The Long Patrol

The British in Germany Since 1945

Roy Bainton

Mainstream Publishing *eBooks*

This book is dedicated to
BOB HALL and HILARY BLYTHE
whose faith and encouragement
have always been music to my ears.

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

Epub ISBN: 9781780573717
Version 1.0
www.mainstreampublishing.com

First published in Great Britain in 2003 by MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING
(EDINBURGH) LTD
7 Albany Street
Edinburgh EH1 3UG

ISBN 1 84018 715 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Acknowledgements: The Long Patrollers

To all of the following who served at various times in BAOR, without whose detailed recollections this book would not exist, I offer my sincere thanks for your contributions.

1945–60
Ronald Loveday, M.V. Bayes, Terry Barber, Harry Jackson, Dennis Pell, Albert Winstanley, Jed Cressy, John Appleby, Geoff Gilbert, J.G. Rooth, J.E. Booth, Alec Kingsmill, Gordon Cox, Allen Parker, Gerald Gurney, Ted Levy, Stan Roberts, Peter Daniels, George Walker, Gerda Walker, Norman Baldwin, R. Doney, John Saville, Hugh Martin, Betty R. Radley, Adrian Cooper, Margaret Shelley, Mrs H. Roberts, Rosalee Meehan, Bob McLaughlin, Andrew Burns, Iain Leggatt, Major Reg Jones

1960–70
Jimmy King, Phil ‘Tommo’ Thompson, Brian Morris, T. Clark BEM, Hilary Plews, Susan Cullen, Brian Airey, Iain Leggatt, Don Rowley, Charlie Landsborough, George Enderby

1970–89
Carole Gladman, Janine Soyer, Cheryl Ciccone, Dr Hugh Thomas, Shirley Houston, Marguerite Frost, Rosemary Blackwood, Lieutenant Colonel Robin Greenham, Martin McIntyre, Nigel Dunkley MBE, Mike Robinson

IN GERMANY
Carolyn Battey, Media Operations, Herford; Mike Whitehurst, Information Officer, Herford; Warrant Officer Will Betts,

Herford; Colin Gordon, Liaison, Herford; Major Martin Waters, Sennelager; Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Bacon, Sennelager; Simon Tanner, Sennelager; Erich Kessler, Bielefeld; Madeline Donelly, Gütersloh; Warrant Officer Dave Walkley, Gütersloh; Stephan Grimm, Gütersloh; Erwin Gotthald, Berlin; Lieutenant Colonel Robin Greenham, Berlin; Nigel Dunkley MBE, Berlin; Gunter Steinmeyer, Berlin; BFBS, Germany; *Soldier* magazine; Sixth Sense; The Museum of The Allied Forces, Berlin; The Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Berlin; and special thanks to the MOD for their help.

AND SPECIAL THANKS TO:
My agent, Malcolm Imrie, for his faith and support in this project; to my wife, Wendy, for suffering yet another year of penury; to Bill Campbell at Mainstream; my son, Dr Martin Bainton for his support; Jane Aisbitt; Graeme Blaikie and Will Mackie at Mainstream; my daughter Sarah and her partner, Ivan Ball, for their continuing encouragement; Peter Jackson, Mark Chamberlain and the members of The Over The Hill Club for always buying my books; and Peter Moody, for making life easier.

