundred fifty thousand, which possibly includes the sanitation fees, which AFCENT may have been separated out from the property taxes as a valid service). The Limburg PSP opportunistically chimed in they'd be glad to help Brunssum get rid of AFCENT if it continued to refuse to pay these taxes.⁹³ Schinnen had back-and-forth correspondence over the course of 1977-1978 with different ministries about the property taxes, after having determined to be missing out on 36,500 guilders a year because of the base there - quite considerable for a town a quarter the size of Brunssum. However, all these municipalities did receive increased funding to compensate for hosting the unregistered AFCENT families, so this was roughly revenue-neutral in the estimation of a cabinet minister. Schinnen and Brunssum tried to make use of

⁹¹ "Beek forceert uitspraak bij de kroon", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 9, 1968; "Alleen wedden van wethouders omhoog in Beek", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 9, 1968; "Oud-ontvanger neemt salarisonderdeel niet", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 8, 1972.

⁹² Netherlands. Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1981-1982 nummer 346.

⁹³ "PSP Limburg wil Afcent weg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 16, 1977;

a rhetorical loophole by arguing that AFCENT wasn't really the property owner but the Dutch government, who had granted state mine buildings for NATO to use. This issue appears to have been such a hot-button topic that, after both the ministries of finance and the interior asked Schinnen not to levy the taxes because they were in the process of arranging the exemption, Schinnen decided to just send the bill anyway. After a NATO committee and multilateral negotiations the government finally put the issue to rest in 1981: 'yes' to the sanitation-related fees, 'no' to property taxes.⁹⁴

Though it is a tough task to reconstruct the layout of a regional housing market from fifty years ago, there are enough references to the state of housing prices in the papers, corroborated by some of the interviews, to form a decent picture of what happened in the market. Despite mayor Quint's assurances to have the means to be able to contain rising prices it was considered common knowledge that AFCENT brought a lot of inflationary pressure to bear. There are several likely reasons for this, working in tandem with each other. Firstly, the Netherlands dealt with a housing shortage in the late '60s, meaning the influx of people created a lot of additional demand on a limited supply. Secondly, there was considerable willingness among AFCENT personnel to pay rents way above market value, as they were financially well-off, used to the high rents they paid in Fontainebleau, and were only staying for a few years anyway. A favorable Dollar value made it quite cheap for Americans in particular, and the US government supplemented their income. Landlords were willing to exploit these circumstances and rents rose immensely, sometimes more than doubling. The fact that these inflated rents drove away prospective Dutch tenants did not matter too much, because of the relative inelasticity in the soldiers' demand, so many private individuals used the opportunity to make some easy extra money. Indeed, there are many references both in the newspapers and by interviewees to this, indicating it was a public subject and part of the common narrative, as it is still ingrained in their memory fifty years later. According to one interviewee people would often rent out the homes they got out of

⁹⁴ Netherlands. Tweede kamer. Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1976-1977 nummer 976; Netherlands. Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1981-1982 nummer 346; Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1981-1982 nummer 327; Voorleggen van de kwestie of het leger van de Verenigde Staten is vrijgesteld van het gebruikersaandeel in de onroerendgoedbelasting voor het gebruik van het pand Borgerweg 10 te Schinnen, aan Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, de Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten en de Gemeente Soest, 1975-1978, 2.6.1.2.1.1, inventory number 563, archieven der gemeente Schinnen, 1932-1981, de Domijnen, Sittard.

their parents' inheritance, and in Sittard people would live in a cheaper flat for a few years, so that they could rent out their own homes to AFCENT and make a profit.⁹⁵ *Limburgs Dagblad* recorded one case, where a man in Schinveld lived in his chicken coop, because he had rented out his house to an AFCENT employee for five hundred guilders a month. Though originally built as a chicken coop, the inside actually contained a television, table, bed, refrigerator, and of course some chickens.⁹⁶ Such stories were no longer common after two or three years, however.

From a multitude of prices mentioned in passing we can ascertain that rent for (regular street level) homes tended to be somewhere between three hundred and four hundred guilders while an average apartment in a high-rise building tended to be somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty to two hundred guilders. AFCENT personnel generally paid several hundred guilders more than the market value, so homes regularly went for five or six hundred guilders, and in a select few instances near to a thousand. Typical cases are those like a repeatedly referenced set of apartments in Geleen, which increased from 213 to 327 guilders, and an apartment building in Brunssum which went from 326 to 500 guilders. AFCENT had a housing office to help personnel with finding housing at more acceptable price levels, but a large proportion (if not the vast majority) of them looked for houses in the private market. They were able to pay for expensive housing that the local population had no appetite for, or sometimes even managed to snatch houses out from under potential buyers by their willingness to pay significantly more, as demonstrated by an example in July 1969 where a man had wanted to move into a house on the Leyenbroekerweg in Sittard for three hundred guilders a month, when the house instead went to an officer who was willing to pay six hundred.⁹⁷

The housing situation was severe enough for a pastor in Spaubeek to use his bully pulpit to castigate the municipal council and housing association in a local paper, because out

⁹⁵ Peters, Rob, "Afcenters betalen soms f600,- huur per maand", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 19, 1969; Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017.

⁹⁶ "Verdachte huisde in "kippenhok" en verhuurde woning", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 8, 1968.

⁹⁷ Thonen, Henk, "Limburg accepteerde AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1972; Postma, Ivo, "Fontainebleau zoekt rijke burgers, Brunssum krijgt een zakengolf", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 15, 1966; "Radio shape - Afcen kost twaalf miljoen" *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 18, 1966; "Vertrek Afcen leidt tot leegstand in Zuid-Limburg", *De Telegraaf*, October 13, 1973; Peters, Rob, "Afcenters betalen soms f600,- huur per maand", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 19, 1969.

of the thirty marriages he had officiated in 1970 only two couples were able to find a home in Spaubeek. The pastor specifically pointed to AFCENT occupying so many houses, and driving up the prices.⁹⁸ These problems in the housing market persisted more than a decade after the base had opened. In 1975 while discussing a potential expansion of the headquarters state secretary van Lent acknowledged the continued existence of problems in the housing market, and in 1976 *NRC Handelsblad* published an article about the village of Schinveld, which suffered from very high unemployment while at the same time the village's popularity with AFCENT personnel was making cheaper housing unaffordable.⁹⁹ According to an article in 1972 the rent paid by AFCENT employees was about three hundred guilders on average, but it was reported to have gone up to a thousand on average in 1987, well beyond natural inflation (though this is in part because over time officers had gotten a taste for more comfortable, expensive housing).¹⁰⁰ Geilenkirchen just across the border in Germany suffered similar price inflation in the early '80s from a NATO airbase, with prices supposedly doubling. Only around in the early eighties were proper rules issued on rental pricing to prevent such opportunistic practices as prior, but the consequences of AFCENT for the local rental market had been long lasting and quite significant, with the effects being to some extent similar to those of gentrification, pricing some of the poorer people out of the market.¹⁰¹ This does not necessarily mean rental prices went up uniformly across the region; the research exudes an underlying sense that local landlords considered AFCENT to be more gullible prospective tenants, who wouldn't be too bothered by higher prices which a Dutch person would never accept. As evidenced by the Leyenbroekerweg example where an officer paid six hundred guilders for a house which would have gone for half if the officer had not come along, this to some extent resulted in a two-tiered market where AFCENT paid exorbitant prices for homes that in the absence of interest would often go to locals for prices closer to fair value.

⁹⁸ "Pastoor van Spaubeek levert felle kritiek op gemeenteraad en woningvereniging", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 14, 1971.

⁹⁹ De Ruiter, F., "Werkeloosheid maakt van Schinveld ziek dorp", *NRC Handelsblad*, July 27, 1976; "Nederland betaalt niet te weinig voor komst AAFCE", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 10, 1975.

¹⁰⁰ "Afcnt heeft tekort aan betere woningen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 9, 1987.

¹⁰¹ "AWACS hebben primair een offensief karakter", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 23, 1982; "Afcnt heeft tekort aan betere woningen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 9, 1987.

