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Fulda Gap: A board game, West German society, and a battle that never happened, 1975–85

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This article explores the reception of the American-made board game *Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War* in the Federal Republic of Germany in the early 1980s. The German peace movement used the game, which depicted conventional, chemical, and nuclear war on German territory, as a potent symbol of what they believed to be American and NATO disregard for German lives and sovereignty. The controversy over the game reflected the changing character of German-American relations during the ‘Second Cold War’ and increasing concerns among Germans about the possible consequences of superpower conflict in Central Europe.

KEYWORDS Fulda Gap; wargaming; West Germany; Peace Movement; Cold War

On a beautiful day in 1979, US Army Brigadier General John Galvin went for a drive in his Volkswagen Bug. He followed a series of narrow logging roads along the Kinzig River, not far from the West German city of Fulda. Admiring the natural beauty of the ridgeline and its view across the valley, he considered what might happen if, as feared, a Soviet armoured thrust moved through the region on its way toward Frankfurt and the Rhine. Galvin ‘then followed the swing of our planned counterattack and thought, if we do stop them, would they respond with tactical nuclear weapons? What about Fulda? We would hold on to Fulda at all costs, but there might not be much left of it’.¹ This article is a history of a battle that happened only in the imagination, along a narrow strip of forests and hills in the heart of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). It was fought across a global

¹ John R. Galvin, *Fighting the Cold War: A Soldier’s Memoir* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 251.

media landscape and in the minds of soldiers and civilians who saw themselves killing, dying, and living with the consequences of a titanic struggle between superpower alliances. The fact that the Fulda Gap did not become the central front of the Third World War does not diminish its importance. Because the battle did not happen, it served as an imaginative device that allowed soldiers and civilians who lived in the shadow of the Cold War to think widely about what war might mean. We can see the dynamics of Cold War anxiety about the Fulda Gap in an unlikely place: an American board game that became a totemic symbol of the Peace Movement (*Friedensbewegung*) in the Federal Republic during the early 1980s.

In 1977, New York-based Simulations Publications, Inc. (SPI) released a tabletop war game called *Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War* (hereafter *Fulda Gap*). The board game gave players the opportunity to play out an imagined war with cardboard counters representing military units on a map showing actual German towns and cities. People who lived in that space then learned about the game and many reacted with shock and dismay that their lives and deaths could be fodder for entertainment. Here, at the intersection of play, military doctrine, and lived reality, lies an opportunity to think about the cultural history of war and warfare.

The article will first discuss some of the historiographical and methodological implications of war games and the relationship between imagined war and the realities of large-scale conflict. After setting the political and military context of the Cold War in the late 1970s and 80s, I will discuss the origins, distribution, and reception of *Fulda Gap*. Finally, the article examines the ways that the German peace movement used *Fulda Gap* as part of a larger critique of the United States and the assumptions that underpinned the Atlantic alliance.

Historians of war now write comfortably about the relationship between conflict and culture, a development that has helped to shift the intellectual framework of military history over the past scholarly generation. Battles matter not just as sites of violence, suffering, victory, and defeat, but also as places that shape wider cultures of memory.² The ways in which observers ascribe meaning to military operations and institutions help us to map contemporary attitudes toward war and warfare.³ Wargames, in which players are encouraged to ‘represent and playfully re-enact’ armed conflict in a non-violent but competitive setting, demonstrate the critical connection between imaginative play, critical thinking, and military operations.⁴

The very public controversy over *Fulda Gap* demonstrates the juxtaposition between Cold War audiences. For anglophone players in the United States, the game was a way to imagine how one of the superpower blocs might win a military conflict on Europe’s most dangerous military frontier. For Germans, it was both a reflection of their anxieties over what such a war would look like when fought in

² See Hew Strachan’s editorial foreword in Murray Pittock, *Culloden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix.

³ Stephen Morillo and Michael F. Pavkovich, *What Is Military History?* (London: Polity, 2018), 5.

⁴ Philip Hammond and Holger Pötzsch, ‘Introduction: Studying Games and War’, in *War Games: Memory, Militarism, and the Subject of Play*, ed. by Philip Hammond and Holger Pötzsch (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 1.

and above their homes, and a blunt reminder of what many perceived to be a lack of German agency and sovereignty over their own territory.