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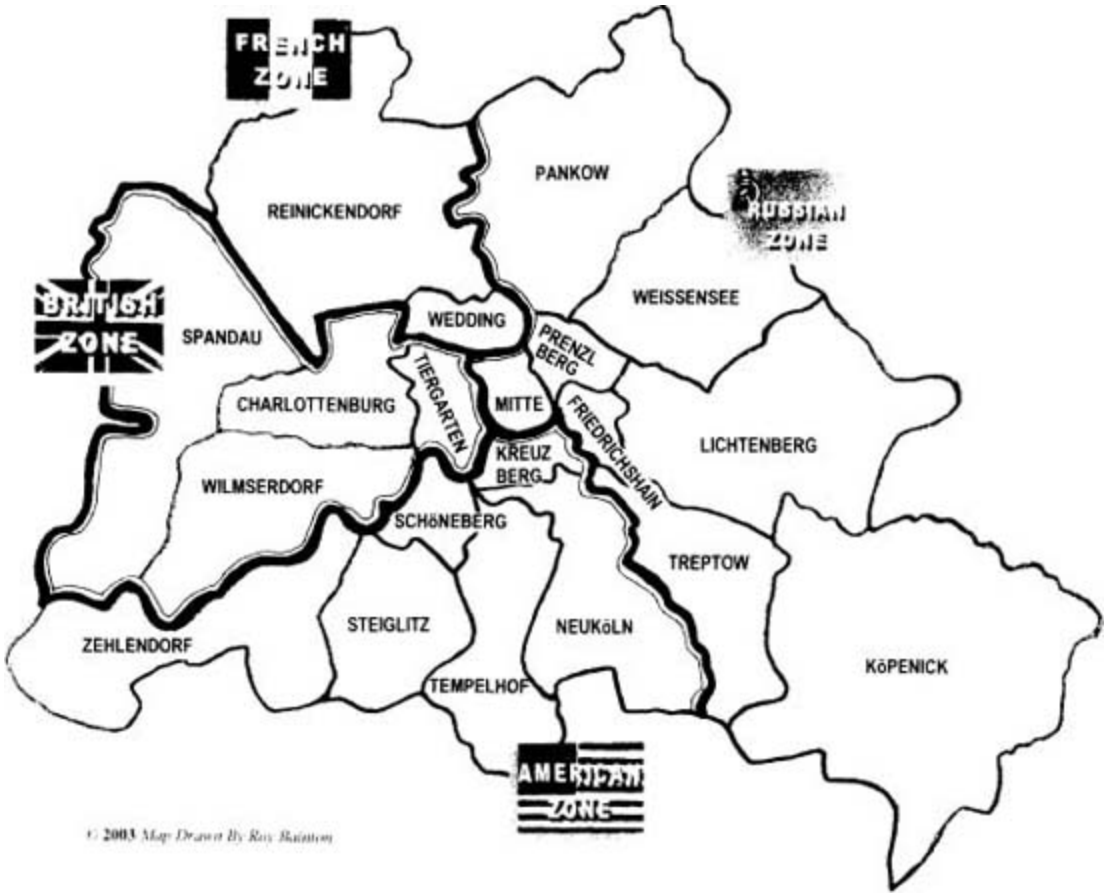
Divided Berlin
1945–1989

In 1949, the repercussions of the Berlin Airlift created further political tension between the eastern and western blocs. The three western zones – British, American and French – were fused together to become the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) or West Germany. In the east, the Soviets formed the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which would become known as East Germany. West Berlin kept its zones and East Berlin became the capital of East Germany, whilst Bonn became the capital of West Germany. In 1951 Walter Ulbricht became leader of the GDR until 1971, when he was replaced by Erich Honecker. Dissatisfaction in the East had led to a mass revolt among the population in 1953 that was quickly subdued by Soviet troops. In 1955, the GDR joined the Warsaw Pact, whilst West Germany joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In 1961, an estimated four million crossed from the East to the West, which prompted the Soviets to build the Berlin Wall. Following mass demonstrators in Berlin on 1989, the wall was finally breached, and by July 1990 Germany was reunited.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MITTE
CHARLOTTENBURG
FRIEDRICHSHAIN
LICHTENBERG
KREUZ BERG
WILMSERDORF
SCHöNEBERG
TREPTOW
STEIGLITZ
NEUKöLN
ZEHLENDORF
KöPENICK
TEMPELHOF
AMERICAN ZONE
© 2003 Map Drawn By Ray Bainton

A Brief Guide to Army Organisation

Army Group This is usually commanded by a **field marshal** and consists of several armies grouped together with as many as a million soldiers involved.

Army Commanded by a **general** or a **lieutenant-general**, this consists of various **corps** usually numbering up to 450,000 men.

Corps Consist of a number of **divisions** numbering anywhere between 75,000 and 150,000 men. Corps are under the command of either a lieutenant-general or a **major-general.**

Division This is made up of a number of **brigades** commanded by a major-general. A division can number up to 20,000 soldiers.

Brigade This is formed from **regiments** or **battalions** commanded by a **brigadier** or a **brigadier-general**, and can number up to 8,000 men.

Regiment In the British Army a **regiment** is an administrative body which organises all the operations of the services and arms, with the exception of infantry, which operates under the title '**battalion**'.