3.3 Conclusion

AFCENT left quite a significant physical imprint on the local community, in terms of its occupation of space and assorted economic effects. Though many of these consequences were no doubt anticipated, such as the increase in traffic and the eagerly awaited economic benefits, it is in areas that were less expected or insufficiently planned for that one finds some discontented stirrings. The community already had to deal with social dislocation due to the closure of the mines, which was in many ways the central social institution, when they also had to give up a lot of their communal spaces to accommodate AFCENT. However public dissatisfaction was primarily displayed by the young (who were likely most affected by losing these recreational facilities), rather than older segments of the community. The municipal government worked to replace the lost spaces as quickly as possible and resolved most of these issues within a few months, so for the most part people seem to have taken it in stride. Instead long term problems arose from rising rental prices, and some budgetary headaches from AFCENT's unclear privileged status. The rising rents in particular formed a long lasting problem. AFCENT brought a sorely needed economic injection, in conjunction with a fairly favorable national economy; homeowners and landlords saw an increase in the value of their property, and AFCENT construction projects generally went to Dutch contractors. However, while good for those who were employed by it and for retailers it did push housing out of reach for many, such as in Schinveld, spurring at least one pastor (another social institution) to action. Nevertheless, six years into AFCENT's stay these housing problems did not at all outweigh its perceived vital economic importance, so a multitude of governmental branches and business institutions lobbied to retain the base. AFCENT would stay - and Brunssum appeared glad to keep it.

Chapter 4

Social impact

AFCENT did not just spend money and rent houses in Limburg, but its members also became a part of the local community. For most people the day-to-day encounters they might have on the street or in the cafés were the closest they would ever get to the goings-on in the headquarters behind the barbed wire fencing. AFCENT operated many of its own facilities, had its own parties, and its members played in their own sports leagues, but many individuals also participated in local sports, clubs and festivities, and there are signs hinting at forms of cross-cultural exchange. There are in effect a number of competing interpretative narratives: according to one AFCENT largely integrated into the local community and became a participating member, while according to another AFCENT integrated to some extent, but to a significant degree stuck to a more closed community (such as the different nationalities, and friendships with Dutch defense employees). A more favored narrative among opposition of course was of a failed or antagonistic integration, but while there are certainly grounds on which to judge it negatively the arguments used by the opposition don't appear to make great use of these, preferring to stick to prior lines of argument. This chapter is largely a chronicle of the ways AFCENT and the community interacted, mostly positively, but with elements of darker downsides. In short, in what ways did AFCENT and the local community intersect?

4.1 Common interactions and perception

From early 1967 on it quickly became a common sight to see uniformed military personnel walking in the street, or see the aforementioned ubiquitous vehicles drive by. This was generally the most common way in which both communities came across one another, including for the interviewees (at least prior to working there, for those who became defense employees). AFCENT also employed hundreds of locals for menial jobs, such as to do laundry, as servers in their clubs, attendants, hairdressers, shopkeepers, chauffeurs, etc. and most people - if they didn't have one of these jobs themselves - often knew a friend who did. Additionally, they would regularly encounter them in stores and at the local cafés, and AFCENT personnel developed their own favorite bars to hang out (a few of the names which came up repeatedly were the 'Godfather club', the 'Koempelclub' and 'Shangri-la') where

they were generally known as reputable men on their best behavior. Americans in particular were purported to be held on a tight leash by their superiors. One of the interviewees confessed he couldn't remember ever seeing any of them drunk, especially when they were in uniform, because they would take care not to cause any trouble and have it make its way up to the chain to their officer.¹⁰² They were fairly easily recognizable by their uniforms, their short military haircuts, their muscular build, as well as the fact that a relative preponderance of them were African-American. For many their presence was mostly characterized by a measure of curiosity and a sense of mystery as to their activities on base. Locals got used to this presence quite quickly as a daily fact of life, and businesses adjusted to their tastes. This easy acceptance can partially be explained by two possible causes. Firstly, the region was already familiar to hosting many foreigners. Quint stated as much in advance of AFCENT's move, and how he wasn't worried about integration because "the mentality in the perhaps not so very large Brunssum is actually urban", in terms of a progressive mindset.¹⁰³ There is a lot to support this assessment, because due to the mining industry there were a lot of other nationalities living there or commuting across the borders, such as Germans, Italians and Slovenians. The cities had also grown large and wealthy because of the mines, and Heerlen in particular had a modern city center with some of the most modern buildings in the Netherlands at the time, such as its theater, which was one of the largest theaters in the country. There is little reason to assume an insular mindset. Secondly, the region had a strong affection for the Americans, because Limburg was liberated by the American army during the war. The World War II cemetery in Margraten in Southern Limburg came up in almost every conversation, and the fact that every individual grave is adopted and taken care of by local families is very indicative of this affection. Since arriving AFCENT officials have been present at nearly every ceremony at the cemetery. The intensity of contact with the community would differ depending in the town, however: their presence could be felt very strongly in Brunssum, while during research visits in nearby Schinnen our questions to locals found relatively little purchase, because the base personnel in Schinnen was perceived to keep to itself more - at

¹⁰² Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017.

¹⁰³ "Brunssum bouwt versneld aan AFCENT-toekomst", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 12, 1966.

least for the past few decades. Their imprint may have been smaller because it is a substantially smaller base than the one in Brunssum.¹⁰⁴

AFCENT personnel considered the Dutch people to be friendly, open and pleasant, particularly in comparison to the French, and their first chaplain, father Greenburg, considered them to have a high sense of self-esteem, and he was of the opinion that these characteristics were evidenced by the large windows of Dutch houses, which invited people to take a peek inside.¹⁰⁵ They also judged the Dutch more modern and progressive than the French. In a newspaper interview colonel Patrick Henry illustrated this friendly nature with an anecdote, when he asked a man for directions to a particular address and the man had trouble explaining the route to him, the man let him get in his car and simply drove him there instead. Almost the exact same anecdote appeared in another newspaper interview as well (but where a Dutch man got into the soldier's car instead).¹⁰⁶ In one of the interviews two of the Americans also professed, with a hearty laugh, how they considered everything to be 'slow', in terms of the pace at which people lived their lives, but that's likely a reflection of the area being a bit more rural, far removed from the Netherlands' urban core (despite Heerlen's modernization).¹⁰⁷ There were also multiple remarks in newspaper interviews on how clean and well-maintained the streets and buildings were - a bit of an ironic statement, as just months before they arrived when the mines were still active the towns would be covered by smoke and dust, and if you parked your car for an hour it'd be black by the time you returned. I spoke with a number of Dutch former defense employees who worked at military depots with the American contingent, who went further into the weeds of what their relation with the Americans was like.

In an amusing parallel I heard multiple iterations of the same opinion about one another among both sides, which claimed that Americans had a very singular focus when working, demanding high standards, and valuing efficiency and skill solely in their assigned

¹⁰⁴ The research visits took place on March 24 and April 11, 2017, during which we spoke with multiple locals (passersby, store owners, and a few municipal employees at the reception desk), and Rita Hoefnagels, the community relations manager for the base.

¹⁰⁵ "Eerste AFCENT-gezin woont in kerkraadse flat", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 11, 1967; "Heerlenaar Jac Vellen legt contacten tussen Afcent en burgerij", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 21, 1967; "Chaplain Greenburg aalmoezenier bij Afcent", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 24, 1967.

¹⁰⁶ Postma, Ivo, "Kolonel Henry, een bereisde Amerikaan", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 25, 1967; Hendriks, Jan, "Wendell Harris zoekt vergeefs naar gastvrije familie uit 1944", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1967.

¹⁰⁷ Poteat, Jim, and William Adams, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, May 21, 2017.

task, but not beyond it, and that they did not have any inclination to step in at someone else's task if it went wrong, while Dutch personnel were a bit more easily satisfied, but had a wider orientation and would assist in other people's tasks. According to one of the Dutch this was indicative of a broader, more extensive base of knowledge among the Dutch (and other European) employees and an interest in the success of the wider enterprise, just 'chaos' according to Americans. According to the defense employees I spoke to the Americans essentially became robotic when in uniform, but nevertheless they were good fun to have a drink with off-duty, even if their energetic exuberance sometimes struck them as a little crazy. Both sides had their own nicknames (with derogatory undertones) as well: the Americans called the Dutch 'cheese heads', and the Dutch (including some of the civilians I encountered, but more prevalent among the employees) referred to the Americans as 'yanks'.

