

NATO trains defense against spetsnaz

by Rainer Apel and Michael Liebig

In the framework of this year's NATO autumn maneuvers, the exercise "LV'88" was held from Sept. 8 to 13, to practice securing freedom to operate in the Rear Combat Zone (RCZ) of NATO's Central Army Group (Centag).

Centag encompasses the southern half of West Germany, south of a line running from Kassel to Bonn and from there through the Ardennes in Belgium. "LV'88" was confined primarily to the West German state of Rhineland-Palatinate (the part of Germany west of the Rhine and south of Bonn, bounded on the south by the Saar, and to the West by Belgium and Luxembourg). "LV'88" was under the command of Territorial Command South of the Bundeswehr (West German Armed Forces), located in Mannheim.

Were war to break out, some 250,000 German Territorial troops (for the most part reservists) would be placed under Centag's command; however, for the LV'88 exercises, only about 30,000 Bundeswehr troops, including some 15,000 reservists, were involved. The Territorial Forces of the Bundeswehr, in contrast to the standing Army, are not deployed directly under NATO command, but under a national, German command.

Defending the rear

All too often, the importance of the military dimension of "rear areas" relative to the "front" is underestimated. Usually the rear's significance is seen as logistical supply areas for the troops fighting at the front. In this regard, the main supporting task of the Territorial Command South encompasses: a) Securing the lines of supply to the front; b) Keeping open the transport routes, in particular those crossing the Rhine; c) Receiving and treating the wounded; d) Cooperation with German civilian authorities; e) Securing the movement of fresh combat forces to reinforce or replace units at the front. These reinforcements include above all the American "Reforger troops" (airlifted in from bases in the United States), and also French and Canadian forces.

This support dimension of the wartime tasks assigned to Territorial Command South was reflected in the "LV'88" exercises. The Territorials practiced organizing the moving columns of large American and French units through the Palatinate and over the Rhine. The American units then went on to participate in the large "Certain Challenge" maneuvers east of the Rhine in the regions of the Main and Neckar rivers,

with the French units concentrated in the Neckar region.

The second dimension of the wartime tasks assigned to Territorial Command South involves military operations by the Territorial Forces in the rear zones, where they have to operate "on their own two feet." Here, the job is to defend against and smash enemy sabotage and commando operations, as well as enemy forces parachuted or air-transported into the rear zone. In the "LV'88" exercises, *combat actions* in the rear area were given a high priority—reflecting, in turn, the huge attention the Soviet military leadership accords to operations against NATO's rear areas.

Specifically, in the framework of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov's reorganization of the Western Theater of War High Command, the Soviet special forces units (*spetsnaz*) and airborne troops have been expanded, quantitatively and qualitatively. These *spetsnaz* and airborne forces will be primarily employed, and clearly so, in NATO's rear.

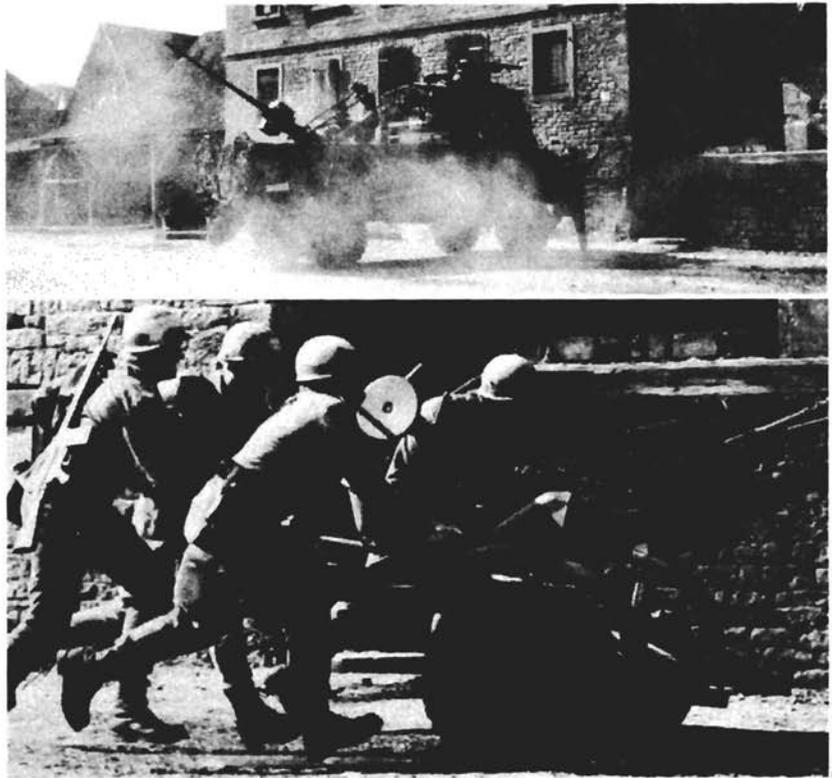
Those who observed the NATO autumn maneuvers last year, were struck most unpleasantly by the fact that the maneuver scenarios accorded no importance whatsoever to commando and sabotage operations mounted by the aggressor. Questions posed along these lines were usually met with a shrug. It was therefore refreshing and encouraging that in the "LV'88" exercises, the guarding of vital objects, and the defense against and crushing of commando operations were given a central role at every level of command, down to the company level. In the "LV'88" maneuvers, *spetsnaz* was no longer some exotic, foreign word.