The controversy over the game both reflected and exacerbated ongoing tensions in German domestic politics and in the changing nature of the German-American relationship in the early 1980s. The game's existence, and the context in which it was published and sold, appeared to trivialise German anxiety and danger at a time when that peril appeared particularly acute.⁵ This period saw a dramatic upswing in activism against the nuclear architecture of the Cold War, focused on the proposed deployment of a new generation of missiles on both sides of the Iron Curtain.⁶ Activists confronted the stark imbalance of power, sovereignty, and political legitimacy that seemed to underpin the Atlantic alliance.

While the peace movement failed to stop the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles, its efforts helped to transform the political culture of the Federal Republic. The movement helped to shift the German public decisively toward what Steve Breyman called 'a breakdown of domestic nuclear defense consensus', an increased fear of war, and a distrust of the Reagan administration's intentions.⁷ This change in attitudes among German voters helped to convince the Helmut Kohl government eventually to support the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a major step toward bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion. While the controversy over *Fulda Gap* was only one small part of this broader transformation, it both reflected and catalysed a series of changes taking place beneath the surface of German society in the 1980s.

One of the key concepts that emerged from this growing sense of anxiety was *Betroffenheit*, a nearly untranslatable word that conveys a sense of personal concern and engagement.⁸ *Betroffenheit* appeared in a variety of contexts, including heightened concerns for environmental protection around issues like the destruction of German forests by acid rain and other pollutants (*Waldsterben*) or activism around opposition to nuclear energy. A vocal and increasingly powerful cohort of Germans felt an existential threat to their lives and communities from the Cold War military balance, and they sought to use their voices to do something about it.

⁵ There is a growing literature on the importance of fear in German politics and culture during the Cold War: Bernd Greiner, 'Angst im Kalten Krieg. Bilanz und Ausblick', in *Angst im Kalten Krieg*, ed. by Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, and Dierk Walter (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2009); Jörg Arnold, 'Kassel 1943 mahnt ... zur Genealogie der Angst im Kalten Krieg', *ibid.*; Benjamin Ziemann, 'German Angst? Debating Cold War Anxieties in West Germany, 1945–90', in *Understanding the Imaginary War: Culture, Thought and Nuclear Conflict, 1945–90*, ed. by Matthew Grant and Benjamin Ziemann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Susanne Schregel, *Der Atomkrieg vor der Wohnungstür. eine Politikgeschichte der neuen Friedensbewegung in der Bundesrepublik 1970–1985* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010), 164–82.

⁶ There has been a proliferation of literature on the 'Euromissile' controversy: for example, Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother, eds., *The Euromissile and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

⁷ Philipp Gassert, 'West German Politics, the INF Treaty, and the Popular Dynamics of Peace' in *The INF Treaty of 1987*, ed. by Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, and Hermann Wentker (Munich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 262; Steve Breyman, *Why Movements Matter: The West German Peace Movement and US Arms Control Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 7, 227.

⁸ Ziemann, 'German Angst?', 118.

A game, designed to encourage creative thinking about war and for the enjoyment of its players, became a projection screen upon which German society could project its anxieties about the possibility of armed conflict.⁹ Such fears, driven by fictional narratives, games, and other cultural products, helped to shape the ‘imagined’ Cold War.¹⁰ As Holger Nehring has argued, it is important for historians to remember ‘one of the key elements of the Cold War: its war-like character’.¹¹ While we know today that the superpower confrontation ended without a land war in Central Europe, contemporaries did not. While the death and destruction portrayed in *Fulda Gap* affected only cardboard tiles, there was a distinct possibility that a similar fate might befall real people and real communities.

There is a growing literature on wargaming, much of it focused on its utility for education and training. A substantial part of this scholarship examines the role of wargaming in military education. At the same time, educators at civilian schools and universities suggest that wargames can help students think critically about historical contingency and ‘put students into the minds of people from the past’.¹² Several previous studies have mentioned the *Fulda Gap* controversy in discussions of the relationship between international politics and the role of games in the ‘escalation of the lived experience’ of the Cold War.¹³

Both the physical space of the Fulda Gap and the board game landscape of *Fulda Gap* were to a great degree imagined constructs, each of which needs to be understood in turn. The Fulda Gap provides a fascinating example of the political geography of the Cold War. The term refers to a terrain feature of relatively flat land between the uplands of the Knüllgebirge to the north and the Rhön and Spessart to the south, with the Vogelsberg and the Kinzig River between them. Along with similar ‘gaps’ or ‘corridors’ near the Inner German border at Hof, Weiden, and Coburg, NATO planners saw the area around Fulda as a particularly vulnerable point likely to draw the attention of their Warsaw Pact adversaries.¹⁴

The region of the Fulda Gap is not naturally a strategic feature. It was as much a political concept as a geographic one. The Inner German border ran through what had previously been the heart of the country, dividing the eastern state of Thuringia

⁹ This discussion also took place over the German translation of John Hackett’s novel *The Third World War*: Adam R. Seipp, “Visionary Battle Scenes”: Reading Sir John Hackett’s *The Third World War*, 1977–85’, *Journal of Military History*, 83, 4 (2019).

