

GI Joe meets the Jock

The introduction of the US Army to the 4th Royal Tank Regiment began with the deployment of many thousands of Americans to West Germany for Exercise REFORGER in September 1987. They came in all shapes and sizes, with strange vehicles, Kevlar helmets, uniforms of unfamiliar camouflage and crew-cut hair - rather an odd breed. It was subsequently learned that C Squadron were to have the honour of hosting an American troop for a month. Muffled comments were heard on the tank park.

Contact was first established on a low level exercise. They joined us in our hides and examined the tanks. After scrambling over the vehicles they came back with a few comments and some of us were a little surprised by their reaction to Chieftain - 'Wow! Great! Wish we had it! - but one can rarely fault the US Army for its enthusiasm.

Since it was intended that our guests should crew tanks on Exercise KEYSTONE, courses were held for them in driving, gunnery and signals. They subsequently joined their troops two days prior to deployment in order to meet and work with our soldiers. Then we all took our place with the Orange Forces acting as enemy to 2nd Infantry Division from the UK.

Despite their limited introduction to our methods and equipment. our American colleagues tried hard to adapt to our ways in the field, but found it rather different, especially;

- Never before had they driven through real villages in tanks.
- The interpretation of 'no noise' in hides differed a touch in volume between the nationalities.
- Being used to centralized cooking, they found the British habit of 'self-catering' rather bizarre.
- Voice Procedure made talking over the air difficult. Battle Code (BATCO) made it impossible.
- Bone domes were an instrument of medieval torture and contravened the Geneva Convention.

When the end of the exercise arrived, there was a short period of leave which most of the US soldiers spent in Osnabruck relaxing and taking in air. This completed our short acquaintance with their army at work, rest and play.

I thought that Exercise FLYING ARMOUR was a useful experience. It was the first opportunity that I, and most of my soldiers had had to work closely with the US Army. We all learned a lot about their different life style, altitudes and culture and slowly, through mutual effort, managed to close the 'Atlantic Gap'. I can't wait for a chance to have a look at life from their side!

Lieutenant P J Kidd