

Personal Recollections
Of
495 MCLU RCT(V)
1975 - 1981

495 MOVEMENT CONTROL LIAISON UNIT RCT[V] 1975-1981

RECOLLECTIONS OF, AND MY ASSOCIATION WITH, 495 MCLU RCT[V]

by Colonel C J (Rick) Ahern TD

INTRODUCTION

Following extended National Service, I spent most of my service in the reserve army with road transport "rubber wheels" units. I was aware of the existence of "Movers" but had virtually no contact with them. This was primarily because all units in the 1950s and 1960s were fully recruited and Central Volunteer HQ could only train one major unit at a time due to the large number of soldiers involved and the limited accommodation at Grange Camp, Kempston, near Bedford. Thus, "movers" and "roadies" seldom met, except at very occasional external conferences.

Whilst my knowledge of movers in general was sparse I had even less contact with, or knowledge of, the liaison units. These units, 495 MCLU[V] with mobilisation appointments in BAOR and 496 MCLU[V] which liaised with US Forces in UK, were comprised mainly of senior majors who had completed tours with their regiments and thus had gained considerable military experience. This attribute was to prove vital when seeking co-operation with Allied Forces military HQs and civil agencies in times of mutual stress.

1975 - FIRST CONTACT

Towards the end of my tenure of command of 260 Amb Sqn RCT[V] I persuaded Lt Col Colin Brice ERD TD, my former commanding officer in 160 Regt RCT[V] and at that time the Senior Officer of 495 MCLU RCT[V], to allow me to participate in Exercise Wintex 75 so that I could explore the role that movers played in the ORBAT.

EXERCISE WINTEX 75

On 1 March 1975 I reported to CV HQ RCT[V] at Grange Camp, Kempston, Bedford. We were all documented, required to take the Mattrix continental driving test and fire our personal weapons. It was then that I learned that 495 MCLU[V] was organised to perform in two separate areas. Roughly half were to work in the Low Countries with the other half in Germany. I was informed that I was to be attached to the element bound for Germany. Led by Col Colin my companions in Germany included Lt Col David Suthers, Majors Mike Snow, Roy Churchman, Peter Bowden, Tony Leach, Gordon Balme, John Lauder, Ian Jones, P Murch, D Rawlinson, Terry Shiels, Alan Edwards, I Sutton, Bill Wilson, Bill Gibbs, M McCarraher, Mike Herbert, Alan Starr and Lieut R Pearson. I was to be attached to the road movement cell co-located with the Bundeswehr's Verkehrs Kreis Kommandenturen [Verk K] 730 [traffic office] based at the Bundeswehr barracks in Kupferdreh, a suburb of Essen. 495 MCLU[V] was also to provide a rail cell based nearby at Essen Hauptbahnhof . The Kupferdreh road cell comprised Majs Tony Leach, Gordon Balme S/Sgt Synott, Sgt Rutledge, Dvr Cromwell and myself.

On 3 March we set off from Kempston for South Cerney for processing prior to being moved to RAF Brize Norton for a flight in a piston-engined Britannia bound for RAF Wildenrath. We were then transported to Joint Headquarters BAOR at Rheindahlen where we were accommodated in various officers' messes. On 4 March we attended both general and specific briefings prior to being allocated a self-drive car for the journey to Kupferdreh in the

evening. Next day we set about opening the "war box", organising the cell and getting to know our hosts. Tony Leach divided the team into two 12-hour shifts with me floating between the shifts.

The principal role of the cell was to facilitate the forward movement of British reinforcement units travelling by road eastwards through the Ruhr to areas immediately behind the 1st British Corps rear boundary. This entailed close cooperation with the Bundeswehr traffic office. We also made regular liaison visits to the rail cell at Essen. In addition, we received visits by many officers from various British HQs because this was the first deployment of British troops into Bundeswehr local traffic offices. In previous exercises liaison had been confined to the Bundeswehr's regional command Wehr Bereichs Kommandenturen [WBK 3] in Dusseldorf.

Endex was declared early on Friday 14 March. We repacked the "war box", said farewell to our hosts and recovered to Rheindahlen. Saturday morning was free time – a chance to explore the large NAAFI and the officers' mess shops for "duty free" goods. We set off from Rheindahlen at 16.00 to return to RAF Wildenrath. Our flight back to Brize Norton was interrupted by the need to land at Brussels to pick up our Low Countries members. We arrived back at Kempston just before midnight ready for dispersal the following morning.

