Research Note

The Military Liaison Missions in Germany

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The Military Liaison Missions (MLMs) in Germany are six military units which have been active in Germany for 20 years. Three of them are Western units—American, French and British—and consist,[1] respectively, of 14, 18, and 31 persons. All but one of the men are officers or enlisted men. They are accredited to the Commander in Chief of the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany, at Wünsdorf, East Germany. Because the official headquarters of the Western units are all in Potsdam, East Germany, a suburb of Berlin, they are sometimes called the "Potsdam missions." The other three MLMs are Soviet units accredited to the respective commanders-in-chief of the US Army, Europe, the French Forces in Germany, and the British Army of the Rhine. The Soviet units are entitled to the same numbers of persons as their Western counterparts in East Germany, but the Soviet MLMs to the British and French are currently about 30 percent below full strength.

This paper describes the history and nature of these military missions, and some of the things they do. In relation to arms control the MLMs are interesting for three reasons: (1) they have *been* an arms control measure in that they have provided the Soviets and the Western Allies with some information on the nature and extent of each other's military activities in Germany during times of crisis; (2) insofar as the MLMs exercise certain limited rights to travel and make observations, they serve as an example of mobile inspection teams; and (3) the MLMs may also be an example or prototype of future exchanges of military liaison missions.

The MLMs in Germany are a unique arrangement which will probably not be duplicated again. But the concept of limited exchanges of liaison or observation personnel has, from time to time, been "in the air," and something *like* an exchange of military liaison missions may be considered as an initial arms control measure—e.g., as a measure to reduce the risk of surprise attack.[2]

[1] The specific data in this paper were current as of 1964.

[2] Both the US, in its *Outline of Basic Provisions of a Treaty on General and Complete Dis-*

The somewhat disjointed circumstances which led to setting up the MLMs in 1946 and 1947 are as follows: A 1943 British memorandum, submitted for the consideration of the American and Soviet delegates on the European Advisory Commission (EAC) early in 1944, proposed that after her surrender Germany should be totally occupied, and that the best way of accomplishing this would be to divide the country into three zones, each to be occupied by one of the major allies. But to give the appearance in any given zone that the occupation was by the United Nations, rather than just one power, the British proposed that the occupying powers station "token" military units in each other's zones. When this proposal was referred to them for comment, US military leaders said the stationing of such token units in areas predominantly occupied by other powers would be inadvisable from the military point of view. The only condition under which such units would be justified would be if they were for liaison purposes. The British promptly agreed, and dropped the "token unit" plan. But the Soviets picked up the liaison idea—either because they liked it, or because they thought the United States liked it, or both—and incorporated it as part of their proposal on control machinery for occupying Germany, a proposal which the US and the UK found generally acceptable, and, with few changes, agreed to. This "Agreement on Control Machinery in Germany" was signed by the American, British, and Soviet representatives to the EAC on November 14, 1944, and amended on May 1, 1945, to permit French participation. The Agreement, but not the specific clauses in it, was reaffirmed by the US, British, and Soviet heads of state at the Potsdam Conference of 1945.

Thus it was that a US reason for rejecting a British plan became a provision in a Soviet proposal which was agreeable to all. The specific provision—the "enabling clause" of the MLMs—is: "Each Commander-in-Chief in his zone of occupation will have attached to him military, naval and air representatives of the other two [later three] Commanders-in-Chief for liaison duties."[3]

The lack of coordination between the Anglo-American and Soviet military forces during the close of World War II shaded gradually into the lack of coordination when it was over. Soon after the German surrender, probably in an effort to put into effect the scant plans and guidance he had been given, General Eisenhower is reported to have tried to set up military liaison mission exchanges with the British and Soviets. But first the Soviets and then the Americans equivocated, and meanwhile the pressing postwar problems caused the setting up of the missions to be given low priority. Then, after several exchanges of views in 1946, the agreement on "Military Liaison Missions Accredited to the Soviet and United States Commanders-in-Chief of the Zones of Occupation in Germany" was signed by General Clarence Huebner, Deputy Commander of the US European Command, and General Sergeyevich Malinin,

armament in a Peaceful World, and the USSR, in its *Draft Treaty on General and Complete Disarmament*, propose to exchange military missions, but presumably these missions might take any one of a number of forms. The US has also proposed that an exchange of military missions could be agreed to independently of other arms control or disarmament measures, and has maintained a very flexible position about the nature and composition of such missions.

[3] US Department of State, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, Volume 5, Part 2. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956 (TIAS 3070, Article 2).

Deputy Commander to the Chief of Staff of the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany, on April 5, 1947. It is sometimes referred to as the "Heubner-Malinin Agreement." Similar British-Soviet and French-Soviet agreements had been signed on September 16, 1946, and April 3, 1947, respectively.