4.2 Leisure and culture

Apart from spending time in clubs and cafés AFCENT personnel used much their free time practicing sports. Judging by the massive volume of reporting on this topic it almost appears as though this was how they spent the majority of their time; the number of sports they were involved in is dizzying, and in some years sports reports made up as much as three quarters of all the articles which referenced AFCENT. To some degree these sports were practiced internally - they had their own sporting fields after all - and reference is made to AFCENT having its own sports leagues and tournaments, where teams from the Limburg bases played against each other and against teams from other bases in Europe. However, sports were also a useful conduit for contact with the local population, so many of the men joined local clubs or helped to popularize sports from their own country that the Dutch were unfamiliar with. Even before AFCENT had actually moved to Brunssum did sports play a role, when an English general called up a board member of the mines and had just a single question to ask about Limburg: "is there a golf course?" Indeed there was, a small nine-hole one, but that was sufficient.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Jochems, Frederieke, *Militairen in de mijnstreek*, directed by Frederieke Jochems. Valkenburg: Mezzia media productions, 2013.

Even for a community of thousands the sheer number of sports practiced was quite diverse. AFCENT personnel quickly set out to form sports clubs and teams within the base. These include, but are likely not limited to: soccer teams, American football teams, the 'Smoke Eaters' ice hockey team, a baseball club, the Afcent 'Knights' rugby team, the 'Afcent Marching Team', the 'Afcent Boat Club', bowling teams, the 'Afcent Divers Club', a fencing club, an athletics club, the 'Afcent Glory' nine-pin bowling team (an alternate form of bowling known in Dutch as 'kegelen'), and the 'Afcent-para club'. Many of these were primarily played in competitions within the confines of the military, in leagues with bases in the central European area, but in many of these cases they participated in Dutch competitions or friendly matches, either as a full team or by joining Dutch ones. For instance, the soccer club RKONS from Schaesbergse had a German AFCENT goalkeeper, and Englishman sergeant George Steven Ley, who had prior experience as referee while serving in the Royal Air Force, managed to become a referee in Dutch professional soccer.¹⁰⁹ Additionally AFCENT personnel helped to introduce and popularize a number of sports from England, the United States and Canada, which didn't have a following in Limburg yet (though some of these were a bit more popular in the north-west of the country). Bowling was largely absent most of the southern Netherlands prior, but started to gain a lot of popularity within two years of AFCENT arriving. A bowling center was planned in Heerlen in 1969 in collaboration with AFCENT and the American bowling association, and sixty AFCENT teams were itching to use it when it opened. Where before there hadn't been any bowling centers at all south of the city of Eindhoven, now Heerlen had one of the largest in the country, and it was also very popular among civilians, who were curious about the new sports - enough so to found the Bowling Bond Heerlen. As declared by *Limburgs Dagblad* in a 1972 article, "Bowling is in".¹¹⁰ Similarly AFCENT played a role in the spreading of rugby and ice hockey. Rugby was favoured among the English service members and after playing against other NATO teams and friendly games across the Netherlands they joined the Dutch rugby competition as the 'Knights'. They were the first team from Limburg to join the competition, and were hoping to increase its

¹⁰⁹ Muré, Harry, "George S. Ley Engels arbiter in Nederlands betaald voetbal", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 20, 1967; "AFCENT-keeper", *Limburgs Dagblad*, August 28, 1967.

¹¹⁰"Heerlen krijgt bowlingcentrum", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 11, 1969; Schmeetz, Max, "Zuid-Limburg is Bowling-minded", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 21, 1970; Thonen, Henk, "Limburg accepteerde AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1972.

popularity in the region, allowing visitors to watch the matches on the AFCENT sporting grounds. They performed incredibly well (going unbeaten for long stretches) but temporarily left the competition in 1974 because of a dispute with the Dutch Rugby Bond (they failed to make it to a number of games due to the oil crisis), but reconciled and returned in 1975, with their spokespeople regularly espousing they returned because of the wish to make the sport more popular in Limburg.¹¹¹ For multiple of the sports it wasn't uncommon for the games to be open to the public: the first American football game in 1967 drew a thousand spectators, a mixture of AFCENT personnel and locals. The AFCENT parachute club in particular drew attention, and one of the interviews recalled being awestruck as a child when they did parachuting demonstrations at events and open days.¹¹² Unsurprisingly, it was the Canadians who were predisposed to ice hockey, and when the first ice stadium in Limburg opened in 1968 it received collaboration from a few dozen Canadians, who helped with training and to set up a club to join the Dutch national competition, similar to the rugby team. Though the number of foreigners allowed in a team was under normal circumstances severely limited, the Dutch Ice Hockey Bond gave them special permission to play almost exclusively with Canadians in their team for three years, after which they had to phase in Dutch players. They too were interested in popularizing the sport, immediately beginning to train youth teams (though about half of the first group were the Canadians' children).¹¹³ In some instances these sports were used very explicitly as a tool for building contact and promoting integration. The AFCENT diving club was eager to assist fishermen with cleaning up a fishing pond, drawing quite a lot of youthful spectators on the banks, and two of their members found a seventeenth century anchor in the Maas which they donated to a local museum.¹¹⁴ In the Sittard neighborhood Limbrichterveld English AFCENT-families invited locals over for a few rounds of soccer to build relations (first women's soccer, then the men), with a few crates of

¹¹¹ "Rugby-wedstrijd in Brunssum", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 23, 1971; "Afcnt will rugbysport in Limburg populair maken", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 30, 1971; "Afcnt knights definitief uit rugbycompetitie", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 2, 1974; "Afcnt knights terug in rugbycompetitie", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 17, 1975.

¹¹² "Georganiseerd gooi- en smijtwerk", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 18, 1967.

¹¹³ "Limburgs Ijsstadion opent poorten", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 14, 1968; Tomadesso, Nino, " "Ijshockey Geleen" roept Zuidlimburgse jeugd", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 9, 1968.

¹¹⁴ "Vijver schoongedoken", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 24, 1972; "Antiek anker nu in streekmuseum Elsloo", *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 17, 1973.

beer set aside for the winner, and they repeated the gathering the following year.¹¹⁵ There were hopes the American presence would help baseball gain more popularity as well in the region as well, but the results were only modest, because the Americans (and their children) preferred to play in their own leagues and had relatively little contacts with local teams, except for HSCM in Maastricht.¹¹⁶ Beyond sporting clubs they also started other types of societies, such as army bands, a cheerleading group (from the AFCENT school) and even a freemasons lodge.¹¹⁷

The assimilation of sports is one of the most distinct types of cultural transfer, but AFCENT's influence was also felt in other ways, and AFCENT members themselves participated in local culture themselves as well. AFCENT personnel would regularly celebrate their countries' most iconic holidays, such as the English who went out to celebrate Guy Fawkes day multiple times (each year, probably), and the Americans who held massive Fourth of July picnics, attended by hundreds of people.¹¹⁸ They also helped to introduce to Limburg the concept of Valentine's Day, which until then hadn't really been known there, and in 1973 *Limburgs Dagblad* devoted a large article on the second page to it, to explain what the holiday entailed. It was starting to take root among retailers, eager to capture the public's interest, and was very popular among the English and Americans.¹¹⁹ In addition, they introduced games like bingo, barbecuing gained a soaring popularity, and one interviewee attributed youth walking with radios on their shoulders to copying of the Americans, and how some Limburg schools emulate typical American high school traditions, such as cheerleading and uniformed school bands. They also helped to introduce new types of music, such as the soul music heavily associated with the African-American members.¹²⁰ In return, AFCENT personnel was particularly taken by Carnival celebrations, with many of them partaking the very first

¹¹⁵ "Afcnt verbreedert met Limbrichterveld", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 22, 1970; "plaatselijke sport", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 23, 1971.

¹¹⁶ "Basis gelegd voor de Honkbalclub Maastricht", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 25, 1974; Janssen, Michel, "Honkbal-interesse nog niet denderend", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 17, 1977.

¹¹⁷ "Afcnt cheerleaders vrijdag bij Mies!!", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 28, 1976; "Amerikaans concert in open lucht te Geleen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 23, 1967; "Vrijmetselaars hebben tweede Limburgse loge", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 23, 1970.