Battalions are mainly formed from infantry; they are a formation of around 600 to 1,000 soldiers under the command of a **lieutenant-colonel.** The battalion consists of various **companies.**

Company (or squadron) This is a group of soldiers, usually numbering up to 150 men. It is commanded by a **major** or a **captain** and is broken down into smaller units known as **platoons.**

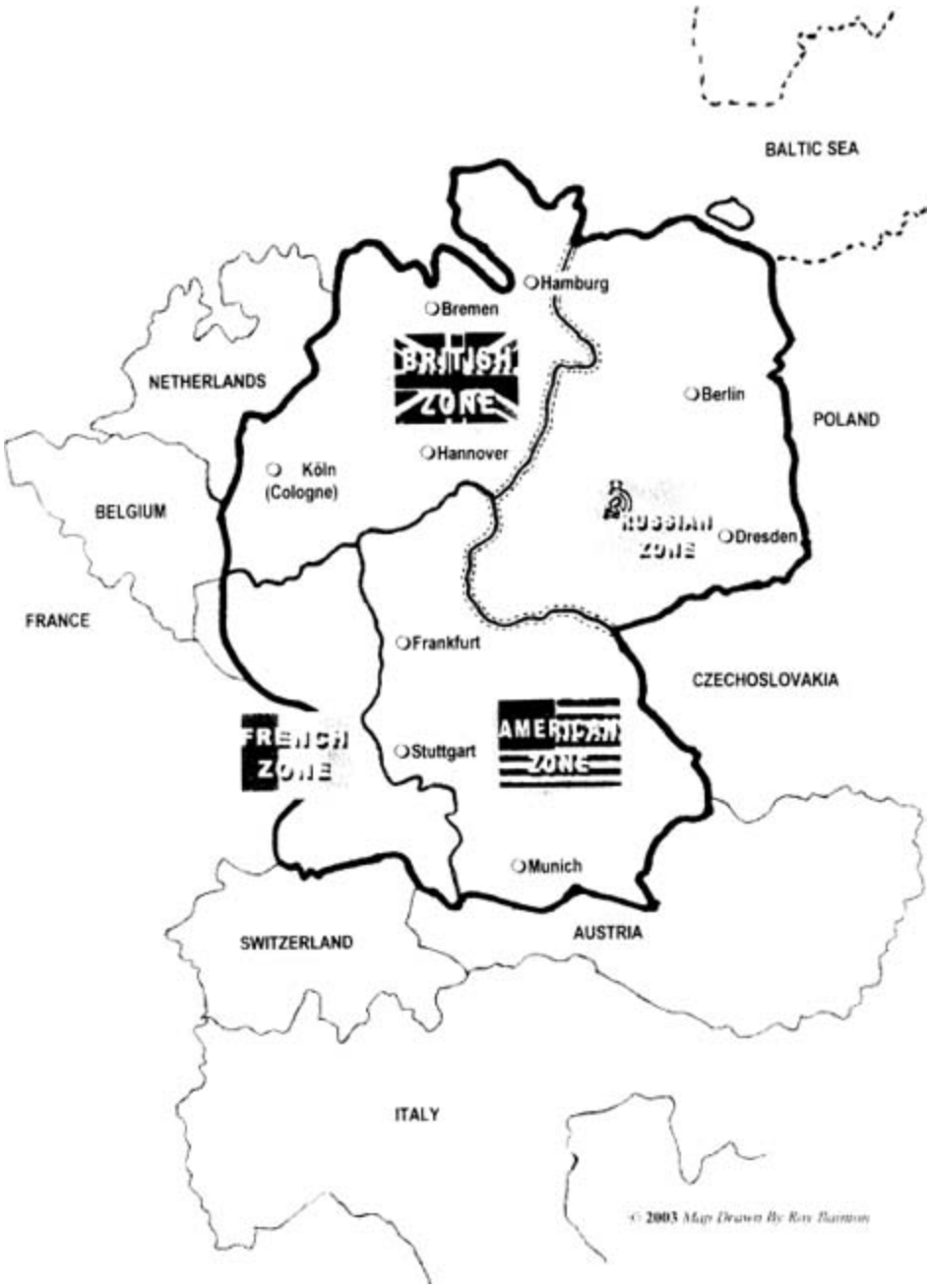
Platoons usually consist of up to 30 men and are sometimes referred to as **troops.** A platoon is

commanded by a **junior officer.**

Section This is the Army's smallest fighting formation of up to ten soldiers, commanded by an **NCO** (non-commissioned officer). (The Americans refer to this grouping as a 'squad'.)