The provisions of the Heubner-Malinin Agreement are almost entirely those which the US proposed to the Soviets at the time: the missions would be composed of air, navy, and army representatives; there would be no political representatives (a proscription which did not appear in the earlier British-Soviet and French-Soviet agreements); the missions would consist of not more than 14 officers and enlisted men;[4] they would be accredited to the respective US and Soviet commanders-in-chief in the zones of occupation "to maintain liaison between both Commanders-in-Chief and their staffs"; the missions would have the "right to engage in matters of protecting the interests of their nationals and to make representations accordingly as well as in matters of protecting their property interests in the zone where they are located"; they would have the right to aid visitors from their own countries; they would have their own radio communication stations with their headquarters, and also be able to use normal mail, telegraph, and telephone service; and their couriers would have diplomatic immunity. Further, "Each member of the missions will be given identical travel facilities to include identical permanent passes in Russian and English languages permitting complete freedom of travel wherever and whenever it will be desired over territory and roads in both zones, except places of disposition of military units without escort or supervision." Finally, special requests could be made—which would have to be acted upon within 24 to 72 hours—to visit headquarters, military government offices, forces, units, military schools, factories, and the like.

During the early postwar period the MLMs were mainly concerned with the outstanding problems of the time: graves registration, train pilferage, extradition of prisoners for trial, securing travel permits, transfer of prisoners of war, and incidents arising out of black market activities and border incidents. But as times have changed, so have the activities of the MLMs. With the disappearance of the Allied Control Council the USMLM (and the Soviet MLM in the US zone) have become the highest links between the commanders-in-chief of the US and Soviet military forces that confront each other in Europe today. Because the United States does not have diplomatic relations with the East German government, the USMLM performs liaison duties for all US agencies. Its day-to-day tasks include negotiating the release of trains that are detained in East Germany, aiding lost tourists, evacuating personnel who have crash-landed or been forced down (the USMLM has its own ambulance), arranging to confront US defectors to make sure they are there of their own free will, and arranging for Americans to visit and travel in East Germany. They also arrange for official and social gatherings between Soviets and Americans in East Germany.

In accordance with the provisions of the Huebner-Malinin Agreement, both the Soviet and Western MLMs are permitted to—and do—travel a good deal in Germany. When on tours the personnel wear uniforms. The USMLM travels in American-made,

[4] The Soviets originally proposed that the maximum be 31—the number they had agreed to earlier with the British. The US was at the time concerned with keeping the number of foreign liaison personnel in the US Zone to a minimum and countered with a proposal of 10. The compromise was 14.

standard US Army sedans which have the usual color and identification markings. (Since 1964 a US sports car has also been used.)

During the first few years of their existence the Western missions experienced no travel restrictions, although they were not permitted to use certain entry and exit points in entering and leaving the Soviet Zone. During the Berlin blockade of 1948 and 1949 the USMLM vehicles traveled freely to and from Berlin and rendered valuable service in recovering people and equipment from crashed aircraft in the air corridors during the airlift. USMLM officers' relations with the Soviets remained cordial.

Then, in 1951, the Soviets issued a map to the USMLM which showed areas totaling about 1,900 square miles in which the mission was restricted from traveling. (The area of East Germany is 41,645 square miles—about the size of Ohio or Tennessee.) Restrictive signs also began to appear about this time, which prohibited the Western missions from using certain roads. Between 1958 and 1961, in a series of exchanges of restricted area maps between the Soviets and the Western Allies, the extent of restricted areas grew greatly. Today the permanent restricted areas in which the Western MLMs are not permitted to travel have a total area equivalent to about one-third of East Germany, and restrictive signs bring the total restricted area to about one-half. The Soviet MLMs in West Germany are restricted from areas totaling about the same number of square miles. In addition, both sides impose temporary restricted areas (lasting from 3 to 30 days) on each other's MLMs.

Prior to April 1962, when the US and Soviet commanders-in-chief in Germany, General Bruce Clarke and Marshal Koniev, reaffirmed the Huebner-Malinin Agreement, there had been a number of instances of harassment and detention of the MLMs. Since that meeting, no major incidents have occurred.

It is noteworthy that the Western MLMs encountered no unusual restrictions, beyond those just noted, during the Korean war (except for one month), during the East German uprisings of 1953, during the initial part of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, after the U-2 incident, while the Berlin wall was going up in August 1961, or during the Cuban crisis of October 1962. During the latter crisis both Soviet and Western MLMs were active in determining whether or not there would be repercussions in Germany over the President's ultimatum. In view of the tensions aroused during the Cuban crisis, it was fortunate that the MLMs "happened" to have happened. The USMLM provided reassuring information at a time when it was critically needed.

The assignment of military attaches to embassies in foreign countries is, of course, standard procedure among nations. The US has military attaches assigned to the American Embassies in Moscow and Eastern Europe, and the Communist countries similarly assign military attaches to their embassies in the US and elsewhere. There have also been exchanges of military liaison missions in other countries besides Germany. What make the Military Liaison Missions in Germany of particular interest are that they were almost fortuitously set up in the first place, that they have relatively more freedom than do military attaches, and that they have fallen heir to perfoming vital functions of liaison and communication in a critical area of the world.