¹¹⁸ "Amerikaanse monsterpic-nic", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 2, 1967;

¹¹⁹ "Vandaag Valentijnsdag: het feest van de sweethearts", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 14, 1973

¹²⁰ "Gokken", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 5, 1971; Thonen, Henk, "Limburg accepteerde AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1972; Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Heerlen, June 14, 2017.

year they were in Limburg, and some joining with their own parade floats. The AFCENT members in the Tapijnkazerne were in contact with local Carnival organizations such as the 'Tempeleers' in Maastricht, and at least once a member of AFCENT was chosen to be Carnival 'prince' in Spaubeek (though admittedly he was a Dutch officer). In 1968 AFCENT actually postponed a set of military exercises in order to allow its members to take part in the Carnival celebrations.¹²¹



The Dutch Sinterklaas and American Santa Claus celebrating together, in Beek in 1971.¹²²

4.3 integration and adaptation

As a large organization of thousands, it wasn't surprising AFCENT integrated itself into Limburg society. Integration in the sense intended here means not just to what extent AFCENT adapted to the local way of life, but also the degree to which AFCENT as an entity became ingrained as a part of public life and the public consciousness. The integration process is very indicative of the essential character of the relationship with the community.

¹²¹ "Officiëren van AFCENT lunchten samen met Tempeleers", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 6, 1967; "Eddy I prins van kwakkerte", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 8, 1974; "Afcënt-oefening uitgesteld voor carnavalsviering", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 18, 1968.

¹²² "Klaas en Claus tegelijkertijd in Beek ingehaald", *Limburgs Dagblad*, November 23, 1971.

Apart from the subsets of cultural transfer discussed in the previous section, there were plenty of other ways in which both sides tried to adapt to one another. At present proficiency in English is ubiquitous in the Netherlands, but even fifty years ago it was quite common for the Dutch to be able to hold a conversation in English (or at least make do with gestures and the few words they knew). This did make it tough for AFCENT personnel to practice their Dutch, because the Dutch tended to reply in English, or otherwise fetch someone who spoke English. When AFCENT arrived it received over fifteen thousand job applications from Dutch, and almost every job except the most menial ones required some level of comprehension of English. Even ads requesting young people as servers in AFCENT clubs frequently had a language requirement. Especially in the early days newspapers would often publish snippets of English sentences said to them by AFCENT personnel without accompanying these with any translation, under the assumption readers were able to understand these, including puns (“Limburg is bowling-minded”). Those who needed to polish up their English apparently did so, as English dictionaries and language courses surged in demand in early 1967. Interest also went the other way so AFCENT started a Dutch language course taught on AFCENT bases by their community relations advisor Jac Vellen, a Dutch man who used to live in the US.¹²³ AFCENT also included a large German contingent (and most of its commanding generals have been German), but many people were quite well-versed in German as well, as Limburg is part of the tri-border area, where there is a lot of travel and communication across the border with Germany. Though there may have been a great deal of suspicion towards Germany in terms of politics, this does not appear to have caused them any problems with the locals on a personal level.¹²⁴

Businesses quickly began to adjust to AFCENT. As mentioned in chapter two a delegation of small business-owners went to Fontainebleau to survey the available assortment of products, and retailers adapted to suit the needs of AFCENT personnel: “French cheeses, instant-foods, sodas [...], delicacies (sauces, ketchup, soups), American donuts, diverse teas for the English. In the textiles sector there is great demand for shirts in “navy-

¹²³ “Engelse ziekte in mijnstreek”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 18, 1967; “Amerikanen leren Nederlands”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 23, 1967.

¹²⁴ “Eerste AFCENT-gezin woont in Kerkraadse flat”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 11, 1967.

blue". In bookstores for pornographic-magazines."¹²⁵ A reading hall in Beek began purchasing more books in foreign languages because of AFCENT, lunchrooms began serving foods appealing to the different nationalities, and bars would play American music to appeal to their foreign customers. In Brunssum store owners initially held on to a traditional mentality so stores would close early (interviewees complained about this as part of the reason why they found life there to be slow), meaning AFCENT personnel would have to go down to Heerlen instead, but they caught on eventually.¹²⁶ Businesses also started to advertise in English, and in some cases specifically tried to target AFCENT with their ad campaigns. For example in 1968 airliner Sabena successfully focused through brochures and magazine ads on AFCENT personnel, among whom it had become a popular trend to send Dutch dog breeds to family back home in the US and Scotland as presents, in order to get them to use their planes to transport the dogs.¹²⁷ AFCENT had its own tax-free shops, but their wares made their way into the hands of locals as well. Despite its illegality there was a lively black market trade going on between the local population and AFCENT personnel, either buying goods as a favor for Dutch friends, or selling these goods in cafés. A local who was caught by the police having bought some stolen cigarettes defended himself saying that he hadn't noticed they were stolen, because the entire region was buying cigarettes from AFCENT.¹²⁸

AFCENT appears to have taken a lot of effort to make itself a valued institution in the community. Every year from the year they arrived they held a lottery for charity among their own members, and held charity balls with a lot of high society (governors, mayors, NATO officials, and so forth). The annual lottery usually raised somewhere between 15000 and 25000 guilders, and the proceeds generally were split between two institutions, with some money left over to hand out over the course of the year. AFCENT appears to have been particularly taken with helping the disabled, as each year the recipients of the cheques were always institutions which aided the disabled, and they regularly engaged in smaller acts of charity towards disabled groups. There were also other small charity events, either annually

¹²⁵ "AFCENT begint normaal verschijnsel te worden in het Limburgse leven", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 24, 1967.

¹²⁶ "AFCENT begint normaal verschijnsel te worden in het Limburgse leven", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 24, 1967; "Leeszaal Beek koopt meer boeken in vreemde talen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 22, 1967; Poteat, Jim, and William Adams, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, May 21, 2017.

¹²⁷ "Honds geschenk", *De Tijd*, July 24, 1968.

¹²⁸ "Met 18 jaar al indrukwekkende inbrekersfiguur", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 25, 1970.

such as the drive by the AFCENT fire department to collect toys for Limburg orphanages, or spontaneous one-offs, such as the time an AFCENT officer organized an aid campaign to help out a family whose trailer burned down, spreading brochures for clothing donations etc. via AFCENT offices.¹²⁹ AFCENT was also very involved in providing transport for sporting and charitable events, always having a few vehicles to spare to help the sick and elderly go shopping for a day, helping people get to a sporting event, helping out an orchestra which had no transport, or even help a film crew with a van and generator.¹³⁰ All of this charity is indicative of, if not a deep sense of involvement with the community, then at least an awareness of the importance of cultivating a good reputation. Indeed, a letter written to *Limburgs Dagblad* made a similar connection, pondering how now that AFCENT was doing so many good deeds it was creating good-will, and connecting this to the fact there hadn't been a protest in a while, so they ought to continue.¹³¹ During his tenure Von Kielmansegg must have recognized its importance as well: AFCENT handed out awards annually, and its oldest and most prestigious award (still in use to this day at the international school) was the Von Kielmansegg award, handed out to an officer who made a laudable contribution to international cooperation. For example in 1974 it was handed out to lieutenant Jan Deurloo, for his efforts in arranging sports matches between AFCENT and surrounding municipalities.¹³² Additionally, AFCENT members regularly went to schools for events, attempting to popularize NATO.

Outside of the hard-core opposition AFCENT does appear to have enjoyed a fairly widespread positive reputation, tinged with an appreciation for its mysterious and exciting nature - especially for children. Recognition of its economic importance was already clear from the responses during the 1973-1974 departure panic, but its reputation extended beyond that sphere, even among those who had reasons for dissatisfaction. Many of the former defense employees I spoke to, who had worked in the American military depots, are now suffering from severe health problems due to poisonous substances (in particular one

¹²⁹ "Nederlandse officier bij Afcent onderscheiden", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 10, 1974; "Hond redt gezin (zeven kinderen) van vuurdood", *Leeuwarder Courant*, January 27, 1968.

¹³⁰ "Chronisch zieken reden uit winkelen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 30, 1968; "tour de frats in stein neergestreken", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 11, 1969; "Afcenit hielp Edelweis uit de brand", *Limburgs Dagblad*, March 18, 1971; "Limburg is een stervend land", *Limburgs Dagblad*, August 26, 1972.

¹³¹ "Afcenit", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 11, 1971.

¹³² "Nederlandse officier bij Afcent onderscheiden", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 10, 1974.

known as Chrome-6) used during maintenance. But while speaking with them in a group the conversation did turn - without prompting - to emphasize they felt that the experience of working there had been a positive one, and a pleasure that they did not regret in itself and would do again, though I cannot entirely excise the suspicion that this emphasis was at least in part provoked by my presence at the table, even if I was merely listening at the time. This was not out of some kind of fear to be heard publicly bad-mouthing their former workplace, but to put their issues into perspective and discuss both sides of the ledger, implicitly for me. They could have had ample reason for bitterness towards the Americans, but it did not affect their view of them. Instead their ire was solely directed at the ministry of defense, which was dragging its feet on compensation.