My experience taught me that the movers were the oil that lubricated the complex arrangements that had to be negotiated where road and rail movements were taking place in another country, where UK movements did not necessarily have primacy. I had "lifted the corner of the lid" on what being a mover entailed!

Another benefit of my attachment to 495 MCLU was that I was able to make valuable contacts with officers and HQs that were to assist me later in the year when I had been tasked with commanding an ad hoc road transport squadron in support of the Regular Army on Exercise Spearpoint 1975, when a completely new resupply system was to be trialled.

1976

On 1 May 1976 I was posted in to 495 Movement Control Increment, the former title of 495 MCLU[V], as SO2 Mov as a liaison officer to the Bundeswehr movements HQ at Territorial Northern Command [GTNC]. However, I did not train with 495 MCLU[V] and instead went on attachment with 2 Div Regt RCT on Ex Spearpoint 76, the major FTX of the year across an area close to the Inner German Border with East Germany. I was posted out of 495 MCLU[V] after six months upon being appointed second-in command of 161 Amb Regt RCT[V].

1977

EXERCISE WINTEX 1977

I participated in Ex Wintex 77 but as a second-in-command of 161 Amb Regt RCT[V]. However, I reported for training to CV HQ, travelled with and spent several days of the exercise working with members of 495 MCLU[V]. Those members were Lt Cols Andy Fairweather, Mike Wrightson, John Augar, Majors Mc K Booth, John Lyon-Maris, Bill Wilson, Derek Wrathall, David Bradbrook, Mike Knight, Colin Spurr, Peter Bowden, R Thirway, Tony Leach, Howard Trundell, John Lauder, Jack Butler, S/Sgts Tuff, Veale, Jones, Mattravis, Stubbs, Dent, Landon and Sgt Vickers.

1978

POSTED TO 495 MCLU[V]

On 1 January 1978 I was promoted to Lt Col and appointed to the post of SO1 to the movements headquarters of the German Territorial Northern Command [GTNC] vice Lt Col John Augar ERD.

The unit's annual training in 1978 comprised three separate activities – all in BAOR. Some members attended just one activity while others managed to attend two or even all three activities.

1. COMMUNICATION ZONE ROLE TRAINING

This involved a two-week review of mobilisation plans and locations, primarily in Belgium and the Netherlands. However, those with mobilisation appointments in Germany made a brief visit to HQ BAOR for location specific briefings.

Those involved were Lt Cols Andy Fairweather, Rick Ahern, Sandy White, John Lyon-Maris, Derek Wrathall, Majors M Francies, Gordon Rix, Bob Cross, Mike Knight, Alan Edwards, S/Sgts Mattravis, Tuff, Veale, Jones and Glennie.

Travel on the Sunday was by coach from Grantham to Felixstowe for the afternoon sailing to Zeebrugge reaching Emblem around midnight. Monday involved those with German appointments travelling to HQ BAOR Rheindahlen for two days of briefings on the rail plan and the War Books. On the Tuesday I was able to fit in a visit to my mobilisation location with GTNC and to meet the German officers with whom I was to work. I also visited the RAEC school in Rheindahlen to meet the senior German language tutor before our return to Emblem.

Wednesday saw us attend briefings at the Belgian army headquarters of Movement Control Interior and the Belgian MOD before visiting Brussels airport.

I was able to train for only the first week so on the Thursday I returned to HQ BAOR for further study of the War Books and to review the Ex Wintex 1977 post exercise reports. On the Friday I had a morning flight back from RAF Wildenrath to Brize Norton before dispersing to my home.

