



By appointment
to HM The Queen
motor car manufacturers
Bentley Motors Limited
Crewe Cheshire



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Press Information

COMISO AIR BASE

- Comiso Air Base was built between 1935 and 1939 as Magliocco Aerodromo, and was one of several important Sicilian aerodromes in the Second World War. The Luftwaffe operated from the base from 1941 as part of Italy's Axis Alliance. As such, the base was targeted by the Allies who successfully bombed the base on 26 May and 17 June 1943 ahead of the Allied landings on Sicily.
- The base was captured by US forces on 11 July 1943. After repairs to the runway, Allied air forces began operations at the now-renamed Comiso Airfield under the USAAF Twelfth Air Force. It was primarily used to support airborne and assault glider operations, and the RAF also based three different squadrons of Spitfires at the base until the end of the war.
- The airfield and facilities at Magliocco fell into disuse and disrepair during the postwar years. In 1954, Alitalia, the Italian national airline, began commercial operations using the main runway, that was extended to commercial length.
- Comiso then began its second life during the Cold War, and on 7 August 1981 was officially selected as the second European main operating base for the nuclear BGM-109G Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) – thanks to the infrastructure already in place and the US knowledge of the area. These missiles were a key element of NATO's counter to the Soviet Union's deployment of intercontinental missiles with nuclear warheads.
- On 17 March 1982, Commander George W. Holland, of the U.S. Navy Civil Engineering Corps, arrived at Comiso as the resident officer in charge of construction (ROICC). Most of the existing buildings were ruined and so were demolished – with careful disposal of unexploded Second World War ordinance – and a new base was constructed. Work on the first stage of the base was completed on 13 August 1982.

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- The 487th Combat Support Group was assigned to Comiso Air Station in May 1983; their efforts led to the 30 June 1983 activation of the 487th Tactical Missile Wing. Construction of permanent facilities began that summer, with the first major support facilities, which included the first two dormitories which were completed in late 1983. These facilities belonged to the first of three increments of construction, which would activate the wing and base in stages.
- From 1983 to 1991, Comiso Air Base was the largest NATO base in southern Europe and housed 112 BGM-109G Ground Launched Cruise Missiles in seven hardened concrete bunkers. It was an extremely tightly controlled facility with a large security presence assigned due to the mission of the base, and the presence of nuclear-armed missiles which were stored at the base.
- 2,000 military personnel and family members lived on the base at its peak, at which point it covered a million square metres. The base functioned as a small self-contained town, with a supermarket, clinic, theatre, sports centre, outdoor pool, large school, its own chapel and fire station.
- The base closed on 30 June 1991 as a result of the signing of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force Treaty in 1987.
- In the late 1990s, Comiso was used for the “Rainbow Mission” that housed 5,000 Kosovars during the war in former Yugoslavia. The refugees were temporarily settled in the abandoned homes on the base.
- The north side of the base and main runway have since been developed as Comiso Airport, which supports Sicily's main airport in Catania. Meanwhile, the Air Base south of the runway was abandoned in the late 1990s, and has since slowly been reclaimed by nature.
- Bentley's usage of Comiso is the first time the abandoned base has been put into service for any driving activity. Looking to the future, investigations are being made to locate a new technology research centre, database archives and student accommodation at Comiso.

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