¹⁰ Matthew Grant and Benjamin Ziemann, ‘Introduction: The Cold War as an Imaginary War’, in *Understanding the Imaginary War: Culture, Thought, and Nuclear Conflict, 1945–1990*, ed. by Matthew Grant and Benjamin Ziemann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Holger Nehring, ‘What Was the Cold War?’, *English Historical Review* 127, 527 (2012), 923.

¹² Judkin Browning, ‘Of Water Balloons and History: Using Wargames as Active Learning Tools to Teach the Historical Process’, *The History Teacher*, 42.3 (2009), 564; Solomon K. Smith, ‘Pounding Dice into Musket Balls: Using Wargames to Teach the American Revolution’, *The History Teacher*, 46.4 (2013).

¹³ Florian Greiner and Maren Röger, ‘Den Kalten Krieg spielen: Brett- und Computerspiele in der Systemkonfrontation’, *Zeithistorische Forschung*, 16.1 (2019); Peter Hughes Jachimiak, “‘Tanks, Terrain and Black Horses’: The Intra-German Border, Mitteldeutschland and Third World War Cultural Texts”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14.3 (2011); Hermann R. Hammerich, ‘The Fulda Gap: A Flashpoint of the Cold War between Myth and Reality’, in *Fulda Gap: Battlefield of the Cold War Alliances*, ed. by Dieter Krüger and Volker Bausch (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

¹⁴ Hugh Faringdon, *Strategic Geography: Nato, the Warsaw Pact, and the Superpowers*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 375–8.

from the western states of Hessen and Bavaria. The Fulda Gap was the most direct path for an armoured invasion to reach the financial center of Frankfurt am Main and the large NATO and American bases in the southeastern part of West Germany, a veritable ‘playground for tanks’.¹⁵ General Donn Starry, one of the intellectual leaders of the US Army during the post-Vietnam era, bluntly described the area as ‘the shortest way to the Rhine ... It is the shortest way to the logistics complexes of Kaiserslautern. It is the shortest way to France. It is the shortest way to cut Germany in two’.¹⁶ For much of the Cold War, the eastern and western sides of the gap were manned by US V Corps and the Soviet 8th Guards Army.¹⁷

The lack of any historic strategic or geographic unity to the Fulda Gap can be clearly seen in the fact that the German language had no term for the area. NATO planners began talking about it in the 1950s, but most Germans were unaware of the designation until the late 1970s.¹⁸ The controversy over the board game helped to make the term better known in Germany, but there was still no commonly agreed German translation.¹⁹ Germans disagreed about how best to render the word ‘gap’, and alternated between *Bresche*, *Senke*, or *Lücke*. In the end, most Germans simply used the English term ‘Fulda Gap’ or ‘Fulda-Gap’.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s it emerged as the central physical site in the imagined Cold War and became a metonym for the bloodiest possible outcome of the NATO-Warsaw Pact contest for supremacy in Europe. This is important in part because it placed the Fulda Gap at the intersection of three critical but related developments taking place at the time: the escalation of Cold War tensions in the late 1970s, efforts to rebuild the US Army after the disaster of Vietnam, and the increasingly vocal German and international resistance to nuclear proliferation.

The ‘Second Cold War’ began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. It came to an end after the ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev and the start of renewed superpower diplomacy just a few years before the Cold War international order collapsed for good.²⁰ While superpower rivalry provided an overarching framework for the military and political events of this period, there was also a complex interplay of domestic politics, generational change, and cultural shifts taking place on both sides of the Atlantic.

For American forces in Germany, the Second Cold War meant a substantial growth of personnel and a vast modernisation program that brought new

¹⁵ Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *‘Ruck It Up’: The Post-Cold War Transformation of V Corps, 1990–2001* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2005), 5.

¹⁶ Benjamin Jensen, *Forging the Sword: Doctrinal Change in the US Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 62.

¹⁷ Donald A. Carter, *Forging the Shield: The US Army in Europe, 1951–1962* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2015), 40.

¹⁸ One of the earliest references to the concept that I have found is Drew Middleton, ‘The Seventh Army’, *Combat Forces Journal*, August 1952, 12–17.