2. BASIC GERMAN LANGUAGE COURSE

The second period of training comprised attendance on a two-week basic German language course run at the RAEC school in Rheindahlen. We reported directly to RAF Hendon for the night before flying from Luton to Wildenrath. However, because of fog we were bussed to Birmingham which caused a 3-hour delay in our flight. Thus, we arrived late in Rheindahlen but within 90 minutes of our arrival there we were in the classroom for our first lesson. The Basic German course concentrates on the spoken word but inevitably involves some German grammar, which many of us found confusing! However, our tutor Frau Greta Brown was very understanding and tolerant. We had persuaded HQ BAOR Tpt & Mov to authorise the release to us of a self-drive minibus for the duration of our course. Maj David Jones volunteered to be our driver. This considerably enhanced our ability to practise our vocabulary in evening trips to the hostelries in the local villages. It also provided us with the ability to make a Saturday visit to Koln Cathedral, a boat trip on the Rhein followed by an evening meal in Dusseldorf's Altstadt. Sunday saw us on board ship for a picnic lunch sailing on the Baldenersee from Kupferdreh. The second week of the course culminated with an oral examination where all eleven students passed with five being considered eligible for the more demanding colloquial course. The course comprised Lt Col Rick Ahern, Majors Peter

Richardson, Jack Butler, Howard Trundell, John Lauder, Ralph Alford, Pat Codd, Paul Whittard, Derek Unthank, Gerry Last and Mike Herbert. Following the final examinations the course participants entertained their tutors and their spouses on our last night in Germany to dinner at a restaurant in Dusseldorf. Here the signature dishes, which many of us enjoyed, were Französische Zwiebelsuppe mit Kasse uberbacken [French onion soup with grilled cheese on toast floated on top], followed by Weiner schnitzel and completed by a large helping of Apfel strudel. Once again Maj David Jones, as our alcohol-free driver, sacrificed his thirst for "noch ein bier"!

3. EXERCISE JOG TROT 1978

Some members of 495 MCLU were able to attend Ex Jog Trot, a one-week command post exercise [CPX] in the HQ BAOR gymnasium, in September as additional training. After a 03 00 reveille on the Saturday we flew from RAF Lyneham in a Hercules to RAF Wildenrath. Sunday was spent attending exercise briefings and in setting up our liaison cells and establishing the working shifts for 24-hour coverage. The paper exercise ran from the Monday morning until the Friday. Saturday saw another early reveille at 02.30 for our flight out of Koln/Bonn airfield for Luton. However, fog persisted at Luton and we were diverted to Manchester where we sat on the ground until it was possible to fly down to Luton. Those participating were Lt Col Rick Ahern, Majors Gerry Last, Pat Codd, Peter King, Roger Webber, Robert Latimer, Bill Copeland, Ian Jones and David Jones.

1979

EXERCISE WINTEX 1979

This biennial major reinforcement command post exercise [CPX] started on Saturday 10 March. To be ready in time we had an early departure from Grantham at 04.00 for our flight from RAF Brize Norton to RAF Wildenrath in an RAF VC 10. Upon arrival at HQ BAOR we immediately attended exercise briefings, collected our war boxes, were issued with our self-drive transport before deploying to our war locations. For this exercise my work station was at the Bundeswehr's GTNC barracks in Monchen Gladbach. The Wintex series of exercises were designed to test the war plans relating to the reinforcement of BAOR in an emergency assuming that there was a severe threat from "Orange Forces" in the East. These exercises last for two weeks and test all levels of command, both civilian and military, from the UK government through UK forces, cross-channel facilities and both civilian and military authorities in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the United States. The US Forces are involved on both sides of the channel because it is assumed that they, too, will be reinforcing their own Germany based units from resources both in the UK and direct from the United States.

During most of the exercise the participants worked 12-hour shifts. This is reasonably practical where locations are double manned but those in solo posts had to adjust their working patterns to fit in with their host HQs' briefing conference timetables. Recovery to the UK was on the third Saturday with us arriving back at Grantham at 19.00 Those participating in Germany were Lt Col Rick Ahern, Majors Peter Richardson, Robert Latimer, Gerry Last, Pat Codd, Robin Thirlway, John Lauder, Paul Whittard, Mike Herbert, Jack Butler, S/Sgts Dent, Landon, Synott & Vickers.

EXERCISE PLAIN SAILING 1979

The Plain Sailing series of one-week command post exercises are intended as a follow-up to Ex Wintex and to reinforce the lessons learned on Ex Wintex. These CPXs take place in HQ BAOR and do not involve deployment to mobilisation locations. The members of 495

MCLU[V] taking part in Germany were Lt Cols John Lyon-Maris, Rick Ahern, Majors Robert Latimer, David Stevens, Roger Laing and Robin Lloyd-Hughes.

