



U.S. GO HOME: THE U.S. MILITARY IN FRANCE, 1945 TO 1968

BY M. DAVID EGAN AND JEAN EGAN

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2022
Pp. vi,608. \$49.99

REVIEW BY ASHLEY VANCE

When the U.S. Army stormed the beaches of Normandy in June 1944, it became a seemingly intractable force in France for the next two decades. In the final year of the war, Allied forces set up temporary encampments and hospitals, buried their dead, and used the ports in Cherbourg, Marseille, and Le Havre to process soldiers and supplies in and out of Western Europe. By all accounts, it appeared as if the United States would leave when the wartime dust settled. However, just as the Allied powers chose France as the ideal location for the invasion of Europe during the war, leaders at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) chose France as the best location for their international headquarters and supply route into West

Germany for the Cold War. When French Communists started the “U.S. Go Home” chant in response to their arrival, General Dwight D. Eisenhower responded that the Allied forces were there “to protect France and would gladly go home when they were no longer needed” (34).

Western forces spent the next two decades erecting various facilities throughout France to support the Western Alliance for the Cold War. Office buildings, training grounds, equipment warehouses, airfields, storage depots, soldier barracks, and dependent housing were constructed in locations that varied from the French countryside to the heart of Paris. Like their wartime predecessors, Allied forces in the 1950s and 1960s struggled to fully accommodate the French during their stay. Problems developed over how to house the arriving soldiers and diplomats, especially given the existing acute housing shortage for French civilians. The Western powers debated over who would pay for and construct the needed facilities. And, depending on the year, the French populace did not welcome another foreign military in their already war-torn towns and villages. Tensions ultimately escalated to the point that French President Charles de Gaulle finally asked the U.S. military to leave in March 1966. In *U.S. Go Home: The U.S. Military in France, 1945 to 1968*, M. David Egan and Jean Egan chronicle the presence of U.S. military forces in France from their initial arrival in the summer of 1944 to their eventual departure in 1968.

The authors undertook a massive project when they chronicled the history of U.S. forces in postwar France. Across twelve chapters, *U.S. Go Home* is a 520-page history that offers an additional 70 pages of supportive materials and references, including images, maps, and diagrams throughout the chapters. To do justice to the complexity of the international landscape at the time, the authors tackle not just the U.S. military presence in France. They also deal with the history of the Cold War, events in divided Germany, and the development of NATO and SHAPE. They explain the French engagement in the Cold War and French responses to the Western forces setting up there, and address the political relationship between France and the United States until the late 1960s. The book serves as a rich introduction for readers who want an internationally focused understanding of U.S. forces in Western Europe after World

War II. The book has a chronological arc with topically arranged chapters, each with nearly two dozen subsections. Given the massive amount of information to be covered in each section, most are only two or three paragraphs in length. Thankfully, extensive footnotes guide readers to locate richer sources on each topic.

Because the book is almost encyclopedic in nature, it misses many of the nuances one would achieve in a narrower history. For example, in Chapter 2, the authors discuss the return of combat troops to Europe in 1951 after the Korean War began. They note General Eisenhower’s visit to the United States in January to persuade Congress to authorize the troop buildup, which they did in early April. However, the short two-paragraph summary of the troop return to Europe ignores the fact that President Harry S. Truman authorized the buildup in November 1950 and that, by January 1951, the Army was already mobilizing troops and erecting housing for them in West Germany. Less than a month after Congress approved the buildup, the 4th Infantry Division arrived in Bremerhaven. In West Germany, Army commanders negotiated with local governments for housing and base construction. This task likely informed how negotiations of the same kind took place in France months later. The missing domestic and foreign context limits the reader’s understanding of the complexity and significance of the troop buildup authorization.

Yet the lack of nuance should not dissuade readers. Many lesser-known aspects of the troop deployment to Europe are highlighted. For example, Chapter 1 tells the story of the redeployment of “Cigarette Camps” near Le Havre that existed until mid-1946; Chapter 5 provides a wonderful overview of Camp des Loges, known at the time as the “Little Pentagon” because of its dense concentration of U.S. generals and officers; and Chapter 11 highlights the need for soldiers and their dependents to maintain “NEO [noncombatant evacuation operation] Kits” stocked with supplies in case of an emergency evacuation. Additionally, the authors have a passion for architecture, as all of the chapters provide detailed diagrams to explain how buildings and equipment were constructed and used in France. Their use of maps, which are drawn and easy to read, is also incredibly valuable for readers unfamiliar with France and its connection to neighboring nations.

The French decision to ask U.S. forces to leave by mid-1967 was as much about the American imposition on the French people as it was about fundamental political differences between the two nations. As the authors note, Charles de Gaulle believed “that the U.S. would not sacrifice American cities to save French cities” (489). He was unhappy with President John F. Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, personally disliked President Lyndon B. Johnson and loathed his movement into Vietnam, and refused to accept America’s insistence that France not possess a nuclear arsenal to defend itself. When de Gaulle asked America to leave, the U.S. military had already stationed 70,000 soldiers and their families in France. Additionally, the military stored nearly one million tons of supplies and equipment throughout the nation. The removal of personnel and equipment was “the largest peacetime exercise of transportation by land, sea, and air the U.S. military had ever undertaken” (493). Yet the U.S. military did not diminish its mission in Europe when its forces left France. Understanding the complexity of U.S. commitments to Western Europe throughout the first decades of the Cold War necessitates understanding how and why the military deployed to France and why it ultimately left.

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