

Ceremony at former border outpost salutes 20th anniversary last Cold War patrol

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POINT ALPHA, Germany -- A retreat ceremony commemorating the 20th anniversary of the last U.S. Army patrol along the border of the former East and West Germany took place at this one-time outpost near the city of Fulda, March 31.

The event honored the achievements of the Soldiers of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, known as the Blackhorse Regiment, and the partnership between America and Germany during the Cold War era.

"Being here was a difficult mission," said retired Gen. John Abrams, the "Blackhorse" commander at the time of the last patrol. Abrams said the mission here began in February 1946 with the 14th Cavalry Group, a unit that well-known to his father, former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Creighton Abrams.

The Soldiers who manned Point Alpha trained and deployed in a fast tempo, Abrams said, rotating as often as every three months between their home base in Fulda, field training in Grafenwoehr,



Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, V Corps, lower the U.S. flag during a retreat ceremony at Point Alpha near Fulda, Germany, March 31. The ceremony commemorated the 20th anniversary of the last U.S. patrol along the border of East and West Germany at the close of the Cold War. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Claudio R. Tejada)

and duty on the border.

Platoons of approximately 40 cavalry troopers pulled patrol duties from four to six weeks at a time to demonstrate NATO's presence here and make a show of force along the border overlooking the famed Fulda Gap, where many expected the ultimate confrontation of the Cold War to play out.

The regiment's mission and assignment at what was officially called Observation Point Alpha ended with Germany's reunification in November 1989 and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.

Starting this year, a German-American Day celebration is planned for March 31 each year here, Abrams said.

The retreat ceremony took place on a chilly day, near the former U.S. observation tower, just a moment's walk away from the former border and a now-defunct East German guard tower. Current and retired senior U.S. Army leaders and German government officials addressed the importance of the mission for the U.S.-German partnership.

"The Soldiers that represented U.S. Army Europe, both in this regiment and for this region, all rotated up here to pull part of the mission and the duty," Abrams said during his keynote address.

"The work at Point Alpha is a symbol of the NATO alliance," he said. "I can tell you with all respect and admiration that this partnership was excellent. It was excellent in the cities and communities (where) we lived; it was excellent in the military; and it was excellent, frankly, in the framework of the NATO alliance, which continues to grow."

Brig. Gen. Michael A. Ryan, the V Corps deputy commanding general, said the corps and its German partners successfully defended the Fulda Gap for four decades.

"The U.S. and western allies focused for 40 years on deterring aggression and defending Western Europe against threats from the Soviet Union and its communist partners in Eastern Europe," he said. Ryan emphasized that the outpost's mission today, standing as a symbol of that partnership, is just as important as Point Alpha's strategic value during the Cold War.

The presence of NATO troops on this border, and the alliance between Germany and U.S. units such as the 11th ACR and other V Corps and VII Corps Soldiers, ensured that the west was ready to deploy in response to an invasion from the east, said Lt. Col. John McClory, a former commander of K Troop, 3rd Squadron, 11th ACR.

Today OP Alpha is “a chilling but important reminder of the division of Germany and the west-east altercations of the Cold War,” said Ryan.

“Point Alpha is a strong reminder of the vigilance and professionalism of those V Corps and 11th ACR troopers and warriors,” he said.