1980

COMMUNICATION ZONE ROLE TRAINING – PLANS, LOCATIONS & PERSONALITIES

Annual Camp for the Low Countries element of 495 MCLU[V] was held in February. We started with a day and a half of briefings at Grantham from representatives from HQ BAOR and Belgian, Dutch and German Army movements HQs. The briefings were followed by an evening departure for the night crossing from Felixstowe to Zeebrugge. The two-week visit was based upon Emblem Camp, near Antwerp with the training being organised by HQ RCT, British Forces, Antwerp. The first week included a briefing on the geo-political situation in Belgium by a member of the British ambassador's staff, briefings by the personnel of, and visits to, Belgian movements HQs at MCG Inter and the Belgian MoD. It also included a tour of the nearly completed nuclear power station at Doel and the ancient Citadel at Namur. During the second week we visited the UK's ordinance depots and workshops where massive mobilisation stocks and many vehicles of various types were stored, ready to be issued in an emergency. We also attended briefings and visited the Dutch HQs at Gouda, the National Traffic Centre and we toured Rotterdam harbour on a Dutch military tug boat before being shown around the vast European Container Terminal.

The participants in this training were Lt Cols, Andy Fairweather, Rick Ahern, Derek Wrathall, Majors John Abbott, Jim Gibbs, John Kier, Mike Knight, John Lauder, Ted Patten, Mike Ward, Mike Webber & Roger Webber.

EXERCISE FAST BUCK 80

Many of those members of 495 MCLU[V] who had Germany-based appointments were involved in the command post exercise [CPX] Exercise Fast Buck 80 in March. This was another biennial one-week CPX held at HQ BAOR designed to test part of the mobilisation procedures. Our travel was by RAF Hercules from RAF Lyneham to RAF Wildenrath. Much of the time was spent on detailed planning for the series of exercises that were to be held in the autumn and incorporated into Exercise Spearpoint 80.

EXERCISE CRUSADER 80

Exercise Crusader 80 was the overall name given to a series of separate but inter-locking major exercises. It was to be the largest reinforcement of continental Europe from the UK and US since the second world war. Participants from 495 MCLU[V] were involved in many aspects of the constituent exercises, their training dates being dependent upon which phase of the overall scheme affected their mobilisation appointment.

My participation, along with Maj Gerry Bowden, related to acting as BR liaison officers reporting to the Bundeswehr Regional Command at WBK 111 on Ex Cargo Canoe 1 in which the UK reinforcement units were denied crossing the Rhine by road bridge but required to cross the river on small armed Ro-Ro ferries provided by the Bundeswehr's river engineers. Observing, and occasionally travelling with, these BR convoys, four task vehicles at a time, was indeed an education! These small ferries criss-crossed a path across the fast-flowing River Rhein throughout a 36-hour period, weaving their way through a swiftly-moving long tangle of dumb barge-trains each with but a single tug boat in control – usually the last vessel in the string with very restricted forward vision!

During our second week we were instructed by WBK 111 to be observers on Ex Cargo Canoe 2 which was similar to Ex Cargo Canoe 1 except that it involved US troops flown in from the

States to pick up their pre-positioned mobilisation vehicles. Most of the troops were volunteers from the National Guard, many abroad for the first time, who were a little daunted by the narrow roads of the German villages and countryside. Their crossing of the Rhein was also by the Bundeswehr's river engineers but took place at two crossings north of Bonn, then the capital city of West Germany.

Major Gerry Bowden's article for Grantham's in-house magazine The Volunteer is attached at Annex A.

COLLOQUIAL GERMAN LANGUAGE COURSE

The RAEC language instructors at HQ BAOR had devised a two-stage Colloquial German course to supplement the usual course of four consecutive weeks. The hybrid version was to consist of one week of study followed after an interval of four weeks and then by a final week of study. Those living close to the educational centre were to attend seminars one day during each of the intervening weeks while those who were not able to attend were provided with literature, pre-recorded tapes and guidance as to what they should study at home.

I attended the inaugural split course which was based at the Royal Signal's barracks in Krefeld. The course required intensive study – especially by those whose daily role was not in a German-speaking environment. It was, however, satisfying to achieve a pass in the final examination and it would prove to be most useful in my future deployments with the Bundeswehr.

