

Witness Kuhn

On the situation in the terminal:

Int. Muth: Today is March 9, 2018 – Eyewitness Project Airbase. The interview partner is Franz Kuhn. It is now 11:45. We will now interview Franz Kuhn. Franz is here with me because we have known each other since childhood. Franz was a conscript at FFB airbase in 1972, responsible for passenger handling. Franz will tell us everything else himself. He'll just introduce himself again briefly first.

Kuhn: I am Franz Kuhn, I am 65 years old and live in Mammendorf. I was born in Gernlinden. I was stationed in FFB in 1972 during my compulsory military service, including the time when the Olympics took place. During this time, FFB was converted into a supplementary airport to the Munich-Riem airport. Civilian flights were handled there – as far as I know – mainly to the Northern Europe region: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland etc. A number of flights were handled there every day, with arrival and departure. My task, especially during this time – and I would add that all conscripts who were stationed in FFB were deployed for airport handling. My specific job, in particular in the field of departures – was to determine the weight of suitcases, to stick a ticket or a sticker on the suitcase and to create the passenger lists as was done those days. The suitcases were then loaded onto the trolleys and then driven onto the apron and loaded onto the aircraft. That was my job. On the day in question, when the attack took place, I was on duty, on a shift of generally 6–8 hours. Then in the course of the day, from about 2 p.m. onwards, no more departures took place because, as we now know – FFB was cleared for the helicopters from Munich. There were no more passenger aircraft stationed or parked on the apron. The apron was absolutely empty

Int. Muth: Did you hear anything about what was going on, on TV or radio?

Kuhn: Yes, in the course of the morning we did see on TV that there was a hostage situation in Munich, and that negotiations were taking place, etc., but we didn't hear that the plan was to fly out with helicopters in the direction of FFB, not at least until 2 p.m. That was somehow secret, nothing was known to us. Only after the departures stopped and there were no more passenger planes on the apron, and the Federal Border Police arrived with all those vehicles, did it become clear to us that something was going on. What didn't we know. It only became clear in the course of the late afternoon and it was also made public in the press that something like that was planned. That they wanted to force an escape with the helicopters. Whether that was a proposal from the police, from the state – that I don't know.

Int. Muth: Were you somehow prepared, perhaps by superiors, that this would happen?

Kuhn: No, no. We were in no way informed or instructed by anyone about how to behave. The only thing that happened was that in the late afternoon, after the Border Guard turned up and the hall I was in – the departure terminal, that's the hall of the 3 or 4 in a row there that was closest to the tower. The corner of that hall is about 200m away from the tower, and of course it was secured by the Federal Border Guard, because there were a lot of passengers in this hall. I think 300, 400 people who were actually ready for departure and were supposed to take off in the course of the afternoon, the next 2–3 hours. But when the departure was canceled and all – the people were transported from Munich out of the sports facilities with the buses and they were somehow taken away. They were left in the hall, so to speak, supervised in the hall, or whatever you want to call it. But it was very cramped and – how shall I put it – very overcrowded. And that's why this hall was also massively protected by the Federal Border Guard. All the doors, gates, everything that led outside from the hall was occupied by the Border Guards. Of course, we noticed that and we knew that something was going on.

Int. Muth: And you were not allowed to leave the hall?

Kuhn: No, we were stuck in the hall just like the passengers, even though there were no helicopters there yet. It was purely a precautionary measure. The hall was not evacuated. I don't know why, but it would definitely have been possible, because the FFB airport was big enough. It would have been possible to evacuate the people from this hall, which was later very close to the center of the action, to the Kilometer Building, which was hundreds of meters away in safety. They could have done that, but they didn't.

Int. Muth: Franz, did you hear anything from the passengers? They will also have become restless I suppose. Did you say anything? Did you have any contact with the passengers?

Kuhn: No. We did see that the people were restless and asking what was going on. But they didn't ask us in particular. I don't think they were informed, (...) I don't think so. That was all kept very hush-hush. The times were different then. There were no cell phones, so there was no data exchange as might be possible today. That wasn't the case back then. So I think that people were not informed. They just knew that their flights would be postponed and they were told that repeatedly as time went on, and so on. But I don't think they actually knew what was going on.