Another case is similarly illustrative: the elderly couple De Jong, the man a former miner, lived in a home on ground leased from the state mines, and in 1968 the government wanted to force eviction because the grounds were being transferred to AFCENT but De Jong obviously didn't want to give up his home. The stalemate lasted for years, because in 1972 the family was still there, and both sides had put up fencing and barbed wire with a small piece of no-man's-land between them. But when *Limburgs Dagblad* wrote about Limburg accepting AFCENT they concluded their piece that the only person who'd probably prefer to see AFCENT leave was De Jong. This prompted De Jong to submit a letter in reply, refuting that he'd rather see AFCENT leave (and seeming to imply a different story about the barbed wire) and that had the paper come to him they'd have heard a different story.¹³³ This indicates maybe not acceptance, but possibly a recognition of the social undesirability of being against AFCENT. Among most others the base was apparently perceived in such a benign light, that in 1967 as part of a fraternity initiation four students climbed over the fence in the dead of night and replaced the NATO-flag with their fraternity flag. The Marechaussee caught them the next day, and Kielmansegg invited them over, where they apologized and exchanged

¹³³ Thonen, Henk, "Limburg accepteerde AFCENT", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1972; "Afcen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 17, 1972.

pleasantries and some gifts.¹³⁴ There had also been multiple incidents of fraudsters pretending to be AFCENT officers to try to fleece locals.¹³⁵

AFCENT also became an authoritative entity. Their officers were at ceremonies, memorials at the Margraten cemetery, they and their spouses opened events or new buildings, and they were regularly in the presence of mayors, governors, and even cabinet ministers. The image they portrayed through the press and their appearance was one of professional respectability, lending an air of significance to wherever they appeared to perform some ceremonial duty. They were a set of dignitaries like any other, even when they attended events that did not strictly speaking have anything to do with them or their institution, such as the general's wife leading the opening of a spring fair.¹³⁶ In one instance general Kielmansegg was thronged during a visit in Heerlen by a dozen youths for autographs which, despite the protests against his person, seems to belie the opposition's narrative of local antagonism.¹³⁷ Officials themselves admitted that integration hadn't been perfect.

On some level these statements appeared to evoke performative impartiality, but despite all of the ways in which the communities were in contact with one another, there are also compelling signs that speak of separation. Most personnel only stayed in Limburg for three years, because of which they often did not feel the need to invest too much energy in building up a social profile. AFCENT had their own sports leagues, which often took priority over competitions with the Dutch. Personnel also tended to self-segregate into groups of their respective nationalities: groups of them would live near each other, such as several dozen in the same apartment buildings, they would go out in groups by nationality, play their own sports, and the different nationalities developed their own preferences for what establishments to hang out at. It's a natural impulse for people to stick to what they know, and so if they were not socializing with their own countrymen, then at least with those Dutch they knew from work, such as many of the interviewees who were defense employees. This

¹³⁴ "Vlagrovers bieden AFCENT excuses aan", *Limburgs Dagblad*, September 19, 1967; "Groenen verwisselen in hoofdkwartier NAVO-vlag voor verenigingskleuren", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, September 18, 1967. Kielmansegg offered the students a small version of the NATO-flag, and the students surprised the general with a Waterloo edition Stratego board game, which the general very much appreciated because one of his ancestors had fought at Waterloo.

¹³⁵ "wegwerker "diende" bij NATO", *De Telegraaf*, February 1, 1967.

¹³⁶ "Politie houdt met forse hand kabouters tegen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 1, 1970.

¹³⁷ "Populariteit v. Kielmansegg is stijgende....", *Het Vrije Volk*, April 12, 1967.

urge towards familiarity expressed itself in many ways: primarily through the preference for products from their home countries, for example, during one of the interviews the interviewees were quibbling over particular brands of mayonnaise and their own sports.¹³⁸ Several movie theaters would show airings of sports games that had recently been played in the US, primarily for the benefit of American AFCENT personnel. *NRC Handelsblad* published an article describing AFCENT as a ‘Babylon in Limburg’, though they presumably meant the biblical Babel as their article outlined the internal division, rather than vice. In this article a few traces of assimilation are recounted (typically Dutch types of furniture in the home of an American couple, or taking Dutch recipes back home like mash pot) alongside a reinforcement of their respective cultural rituals, a judgement which is substantiated by a great deal of the material.¹³⁹

Despite the imagery of the upstanding military professional and the positive community relationship described above, the relationship certainly wasn’t free of problems. These problems were of common varieties, primarily of ill-mannered habitation, like complaints about garbage, and the ‘unseemly sight’ of laundry hanging from the balconies all week. The complaints pushed AFCENT to appoint an officer to teach its members about proper living habits. Despite being so profitable many landlords became apprehensive about renting to Americans because of such problems, as demonstrated by two examples: One American used his door as a dartboard, while another had sawed holes in all his doors for his dog, without permission. In 1976 the municipal housing association no longer wanted to rent to Americans; many of them had gotten months behind on their rent before disappearing when their time was up and they were redeployed according to *De Waarheid* - though the main editor of *Limburgs Dagblad* reframed it as a rarity, happening “once or twice”. Their respective biases were clearly still very much alive after a decade.¹⁴⁰ Although there is no indication they occurred on a regular basis there were also many isolated incidents of a more serious nature, such as a soldier sexually assaulting an under-aged girl in an elevator, the

¹³⁸ Poteat, Jim, and William Adams, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, May 21, 2017.

¹³⁹ Paumen, Max, “Afcen: Babylon in Limburg”, *NRC Handelsblad*, March 9, 1974.

¹⁴⁰ “Was mag in Geleen niet meer aan voorzijde flats hangen”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 7, 1968; “Limburg ontevreden over woonwijze van AFCENT-militairen”, *Leeuwarder Courant*, October 10, 1967; Thonen, Henk, “Limburg accepteerde AFCENT”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1972; “Afcen-militairen maken huurschuld”, *De Waarheid*, February 7, 1976.

children of a soldier who spent their time as serial burglars, and one reference to a few fistfights.¹⁴¹ Without strong statistical data the incidents that did make it to the newspapers are likely amplified anecdotes rather than indicative of a trend. A common grievance was the belief that the municipality would bend over backwards to accommodate AFCENT in ways it would not for its own citizens, and that AFCENT personnel had less accountability, such as parking where they wanted, or police letting them off without a ticket, and so forth. There is some evidence to support the charge: A garage had complained for years about the stench from the smokestacks of the nearby Poriso brick factory for two years, but when the wind turned one day and the stench blew across AFCENT grounds a group of individual soldiers complained and the problem was resolved within two days. It didn't always pan out this way though: AFCENT complained about a rickety, insecure viaduct, and they were afraid to have their military vehicles keep using it, yet it took three and a half years before it was dealt with. People also sneered at the practically empty busses used to ferry AFCENT children to the international school while their own busses were crowded, but AFCENT did pay a million guilders a year for this contract.¹⁴² Disturbances came to a head most dramatically one night in July of 1970, when after weeks of noise complaints dozens of neighborhood inhabitants went to the AFCENT club at the Casino, accompanied by a CPN member, to demand that they halt the party. Measures were quickly taken to reduce the noise. It was rumored higher ups (unspecified who) intervened, "because it was reported in *De Waarheid*", which points to an awareness to prevent giving reasons for agitation from the left.¹⁴³

This reintroduction of *De Waarheid* makes for a timely entrance, with the revisiting of another topic: Protests against AFCENT did continue over the course of the seventies, but they never seemed to regain the same size and fervor of those of 1967-1968. There was a rotation of protest organizers, who would generally be active for two or three years and then die off, to be replaced a few years later by a different organizer. The 'Happy end Afcent'

¹⁴¹ "AFCENT-militair pleegt in de lift ontucht met 7-jarig meisje", *Limburgs Dagblad*, January 19, 1968; "Afblijven-Afcent", *De Waarheid*, July 18, 1969; "twee Amerikanen in arrest", *De Telegraaf*, March 24, 1969.