1981

EXERCISE WINTEX 81

On 6 March, in accordance with established practice, we assembled at Grantham on the Friday before departing at 02.00 on the Saturday for breakfast at South Cerney Air Mounting Centre before catching our flight from RAF Lyneham to RAF Wildenrath in a Hercules C140. Sunday saw all participants assembled in the Garrison Theatre at Rheindahlen for Ex Wintex briefings followed by the issue of vehicles and stationery. On Monday we attended a detailed movements briefing before being sent on our way to our host unit's exercise locations. Those attached to GTNC established their cell at the main Bundeswehr barracks in Monchen Gladbach. Because the German army is "home based" it provides little living accommodation and thus we commuted to Monchen Gladbach for our shifts while being accommodated in the Rheindahlen officers' messes.

Whilst the nature of exercise-play was becoming familiar to we reservists it was often a new experience for regular officers and soldiers. As with all Ex Wintex exercises the purpose was to practise the reinforcement of BAOR in the event of an actual or a threatened emergency. Half way through the exercise I was partially withdrawn from the GTNC cell by Brig Brian Ridley, then Comd Tpt & Mov HQ BAOR RCT. He instructed me to liaise with Comd Med and to study the new medical evacuation plan because it would significantly alter the RCT's transport support of the med plans. This was to have a major impact upon 161 Amb Regt RCT[V], which was to be my next appointment.

POSTED OUT

On 1 April I was posted out of 495 MCLU[V] on being appointed the Commanding Officer of 161 Amb Regt RCT[V].

During the next 3 years I was to meet members of 495 MCLU[V] on many occasions because 495 MCLU[V], including its successor the British Support Command Liaison & Movements

Staff TA, and 161 Amb Regt RCT[V] attended many exercises in BAOR that required the participation of these movements and transport units.

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Annex A to 495 Movement Control Liaison Unit RCT[V] 1975-1981

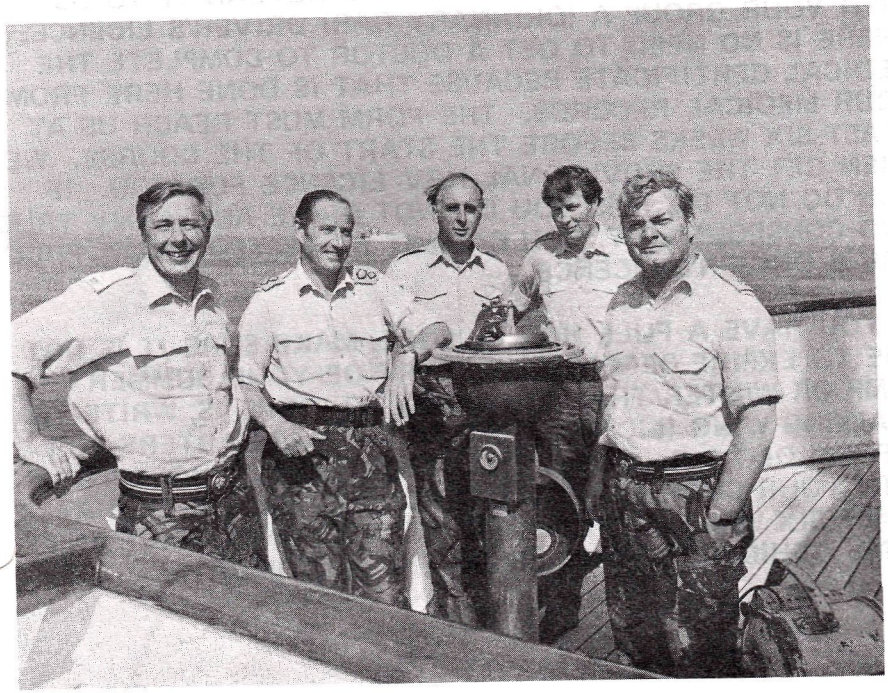
FOUR ENGLISH OFFICERS CROSSED THE RHINE (MANY TIMES)

by

Major Gerald F Bowden TD

Among the very first in the field for Crusader 80 were five officers of 495 Movement Control Liaison Unit. They set out from Grantham, four destined for Germany and one for Belgium - Lieutenant Colonel Rick Ahern and Major Gerry Bowden to Verk K 730 at Essen, Lieutenant Colonel Bill Wilson and Major Chris King to WBK 111 at Dusseldorf and Captain James Stewart to Belgian Army HQ.

Here are some random recollections, from jottings recorded in a field pocket book, of two weeks in the mounting phase of the biggest ever NATO exercise short of actual war.