Divided Germany

After the Second World War, Germany was divided into four zones of control: British, American, French and Russian. The western zones were fused to become West Germany in 1949. The immediate post-war period was accompanied by the mass movement of millions of refugees and displaced persons. Following economic recovery in the West as a result of the Marshall Plan, in 1957 the European Economic Comunity (EEC) was formed. In the East, Soviet reparations drained the economy, the result being that recovery did not get under way until the death of Stalin in 1953.


BALTIC SEA
Hamburg
Bremen
BRITISH ZONE
NETHERLANDS
Berlin
POLAND
Hannover
Köln
(Cologne)
BELGIUM
RUSSIAN ZONE
Dresden
FRANCE
Frankfurt
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
FRENCH ZONE
Stuttgart
AMERICAN ZONE
Munich
SWITZERLAND
AUSTRIA
ITALY
© 2003 Map Drawn By Ron Blanton

Army Ranks

There are a great number of ranks in the Army depending on which department – Infantry, Armour or Artillery – soldiers are serving in, so this again is a very basic overview of the chain of command. For instance, the rank of private goes under a number of titles; if he's serving with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), he's known as 'craftsman'; in the Royal Signals he'll be 'signalman'; in the Guards a 'guardsman'; and in the Special Air Service (SAS) he'd be a 'trooper'.

The following, from the top down, gives an elementary view of ranks. The British Army has also taken on the US Army's 'star system' for Generals, and these are noted below.

- Field marshal (5 stars)
- General (4 stars)
- Lieutenant-general (3 Stars)
- Major-general 2 stars)
- Brigadier (1 star)
- Colonel
- Lieutenant-colonel
- Major
- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Second-lieutenant (both lieutenants and second-lieutenants are also referred to as subalterns)
- Regimental sergeant-major (RSM) is a warrant officer class I
- Company sergeant-major (CSM) is a warrant officer class II
- Colour-sergeant
- Sergeant

Corporal
Lance-corporal
Private

Glossary & List of Abbreviations

Battle Group Mixed force with tanks, armoured vehicles and infantry
Bundeswehr Germany's post-war armed forces
Lumpie A slang Army term for a female soldier
Redcap Military Police (noted for their red headgear)
Singlies Unmarried soldiers
Squaddie A general slang term for soldiers usually at the rank of private
Stag Sentry duty
Tour (or **Tour of Duty**) Denotes a period of service in a particular location
Towel Head Slang term for an Arab
WRAC Women's Royal Army Corps
AAC Army Air Corps
BAOR British Army of the Rhine
BFBS British Forces Broadcasting Service
BFES British Forces Education Service
BFPO British Forces Post Office
ENSA Entertainments National Service Association
FDR *Federal Deutsches Republic* – the Federal Republic of Germany (known as West Germany)
GDR German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GPO General Post Office
NAAFI Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
PONTI Person of No Tactical Importance
RA Royal Artillery
RAEC Royal Army Educational Corps
RAMC Royal Army Medical Corps
RAOC Royal Army Ordnance Corps
RAPC Royal Army Pay Corps
RCT Royal Corps of Transport
REME Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

RMP Royal Military Police
STASI *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* – East German Ministry of State Security

Introduction

> From 7 May 1945 we put our rifles away and got to work. After Hamburg we went to Duisburg. We cleared mines, stray bombs (our bombs!) from the autobahns. Our main job was bridges, started at Düsseldorf, on to Wesel, Marienborn, working all the way back to Hamburg. When you called [your book] *The Long Patrol*, you got it right. But think – it was men like myself and my comrades who had made it. A lot did not.
>
> Ronald Loveday, Lance Corporal, London Bomb Disposal

Shiny, chromium plated, it stood out amongst the other dusty bric-a-brac and caught my eye. It was five inches by three and even without my reading glasses I could see the familiar outline of a map of what was once called West Germany engraved on the front.

How this old cigarette case came to be in an antiques arcade in the cosy little market town of Louth in Lincolnshire will remain a mystery. The man on the stall couldn't tell me. Once I had my glasses on it intrigued me even more. The North Sea was engraved in German as *'Nordsee'*. At the bottom right-hand corner of the map was the legend 'The British Zone In Germany'. And there were all the towns and cities I remembered from childhood.

Back in the 1950s, when Judith Chalmers would get into her stride every Sunday lunchtime on BBC radio's *Family Favourites*, without fail those seemingly strange locations would figure largely: Osnabrück, Hanover, Detmold, Münster, Oldenburg, Sennelager.

