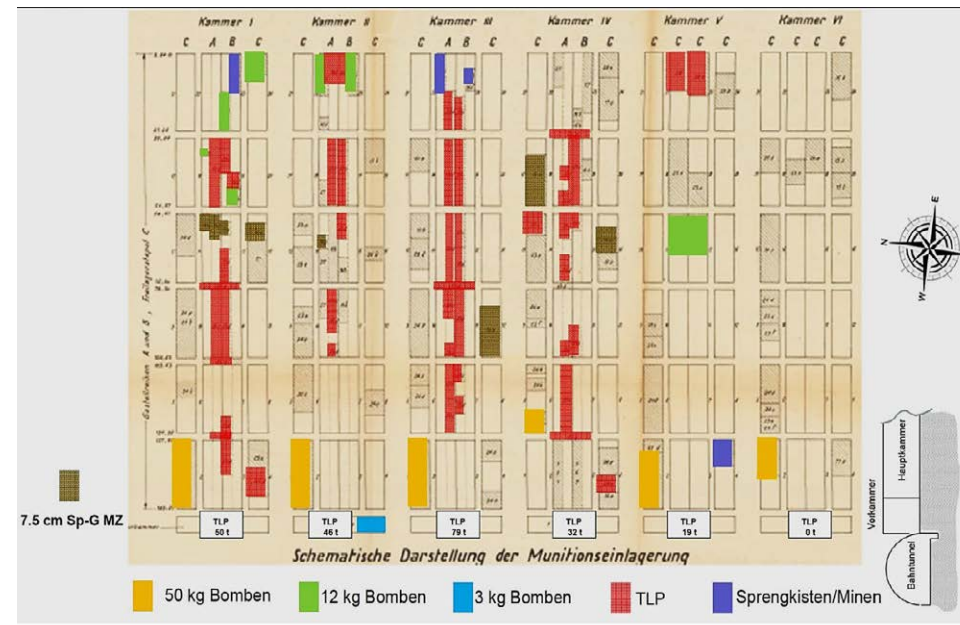
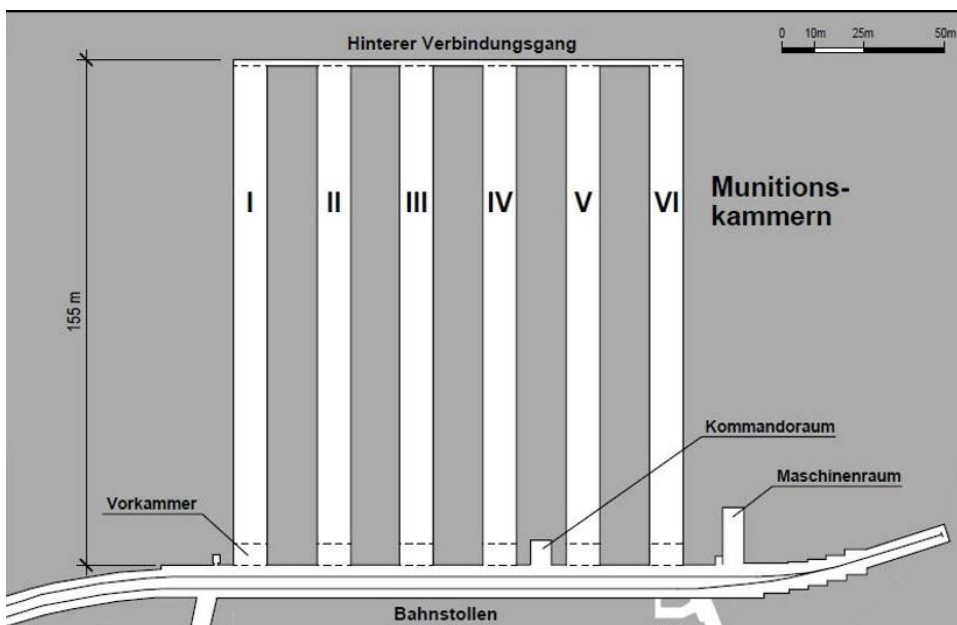