¹⁴² "Afblijven-Afcent", *De Waarheid*, July 18, 1969; "ergernis onder Limburgse bevolking over optreden Afcent militairen", *De Waarheid*, July 9, 1970; "Wanneer wordt Nederland weer zelfstandig", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 15, 1972; "Accepteerde Limburg AFCENT?", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 25, 1972; "Afcent in geweer tegen barre stank", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 21, 1975; "Waarom kan bij AFCENT alles en in Brunssum bijna niets", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 9, 1969.

¹⁴³ "Afcent neemt anti-lawaai maatregelen", *Limburgs Dagblad*, July 2, 1970; "ergernis onder Limburgse bevolking over optreden Afcent militairen", *De Waarheid*, July 9, 1970.

committee was active around 1970 to 1972, the Marxist-Leninist 'Werkgroep Zuidelijk Afrika' combined anti-colonial activism (against the war in the Portuguese colony Angola, for example) with anti-NATO and particularly anti-American and anti-Nixon sentiments, protesting against AFCENT between 1970 and 1973. The committee 'Stop Militarisering Limburg' was active in the late seventies, among other things strongly resisting plans for the opening of a military depot. This committee appears to have gained the most traction locally, and at their peak collected 11,600 signatures to hand to governor van Rooy and minister of defense Vredeling "against militarization and in favor of employment", though there's reason to assume in this instance that the primary attraction for those who signed was employment (and a number of adjacent topics part of the protest, such as housing, unemployment benefits, education and wages), considering unemployment in Southern Limburg nearly tripled from the mid-seventies on during the oil crises.¹⁴⁴ These stretches of activity were interspersed with stunts by Dirk de Vrome, nicknamed 'red giant', attempting to embarrass AFCENT officials and the authorities. In 1973 he and his accomplices disguised themselves as Swedish generals, trying to award officials by pinning them with fake medals with the text "sod off NATO", though they were caught well in advance.¹⁴⁵ Aside from the fake Swedes, the most indelible image would undoubtedly be from a 1972 protest at the base in Schinnen where a 'Werkgroep Zuidelijk Afrika' protest leader, surrounded by watching police, dramatically poured a jug of coffee from Angola out on base grounds, declaring it to be 'blood coffee' and offering Tanzanian coffee to the base commander instead.¹⁴⁶ However it's not all too likely that such cases of resistance and resentment were held broadly among the population. Prominent protestors and protest groups often came from outside the immediate region, and emerged from a pretty predictable political corner (communists and pacifists) with a fairly small footprint in Limburg, but who may have seemed larger than they were through activity. Just as an example, there were a fair amount of comments and letters submitted to *Limburgs Dagblad* repeating similar arguments from the communists. However

¹⁴⁴ "Handtekeningen tegen militarisering van Limburg", *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 18, 1975; Kasper et al., "Na de mijnsluiting", 28.

¹⁴⁵ "Rode reus ontmaskerd als Zweedse generaal", *Limburgs Dagblad*, October 25, 1973.

¹⁴⁶ "Demonstratie tegen oorlog in Angola", *Limburgs Dagblad*, February 7, 1972.

they often came from the same people. A man named Bert Fermin, an author, submitted letters on at least four different occasions, years apart.¹⁴⁷ Despite the overwhelming



A protestor pours coffee on the road on the base in Schinnen.¹⁴⁸

electoral dominance of the KVP one interviewee told me how “the left used to hold sway in those days”.

Over the course of the seventies Heerlen and its surroundings were subjected to an incredibly severe drug problem. AFCENT’s arrival coincided with a lot of social dislocation, and it likely stood at the root of a heroin epidemic that took hold of Heerlen, according to the theory advanced by Maurice Hermans in his 2016 book *De Antistad* (and further investigated in a VPRO documentary). Soft-drugs like cannabis had long made their entry into Dutch nightlife, but the societal weakness, high unemployment and resulting pessimism in Heerlen after the mine closures made it a particularly vulnerable target for the introduction of heroin, and it suffered from an addiction epidemic in ways that other cities (like Amsterdam) where heroin was available did not. Heerlen had fifteen hundred addicts in a town of a hundred

¹⁴⁷ “Accepteerde Limburg AFCENT?”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 25, 1972.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

thousand, a remarkably high number, and Hermans links the introduction of heroin to addicted American soldiers who were stationed there from Vietnam. By the end of the Vietnam War Nixon declared the War on Drugs, and as part of 'Operation Golden Flow' American soldiers had to take mandatory urine tests before being allowed to return to the United States. Many of the addicted soldiers were stationed in Europe in the interim, to receive help until they could return home (this meant that aside from addicted soldiers there were also some exhibiting PTSD). Shangri-La and Kosmos Underground in Heerlen were popular among American soldiers, particularly blacks, where they brought Heroin into the scene. Before long drugs were available in cafés, and one of the interviews in the documentary describes the image of stoned black men lying in the grass outside Heerlen station. Yet the connection with AFCENT does not appear to have been widely recognized nor become public knowledge at the time, except perhaps by those who were part of the nightlife. In light of the above context some of the casual drug references made in one of the interviews certainly fall into place. The papers portray a rather different world, where the only drug-related reporting on AFCENT were of a few individual incidents, usually with cannabis. Most severe were the arrests of a number of soldiers who were involved in an international smuggling ring - but again this involved soft-drugs, rather than heroin.¹⁴⁹ Only in the late eighties did news of "a culture of sex and drugs" truly explode outwards when a story broke in *De Telegraaf*, concerning allegations of drug abuse, Soviet sabotage and heroin smuggling made by Dutch lieutenant-general Berkhof, who had been fired after nine months as chief of staff at AFCENT.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Omroepvereniging VPRO, "Het spoor terug: Harddrugs in Heerlen - OVT - NPO Radio 1," nporadio1.nl. <http://www.nporadio1.nl/ovt/onderwerpen/412903-het-spoor-terug-harddrugs-in-heerlen> (Accessed July 15, 2017);

Hermans, Maurice, "Heerlense heroine-epidemie." Heerlenvertelt.nl.

<http://www.heerlenvertelt.nl/2017/07/heerlense-heroine-epidemie/> (Accessed July 15, 2017);

hermans, Maurice, "Heerlense heroine I: operation golden flow." Heerlenvertelt.nl.

<http://www.heerlenvertelt.nl/2017/07/heerlense-heroine-i-operation-golden-flow/> (Accessed July 15, 2017);

Hermans, Maurice, "Heerlense heroine II: GI Joe in Shang-ri La." Heerlenvertelt.nl.

<http://www.heerlenvertelt.nl/2017/07/heerlense-heroine-ii-gi-joe-in-shang-ri-la/> (Accessed July 15, 2017).

¹⁵⁰ Hermans, Maurice, "Heerlense heroine II: GI Joe in Shang-ri La." Heerlenvertelt.nl.

<http://www.heerlenvertelt.nl/2017/07/heerlense-heroine-ii-gi-joe-in-shang-ri-la/> (Accessed July 15, 2017);

Loon, H. van, "sex en drugs rond "Afcen"-hoofdkwartier", *De Telegraaf*, February 21, 1987.

4.4 Race

Few issues are both as persistent and thorny as race. Racism is a global phenomenon, and the Netherlands were no different, so some of its traces are distinctly noticeable. A significant proportion of the American army was African-American, so there were plenty of them stationed at AFCENT, and the ways in which they were treated and perceived were subject to an interplay of multiple conceptions of the black soldier.

Black people were a rarity in Limburg, especially before AFCENT moved there. But while Limburg had an overwhelmingly white population (even now Brunssum is home to a vastly larger percentage of western immigrants than non-western, the reverse of the national average), it wasn't completely unfamiliar with people of color. For example there were so-called 'liberation children', who were the children resulting from liaisons between local women and African-American soldiers from the logistics divisions stationed there near the end of World War II.¹⁵¹ Additionally Schinnen's migration logs noted a fair number of foreign laborers from far-off Asian and African countries moving to and out of the town over the years. When AFCENT was moved into Brunssum its black personnel was generally treated kindly the same way they had been in 1944, and just like then as something of an 'exotic' curiosity. For example, an archivist in Geleen mentioned to me that the first time he saw a black man was a guard at the AFCENT base in Schinnen, and the sense of novelty is suggested in some of the language used by newspapers to describe them. The black soldiers were usually referred to with the word 'neger', which was roughly equivalent to the term 'negro' in use contemporaneously in the United States, and was a conventional way to call black people - though just like negro it has since then fallen out of favor and is now generally considered offensive.

