

View of Germany. Arrows indicate theoretical vectors of attack via the Fulda Gap. Southern vector via town of Fulda, Northern via Bad Hersfeld, both are part of the Fulda Gap.

FULDA GAP

By SSG William Valentin



LANDSTUHL, Germany – Noncommissioned Officers and Officers of Charlie Company 53rd Signal Battalion conducted a joint NCO/Officer professional development session here. The purpose of the NCO/ODP was to introduce local military history about the United States Army 3rd Armored Division and the 8th Infantry Division, their standoff with the Soviet 8th Guard's Army, and the large scale planning for stopping an invasion during the Cold War.

The NCOs and Officers of Charlie Company started the day with a brunch at a local German Monastery. There they discussed the history behind the Fulda Gap, and the importance of Observation Point Alpha which now stands as a Cold War memorial. The Fulda Gap is a section of territory between the former East German border and Frankfurt, (West) Germany. Strategically the Fulda Gap was of immense importance during the Cold War. It was one of two obvious routes for any invader attacking West Germany. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Forces and Warsaw Pact Forces stood on the edge of war at the Fulda Gap from roughly 1945 until 1991. Observation Point Alpha was one of four Observation Posts along the East/West German border. The importance of Observation Point Alpha was that it stood directly in the center of the NATO defense line. If there had been an attack during the Cold War, it was most likely that Observation Point Alpha would have been the first place Warsaw Pact Forces would have destroyed during their invasion.

After the discussion, the Charlie Company NCOs and Officers were taken to the Cold War memorial that stands at

Observation Point Alpha. The moment the Soldiers stepped off the bus they could get a sense of the tension that U.S. Forces had felt at that Wall just 20 years ago. The visiting Soldiers began on the West Cold War memorial, also known as the NATO side of the Cold War standoff. They went to Observation Point Alpha and read about the extensive planning that military strategists had done. They also got to see what it was like to be a U.S. Soldier standing no further than 100 meters away from the enemy who was monitoring them as well, just ready for the first shot to be fired that could have been the launch of the Third World War. After learning about the life of U.S. Soldiers during the Cold War, and forging an "hour by hour defense against Soviet/East German Forces," Charlie Company NCOs and Officers went to the East Cold War memorial. There the NCOs and Officers learned what it was like to be an East German Soldier monitoring NATO Forces while just a hundred meters away stood the entire 3rd Armored Division and 8th Infantry Division.

The professional development session at the Fulda Gap was an event to be remembered by those in attendance. On the ride back, NCOs and Officers could not stop talking about what it must have been like to be a Cold War Soldier waiting at the brink of war. 