

Caravan Guard 88: American troops' defense of Europe's central front

by Dean Andromidas

The U.S. Army's Fifth Corps held its annual Field Training Exercise (FTX), *Caravan Guard*. Although much smaller in scale than the annual *Autumn Forge* exercises, the exercises gave an excellent impression of the complexity and massiveness of the effort required to maintain a deterrence against Soviet attack, if not the ability to defeat such an attack. Observation of the maneuvers afforded striking testimony to the irresponsibility and even treason of actions by the leadership in Washington to weaken that effort through the INF treaty, cast doubt on it through such policy deliberations as the Iklé-Wohlstetter "Discriminate Deterrence" report, and then punch holes in it through budget cuts.

One of the most revealing aspects of the exercise is the impression it left of the indefensibility of Western Europe if Sen. Sam Nunn and company got their way, and these troops were withdrawn.

Strategic cynics might say that in the event of a Soviet attack on Western Europe, the only role the U.S. Army has, is to guarantee that the President of the United States would have to risk nuclear war for Europe's defense. Therefore, the troops should be removed to prevent general war. In fact, former Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy Fred Iklé, in an interview in a West German newspaper, created a scandal by stating that it would be "insane" for the United States to come to the defense of Germany. Indeed, this could become the case, de facto, if congressional budget cutters and an administration growing more and more blind to strategic reality persist in their present course.

More sane and realistic thinkers see these troops as the front line of an international defense alliance whose integrity and readiness must be maintained, augmented, and developed if we are to deter a Soviet attack, or *win* the ensuing war, should the Soviets choose to attack.

Mission of the Fifth Corps

The Fifth Corps is one of two U.S. Army corps comprising the four American divisions which are stationed in Western Europe. The other corps is the Seventh, based in Stuttgart. Together, they constitute the American Seventh Army, designated *U.S. Army Europe*, with its headquarters in Heidelberg. Theoretically, they can be reinforced by the American Third Corps stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, as well as other formations. The annual *Reforger* exercise is aimed at

exercising that reinforcement capability. These two American corps lie adjacent to one another, and are responsible for nearly 200 miles of north-south front facing East Germany and Czechoslovakia. They comprise two of the eight NATO corps, including West Germany's three corps, and one each of Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium on NATO's central front. These eight NATO corps are supported by 3,500 tactical aircraft. The Central Front confronts 30 Soviet divisions supported by 7,500 tactical aircraft. Those are augmented by 29 non-Soviet Warsaw Pact divisions.

The Fifth Corps, whose headquarters is in the old I.G. Farben office complex in Frankfurt on the Main River, was first formed to fight in World War I, and reconstituted to fight in the World War II. Elements of this corps were the first to enter German territory in 1944, and the first to make contact with the Red Army in 1945. It returned to Germany in 1951, following the decision to rearm Europe and establish the Atlantic Treaty organization. Its territorial front lies astride the famous Fulda Gap, in the valley between the Volgasberg and the Rhoen mountains, through which runs the German-German border on the Fulda River. This is one of the several "high-speed axes of approach" that would be used by an invading Soviet army, whose war plan envisions reaching the Rhine in seven days and North Sea ports and the English Channel in two weeks.

This year's Field Training Exercise, *Caravan Guard*, was an exercise of the maneuvering ability of the corps. It pitted the corps' 3rd Armored Division, 8th Infantry Division, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and other units in a one-on-one attack-defense-attack battle scenario. To the great disappointment of both the soldiers and the spectators and journalists present, the exercise had to be curtailed to be only a command field exercise, because of weather conditions. Given unusually high temperatures and rainy conditions, the maneuvers of heavy tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs) would have caused unacceptable damage to the countryside. The maneuvers are staged over private farms, public roads, and through towns and villages. Therefore, the property, not to mention the lives, of the civilian community becomes a very important consideration. Imagine two full American Army divisions comprising over 46,000 men maneuvering through suburban and rural New York State, and you have an idea of the situation.



A Soviet observer attends the Caravan Guard 88 NATO military maneuvers, February 1988.

'Everything but the teeth'

Lt. Gen. J.W. Woodmansee, the Fifth Corps commander, described the exercise as "everything but the teeth." Indeed, despite the absence of tanks and most of the APCs, a tremendous amount of activity took place, involving 23,200 men (down from 46,000), 799 tracked vehicles (down from 3,340), 6,349 wheeled vehicles, 282 helicopters, and 20 fixed-wing aircraft, in a command field exercise employing four or five vehicles for each company with its command staff. In addition, all the communications, logistical, and aviation resources were deployed as if the full divisions were being maneuvered. Despite the lack of spectacular maneuvering of tanks, mechanized artillery, and the like, there was a lot to see and hear on how the U.S. Army fights in the field.

As in all NATO military exercises, Soviet and other Warsaw Pact countries sent observers. Despite this relative openness of the exercise and the fact that nothing of a very secretive nature was occurring, it was reported by one source, after noticing a Soviet observer raise his arm every time he came across something that was of some intelligence value, that he had a tiny camera up his sleeve—which, obviously enough, automatically snapped pictures when he raised his hand and pointed it. (Good practice, no doubt, for the new opportunities presented by the verification procedures of the INF treaty.) Also on hand were a fair share of East bloc TIR

trucks (Transport Internationale Routier, trucks which pass freely through customs) traversing the area.

