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And finally... The Blausee-Mitholz Disaster - A follow-up

Jean-François Andrist details the second explosion at Dailly

I was interested to read Bryan Stone's article in the March *Swiss Express* about the now almost forgotten explosion at the Swiss Army ammunition store. At the end of his item Bryan comments that a similar explosion had taken place at Dailly, which he incorrectly locates as near Vevey. (*Bryan acknowledges his error. Editor.*) This earlier disaster took place at the Fort de Dailly, another army bastion, located high up on the east side of the Rhône valley near the tiny community of Mörtsch. Unlike Blausee-Mitholz this very small place is not located directly on a major transportation artery! To reach it an intrepid traveller has to go to St Maurice, then to Lavey les Bains from where a narrow mountain road with some 30 hairpins winds its way up to Mörtsch, a village so small that its PostAuto service was withdrawn several years ago. The entrance to the Fort de Dailly is still further up the mountainside. The explosion occurred on 28th May 1946, and my father duly remembered the noise even when being between 12 to 15km away on the floor of the Rhône valley. Three magazines containing some 5,500 105mm shells (about 450t of explosive) exploded, due to the decomposition

of nitrocellulose propellant. The explosion resulted in the deaths of six construction workers, who were employed on a modernisation project of the complex series of linked tunnels and living quarters for the troops based there, which was current at the time. The magazine served several sets of 105mm guns that could control movement along the Rhône valley and the blast threw four 105mm guns of the Batterie de Plex from their emplacements and damaged six more. The fortress continued in army use until 2003 and since its abandonment group visits are now possible, but since there are no trains, no postal bus service, no funicular, and no cable car, tiny Mörtsch (unlike Blausee-Mitholz) would be difficult for interested readers to visit! Shortly after this explosion two similar incidents occurred at ammunition stores in the Graubünden during June 1946. It seems that at the time the Swiss Army did not really understand the chemical deterioration reasons behind these incidents (or take appropriate action) until after the final, and far more serious, one in the Kander Valley at Christmas 1947. 

Where's Heidi?

They are at the station for the out-of-town shopping complex at 'Shoppyland', 12 minutes north of Bern Hbf on line S8 to Jegenstorf. 



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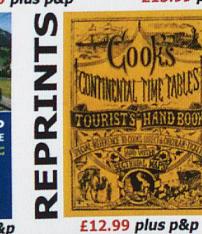
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