All of us on the deck of *MV England;* the *Dana Futura,* loaded with vehicles of 7 Field Force, in the background, sailing in line abreast

Grantham – the last Sunday in August – the permanent staff in mess for a family luncheon – a pleasing reversal of roles, the regulars disguised as temporary civilians and we reservists as temporary soldiers.

Bags and webbing thtown into the rover, canopy rolled back and we're off to BAOR in the warm afternoon sunshine. Through England's green and pleasant land – a puncture and wheel-change – cattle grazing in a lyrical landscape – Windsor Castle in the gathering dusk. Refuel at Aldershot (of nostalgic memory), a phone call home to say goodbye and on to Southampton in the darkness.

The Danish Civilian Ferries (DFDS), on which we are to travel, lit up like great cruise liners about to set sail for the tropics. Night loading of squadrons of Chieftains with revolving lights flashing, roaring and clattering up the ramps to the vehicle decks of the *Dana Futura;* their dusty crews retrieving their overnight packs and moving to the sister ship *England.* A new loading concept – vehicles in one vessel, passengers in another sailing in convoy. For one night and one day it was a pleasure cruise; luxury beyond the dreams of seasoned travellers on the LSL fleet. Comfortable cabins, Danish food and attentive service; deck chairs in the sunshine and sea breezes. It was a dry ship but no one seemed to mind.

Berth at Zeebrugge in the late afternoon, some red flannel and top brass to meet us. The wagons and tracked vehicles start up, amid fumes and reverberation to form up on the quayside. Our movers are the last off and we dash ahead in the darkness on the long autobaln to Rheindalen, having dropped James Stewart at Emblem. A briefing in the kellars of JHQ, two hours sleep and we are off to our appointed tasks.

Verkehrskommandatur 730 seems rather failiar – both the surroundings and (to us) the rather formal personal communication and rigid approach to changing situations – it must have been regular viewing of *Secret Army.* Within half an hour of setting up shop we are visited by General Windisch who treats us as long-term residents of his District; we are, amongst other things, to monitor an exercise in transporting tanks and vehicles across the Rhine – *Cargo Canoe.*

A recce of approach routes and lying up areas found us watching the German Army ferryboat crews slickly practising roll-on-roll-ff operations at the Rhine crossing sites. There is heavy traffic on the river, often four linked barges moving with a speed and determination disastrous to any obstacle. Three boats are used – reminiscent of the old RPLs but ramped at both ends – on a circuit, dodging nimbly between fleets of barges, to provide a continuous traffic flow. The time from calling forward vehicles, rolling on, crossing, dropping off, to re-forming need be no more than five minutes. The ferries have light anti-aircraft guns and a defence boat stands off downstream. Later, 7 Field Force were put across, demonstrating Anglo-German co-operation and non-dependance on bridges.

Cargo Canoe 2, the second series of Rhine crossings, occurred on the following week further south. This time our customers were the aptly-named American *Hell on Wheels* division. At first sight, liaison with Americans may seem easier because we share (more or less) the same language but their transport and movement

operating techniques differ greatly and these can cause misunderstandings. However, years of diligently watching M.A.S.H. paid its dividends and rapport was established.

The American crossings were a 'high visibility' event, much filmed, photographed and televised with many international military observers swooping in by helicopter. The four members of the Defence Committee of NATO arrived more modestly in one small motor car. An unexpected torrent of rain caused ponchos and greatcoats to be gathered from all directions and issued indiscriminately to visitors. It could be rather surprising to find that a German captain's combat jacket concealed a Belgian 4-star General; any SOXMIS observer must have been thoroughly confused and attribute the phenomenon to a subtle security precaution. No doubt the Kremlin are still trying to work this one out. The Americans, too, successfully crossed the river and rolled eastwards.

We handed over duties to Majors Bob Lattimer and Jim Gibbs, collected our 'duty-frees' and flew back to Brize Norton as the Spearpoint phase of Crusader was about to begin.

Exercise-lag, a day of disorientation back home. You can look at your watch and believe what it says without adding or subtracting for alpha, bravo or zulu times. There is a feeling that one's family and friends at home and seen more of the exercise, its strategic aims and tactical developments through high TV, radio and newspaper coverage; I found myself asking them what they thought of it – they had a wider view than we had from our two week's Watch on the Rhine.