It was hard to imagine how far away these places were. Back then, of course, before the British discovered holidays abroad, Germany still seemed as distant to us as Mars or Venus. Today we can leave the Midlands at breakfast time and be in Frankfurt for tea – a journey which, in my childhood, would have seemed like a major expedition.

Yet in those mysterious places, from where soldiers wrote postcards from British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses requesting the latest chart hit by Elvis Presley, Little Richard or Lonnie Donegan, lived thousands of British servicemen. Many were regulars, thousands more were reluctant recruits enduring their two years' national service. Even as I grew older, 'our boys' in Germany continued to figure large in our lives. Well into the 70s and 80s it seemed as if there was a very large corner of that conquered foreign field which would be forever England – and Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Today, the British are not afraid of Europe. They buy houses in France and apartments in Spain and Portugal. But Germany? That's a different place. For the British experience of life in Germany there are no Peter Mayle memoirs nor any wistful Stella Artois adverts. Although there's a lot of pleasure to be had in Deutschland, it seems to come across to us as too 'businesslike' for a holiday venue. Our experience of Germany is a military one, although prior to writing this book, having a German grandfather, I have frequently toured the country in an attempt to discover my own roots and study the German character.

The Germans have always been an industrious, law-abiding people. There used to be a cynical notion among some Allied politicians following the fall of the Third Reich that, with the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949, the Germans had taken to their new-found democracy 'because they had been ordered to do so'. Yet there has always been a degree of obedience and correctness in German society which still impresses the more laid-back British visitor.

We have been conditioned over the decades since the Second World War to accept a stereotyped view of our European neighbours, the classic example of which is John Cleese's 'Don't mention the war' episode in the hilarious *Fawlty Towers* series. Often it was hard to resist.

I narrowly escaped national service in the late 50s by going to sea in the merchant navy. But that seven-year experience of living for long periods of time in the enclosed environment of a tramp steamer, with all its attendant traditions and comradeship, is not dissimilar to that which creates the bond between soldiers. The difference was that as simple civilian sailors, we were not armed or constantly expecting a Third World War. The only Russians we saw were passing vessels similar to ours, just enigmatic floating islands of the Soviet regime, with their hammer-and-sickle funnel markings and red flags. Their politics didn't particularly matter; like us, they were simple sailors.

Not coming from a military background, I did wonder just how interesting this project might be, yet after taking a look at the statistics that revealed that over those four decades hundreds of thousands of men, women and children had undergone this German experience, it became more intriguing. Although the RAF were also stationed in Germany during those years, the general perception of the period has always centred on the Army's presence. BAOR was an abbreviation known to all, so without wishing to make light of our flyers' German experience, it seemed simpler from my point of view to keep this story in khaki. To prepare a proposal for the book I placed a series of letters in provincial newspapers asking readers if they had been in the forces and stationed in Germany at any time between 1945 and 1990. The resulting mailbag plunged me into hours of fascinating reading, telephone conversations and face-to-face interviews, and within a very short time I realised that here was a hitherto neglected chapter of British social history, detached from the mother country.

Soldiers remember numbers, regiments, exercises and their mates. They also remember the countries they served in and how they felt about their locations overseas. Men like Bob Spragg, who emailed me his complete Army career, recalled that 'My total service was 22 years and 117 days'.

The months, days and hours seemed even more important to the national service conscripts.

The German military experience had produced a new breed of Brit abroad. No matter what your opinion of the EU, as I discovered on my visits to today's Army bases, many of these fatigue-clad expats seemed, by their attitude, to represent the new European just as much as Jacques Delors or Helmut Kohl. From the preparatory reading I had done I fully expected to meet young soldiers seething with xenophobia, living an insular life in their secure UK enclaves, complete with HP Sauce, PG Tips and jars of Marmite. To some degree the latter part of that expectation was correct, but on the whole my preconceptions were obliterated after my first hour at the British Army's Wentworth Barracks in Herford, Northern Germany.

The end of the Cold War has altered the atmosphere. There are already many books in print which deal with the history of the Cold War, NATO and the various political upheavals Europe has undergone since 1945. These mainly academic studies are indispensable for anyone tackling a book such as this one. Yet the ordinary serviceman's individual experience of those four tense decades has, until now, remained isolated, confined to a hearty retelling in the pub or at one of the many regimental association reunions which occur frequently around the UK.