Too tame a scenario

However, one must also critically note that the arrangements for the maneuver scenario for "LV'88"—as far as the observer could see—concerning the firepower, intensity, and extent of enemy commando operations, were staged in a rather tame and quite artificial "gradual-escalation" fashion. In accordance with the Soviet conception of the "initial period of war," as it has been developed since the 1970s by the Ogarkov School, one must assume that a Soviet attack will begin through lightning, surprise commando operations, conducted over a broad area. The scenario assumption in "LV'88" therefore seems more than questionable—as it appeared at least to the observers: After being infiltrated into the NATO rear, enemy special forces units would first spend a long time reconnoitering the objects they were assigned to take out, then "probe" for soft spots in the NATO defense, and then finally attack.

It was also unclear what attention "LV'88" had paid to the problem of "pre-infiltration" by *spetsnaz* forces and that of their "local" in-place infrastructure. Furthermore, any hint of "unconventional" airborne operations by enemy special forces, for example, by Soviet forced development of glider parachute capabilities, remained unfortunately very vague. The observer was left with the impression that NATO's military leadership has finally come to grips with the burning

Three images of the Territorial Army in action, from the "LV'88" maneuvers in September in West Germany.



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problem of enemy commando operations in the NATO rear, but has, at the same time, applied the "brakes" on drawing the necessary conclusions from this fact.

This evaluation certainly does not apply to the lower levels of the chain of command, nor to the ordinary soldiers, who definitely seem prepared to appreciate this obvious and extremely dangerous form of threat deep in their own country. These reservists require no paranoid, tension-ridden scenarios in order to understand, for example, how easily infiltrated commando troops could be disguised among the many Eastern European migrant workers involved in the harvesting of grapes and wine-making in the area where "LV'88" was in progress. For reservists, it's not hard to comprehend the immense military use for the aggressor in undertaking commando attacks against the military and civilian infrastructure in NATO's rear. They fully realize that the enemy here can count on what for him is an extremely favorable ratio of results scored to forces deployed.

Here lies a broad potential to motivate and activate the Bundeswehr reserve forces, whose importance for the defense of West Germany will clearly dramatically increase. The observer at the exercises witnessed, at the battalion and company level, encouraging signs of readiness and initiative in conducting defense against commando operations. Beyond the necessary task of providing static defense for fixed

objects and defending against *spetsnaz* attacks, the reservists moved in a highly mobile fashion, actively seeking out and destroying enemy commando forces.

How important such active hunting for the enemy before he strikes is, was shown in the defense of airfields. Enemy commando troops, without directly attacking an airfield, simply by using hand-held SAMs fired from near the airfield, can effectively shoot down NATO aircraft taking off or landing. A purely static defense in this case would be senseless. A broad, wide-ranging training program for the Territorial Forces in executing such search and destroy missions against enemy forces lurking in the vicinity, is urgently required.

This example brings home the need for close cooperation between the civilian and military authorities. Not only must the Armed Forces work with police and the Bundesgrenzschutz (West German Border Forces) in locating and defending against *spetsnaz* forces; when it comes to the locating *spetsnaz*, the help provided by the citizens is decisive. The German people's unbiased attitude and indeed good will toward the armed forces was perhaps the most important and most joyful impression gained from the "LV'88" exercise. The actual behavior of the majority of Germans corresponds in no way to the distorted, lying picture of non-existent "irritation" or "hostility" toward NATO maneuvers, that the German mass media frantically attempt to concoct.