¹⁹ Hammerich, ‘Flashpoint’, 18.

²⁰ This term is generally credited to the contemporary journalist Fred Halliday. Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1983). For a discussion of this development in terms: Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), esp. 501–26.

equipment and doctrinal innovation.²¹ After Vietnam, budget cuts, and the shift to an all-volunteer force, US Army Europe (USAREUR) spent much of the decade trying to return to a focus on conventional war in Central Europe. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War, in which armoured formations suffered appalling losses, shocked American planners who had counted on the quality of NATO troops and equipment to offset the Warsaw Pact's numerical superiority.²² The result was a series of changes in doctrine and technology, beginning with the development of the doctrine of 'Active Defense' in 1976, outlined in the Army's Field Manual (FM) 100-5. The new doctrine stressed manoeuvre and synchronisation to ensure that NATO would 'win the first battle of the next war'.

Active Defense proved unpopular among some American commanders, who saw it as a blueprint for losing the war by failing to take the initiative. The result was a shift by 1982 to a far more aggressive doctrine of AirLand Battle, which emphasised the need to 'extend' the battlefield into the enemy's space and disrupt an offensive before it could begin. The new doctrine, along with weapons systems like the Abrams tank, Bradley Fighting Vehicle, and the Apache helicopter, led to an increase in the tempo and visibility of training and manoeuvres in Germany.²³ As an ideal site for a massive clash of armour, the Fulda Gap assumed a central place in this imagined battle.

The internal politics and political culture of the Federal Republic were also in transition. The economic crises of the 1970s, coupled with the lasting influence of the 'New Social Movements' after 1968, heralded a fragmentation of the three-party electoral system that dominated the country's politics since its inception after 1949.²⁴ The peace movement emerged during this period as the anti-communist ideological glue that held together the politics of the Federal Republic weakened.²⁵ NATO's 1979 'double-track' decision, which called for arms control negotiations and the simultaneous modernisation of missile systems in Western Europe, propelled the peace movement to new organisational heights and further fractured the German left.²⁶ A new party, The Greens, emerged from a coalition of activist

²¹ Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2006), 81.

²² A much fuller discussion of these developments can be found in Robert Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); R. Z. Alessi-Friedlander, 'Learning to Fight and Win While Fighting Outnumbered: General Donn A. Starry and the Challenge of Institutional Leadership During a Period of Reform and Modernization', *Military Review*, <<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2017-Online-Exclusive-Articles/Learning-to-Win-While-Fighting-Outnumbered/>> (2017).

²³ Kagan, 81.

²⁴ The literature on the 'second foundation' of the Federal Republic after the upheavals of 1968 is enormous: Andreas Wirsching, *Abschied vom Provisorium, 1982-1990* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006); Edgar Wolfrum, *Die gesegnete Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

²⁵ A contemporary perspective on this change is Helga Haftendorn, 'Germany and the Euromissile Debate', *International Journal*, 40.1 (1984/85), 68-85.

²⁶ Eckart Conze, Marting Klimke, and Jeremy Varon, eds., *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War in the 1980s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Saskia Richter, 'The Protagonists of the Peace Movement', in *The Nuclear Crisis: The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s*, ed. by Christoph Becker-Schaum, et al. (New York: Berghahn, 2016).

groups in the late 1970s. The militarisation of German space by both conventional and nuclear weapons moved to the forefront of domestic politics.

This new, increasingly self-conscious expression of German domestic politics existed awkwardly alongside the powerful and assertive American military presence in the country. Developments in the internal politics of the Federal Republic clashed with Cold War notions of Germany as the central front of a potential superpower struggle. The early 1980s saw an important shift in German public opinion about the continued presence of American forces in the Federal Republic. Since 1956, the influential Allensbach Institute regularly polled German voters about whether they would ‘rejoice or regret’ (*‘begrüßen oder bedauern’*) if the Americans announced that they were pulling out all their troops immediately. In 1983, 17 per cent of Germans said that they would ‘rejoice’. Three years later, 34 per cent indicated that they would, with 32 per cent saying that they would rue the decision.²⁷ This was essentially the first time in the history of polling in the Federal Republic that a plurality of respondents expressed hope for the end of the American presence.

This growing divergence between Germans and Americans over issues of security intersected and coincided with an unexpected development: the rise of hobbyist wargaming in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁸ Tabletop wargaming for civilian use was a niche pursuit in post-1945 America. A few hobbyists played games with metal miniatures, but these were expensive, complicated, and time-consuming.