Trying to marshal all the yarns collected over two years into a comprehensive, chronological manuscript has been a challenge. My first problem came when I realised that the bulk of responses coming in were from men and women who had served in the immediate post-war years, between 1945 and 1960. At one point I almost considered that the book might have to end in 1965, so thin on the ground were contacts from the later decades. Yet eventually more younger ex-servicemen got to hear of the project, and some of the elements of the original concept were saved.

However, the reader will note that those early years do dominate the book and for obvious reasons. One is that in the immediate post-war years the Allied presence in Europe was at its height. Another reason is national service. The experiences of those who were often reluctant conscripts rather than career soldiers seemed to have been burned into their memory much more severely. They were still in their teens. National service was a formative part of their lives and serving in Germany at a time when most of their countrymen only ventured as far as the British coast for a holiday was an exotic experience that they would never forget. In those early years the stark aftermath of the war left an impression that remains grimly intact above all other memories. Some of the memoirs, such as those of Alec Kingsmill, Adrian Cooper, John Saville and Iain Leggatt are gems of recollection that otherwise may well have never seen the light of day.

A large proportion of the men I have spoken to are now well into their 80s. I have had the distinct impression throughout that these memories, although dormant, have been aching to come out ever since the day these men were demobbed. I feel privileged to be the conduit through which so much simple, yet important, history has been allowed to pass. Therefore, I hope I have done them justice.

When we examine the way the art of war has altered since that last great conflict, the growth of technology and the sweeping changes which have overtaken society, it is clear that the world of the soldier of the 1945 to 60 period differs enormously to the one I witnessed in 2002 in Sennelager. There, in the virtual-battle training environment, managed by the Land Warfare Collective Training Group (Germany) (LWCTG[G]), recruits spend many weeks before huge banks of computer screens, plotting and fighting sweeping land battles with cyberspace tanks and armoured vehicles. Alternate days are spent in a cavernous hangar containing tank simulators, their interiors accurate reproductions of the

£2 million-pound machines they will eventually drive through German woods and over fields, and, ultimately, across the real battlefields of any future conflicts.

Much has been made in the media of our Army's poor equipment, of how during the first Gulf War British squaddies swapped their rations with the Americans for decent boots and other essentials. But listening to old soldiers over recent months has convinced me that such gripes and grumbles have, throughout history, formed a major part of the soldier's story and contributed greatly to a characteristic sense of humour. Even as far back as the fourteenth century it made common sense for an archer to build and own his own longbow – or any other essential kit. There may be lasting glory in a noble death but there's a lot more fun to be had by staying alive. Since the nineteenth century, however, governments have organised their ordnance, supplies and arsenals in a more unified manner. The fact that substandard items are still frequently foisted upon troops is more to do with big business – there's big money in arms manufacture. Since 1900, the arms industry has developed along the same lines as other manufacturing industries. Products need to be tested in the field, and not all of them pass muster. Guaranteed obsolescence in products ensures on-going development and new business. It took 100 years for the matchlock rifle to be replaced by the wheellock, another two centuries before the wheellock gave way to the flintlock, which 100 years later was superseded by the percussion-cap rifle. Yet the standard issue to US forces, the Model 1903 Springfield rifle, only lasted 33 years and the automatic M-l Garand, standardised in 1936, only 21 years.[1]

In competitive arms manufacture, just as in the automobile industry, speed, efficiency and fashion – the constant desire for new models – rules the balance sheet.

When we consider the size of armies and their requirement for arms after the nineteenth century, their stock market potential becomes clear. At the height of his power Alexander the Great only commanded 40,000 men. Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army was only half that size. Yet in 1870 a million Prussians invaded France, and in the 1914–18 war, a staggering 66 million men fought on all sides.[2]

This is a big market. Armies need not only guns but uniforms. For instance, in the Second World War, even being a cowboy was a profitable occupation. It is estimated that to provide 2 million men and women with military footwear, it took 3,750,000 cows to provide the uppers and 4,462,500 steers to make the soles.[3] Like the Hollywood movie industry, for the stockbroker, arms manufacture remains a good investment in any depression.

Guns aside, as the following chapters hopefully demonstrate, the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) has had as much to do with our military prowess as weapons have. That's one thing Napoleon got right – the soldier's stomach is very important in peace and war.

