



The high-rise bunkers on Wittenauer Street

After the Nazis started the Second World War on September 1st, 1939, and the German Air Force bombarded many cities in Europe, the first British bombs fell on Berlin during the night of August 25th to 26th, 1940 – in response to a German air raid on London two days earlier. As a counter-reaction, the “Bunker Construction Programme for the Capital of the Reich” was introduced in Berlin, within the framework of which 628 (verifiable) standardised bunker facilities were to be built, including mainly so-called one-storey flat bunkers. Especially in urban areas with large allotment gardens which had no cellars to offer protection, these protective structures were to be implemented with a view to offering people the chance to spend the night inside. The Bunker Construction Programme in Berlin was assigned to the “General Building Inspector for the Capital of the Reich” (GBI) under Hitler’s chief architect, Albert Speer. As work on bunker construction wasn’t proceeding quickly enough due to a lack of building materials and labour, Albert Speer increasingly relied on “above-ground air-raid shelters with a larger capacity”.

Thus, at the beginning of April 1941, it was decided that, “for economic reasons,” in the future there would be no more underground bunkers instead three-storey, high-rise bunkers “each with the capacity for 500 people” would be built. The previously common one-storey flat bunker model was to be avoided for reasons of the disproportionately high cost of materials and the “unpleasant outward appearance” from an architectural and urban planning perspective. The now favoured Type M 500 high-rise bunker was similar in layout to three large flat bunkers stacked on top of each other but, with the same floor space, had a significantly higher capacity. In addition, with the Type M 500 construction model, two ceilings as well as part of the technical development required for three flat bunkers could be saved. The first six high-rise bunkers were built in Spandau, Lankwitz, Buckow, Niederschöneweide and Reinickendorf. On the former Lübarser Street (today Wittenauer Street), there were even two bunkers. Construction began on March 18th, 1941. 18 further facilities of this new construction type were completed, two more were not fully finished, and a further three remained in the planning stages.

The two large M 500 bunkers that are today located at 68/70 and 76/78/80 Wittenauer Street, with a standardised length of 35.2 metres and a width of 19.3 metres, were built in 1941/44, and also employed the use of forced labourers and prisoners of war. The Air Defence Construction Group, Langer, Construction Management North, was responsible, and had headquarters in today’s Reinickendorf town hall. Both bunkers were started at the same time.

The west-lying high-rise bunker (building number 5) was completed in May, 1942; construction work was halted twice on the eastern bunker facility (building number 18), on June 1st, 1942 and again on September 1st, 1944, due to a lack of building materials, so the final handover of the building could only take place at the end of 1944.

On the ground floor, there were two entry airlocks, rooms for the bunker caretaker and the air-raid protection personnel, as well as rooms for the technical department. Two staircases led to both upper floors, the walls should have been between 1.1 (2nd floor) and 1.6 metres thick (base of the ground floor) according to the implementation planning. The hipped roof was made from a thin concrete slab and was also tiled so that it would look like ordinary homes to hostile aircraft. The two large bunkers were supplied with power by an additionally erected transformer building and were to offer the residents of the adjacent allotments

protection during bombing raids. When the air-raid signal sounded, mothers ran to the bunkers with their children and prams, where they even had reserved sleeping quarters fitted with three-level beds. For the older allotment residents or those who were looking for shelter by chance, there were larger rooms with wooden benches.

Neither large bunker suffered a direct hit. As of November 1944, a “Developmental Laboratory for Centimetre Devices” (radio measuring technology for locating aircraft) was set up in the eastern bunker by the “Telefunken Research and Development Centre” under the code name “Erika” and came into operation in January, 1945.

After the war ended, these bunkers were not blown up by the Allies unlike most bunkers in Berlin, as the French military administration used them as storage space for potatoes and foodstuffs. Since 1959, part of the “Berliner Senate Reserves” were stored here, food supplies for West Berlin in case of a second blockade. In the bunkers, egg powder and butter fat, among other things, were stockpiled. From April 1st, 1967, the northern part of Lübarser Street was renamed Wittenauer Street. The Senate Reserves were dissolved after reunification in 1990. Today, the two bunkers are used by various companies as storage facilities, have been registered on the monument protection list of the State of Berlin and are, therefore, architectural monuments. Three bunkers in the same construction style can still be found in Lankwitz (17 Eiswald Street), Tempelhof (24 Friedrich-Karl-Street), and Karlshorst (Zwieseler/corner of Viechtacher Street).

Map legend:

- 1.) 2 M 500 high-rise bunkers, Lübarser Street (extant)
- 2.) Flat bunker, 2F style, Lübarser Street (demolished in 2019)
- 3.) Flat bunker, 4F style, Eichhorster Way (blown up on May 30th, 1947)
- 4.) 2 flat bunkers, 3F style, Teichweg (blown up on June 10th, 1947)
- 5.) M 1200 high-rise bunker, Quickborner Street (blown up on August 27th, 1947)
- 6.) M 1200 high-rise bunker construction site, Wilhelmsruher Damm (not completed)
- 7.) Flat bunker, 2E style, Wilhelmsruher Damm (blown up in 1947/48)

- A.) Lübars forced labourers camp
- B.) Dittmann Fahrzeugbau (vehicle construction) GmbH, 18-22 Lübarser Str. (1941)
- C.) Herbert Lindner GmbH machine tool factory, 4-17 Lübarser Str. (1941)
- D.) Bomb crater
- E.) LS-trench
- F.) Fire extinguishing pond

Image legend:

1. “Bunker Landscape” Wittenau – British aerial photographs (March 16th, 1945).

Graphics/Composite aerial photos: Uwe Friedrich

Source: GeoBasis-DE/SenStadtUm III/Luftbild 1945, film 156, image number 155/156.

2. The two high-rise bunkers on Lübarser (today Wittenauer) Street, looking south (July 30th, 1957); on the left of the roof of the bunker, the remains of the “Telefunken AG” research centre antenna

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3. Children from the “Zur Pappel” allotment in front of the two completed M 500 high-rise bunkers on Lübarser Street, view from the south (1943)

Source: LAB, Image no. 04 Na 5, 261424.

4. Floor plan of the ground floor of the east-lying M 500 high-rise bunker on today's Wittenauer Street

Source: Archiv BU e.V., sketch: Dietmar Arnold

5. Blown-up M 1200 high rise bunker, Quickborner Street (August 27th, 1947).

Source: Archiv BU e.V.

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Literature: Dietmar Arnold, Reiner Janick: Bunker, Sirenen und gepackte Koffer – Berlin unter Stahlbeton (Bunkers, Sirens and Packed Suitcases – Berlin under reinforced concrete) (2017, Edition Berliner Unterwelten im Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin)

Schlickeiser, Klaus: Tag des offenen Denkmals (Day of the open monument) 2005. The Bunker in Wittenau. In: Village Courier No. 55, p. 10 onwards, October/November 2005.

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