British new look divisions tested in Exercise Spearpoint

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The British Army has had virtually the same corps, divisional and brigade organizations since 1914. There have been some internal changes within the battalions and regiments but all have zealously guarded their capability to be, if necessary, self-contained fighting units. The latest defense review, the advent of effective missiles and the very considerable improvements made in communication equipment created the impetus necessary for a complete review of formation, unit and logistical organizations and functions. A full re-appraisal of the requirements for full scale modern combat was instituted by the Ministry of Defence (Army). The principle result of the review was the 'New Look' armoured division. Exercise Spearpoint, held in Germany in November 1976, was designed to put the specially reconstructed 2nd Armoured Division, commanded by Major-General Frank Kitson, and the re-organized system of logistic support to an exhaustive test. General Kitson is one of Britain's brilliant young generals who caused a left wing furore with his well thought out book '*Low intensity operations*'.

Exercise Spearpoint was the largest and all embracing manoeuvre held under the control of the Commander of I (Br) Corps for a number of years. More than 18,000 troops, 376 tanks, 1400 APCs and 3,300 wheeled vehicles, including some from Denmark and the United States, took part in the exercise which lasted for three weeks and covered an area 150 km long and 60 km wide. By agreement with the German authorities free movement was permitted throughout the area.

Until the restructuring took place a British corps has consisted of three divisions each of two or three brigades (two in the present I (Br) Corps), a reconnaissance regiment, two artillery brigades, an engineer regiment and the normal corps logistical units. The brigades have been self supporting combat formations normally composed of three major units — armour and infantry, each commanded by lieutenant-colonels — an engineer regiment, a close support artillery regiment and its own workshops, transport and ordnance supply units allocated. The brigade group normally kept its own identity although could be re-inforced from divisional and corps resources when necessary.

Weapons to men ratio

The principle aim of the re-organization is to improve the ratio of weapons to men in the fighting units and so make the most efficient use of the available manpower. The methods of achieving this aim have included the abolition of one level of command in the division, an increase in the span of command of the divisional commander and the lieutenant-colonel, the concentration of specialists into supporting corps and units and a very thorough re-organization of the logistic and transport units to ensure the continuous movement of supplies and ammunition from rear to front with the minimum of transshipment from vehicle to vehicle.

When the restructuring is completed in two years

A M107 175 mm gun of the general support regiment

time the brigade level of command will have disappeared; I (Br) Corps will consist of four armoured divisions, an artillery division of two light AD regiments (Rapier missiles), a surface to surface missile regiment (Lance), a locating regiment and a corps general support regiment the batteries of which will normally be allocated to divisions (175 mm M107s, 155 mm M109s and 8 inch guns, the latter with a nuclear capability) and corps troops. The latter include an amphibious engineer regiment, two signal regiments, an aviation regiment and the usual logistic services. In addition the corps will have a formation called a Field Force, consisting of three lorried infantry battalions and a close support artillery regiment and designed to defend vulnerable points, to clear villages and forest areas and to provide a corps reserve.

New structure, new concept

The greatest changes have taken place in the armoured division and it was these which were tested in the exercise. The whole structure is designed to take advantage of the inherent flexibility of modern professional units and their capability of being divided into their sub-units and brought together with others to form task forces, battle groups and combat teams. The peacetime strength of the new armoured division is 8,600 but it is capable of rapid re-inforcement to its wartime strength of 14,000 with members of the Territorial and Army Voluntary Reserve. Many of the latter carry out their 'annual camp' period with the division or with logistic units which come out in time of tension. The call-up and movement of one TAVR battalion and other individuals and minor units was practised for Exercise Spearpoint. They were brought over by civilian ferry and army landing craft.

The composition of the 2nd Armoured Division for the exercise was one armoured reconnaissance regiment consisting of three squadrons, two medium recce with Scorpion CVRs (76 mm gun) and one close recce with Scimitar CVRs (Rarden 30 mm cannons), two armoured regiments — each with 66 operational Chieftains plus 6 in reserve — divided into four squadrons, and three mechanized infantry battalions each of a headquarters company and four rifle companies all carried in AV432 APCs. The reconnaissance troops and platoons, once with the armoured regiments and infantry battalions, have been concentrated into the armoured reconnaissance regiment; the infantry battalions have lost their pioneer platoons to the engineer regiment but retain eight 81 mm mortars. The long range Swingfire anti-tank missiles and the shoulder fired Blowpipe anti-aircraft missiles are part of the artillery group. Each infantry platoon will receive a Milan anti-tank missile launcher in replacement for the Carl Gustav short range launcher at present in service. The capabilities of the 4,000 m range Milan in the hands of the infantry were tested in the exercise because the Carl Gustav was 'simulating' the new weapon.