This book, although concerned with soldiers, is not about war. It deals with long periods of that odd void we loosely called 'peace' – or the absence of war – that was filled in Germany by a military who were kept in a constant state of alertness. National servicemen simply counted their days, longing to be back in civvy street. However, despite much of their initial reluctance to be in uniform, one phrase seemed to repeat itself at the end of every national serviceman's conversation or letter: 'I wouldn't have missed it for the world.'

As for the regular soldiers and their families, in the main they too were just enjoying their day-to-day life in the hope that the politicians would keep their safety catches firmly locked and stick to diplomacy. Of course, they never do.

One thing struck me in particular whilst visiting our bases in Germany: everyone seemed relaxed and happy to be there. Although everyone was British, I felt foreign. I asked one warrant officer from Bielefeld (he wished to remain anonymous), who will soon be leaving the Army after almost 30 years of service, about what he would do back home.

'Back home? I can't see myself going back. It seems foreign to me. I go over, you know, [for] special occasions, weddings, that kind of thing. But it's all alien to me. I've got used to Germany. I have a German wife. I live in a German house. I mix with my neighbours. No, it isn't the England I remember. I suppose I'll live out my days here in Germany.'

His attitude might have been unbelievable to those British soldiers in Germany back in 1945, yet the roots of this German love affair were planted even then.

M. V. Bayes, now living in Leamington Spa, served in the Royal Corps of Signals and was stationed in Hanover and Berlin from 1945 to 47.

'When the war ended we were not allowed to speak to the Germans. We had a policy of non-fraternisation. Later this was relaxed. I spoke to few Germans, and the ones I did speak with seemed to regret losing the war, but didn't regret starting it. Some of the men in our unit had German girlfriends, and one man said he would never go back to his wife . . .'

The modern, favourable attitude to the Germans was more prevalent than I'd expected. When one considers the bitterness of Anglo-German history over the past century, it says much for the way Europe has picked itself up and dusted off the grief of two massive wars. In many ways, regular soldiers who have experienced long service in Germany have grown with that country, and not with Britain. They follow the flag, and do their government's

bidding, yet when the time comes to hang up their uniform, many will be quite happy to stay in their beloved Deutschland. As the saying in Berlin goes regarding the Allies: ‘they came as conquerors and left as friends’ – but many have stayed.

The period of history which brought about that transformation is a remarkable chapter. The Treaty of Versailles, imposed on Germany at the end of the First World War, would pale into insignificance in comparison with the events which were to be experienced by Germans after the defeat of the Third Reich.

A NATION DIVIDED

In 1945, Germany, once a powerful nation, was divided by the victorious Allies into four zones of occupation. The United States, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain all had their own areas of administration. But this was in no way some vindictive sharing of the spoils of war by conquering powers. The reality was that Germany had been so physically, materially and morally devastated by her defeat that in social terms, the country had become a wasteland. In no way could the victors simply retire and leave behind a moral vacuum that might easily have been filled by the all-powerful Soviet Union.

For 13 nightmarish years, National Socialism’s violent stranglehold had throttled any remaining vestiges of political freedom. Democracy, and those who espoused it, had crumbled under the jackboot. The first priority of the Allies was to sort out the hard-line Nazis from those in the social administration who had simply done their jobs, run regions and cities or kept the roads, railways and utilities running. Yet the extent of damage, and the high civilian casualty rate (just under 4 million compared to Britain’s 60,000) offered nothing but a vista of complete chaos, which could only be tackled by military efficiency. At first, strict rules of non-fraternisation were put in place. In a

country which had seemingly thrown itself wholeheartedly behind the Führer's megalomania, no one was to be trusted.

Eventually, those 'good' Germans who had struggled to survive away from the constant scrutiny of the Gestapo, came blinking back into the light, and as their genuine credentials were finally revealed, they began to play a part in administering the four zones. Political parties were formed. Following the war's end, within a few months, despite the fact that all average Germans had on their mind was mere physical survival, elections were held. Although Germans would carry the Nazi period with them as a heavy burden of memory through subsequent generations, one can only respect the accomplishment of the nation in the period after the war, when a new economy, soon to be admired by the world, was built from scratch and cities were reconstructed – all simultaneous with the huge problem of assimilating millions of refugees, exiles from the eastern areas now lost to Germany following her defeat.

