

CHIZE SUB DEPOT

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Chateauroux Sub-Depots

Chateauroux Air Depot commanded several sub-depots. These Sub-Depots were located at Bordeaux-Bacalan, (special clothing & medical supplies); Niort-Chize (aircraft ammunition); Metz-Frescaty (vehicles & construction supplies) St. Mihiel (conventional ammunition storage); St. Nazaire (aircraft seaport); and Les Moulins (vehicle storage and maintenance) and the Villefranche (parts storage).

Chize Sub-Depot

The Chize Sub-Depot was located in the Deux-Sevres Department, 255 miles (410 km) southwest of Paris, east of Autoroute A10, and 14 miles (23 km) south of the city of Niort. It was situated in a large forest, the Foret de Chize, 3.7 miles (6 km) west of the town of Chize. The depot's main entrance was south of route D1 at the village of Virollet.

Chize was requested from France in December 1950. It was planned and built as the primary USAF conventional aircraft munitions (AF Class 39B Combat and Training Munitions) specialized sub-depot in France. The sub-depot was operated from September 1952 until January 1961 by the 73rd Air Depot Wing at Chateauroux, 130 miles to the southeast. There was no available acreage near La Martinerie for munitions

storage. The Foret de Chize, made an excellent ammunition depot since it was located in a thirty-five square mile forest (6,547 acres) remote from habitation. The forest had been used for wild game and bird hunting. It was an ideal example of a site that met the criteria for storing large quantities of munitions safely away from permanent inhabited dwellings. Chize also had the advantage of being near the seaports of La Pallice and Royan, convenient for bulk munitions shipments. The closest airdrome was at Niort. Since Niort is a larger city than Chize, the depot was also known as the Niort Ammo Depot.

Chize Ammunition Storage Annex #2688 was assigned to the USAF by France in February 1951. All sub-depot facilities had to be constructed as part of the NATO/USAFE tactical air infrastructure program. Construction began in November 1952 under control of the Joint Construction Agency, Bordeaux Office, and resulted in a very high quality specialized depot facility. By 1953 the cost was US \$20 million. Munitions storage consisted of approximately 220 corrugated sheet metal covered ammunition shelters with concrete floors and walls for storing aircraft bombs, rockets, flares, napalm tanks, and machine gun and cannon ammunition. These shelters were designed to direct any accidental blast upward to prevent collateral detonations. Special electrical grounding wiring was included to protect explosives from lightning strikes. Fifty-six miles of roads interconnected the storage shelters with the living area, administrative offices, motor pool yard, and munitions maintenance shops. Twenty-eight structures were well built using standard NATO concrete and block construction. Airmen and officer quarters, mess hall, base exchange, fire station, gym, dispensary, and a microwave RRL station were provided for 200 USAF depot military personnel. Two large, 300 foot-long, hangar-like buildings housed the munitions maintenance shops. Thirty miles of double fencing was built along with a dog kennel, since dog patrol teams were used to provide security. A water tower, catch basin, pump station, and ten miles of piping were constructed to supply potable water for personnel needs as well as a ready source of water for fire fighting. A railroad siding from Beauvoir-sur-Niort into the depot was completed in 1953. The Chize property and buildings were officially accepted from France and dedicated on 12 August 1953.

Temporary facilities were used until construction was completed in 1953 as Chize began receiving hundreds of tons of surplus WWII stocks of aircraft munitions shipped from England, West Germany, Belgium, and France. The Chize Depot was operating by 1954, storing 30,000

tons of ammunition and supplying the combat wings in France and Germany with all munitions needed to conduct aircrew training. In a typical month, March 1956, Chize received 861.7 tons of ammunition, shipped 436.11 tons to users, renovated 272.5 tons, and maintained 28,520 tons of ammunition in permanent storage. Ammunition renovation is the unpacking, inspection, cleaning, testing, painting/ marking, and repacking of older munitions.

Total depot work force on 1 January 1956 reached 8 officers, 146 airmen, 1 DAF civilian, and 216 indigenous personnel.

A few U.S. families lived off base in Niort on the economy until nearby GR1 housing was completed in 1956. Support facilities, such as the commissary, school, and hospital were located at the La Rochelle Army post, forty miles west of the base.

Chize grew from the 73d Air Sub-Depot Group into the 7374th Air Depot Group, with primary munitions maintenance performed by the 73d Ammunition Supply Sq.

Later the Chize Depot was operated by the 3134th Ammunition Supply Sq, Depot, and supported by 3130th Air Base Gp at the Chateauroux Air Depot. The Chize depot was connected by the USAFE microwave radio relay network into Chateauroux by 1954. A 7th Radio Relay Detachment maintained the microwave station. A very important attached unit at Chize was Det #2, 7410th Explosives Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Sq. A three man team, Det #14, 12th Air Postal Sq operated a small post office, APO #21.

As part of the 1957 USAFE budget cuts, the 3134th Supply Group transferred Chize Depot to the U.S. Army effective 15 October 1961. This transfer saved USAFE about \$3 million per year. The Army began storing ammunition there in December 1961, and the transfer was completed in January 1962. Army Com Z continued operating Chize as a BASEC ammunition depot until 1966. The real estate was returned to France in January 1967 as part of FRE-LOC. Today the old depot buildings remain and are part of a recreational park known as Zoorama. The entire Forêt de Chize has been developed as France's largest national wildlife refuge and animal research center. Zoorama has become a major tourist attraction in southwestern France and Autoroute A10 Exit #33 is well marked! The park can be found on Michelin Map #322 Local and IGN Series Blue #1529 E. Train service is available to Niort from Paris's Gare Mont-parnasse.

Air Force Order of Battle
Created: 16 Jun 2011
Updated:

Sources