A Scorpion of the medium recce regt of an armoured division

The division also contained the artillery group of a close support regiment (Abbot 105s and Blowpipe), a general support regiment of M109s and the anti-tank battery (Swingfire); the appropriate share of the corps artillery was allocated for the exercise. Other supporting arms and services were the aviation regiment of Scout helicopters concentrated from the units, an engineer regiment, field ambulance, provost company, transport regiment, ordnance company and a field workshops battalion.


There is still a place for infantrymen in modern warfare; riflemen of the Irish Guards debused from their APC

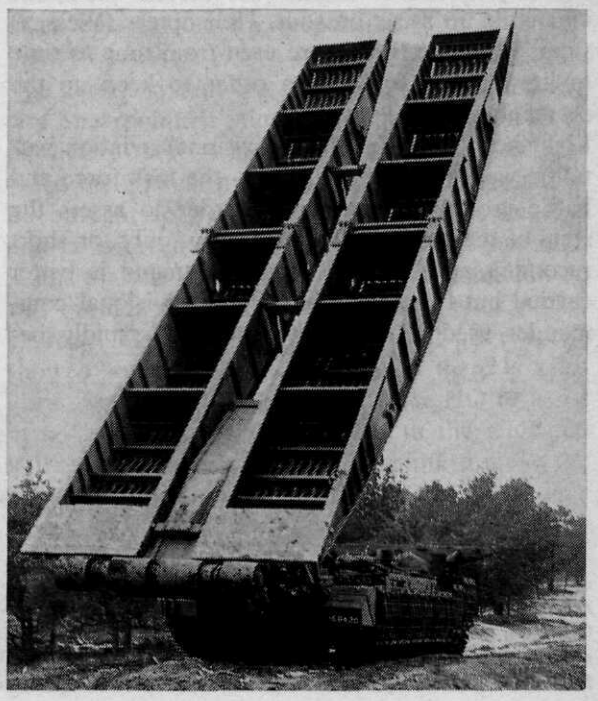
However once the division takes to the field organizational charts become meaningless. The old concept of a lieutenant-colonel commanding his own regiment or battalion is virtually abandoned. Each of the five major fighting unit commanders and their headquarters form the nucleus of a battle group made up of armoured squadrons, infantry companies and supporting arms and services required to carry out the task allocated to them by the divisional commander. Normally these battle groups are composed of four sub-units, i.e. two armoured squadrons and two infantry companies, or three of armour and one of infantry, or vice versa plus supporting arms but this will depend upon the task allocated. Battle groups then form a number of combat teams each commanded by a major; these can be infantry or armour 'heavy' and are built around a company or squadron headquarters. Armour heavy would consist of three troops of tanks and a platoon of infantry with supporting mortars, etc. Because of the efficiency of present day 'push button' radios and the Brain area system, communication units and sub-units can be switched from battle group to battle group and between combat teams rapidly to meet a changing situation. In fact a situation can arise when a lieutenant-colonel finds himself commanding a battle group in which his own HQ is the only part of his normal peacetime command remaining with him! This flexibility was amply demonstrated within the 2nd Armoured Division but can only be carried out effectively by well trained professional officers and men. It is unlikely that a fully conscript army like that of the Soviet Union could attempt such alterations in command during combat.

Span of command and flexibility

When the restructuring of the divisions was first discussed it was planned that the divisional commander should command battle groups directly from his headquarters. Early trials soon proved that this was not practicable, partly due to the problems of having too many formations on the communications command net but mainly because it demanded too much from any commander at the divisional level. He has to be looking always a few days ahead to the next phase of the battle and, except perhaps for nuclear war or in extreme situations, he should not have to take immediate combat decisions. It is difficult for a human brain, especially when under stress, to operate in two time scales. For these reasons two deputy commanders of the rank of brigadier were included in the divisional headquarters and the size of that HQ increased by 100 officers and men and a few vehicles. These deputy commanders can each be placed in command of task forces formed by the divisional commander for particular operations. These are not re-introduced brigade headquarters and there is no intention that they should be, the commanders have no logistic responsibilities and operate from a small task force tactical headquarters. The number of battle groups and supporting arms placed under their command will vary according to the tactical situation. In peacetime these commanders, and some of their staffs, are employed in garrison headquarters in Germany. The wartime divisional headquarters, including the two task force commanders and staff, totals, with the signal regiment, about 750 officers and men which is an increase of 100 from the old divisions. However there has been a saving of 700 officers and men by the abolition of the two brigade HQs.