By the end of the 1940s, a new shadow had cast itself over Germany: the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the United States, now known as the 'superpowers', brandished their opposing ideologies at each other across the Iron Curtain. The Allied hope at the war's end that Germany would have remained a single, unified state had been dashed. As the 1950s dawned, the need for political and economic progress eventually required the three Allied-administered zones of Germany to be joined together, to make, in 1949, the country we would know as the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR), more commonly referred to as West Germany. In the east, the Russians had no intention of moving, and thus the eastern zone became yet another Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

And so the scene was set for a continuing face-off for the next four decades. This cruel split down the centre of a nation must have seemed to many Germans some kind of divine retribution, an added slap in the face on top of

defeat. Families could no longer see one another. If you lived in Dortmund and had relatives in Dresden, the days of getting together were over. The border was as tightly closed and policed as any border in history, and in Berlin, where political stubbornness reigned supreme on both sides of the wire, the city became a focus of vicious political propaganda for both Eastern and Western politicians. The Germans may well have wished to get on with their lives, yet were now caught in the vice of the hostility, suspicion and mutual hatred of the two superpowers.

Within 15 years of the war's end, rearmament had taken place in both the new Germanys. In the GDR, the old familiar uniforms of the *Wehrmacht* from the Second World War still proliferated, but were now adorned with the insignia of a totally different ideology: Soviet Communism. All along the border, from the Baltic down to Czechoslovakia, the new *National Volksarmee* (NVA), pressed their massed, western-facing heavily armed ranks against the wire, fingers on the trigger, waiting for someone to make the wrong move. In the west, the FDR's new armed forces, now called the *Bundeswehr*, joined with NATO and watched 'the enemy', now part of Communism's own international club, the Warsaw Pact, with bated breath. In 1961, the unthinkable happened when the Soviets erected the Berlin Wall. Little did they know it then, but this extreme posturing in concrete and barbed wire would be the catalyst for a distant, glorious occasion – reunification.

And so dawned the age of lie and counter-lie, mistrust, bitterness, suspicion and fear. Could the Allies ever have packed up and gone home in such an atmosphere? Hardly. Germany was the testing ground for two massive blocs of political thought. Occasionally the tension would snap, usually as a result of frayed nerves or trigger-happy border guards. We can be thankful that there were few reports like this press cutting from 1985:

RUSSIANS ‘SHOT AT BRITISH OFFICERS’

A former British Intelligence officer yesterday revealed the shadowy ‘James Bond’ world in which US Army Major Arthur Nicholson died on Sunday. Although Major Nicholson was the first officer shot dead in Eastern Europe, a string of incidents since the Soviet and Allied liaison missions were set up after the Second World War have involved high-speed car chases in sensitive areas, detention by the Russians, interrogation and ‘roughing up’. The 34-year-old former Intelligence Corps officer, who is now working in local government, is married with three children. He spent two and a half years as a member of the 21-strong British liaison mission before leaving the Army in 1983.

During his time in the section the captain made more than 50 visits into Eastern Europe. While he was there two British officers were involved in shootings, one in 1980 involving a lieutenant-colonel, the other in March 1981, when an RAF Squadron Leader was the target. Neither was hit.

He said ‘There were a lot of incidents, car chases and detentions. About ten or twelve officers are detained and questioned each year for ignoring “restricted” signs, which we refuse to recognise. Although we were under strict orders not to go near certain restricted areas, we were told to ignore some signs in less-sensitive places. We also ran convoys – dodging in and out at high speed noting identification plates and other details. The Russians would try to block and ram us, and then chase us, sometimes for miles. I was once chased by two armoured cars over rough country and was once captured, pushed around and questioned. The same thing happens with the Russians over this side, although they are not as tightly controlled. Even after this incident I don’t see these tours being stopped – they are too useful to both sides.’

The three-man British patrols leave each day in marked four-wheel drive Range Rovers or modified Opel cars on two-day or three-day visits to the East. Each patrol has a driver, an NCO and an officer, unarmed and with no radios, but equipped with sophisticated photographic equipment.

Although they avoid wearing camouflaged clothing, they camp overnight in forests in the East and use the British base in Potsdam, a former girls’ school, only for face-to-face meetings with the Russians. The officer added:

‘Although in normal circumstances there is tit-for-tat retaliation after incidents, I think this latest business will blow over quickly. The Russians will be as upset as anyone, and the soldier involved will probably get disciplined and packed off somewhere else.’[4]

Major Nicholson’s tragic death seems such a waste when one considers that within five years of this report the so-called ‘evil empire’ was to dissolve with the fall of the Berlin Wall. An American report of the major’s death goes into