Int. Muth: Were you soldiers in a separate area in the hall? Were you not among the passengers?

Kuhn: No, no. Well, how shall I put it. Well, half of the hall was used as a lounge for the passengers, with seats, etc. There were also shopping facilities there in the duty-free store and that. And they had access to food and drinks etc. The other half was separated in the direction of the boarding controls, i.e. passport control, customs, baggage check – the check-in area. That was all separate. In that area, these people had no access. We were in our section of the airport, if you can call it that, and the others were in their area, just as it is divided up today.

Int. Wolz: What kind of passengers were they? Young people, older people, were there children?

Kuhn: No children. No, it was during the week. I guess that the age range was around 20-50, 60. Just sports enthusiasts who attended sports events from the Olympics, be it in the Olympic Stadium, the swimming pool, gymnastics facility or what have you. They'd been attending those sporting events. I think they were package day tours with an early flight in the morning. Then they were transported to the sporting venues, attended sporting events because they had some kind of tickets, and in the late afternoon they flew home again. Because they were Nordics. How long do you fly there? Finland 2 or 3 hours, depending. So those were day trips with visits to the sports facilities. So in general all ages. Men, women, young, old, but not children that I know of.

Int. Muth: Would it be correct to say that the German Armed Forces did not actually get involved in looking after passengers at all? It only provided services, but the Bundeswehr itself, that for example a higher ranking officer came in and did ...?

Kuhn: No, no. The handling, the passport control, the check-in and everything that was there was done by people, just like I think it was done at Munich's airport in Riem. No one from the Bundeswehr did the passport control. I think that was ordinary airport staff – not necessarily from Riem, but moved here from other airports.

Muth: I see. So the Bundeswehr was kind of in charge, they said what the situation was.

Kuhn: No, no. I don't think, in my opinion, that the Bundeswehr was in charge of it all. I'd say who was in command of the hall, of what had to happen in the hall in terms of keeping the people there, occupying the tower with people from the Federal Border Guard authority and all that – there was not only the Federal Border Guard, there were also the Bavarian police. That was a police matter. At least that is the way I saw it. That wasn't the Bundeswehr. We weren't wearing Bundeswehr clothing either. We were wearing neutral clothing, olive green working gear, without insignia, without anything. So we didn't appear as soldiers, in soldier's clothing. The passengers, the people, the passengers didn't know that we, the baggage handlers, etc., and the helpers who were involved, that we were Bundeswehr soldiers. They didn't know that and they didn't notice that. We, the soldiers involved, were only supporting airport operations the same as they are today.

Today there are normal airport employees who load the luggage and drive the vehicles and refuel and load food, etc. and do all the work at the check-in and things. Well, the check-in was done by the airlines, by a stewardess at the counter, who compiled the passenger lists. That was all professional people, just as it was in normal flight operations.

Int. Muth: And did you know when the helicopters landed?

Kuhn: Just to add to what I mentioned earlier: in the course of the afternoon, I think from 3 onwards, more and more vehicles arrived. Before that the exits were occupied by police and Federal Border Guards. We had no way of getting out of the hall or looking out, because it was simply refused. Then it slowly became known that somehow something was going on in the direction of FFB. What exactly they didn't tell us. Whether the police knew about it or not, I don't know. But in any case, it was clear that something was going on. At the latest when darkness fell – and it was already September so it got dark early. In the evening from 8 p.m. it was already dark, or half past seven. So at some point this plane landed and we noticed that there was a plane stationed next to the hall. I think it was a Boeing 707, which was to be used for the escape or just as a cover, for a fake departure, I don't know. But that was positioned there. We did notice that. And when the helicopters arrived, I don't know what time that was, I can't remember that we heard it and said, "oh now the helicopters are coming". It was quite loud in the hall due to the hundreds of passengers. So you couldn't really hear what was going on outside, at least not the helicopters arriving.