However, the sense of novelty clashed - at least initially - with the enduring myth of black masculine virility. Black soldiers were popular among local young women (at clubs they were particularly appreciated as great dancers), and multiple interviewees paraphrased some of the ways in which their parents' generation considered this to be socially undesirable, playing on the stereotype's blend of sexuality and violence. A lady who started a laundry job

¹⁵¹ Broekema, Pauline, "Els was een zwart meisje in een naoorlogs Limburgs dorp." NOS.nl. <http://nos.nl/artikel/2057519-els-was-een-zwart-meisje-in-een-naoorlogs-limburgs-dorp.html> (accessed July 12, 2017).

at AFCENT was told by her parents she “better not come home with a negro”, and a man demonstrated some of the coarse ways people expressed disapproval, by quoting how the black man would supposedly “shag our white ladies to pieces”.¹⁵² Indeed, the link created between sexuality and race is all the more evidenced by the fact that when I asked a question about the attraction of local young women to the military men of AFCENT, this man introduced the topic of race into the conversation by himself. Some of the reporting and interviews do intimate reference to black people to be a competing descriptive for AFCENT Americans. A couple of different sources also directed some attention on them being tall, a nod to their physical stature (which carries intrinsic links to their sexuality).¹⁵³ Yet despite these perceptions there is no record of any racially motivated conflict at all, and people seemingly kept their views to themselves. Instead where before there was objection and taboo, over time it turned towards acceptance, and there was nothing special about it anymore. Interracial dating occurred at an early stage, and presumably quite a significant number of them married Dutch women (though there is no telling how many), settling in Limburg or returning together to the United States.¹⁵⁴ For example two of the American soldiers I interviewed (and a third I did not get to interview) were black, and they had all married there and settled down in Limburg after they left the military.

There are also hints at a clash between the role of race and the inherent reputability afforded to men in uniform, who exuded more authority and trustworthiness. “If they wore an AFCENT uniform it must be alright”, two interviewees agreed, while civilian people of color (who were not affiliated at all with the base) would receive less goodwill and acceptance, in a manner comparable to Muslim immigrants in many western countries at present.¹⁵⁵ What’s curious is that black AFCENT personnel did not seem to be a part of the official image presented outward, such as through spokespeople, interviews, and profiles in the newspapers. Instead it consists solely of professional-looking white officials, embodying the imagery of white respectability. Indeed, according to a story in *De Waarheid* a man who

¹⁵² Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 14, 2017; Gommans, Peter, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 15, 2017; Terwee, Fried, and Kitty Terwee, interview by author, notes, Heerlen, May 21, 2017.

¹⁵³ “AFCENT begint normaal verschijnsel te worden in het Limburgse leven”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 24, 1967.

¹⁵⁴ “AFCENT begint normaal verschijnsel te worden in het Limburgse leven”, *Limburgs Dagblad*, April 24, 1967.

¹⁵⁵ Heersen, Sjaak, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 14, 2017; Gommans, Peter, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, June 15, 2017.

volunteered for an errand to drive as chauffeur to Brussels was refused, because they wouldn't "let a colored drive officers around" (twenty six years after the desegregation of the army).¹⁵⁶ The only time a black member of AFCENT had an interview or profile in the newspaper was when it was on a matter not related or on behalf of AFCENT or NATO.¹⁵⁷

The two black former soldiers I interviewed had married in the Netherlands and remained there. Marriage obviously tied them to Limburg, but fairly quickly an additional reason emerged: freedom. They both felt far freer in Limburg than back in the United States, and this is particularly understandable for the elder of the two, who grew up during segregation in Danville in the south of Virginia. There, in a 'dry county', he wouldn't even be able to go outside and drink beer, and he had to deal with restrictions and racial oppression, even after the 1964 Civil Rights Act. As he said so concisely: "I prayed to God to get me out of there, and never prayed to go back", and in contrast the Netherlands was 'God's little acre' according to him. On this basis I discussed during the interview the 'breath of freedom' concept with them, stemming from the research by Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke on black soldiers stationed in post-war Germany, which is a descriptive of the sense of freedom black soldiers experienced there due to the alternately arranged race-relations and their own relative socio-economic prosperity while stationed in Germany, and this concept resonated quite emphatically with them.¹⁵⁸ The allowances from the US government supplementing their income were certainly contributory, but the idea still resonated with them despite the absence of a lot of the factors which made the situation in Germany different and unique, as the sense of freedom they felt here was the key factor. The eldest arrived in Brunssum in 1966 ahead of AFCENT's opening, left on assignment a few years later, and then eventually returned, while the younger of them left the military after just a year while stationed in Limburg, but having met his future wife chose to stay in the Netherlands. The fact they both so readily chose to remain seems to belie there were ever any significant racial problems with the local populace. That's not to imply there were never any problems stemming from race, however, they still experienced prejudice - for example they would always receive extra

¹⁵⁶ de Bruin, W. "Als je ziek wordt, kun je beter vertrekken", July 25, 1974.

¹⁵⁷ Hendriks, Jan, "Wendell Harris zocht vergeefs naar gastvrije familie uit 1944", *Limburgs Dagblad*, May 20, 1967.

¹⁵⁸ Höhn and Klimke, *A breath of freedom*, 1-11.

scrutiny at border checks, but most of the time they would just attract the aforementioned sense of novelty from being the only black person around.¹⁵⁹

4.5 Narrative and the heuristics of identity

The prior chapters have touched upon prevailing narratives about the NATO presence, such as those regarding jobs and the economy, and protests against the base. The conclusions of such narratives tended to be diametrically opposed depending on whether one was in favor or against the base. But there are two narratives above all the others (and which in many ways tie the other ones together) that require some additional scrutiny: these hinge on the perception of the other, and the perception of the self.

From the very beginning AFCENT comprised multiple nationalities (Americans, English and Germans about a quarter each, with Canadians, Belgians, Dutch and Luxembourgers making up the remainder), but what was most curious about some of the ways that the base was discussed, is how its personnel is often conflated with the Americans. On an intellectual level people were certainly aware there were many different nationalities involved, but statements in conversations and in newspaper regularly boiled this down to ‘the Americans’. The case of Margraten is very illustrative of this. The cemetery tended to come up a lot in reference, pointing to the American liberation during the war as a basis for good relations with the Americans and AFCENT. This type of conflation possibly was the result from the fact that many of the most obvious markers of the NATO presence were emblematic of known images of American life, such as the large cars, the unfamiliar consumer goods and (stereotypical) American high school rituals, all of which were far more noticeably foreign than the traits associated with the other European partners, who were closer culturally and geographically. They offered tantalizing glimpses into the American lifestyle, with all the cultural symbolism attached to it, if not outright propagandistic value. One former NATO employee’s first memory about AFCENT when he was growing up were the Fisher-price toys of a couple’s children.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the United States had an oversized global footprint, thereby leaving a much larger mark in people’s minds and their mental construction of reality.

¹⁵⁹ Poteat, Jim, and William Adams, interview by author, tape recording, Brunssum, May 21, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ *Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum 50 jaar en samen sterker!* (a hardcover booklet sold during the 50-year anniversary, though it does not contain any information whatsoever on the publisher or author).

This process extended to protesters as well, for many of whom the base served as a useful catch-all for America. They weren't just protesting against AFCENT, they were demonstrating Nixon, they were demonstrating Vietnam, they were demonstrating America, and the NATO base served as a stand-in. What's perhaps just as interesting is the reaction in terms of identity to hosting such a large contingent of outsiders, and the way in which Brunssum began to redefine itself in response. It would not have been surprising had this community closed ranks and doubled down on a traditional sense of identity, amplifying its essence in contrast to 'the other', but instead Brunssum chose the opposite. Being a NATO-town was in some ways its new claim to fame. The town expressly chose to highlight those aspects in its past and present that helped craft the narrative of a town which had always been international, pointing out the many foreign communities and commuters drawn because of the mines and emphasizing its metropolitan character. When AFCENT was about to move to Brunssum the municipality had a brochure created to provide an overview of the town, which almost read like a sales pitch. This brochure, which was translated into English, German, French and Spanish (despite the latter two countries not having any part in the headquarters), advertised Brunssum in terms of a modern local hub, with international ties and attraction.¹⁶¹

This internationalist narrative existed concurrently with the deep recognition of Brunssum's past. The mines and the consequences of the mine closures were felt deeply, and the narrative of AFCENT was always deeply intertwined with it. Indeed, the mines would always come up in conversation with interviewees. AFCENT was irrevocably tied to the mines by virtue of being located on top of the old Hendrik mine, but also because of its history, having arrived right after the closures as part of a promised economic relief effort, thereby creating the perception of a causal link between events. It is a link which also worked in reverse, with the CPN making a concerted effort locally and in parliament in the mid-seventies to get rid of AFCENT by advocating for the reopening of the mines (as if in such an eventuality the base couldn't simply be moved to another spot a few hundred meters away), with the slogan "Koempels (miners) in, AFCENT out".¹⁶² In reality the only tangible connection between

¹⁶¹ Uitgave van een brochure over de gemeente in vijf talen, i.v.m. de komst van de Afcen, nato navo (Afnorth, JTC North), 1966, 2.07.353.33, inventory number 2746, T302 Gemeente Brunssum, 1938-1981, Rijckheyt, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

¹⁶² "Mijnen open betekent meer werk, meer energie", *De Waarheid*, January 15, 1974.