Senior officers in I (Br) Corps are not prepared to lay down 'frontages' for divisions, task forces and battle groups, they point out that in mobile defence large areas can be dominated because of the increased range and effectiveness of today's weapons, particularly of anti-tank missiles. Armour and APC carried infantry can move fast upon the

A tank mounted brigde on a Centurion chassis, able to cross gaps up to 13.7 m, can be laid in three minutes



The anti-tank team of an Irish Guards platoon, simulating Milan with Carl Gustav anti-tank missile launcher

battlefield, artillery support is immediate and, using the forward based Harrier VSTOL aircraft and helicopter carried anti-tank missiles, air support can be provided very quickly. Watching an armoured counter attack from a Scout helicopter on Exercise Spearpoint it was interesting to see the very large area covered. Chieftains moved at least 300 m apart from cover to cover, the Swingfire missiles were 'fired' at ranges up to 3000 m on a misty morning and the Milan simulated at at about the same range. Chieftains were fitted with laser rangers and receivers and when a hit was achieved a large puff of red smoke was released from the knocked out tank. Hits could be seen at ranges of up to a mile. The Swingfire and Blowpipe have in-built simulators which much enhances the training value of an exercise. Mechanized infantry moved widely dispersed avoiding open fields and never using their APCs as light tanks. Called up by the tanks they were supporting, they 'debused' under cover and cleared woods and built up areas on foot. Helicopters (Wessex) supplied by the RAF were used from time to time to lift infantry forward in order to keep up the momentum of the advance.

Light helicopters from the divisional aviation battalion were used extensively by the task force and battle group commanders in order to assess the state of the battle in their areas but only for short reconnaissance flights; actual command is better carried out from the ground. The divisional commander used his helicopter to move rapidly between his tactical and main headquarters as well as for visiting task force headquarters. Prior to the actual battle he attempted to visit as many units of the division as possible and thereby show himself to the troops and explain the situation. This personal contact is a valuable morale raiser and is made possible by the use of helicopters.

Communications

The success of the whole concept of mobile defence spread over large areas of land must depend greatly upon the effectiveness of the communications. Without good command and control the advantages of the flexibility in the composition of the battle groups will be lost. In I (Br) Corps today the communications are good and are being improved all the time. There is secure VHF radio, an insecure VHF back-up and HF between division and task forces and between task force and the battle groups and two systems at least from battle group to combat team. These are supported by the artillery and engineer communications. The Brain area radio relay system covers the whole corps area; this provides telephone communications between the various headquarters. Its disadvantage is that it requires thirty vehicles to run a communications system; the Ptarmigan system which will replace it is much more economical. Radio rebroadcast stations are deployed throughout the combat and rear areas, commanders and others on the move can therefore switch from one

A Chieftain surveys the battle area; Chieftain engines have been modified and no longer give out blue smoke from their exhaust

Danish military police also took part in Exercise Spearpoint

to another and so remain in contact wherever they are. Frequency changes are immediate by press button and the old fashioned 'tuning and netting calls' are a thing of the past. Although electronic jamming is a threat senior officers believe that it is simply not possible to jam simultaneously all the available frequencies and therefore it will be possible to retain command and control on the battlefield.

Logistics

The increased mechanization of the forces, the advent of the missiles and the lager calibre guns has provided more pressure upon the logistic units and this at a time when it is vital that the available manpower is deployed in combat units. This problem has been tackled by concentrating support and logistic effort and by altering the whole forward supply arrangements. All non-combat supply transport (B echelon) has been removed from combat units and concentrated in the transport regiment; this immediately saves wasted road time and some manpower, the various brigade units like the workshops, field ambulance, ordnance unit and transport squadron have been concentrated into divisional units. These are now so designed that they are divisible into two parts and can be deployed in this way. The workshops can 'throw off' aid detachments and forward recovery subunits into the forward or divisional administrative area. The transport regiment is designed to bring fuel, stores, food and ammunition from the corps area through to the divisional administrative area and from there on to the newly organized Immediate Replenishment Group (IRG). IRGs are commanded by an officer supplied by the transport regiment; there are six in the division, one per battle group and one spare. The IRGs are composite supply points, units either send vehicles back to them to resupply or send guides who lead the transport regiments vehicles to their location. The whole system of forward supply is by a 'steady flow' from rear forward. Wherever possible, a truck loaded with ammunition or fuel or food will be passed forward from a base depot right through to a forward unit without it being unloaded, drivers only might be changed as the truck passes from the responsibility of one regiment to another.

The logistic system was thoroughly tested on Exercise Spearpoint: if mines were laid they had to be physically there, when artillery support was provided the equivalent weight of ammunition had to be brought forward, 'casualties' were evacuated and re-inforcements brought forward. More than 9,000 tons of stores, fuel, food and ammunition was brought forward during the first week of the exercise. The system proved itself but the exercise showed some weaknesses: although there is a logistic representative at the task force HQ to assist in co-ordination of the supplies to the allocated battle groups he was not in a position to move the battle groups remaining 2nd line transport. This could lead to confusion when regrouping takes place; the problem is under study.

