

Forces Weekly

ECHO

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PRIME
MINISTER
BFG 1983

'YOU ARE OUR SHIELD' SAYS IRON LADY!



● The Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, has a word with battle-ready soldiers.

PAYING tribute to the British Forces in Germany, the Prime Minister told troops on Lüneburg Heath: "You are our shield. The greatest deterrent is that your training and performance and professionalism are outstanding."

In a packed two-day programme Mrs Margaret Thatcher met Service personnel and their families and visited Army and RAF training areas, accompanied by Field-Marshal Sir Edwin Bramall, Chief of the Defence Staff.

As well as seeing a variety of military displays including a flying demonstration by Harrier jump-jets, aiming a M109 gun with 45 Field Regiment RA and taking part in a huge-scale Battle Group deployment by many units of 1 (Br) Corps on the Soltau training area, Mrs Thatcher also found time to meet the pupils and staff at Montgomery Primary School in Hohne Garrison where she was entertained to a "mini-concert" by youngsters.

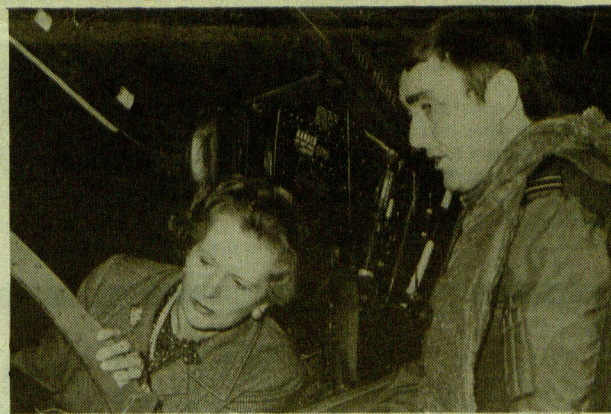
The Prime Minister's visit to the Forces started when she met airmen at RAF Gütersloh, Brüggen and Wildenrath and saw demonstrations by Harriers and Phantoms.

FIREPOWER

Mrs Thatcher met troops "in the field", on exercise near the Munster-Süd training area to see a massive firepower demonstration.

Accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Chris Copeland, Commanding Officer of 45 Field Regiment RA, she aimed one of the Regiment's M109 self-propelled guns, under the guidance of gun commander Sergeant Barry Lane, of Leeds, prior to its being fired over five miles.

She also saw the deployment and firing of Abbot guns belonging to "Chestnut Troop"



● Flt Lt Stu Weatherston explains the cockpit of a Jaguar GR1 to the Prime Minister when she visited 14 Squadron at Brüggen.

of 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery.

During a visit to 20 Armoured Brigade's "Hardened and Reduced" Field HQ she met Brigadier Nick Ansell, and one of her staff was immediately put through to 10 Downing Street by 200 Signal Squadron, who are attached to 20 Brigade.

Then she moved to the climax of the visit — a full-scale Battle Group attack carried out by 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards and supporting cavalry, artillery and infantry units on the Soltau training area.

This massive display of Army firepower involved almost 200 tracked and wheeled vehicles and more than 900 soldiers in a battle manoeuvre under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gilruth, Commanding Officer of 4/7 DG.

The scenario that Mrs Thatcher saw included Chieftain tanks from 4/7 DG, armoured fighting vehicles and infantry soldiers from "A" Company, 1st Battalion The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment and the guns of the Royal Artillery attacking 'enemy' tanks, with the opposing infantry provided by 2nd Battalion The Royal Green Jackets hiding out in a dense wood on Lüneburg Heath.

Mrs Thatcher, clad in goggles and a white headscarf, "went

into action" in a tank nicknamed "Boss Hogg".

The dramatic conclusion to the attack came when all 200 vehicles formed a "ring of steel" round the Prime Minister and the 900 soldiers dismounted to give her "three cheers" after she had step down from "Boss Hogg" to congratulate them on their "outstanding performance".

During a press conference, Mrs Thatcher said Britain was committed to the defence of Western Europe.

TRAINING

She said the commitment had been for 55,000 servicemen for some time, and 55,000 it remains.

"It is one of our commitments and it will be honoured, and it is a very important one.

"Everything that we do here has its essential deterrent quality, the more we train, the better we train and the more we are seen to train the more we strive for increasing perfection the greater the deterrent."

She said: "British Armed Forces in Germany are overwhelmingly welcomed by the enormous majority of the population, who realise that we are doing our task defending Europe as part of NATO and our Forces are very very welcome indeed."

The many faces of a Prime Minister



'PROTECTING THE PEACE OF THE WORLD'



● Above: The Prime Minister arrives at RAF Gutersloh with Air Marshal Patrick Hine (left), Wing Commander J. H. Thompson, and Gp Capt Dicky Johns.

● Below: A friendly greeting for some of the troops playing the enemy in some of the battle scenes watched by the Prime Minister.



THE Prime Minister took the German Press and TV by storm as she landed at Gutersloh on the last day of her visit to British Forces in Germany. She was joined on her visit by the Chief of the Defence Staff and Officers Commanding Ops Wing and 3 (F) Squadron.

She looked fit and well as she saw Harrier demonstrations by 3 Squadron with support from 1 RAF Regiment.