AFCENT and the mines is that the base moved into the abandoned buildings (but being unrelated to their closure), but its presence served as a reminder of the end of the miners' era. Even in the present this heuristic interconnectivity is visibly espoused. Former miners still regularly attend AFCENT-related celebrations or ceremonies in their old mining-gear, and a large mining monument stands outside the gates, and a few departing generals received a miners' lamp as a parting gift (despite not even having worked on the base).¹⁶³ The mines were the bedrock of the regional collective identity, and AFCENT was grafted onto and intertwined with that legacy until it could essentially no longer exist as a separate epistemological entity.

4.6 Conclusion

AFCENT nestled itself into the local community, finding outlets for its members to participate in local social life. With them they brought many of the hallmarks of cultural transfer, in terms of sports, music, feasts and other leisure activities, but their presence also brought with it a new racial dimension, as well as instances of crime and drugs, as much as AFCENT tried to present a respectable facade. AFCENT did come to be perceived as an authority, an institution inherent within the landscape of Limburg, whose dignitaries would attend important events in the same way a mayor or a governor would. In that sense the base naturalized as an entity that had anchored itself within public life. The markers of AFCENT's presence were quite prominently American above any of the other nationalities, and offered a taste of American life to the local Dutch. However, in all social and cultural categories the direction was primarily one way. Individuals did adopt some elements of Dutch life (like recipes and furniture) and carnival celebrations were very popular, but for the most part they retained the lifestyles and cultural symbols, even segregating into the different nationalities amongst themselves in order to celebrate their own festivities and play their own sports. That's not to say this is an unnatural response to being in a foreign country, but ultimately the NATO community's eyes were focused inward, while radiating its cultural markers outwards, and when soldiers would

¹⁶³ "Mijnlamp voor Lemnitzer", *Limburgs Dagblad*, June 11, 1969; "Mijnlamp voor scheidende generaal", *Limburgs Dagblad*, December 3, 1974.

only remain at AFCENT for three years or so, it is not at all surprising they would treat it as a transitory experience.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Just recently AFCENT celebrated its fiftieth birthday since moving from Fontainebleau to Brunssum, and its roots have sunk deep. But that was not always the case, nor has Brunssum or the region remained the same in all that time. To understand the story of AFCENT, its first fifteen years in service and the impact it had on its host town of Brunssum, requires one to know about the history of the mining region, and this background knowledge is integral to answering the research questions as to how the population responded to AFCENT's arrival, what the physical consequences were, and in what ways AFCENT and the local population interacted.

There is no real way to separate AFCENT's history from the history of the mining industry in Limburg. The closure of the mines is inextricably linked with the development of the region, its social cohesion, and the impact AFCENT had as a consequence. In a certain way the closures were responsible for bringing the base to Brunssum in the first place, by providing empty facilities and being an attractive boost for the local economy as part of the government's efforts to provide relief. When the mines began to close in the mid-sixties, it struck away the foundations of local life in terms of economics, collective identity and even the space for recreation, as these were all run in some form or another by the state mines, so when AFCENT was to move into Brunssum the mine closure was the dominant event to define many of the parameters of the local conversation, determined the way in which people responded to its coming, and determined what narrative strands gained most traction locally, as discussed in chapter two. Far-left students from north-western cities, Amsterdam in particular, repeatedly came down to Limburg to demonstrate against NATO and German generals, incorporating items from the national agenda, while the local population was on the whole more worried about replacing lost jobs and facilities. This split between the far left and the majority conservative catholic population persisted throughout the research period, while protests during the seventies that put more emphasis on the mines and job opportunities gained more traction. The most common anxieties that did exist within the community at the time of arrival tended to be of an economic character, such as worries about the creation of a black market due to competition by the AFCENT shops. The various factions fought out their

differences in the press, through newspapers affiliated with the political parties embodying each side. In particular, the CPN disseminated their views through *De Waarheid* (being their party newspaper) and *Limburgs Dagblad* channeled the views of the conservative KVP, while more moderate left-leaning parties like the PvdA found a place in publications such as *Het Vrije Volk* and *Vrij Nederland*. On the one hand *De Waarheid's* reporting took the tone of an overt campaign against the base, on the other hand the conservative establishment in Limburg held tight sway over the editorial direction of Limburg newspapers, and *Limburgs Dagblad's* dismissive attitude towards protests in the late sixties comes through very clearly through the use of biased language. Even under Chief editor Jules van Neerven, a man who was specifically forced out because of his critical editorial tone, did *Limburgs Dagblad* publish an editorial column defending general Kielmansegg from accusations, while Neerven's replacement after 1972 wrote personally several times to argue on behalf of the benefits of AFCENT and to spur readers to action in order to maintain its presence.

In terms of the physical and social impact, as discussed in chapters three and four, AFCENT's presence had a profound influence on public life in a variety of areas. AFCENT personnel spent tens of millions a year locally, and the base contracted hundreds of local businesses, but it also caused disruption, because it annexed many local recreational facilities and their presence drove up the price of housing. The amount of money poured into the local economy - a sum equal to about a third of all the government aid spent in the entirety of the mining region - was so substantial and so vital to the local economic wellbeing that the potential removal of the base elicited vehement lobbying effort. The base added some cultural enrichment too, as personnel introduced the local populace to new sports, music and festivities, and even a degree of greater racial diversity. However, they were also the likely source for a rampant heroin epidemic, and other kinds of drugs circulated through their community as well. These facts are emblematic of the lessons to be drawn from the experience of this base: AFCENT was moved into a population the underpinnings of whose social identity had been devastated. On the one hand the base served as part of a relief effort to alleviate the economic deprivation (which in turn is an important step to addressing subsequent problems), and it even served for the basis of partially redefining Brunssum's sense of identity, emphasizing its international nature and past, but on the other hand the

socio-economic weakness left it vulnerable for the more insidious influences. These consequences are all heavily dependent on the narrative centrality of the mine closures, which is the common thread tying many of the levels of reception, impact and interaction together into a whole. It is a story which would have a fundamentally different character without the mine closures. What is interesting is the way in which the different nationalities were conflated with the Americans, as well as the warm feelings locals held towards them despite the rise of anti-Americanism and ruptures in transatlantic relations. A certain degree of distance between populace and the operations of the base engenders such abstractions, while the regional history with the Americans likely contributed to the generally pleasant relationship.



The last wagon of coal, delved in December of 1966.

The process of researching this topic also made clear that this paper only just scratched the surface. There is a great deal more to be uncovered, in a variety of different directions. For example by finding prospective interviewees to take a deeper look at the English and German members, or a look from inside the headquarters or the municipal government. Was the language as formulated by newspapers and the municipal government chosen with specific intent behind it or did it arise organically? How broadly did the underground environment of sex and drugs extend and how deeply was it hidden beneath

the surface facade? The research as presented primarily looked at perceptions from the civilian community, with a few inroads into AFCENT's perspective from former defense employees and American soldiers, but did not reach into the higher echelons of military and civilian authorities, who might have had a fundamentally different perspective, and were facing very different priorities and perspectives. Alternatively there are new insights to be gained by performing a more far-reaching search for archival data, and a more exhaustive quantitative analysis of the statistical impact of AFCENT. In many ways there is a whole world of knowledge still waiting to be uncovered.

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