The exercise was purposely designed to test the new structure in conventional warfare, however nuclear teams at divisional, task force and battle group levels were kept busy planning nuclear

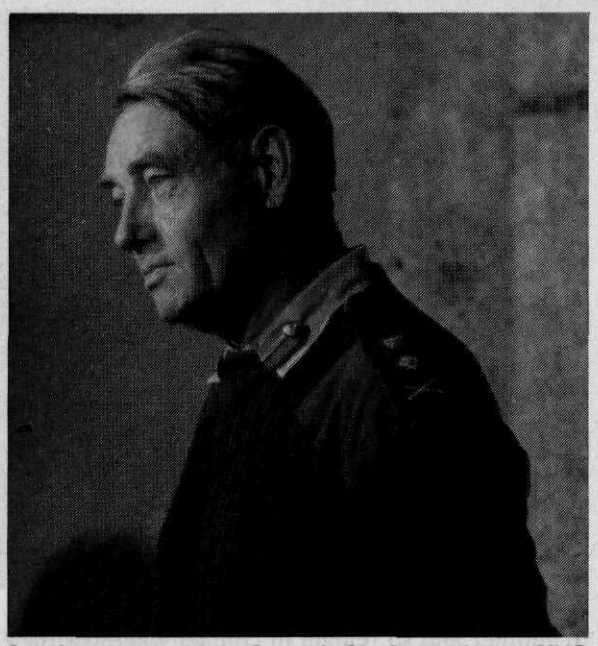
strikes and warning their commanders if 'nuclear worthy' targets were being presented to the enemy. Lance missiles (simulated by Honest Johns), 8 inch guns and the RAF nuclear weapons were kept constantly ready and were used on the last day.

Satisfaction

General Sir Frank King, the CINC BAOR and HQ Northern Army Group, said that he did not believe that the Soviet Union would use nuclear weapons should they ever attack Central Europe, at least in the early stages. He also stressed that the British Army in Germany was still at the same numerical strength as it had been for ten years or more, but was much stronger in weapons and firepower. He considered the strength of 55,000, reinforced in time of tension by 45,000 reservists and TAVR members, to be the 'rock bottom' requirement and any reduction would create a very bad impression upon the other NATO Allies. The present cost of BAOR is £ 605 million of which £ 413 million is in Deutsche Mark. However these costs include the medical and educational expenses of the troops and dependents, which in the UK would not be a charge on the defence vote. He said that we all read a great deal about the improvements to the Warsaw Pact forces but less about our own. Over the last few years they have been considerable especially in improved anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft missiles. 'A Russian officer said to me once', the General told, 'you should think like a Russian, we spend 12% of our budget on arms, would you trust the Poles and Czechs — and we have one billion Chinese at our backs!' They have their difficulties as well.'

The CINC maintained that the British Army gets great advantages from the situation in Northern Ireland, the young leaders mature fast and gain great confidence, they are now the best in the Alliance. Even formations have benefited, the constant regrouping and the attachments of sub-

Air support can be provided very quickly; Jaguars operated in the ground attack role



Satisfied commander, General Sir Frank King, CINC BAOR and COMNORTHAG, believes that the new structure is most successful

units to others in Ulster has tended to improve the speed and efficiency of regrouping to form the battle groups. Battle group training on the Suffield ranges in Canada has been a great boon to I (Br) Corps; about seven battle groups go there each year.

The closer co-operation and integration between the regular and reserve army has been of tremendous value, about 20,000 members of the TAVR carry out their annual camps in Germany and speedily integrate into their units and formations. This trend will continue.

Exercise Spearpoint proved that the new structure of the corps is workable and an improvement on the old organization. There is no doubt that it has much increased the responsibilities of the divisional commander and of the battle group commanders. The span of command of the latter is very large and it will require a high standard of all-round proficiency in the lieutenant-colonel rank; they must be capable of rapid reaction in the command of all arms battle groups in combat. This may become a problem after some days in combat when fatigue and strain begin to take their toll.

The exercise and the new structure of the corps caused considerable interest to other countries in and out of the NATO Alliance. In accordance with the Helsinki Agreement signatories were invited to send observers. Most NATO members

were there in various capacities and representatives from Canada, Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland and Yugoslavia attended. The Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact refused the invitation. Perhaps they realized that even if they did attend arrangements would have been made to make sure that they saw nothing of interest. Maybe their clandestine agents saw more! It is indeed fortunate that the German population accept the need for the Allied forces to carry out major manoeuvres from time to time. In spite of a full damage control organization and reasonable care taken by the participating forces the bill for compensation for damage done to crops, side roads, hedges, etc., amounted to about £ 1 million, of which the German government will pay one third. This is less than was expected because the weather was reasonably kind. It is also about the same as that paid out each year after the various brigade sized exercises held by the British Army on the Rhine. In terms of value gained from the exercises it is cheap at the price.

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