As Harriers blasted their way forward and upward from within 30 feet of the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher's eyes were on the men who in her words were "protecting the peace of the world".

The leader of the four Harriers was Squadron Leader McLeod from the Isle of Skye, a Falklands veteran involved in the last days of the land battle.

As the Harriers left the forest, a Chinook of 18 Squadron, with a Spartan from 1 RAF Regiment underslung, lowered it in front of the Prime Minister for onward missions in the forest.

The landing of the four Harriers in front of the Press and TV crews from Europe and the UK was spectacular, the planes sending up clouds of swirling forest dust.

The Prime Minister's enthusiasm and recognition of the skill of Britain's fighting men was very apparent.

At the Montgomery Service Children's School an excited audience of teachers, children and headmaster were waiting as the three Pumas carrying Britain's leader and the Chief of the Defence Staff and senior officers and officials landed on the playing field — Rupert Bear would not have been made more welcome.

An expected quick tour of the classrooms was not good enough for the Prime Minister who took time to talk to many of the children and to sit with them on the

floor to discuss the things which they were urging to show her.

Even the school computer, programmed to handle corner shop prices, was on show, whilst children showed her drawings of the Houses of Parliament.

A wall display including newspaper cuttings and photographs of the Prime Minister had been specially prepared to mark her visit.

One young boy, under the direction and watchful eye of the Prime Minister, corrected work on the computer and all seemed pleased with the interest and enthusiasm shown by Mrs Thatcher.

The pace set by the Prime Minister confounded any doubts about her health and everyone was impressed by a remarkable woman who sparkled and visibly shook all who came in contact with her.

The Prime Minister and the official party were transported by Chinook and Puma helicopters.

They demonstrated their firepower while Abbots scooted in to complete a formidable display of their capability.

Battery Sergeant Major Norman Fox of 52 Niagara Battery, 45 Regiment, in charge of the M109s must have been pleased with the performance of his men and proud to see the Prime Minister take part in the firing operation.

Sergeant Major Fox had his own trumpet to blow last week when he shattered the world record for walking from John O' Groats to Lands End, cutting the previous record by 13 hours.

Showing off their pride and skill

During her visit the Prime Minister paid tribute to what she described as the sheer professionalism, confidence and genius of the British Armed Forces. She said she had been very impressed by what she had seen, especially the marvellous morale of all the servicemen she had seen on her first visit to the British Forces in Germany as Prime Minister.



● Above: The Prime Minister in "Boss Hog", one of the Chieftains of B Squadron, the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards, as the battle group ground forces flush out the enemy.



● Left: An Abbot of 1 RHA shows off its firepower on the Nato training area at Munster South where Mrs Thatcher was welcomed by Lt General Sir Martin Farndale, the Commander 1 (Br) Corps, and Lt Col C. J. B. Copeland, the CO of 45 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery.

● Below: Smoke billows from the M109 as the Prime Minister was given a real close-up view of the action. She was in the turret when they fired the gun. This was just one of the many features of a battleground trip.



● The Prime Minister is briefed on how damaged aircraft are repaired.



Woman of the right calibre

Although she is known as the Iron Maiden, the Prime Minister still has to protect her ears as gunners of 45 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery fire the American M109's guns. Later Mrs Thatcher was invited into the cockpit of a M109 and loaded three shells.

The Prime Minister was told that the 109's guns in service with the British Army were American, but "they're very good" said Lt Col C. J. B. Copeland, the Commanding Officer of 45 Field Regiment. Right, a Chieftain of D Squadron, the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards.



● There's a grandstand view for the Prime Minister, who is accompanied by Lt Gen Sir Martin Farndale.



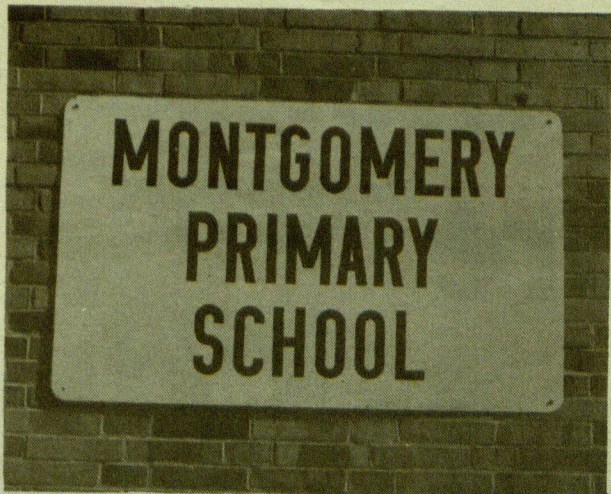
● The Prime Minister with Lt Col P. A. M. Gilrutt and men of the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards.

Front line



● Above and right: there's time for a chat and a smile.





● A smile that says "I met the Prime Minister" — Darren Layton on his day to remember.



● The Prime Minister gets right down to basics.

Back to school



● There's a cheerful wait for these youngsters at Montgomery School.



● Robert Aird solves a problem with a little help from the Prime Minister.



● All ready with a wave as the Prime Minister arrives by Puma helicopter. Right: calling in on class.





10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

You may care to see the attached copy of Forces Weekly Echo which gives extensive coverage to your visit to British Forces Germany. I shall try to get hold of some of the pictures for you.

B. INGHAM

3 October 1983