

# Speech made by Major General John Moore-Bick CBE at the National Army Museum on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## Goodbye Germany?

Goodbye Germany? It cannot be, it must not be. Let's say *Auf Wiedersehen* and grasp that *wieder* bit before it slips away for ever.

For we have built up that long awaited close brotherhood between German and Briton which has been striven for over decades, if not centuries, of misunderstanding. We must not let it go now when we need it as much as ever.

What is it, what was it, this historical aberration of stationing a large part of a nation's army and air forces with all their families in the country of another, first as occupiers but then at the wish of that country, turning occupation into a warm welcome and comfortable symbiosis? You, Germany, gave us intense purpose in our Forward Defence, with our General Deployment Plan, comprising seamless deterrence from the British Frontier Service on that cruel iron curtain, to the panoply of conventional and nuclear deterrence which kept us safe for 45 years. It probably still does so today, despite the fact that few now understand the conventional and nuclear deterrence philosophy drummed into me by my Brussels Master, General Wolfgang Altenburg.

We have been brothers in arms. For those of us who have seen sharper wars since 1990, that is no facile appellation rather the highest accolade. Despite tearing up swathes of Lower Saxony with ever patient farmers resigned to persistent annual errors of map reading, we have enriched your society, as you have ours. Thomas Kielinger, my good friend and collaborator, the most percipient observer of Britain, described the greatest contribution after 1945, not in the Marshall Plan, not in the heroic Berlin Airlift, but in the creation and chaperoning of free

press, radio and television. In one short generation the old poster of Feind Hört Mit became Freund Hört Mit!

At any one time 14 Million Germans listened to British Forces Broadcasting Service Germany. Many used it as their foundation of the outstanding and near universal English language skills which the German people possess today.

Within the generous provisions of the Status of Forces Agreement, in a new country built together out of the ruins of war, our stations, garrisons and airfields developed cohesive communities. The Army now has the challenge of recreating that sense of community in the more dispersed setting of the United Kingdom. It won't be easy. And we know that operational success depends much on that community at home on which operational power is built.

Just when we thought it was all over, crash went the wall in Berlin, flash went the Balkans on fire, and bash went Saddam Hussein into Kuwait.

All of that training, all of those exercises, all of that skill with the handling of combined arms armoured warfare suddenly got tested in a way we never imagined. And lo and behold, it worked. And the superb logisticians made their bits work. I've seen 10 14 ton trucks loaded with AA batteries to replace all those misused in Sony Walkmen. And the air power worked. And 4,000 miles away I know a lady, not the only one, who stepped up to provide leadership to her departed husband's garrison of 700 families, with huge support from the local town for what they deemed "our British soldiers". Even the Bahlsen biscuit factory played its part.

Right at the beginning of our preparations a near neighbour knocked on our door in Oldenburger Straße and handed me his **Leitlinien für das Afrika Korps**. We translated them and were later congratulated on having the best Standard Operating

Procedures in 7 Armoured Brigade, the Desert Rats. In the desert we were surprised one day to hear German voices. Expats from Nienburg living in Saudi Arabia had made their way into the desert to play their part in looking after their town's soldiers.

And thereafter for the next 25 years, Germany, its wide training areas, its efficient ports, its motorways and airfields, provided our mounting base for an ever greater intensity of operations in the Balkans and South West Asia.

We are here under auspices of the BGA who deserve high praise for arranging this reception this evening. For many years, the British German Officers Association wound our two nations' Service officers tightly together. The example was set at the top, and having in mind all of the decades of earnest talks, lectures, discussions and Kameradschaft, one picture says it all.

It is of General Henning von Sandrart, Commander in Chief Central Europe with wife Dorothea, probably used to a top of the range Mercedes, worming their way into the back seats of a small, dirty old Volvo, replete with garden trowels, secateurs and blanket for the inevitable dog, driven by the mop of hair which was Field Marshal Sir Nigel Bagnall, exponent of operational art, and wife Anna. Two cultures united as one in friendship and purpose.

We have built up so much together, we must not just discard it with our military withdrawal, but strive to preserve it in a new generation in a new form. How, is the question I leave with you tonight.