Scaling down *Caravan Guard* to a command field exercise enabled the press, for the first time, to observe the corps command centers called "cells," including the headquarters of the "Orange" forces, of the "Blue" forces, and of the Umpire Command Cell (UCC). The UCC oversees the entire exercise and determines who "wins" the various engagements, attacks, etc. The Blue and Orange cells were staffed as if they were each full corps, that is, commanding the two to four divisions that make up an American corps. These headquarters were surprisingly small, no more than 20 to 25 officers, NCOs, and enlisted men and women. Computer terminals were used to transmit orders, far more secure and efficient than voice communications.

Each of the cells, including the UCC, had a map of the entire war zone complete with the disposition of Blue and Orange, friend and enemy forces. The observable differences in disposition of forces, the location of the "front line" on each of the maps, served as testimony to what one famous military historian called the "fog of war."

The acting corps commander of the Blue forces, in this case the defenders, briefed us on the status of the "battle." The Orange attackers have advanced eight kilometers in the first six hours of the "attack," a color line on the map defines

the "FLOT" (forward line of troops). We are told this is the "cover force battle." Although the "enemy" has advanced eight "klicks," it has yet to reach the prepared defenses of the Orange forces. The corps commander's "G-2," the intelligence officer, briefs us on how he is getting a steady flow of information from his "rollover" troops, specially trained soldiers whose mission is to stay behind as the enemy "rolls over" their positions. They stay hidden and communicate battlefield intelligence to their respective headquarters. Other intelligence flows in through aerial surveillance, and most important, the front-line troops at the "point."

The report of the "firing" of a Lance missile provokes one journalist to ask whether the advance of powerful and sophisticated weapons could lead to a reduction in the number of troops required for European defense. Was the infantryman becoming a dying species? The commander's answer: "Tanks, missiles, nuclear weapons, can be used to destroy targets, enemy positions, and what have you, but it's only the infantry and engineers on the ground who can consolidate and hold that territory. . . . No, the infantryman will by no means be a dying species." (Sam Nunn, Frank Carlucci: Are you listening?)

We leave the headquarters to observe the "battle" via helicopter. We touch down at the "point," the most advanced position of the Blue forces. Here, we are able to observe the "combined arms team," the basic fighting formation of Army-Airforce operations. A young captain, the company commander, in a few moments, briefs us in amazing detail on his company's unfolding engagement. No doubt, his briefing is designed for trained officers, not humble journalists. Describing how his most forward troops are engaging the enemy, he reports that a "JAAT" (joint air attack team) comprising Army attack helicopters such as the new Apache and Air Force F-16 fighter bombers, had just hit an armored formation of the Orange forces.

We remount our helicopter for more observation. This region of Germany is characterized by rolling hills and low mountain ranges. While the open farmland is ideal for mechanized operations, it is interspersed with deep forestland and other natural features suitable for organizing defensive positions and bases for attack. These maneuvers are aimed at exercising these operations, an opportunity that many of the soldiers not only appreciate, but see as absolutely necessary.

Although these maneuvers cover a front of no more the 30 kilometers, equivalent of only one of NATO's 26 divisions on the central front, their observation clearly gave a glimpse at the challenges before NATO in the face of a Soviet military machine undergoing unrestrained development and expansion. The question, as it has confronted NATO since President Reagan signed the INF agreement and spurred on talk of U.S. troop withdrawals, is whether the political leadership of the Alliance will betray what is clearly a commitment among the soldiers of the Alliance to carry out their responsibilities.

France vows military support for Germany

by Christine Bierre

French President François Mitterrand and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, in statements made prior to the Brussels summit meeting of NATO leaders at the beginning of March, warned against American disengagement from Europe and underlined that France would view a Soviet attack on West Germany as tantamount to an attack on France itself.

Chirac stressed, in an interview to *l'Express* magazine published Feb. 26: "I think it necessary to demonstrate more clearly than ever to Germany that she is not alone. This is why I declared in the firmest possible way, that the engagement of France side by side with the Federal Republic, would be immediate and without reserve in case of conflict. This is why I rejoice in the latest concrete developments of Franco-German cooperation, the mixed brigade and the Defense Council, which open the way for the creation of a common strategic space between our two countries, something which General de Gaulle wished for wholeheartedly, and which was contained in germ in the Franco-German treaty of 1963."

President Mitterrand, in an interview to the daily *Ouest France*, criticized the trend in the United States toward withdrawing the nuclear umbrella from Europe. He also opposed plans to compensate for the withdrawal of medium-range nuclear missiles, under the INF treaty, by modernizing short-range missiles. Germany is at the center of any future battlefield, he said, and "Germany has difficulties accepting the idea of being a territory stuffed with nuclear explosives and the probable target of a short-range nuclear war. One can and must understand that. It is true that most of the nuclear weapons of a very short range, cannot attain real objectives beyond the territorial limits of Germany, from where they are presently located."

Asked what America can do to reassure the West Germans, Mitterrand responded: "Ensure the balance of forces in all areas, and do everything to make sure that German soil is not the theater for a new war, which is what deterrence is intended to prevent." On the question as to what are the limits to Franco-German cooperation, he replied, "It is not the duty of France alone to defend Germany, but of the alliance as a whole. The fact that, beyond that, two European countries, friends and allies, linked by several treaties, wish to cooperate intensely, can only be useful to all other partners. The fact that, along with this cooperation, the embryo of a European defense appears, is something that suits me well."