

Prior to my posting to Berlin, I cut my military teeth serving with a British Armoured Brigade in Northern Germany, as part of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). This provided me with my first insight into what the thin blue NATO line was up against. NATO's Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) consisted of four Dutch; four British; three Bundeswehr and two Belgian Divisions deployed in a layer-cake defence that ran from Hamburg to south of Kassel. Three American divisions, based in the US, would act as NORTHAG's reserve. From there, to the Austrian border, six US and six Bundeswehr divisions took over. This relatively small NATO force, having to defend a front that stretched over 1,000 kilometres, faced a force of some 57 divisions of the Warsaw Pact.

Apart from the professional aspect of my role as a small cog in the NATO wheel, I quickly researched deeper into what initially seemed to be a position of stalemate. We, NATO, had better, more modern equipment, didn't we? Our soldiers were better trained and more motivated, weren't they? To top it all, we had the technological edge, hadn't we?

And what did we have facing us? Poorly led, de-motivated, conscript armies, with outdated Soviet-made equipment. Yes, they had 50,000 tanks, but their T-54/55s, T-62s and T-64s, along with a few T-72s and T-80s were no match for NATO's Chieftains, M-60s and Leopard 1s. Additionally, the new Challenger, M1 Abram and Leopard 2 were steadily being drip-fed into our developing armoury.

Sounds good in theory; the reality was very different! The forces of the Soviet army in the Western TVD (Theatre of Military Operations), in the mid 1980s, constituted the largest peacetime concentration of military power in the history of Europe.

On 28 June 1984, the biggest exclusively Soviet exercise since the end of the Second World War (both in terms of its geographical scope and the numbers of armies involved) started. For the first time in history, all four of the Groups of Soviet Forces stationed in East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia took part in a military exercise. Key forces included the five Armies of the Group of Soviet Forces Germany (GSFG) - twenty Divisions comprising 380,000 troops, three divisions of the Northern Group of Soviet Forces, 45,000 troops, Southern Group of Soviet Forces in Hungary with 80,000 troops, the Central Group of Soviet Forces in Czechoslovakia - 100,000, and the Baltic Military District - 300,000 troops

In total, along with the Baltic Fleet and Soviet combat and transport units of the

Soviet Air force, a force of 900,000 were on the move and at one point sixteen divisions were out of their barracks and in pre-assault positions along the West German and Austrian border. To put the numbers in perspective, BAOR at that time had in the region of 55,000 troops in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The question that springs to mind is, would those forces ever be used in anger? Brezhnev was hardly a pacifist....

"We Communists have got to string along with the capitalists for a while. We need their agriculture and their technology. But we are going to continue massive military programmes. . . (soon) we will be in a position to return to a much more aggressive foreign policy designed to gain the upper-hand. . ."

As quoted in *Kissinger: The Secret Side of the Secretary of State* by Gary Allen

A number of concerns were at the forefront of the NATO commander's mind at that time. Why in the previous year had the Group of Soviet Forces Germany been strengthened, increasing its armoured strength from 6,000 to 8,000 tanks, plus increases in artillery and surface-to-surface missiles along with the replacement of older tanks with upgraded T-64s and the new T-80?

It was also well known that the Soviet army could steal out of their barracks almost unnoticed and deploy effectively, whilst maintaining radio-silence. With a major hostile force, in threatening

positions close to the inner German-border, NATO commanders were astounded with the Western governments' laissez faire response, which was reminiscent of the 'see no Russians, hear no Russians' attitude of the past.

The total Warsaw Pact strength in 1984, including the Kiev, Baltic, Belorussian and Carpathian military districts, up against NATO, was a staggering 2,150,000 soldiers, 29,000 tanks, 37,000 APCs, 24,000 guns (greater than 100mm) and nearly 4,000 aircraft.

So, as a British soldier on the frontline in Northern Germany in the 1980s, you can understand my fascination and concern, with how one British Corps, with its 500-600 tanks and 35,000 troops would stack up. Hence my reason for eventually putting pen to paper and writing my Cold War trilogy.

Although a great fan of General Hackett's *The Third World War*, I wanted to explore the tactical aspects as well as the bigger picture, hence the number of small, set-piece battle scenes I have included. Let's face it, when the shells drop and the bullets fly, it's the young lieutenants and more mature sergeants and corporals who would make the minute-by-minute decisions to hold a piece of ground or strongpoint and keep their men alive.

On the following pages I have laid out a potential wargames scenario (and there are plenty more ideas in my books!) which I believe in the event of the 'Cold War turned hot', could have happend.

Above: NATO's Cold War 'Layer Cake' deployment in West Germany.