Mitholz, Switzerland – 20 Dec 1947

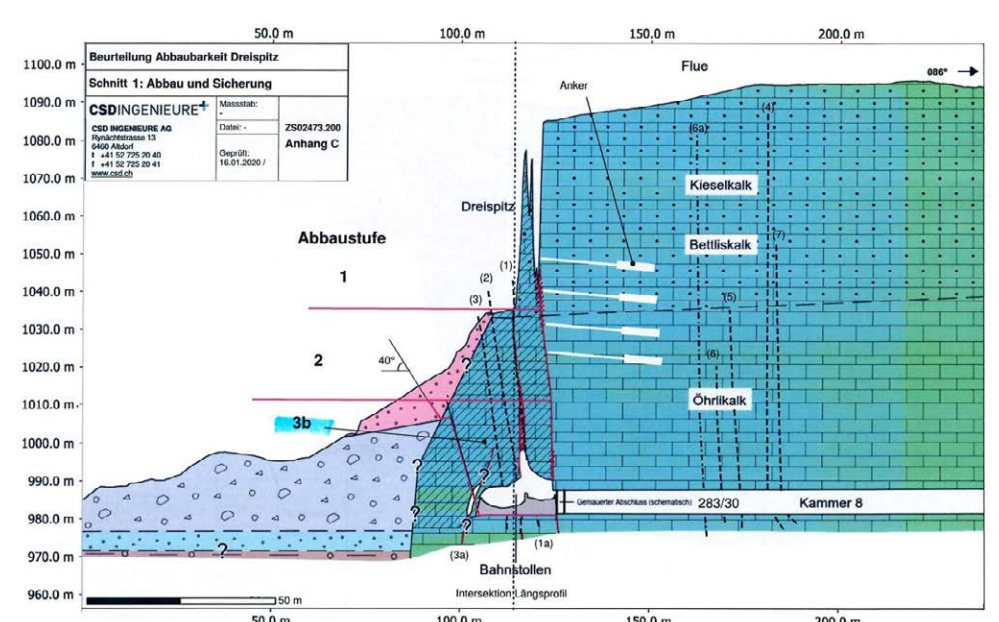


Just after WWII, several huge explosions destroyed one of the biggest underground ammunition storage facilities in Switzerland. The Mitholz installation consisted of 6 chambers, each 150 m long, interconnected by a railway tunnel. At the time of the accident, approximately 7 million kg (gross weight) of ammunition, containing up to 900,000 kg of explosives, was stored in the chambers. This included various types of bombs, artillery rounds, mines, and propellants.

During the accident, a part of the overburden collapsed as well as a part of the railway tunnel. The magnitude of the largest explosion was comparable to 20,000 to 30,000 kg TNT. There was widespread debris scattered up to a distance of 2 km, 9 people were killed, 20 people injured, and 40 buildings in the nearby village were destroyed. There is no conclusive evidence of the cause of the explosion, but it was thought to be due to either deteriorating propellant or copper azide in fuzes.

After the accident, the storage chambers were cleared of the remaining munitions. The collapsed railway tunnel itself was left untouched as it was felt that, mainly due to the hazardous geological situation, it would be too dangerous to dig the munitions out from under the covering rock material. It was thought that these covered munitions would not be a major hazard for the surroundings or the storage chambers. Later, a new access tunnel was built and the chambers were used to store pharmaceuticals for the army. In 2010, there was a plan to locate a computer/data center inside the facility.

A new risk analysis performed in 2018 led to the conclusion that, even today, major explosions from the remnant munitions inside the railway tunnel cannot be excluded. The risk for people in the surrounding area violates current Swiss safety criteria. It was proposed that the installation should no longer be used and that measures should be taken to reduce the risk. The Swiss authorities are currently determining next steps to be taken.



9 Fatalities

20 Injuries

CHF105 Million Damages (1947)