In 1958, a gaming enthusiast named Charles Roberts changed the industry when he started Avalon Hill, a small company that produced war games using cardboard tiles instead of miniatures. It remained though a small market. During the Vietnam era, gamers were uncomfortably out-of-step with an American society sceptical of the value of war. Despite commercial obstacles, the 1960s saw a growing cohort of designers and publishers, including the young Jim Dunnigan. A crucial figure in this story, Dunnigan discovered wargaming as a US Army private in Korea. He published his first game, *Jutland*, with Avalon Hill in 1967. Dunnigan broke off and started SPI in 1969. He later described the business as ‘much like the old 1930s movie in which a group of bright young kids gather around and say “Hey, gang. Let’s put on a Broadway musical in Dad’s garage!”’²⁹

The timing proved propitious. The 1970s witnessed a boom in tabletop gaming. War games surged in popularity as part of the larger trend, fuelled by the end of the war in Vietnam and the success of blockbusters like *Star Wars*. At their height, war game publishers produced more than 100 titles per year. According to internal estimates, SPI and its competitors sold 62,000 copies in 1964. By 1980, that number rose to 2.6 million.³⁰

²⁷ This public opinion data is of course only suggestive: Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie, 1993–1997* (Allensbach: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1997), 1147.

²⁸ This account is taken from James F. Dunnigan, *The Complete Wargames Handbook: How to Play, Design, and Find Them* (New York: William Morrow, 1980); Peter P. Perla, *The Art of Wargaming: A Guide for Professionals and Hobbyists* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990); Matthew B. Caffrey Jr., *On Wargaming: How Wargames Have Shaped History and How They May Shape the Future*, vol. 43, Newport Papers (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2019); David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 358.

²⁹ Dunnigan, 144.

³⁰ Dunnigan, 145.

Along with the games came a universe of magazines (including SPI's *Strategy and Tactics*), meetings, and national conventions. When SPI published *Fulda Gap* in 1977, it was part of a *bona fide* national phenomenon. The Department of Defence took notice as well, contracting with SPI to develop a game to help teach infantry tactics and establishing a synergistic relationship between civilian and military gaming communities.

Fulda Gap was not the first, or the last, board game to depict Cold War ground combat in central Europe. In 1975, SPI published *Wurzburg* [sic], a game of small unit tactics in a fight for the northern Bavarian city. When *Fulda Gap* came out in 1977, it appears to have attracted little to no attention in Germany. As the political climate over missiles and weapons modernisation heated up, however, the game became part of a much larger discussion about the Fulda Gap (see [Figure 1](#)).

Fulda Gap is straightforward, even if the rules are byzantine.³¹ It is designed for two players, one representing NATO, the other the Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact player launches an armoured offensive across the inner German border, and the NATO player must stop the thrust before it cuts the Federal Republic in two. The board, divided into hexagonal spaces, represents the border area between the two Germanies from Zweibrücken in the West to Eisenach in the East. At roughly the centre lies Frankfurt and the confluence of the Main and Rhine rivers. The terrain is colour coded to reflect changes in altitude and forestation, with a clear path through the heart of the Fulda Gap. Many of the larger and smaller towns of the region are represented, as are major and minor roads and highways. Military units are represented by 400 cardboard counters, and there are a number of charts and graphs explaining various aspects of the game's complex movement and combat system.

The rules for *Fulda Gap* show Dunnigan's deep immersion in the operations and weaponry of the opposing sides. He familiarised himself with the doctrine of Active Defense, citing FM 100-5 in the rule book and offering advice to the NATO player to 'counterattack and surround the Enemy whenever possible'.³² Soviet doctrine is less well-developed, with the note that 'the Soviets have other tactical doctrines which, as far as we know (and we're not sure) they will use or be forced to use because of their level of training and experience'.³³

The tone in the rulebook is jaunty and conversational, stressing that the game is 'meant to be enjoyable'³⁴ and that it should not be an exercise in legalism. It is not surprising that German readers, when confronted with such a *blasé* description of the outbreak of war on their soil, might react negatively. Dunnigan wrote:

³¹ The following description and quotations are taken from 'Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War. Rules of Play' (NY, NY: Simulations Publishing, 1977). Hereafter 'Rules'. SPI's in-house magazine, *Strategy and Tactics*, published a long companion to the game, expanding on many of the points made by Dunnigan in the rule book: S. Patrick, 'Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War', *Strategy and Tactics*, 62.May (1977), 30-39.

³² *Strategy and Tactics* published a long companion to the game, expanding on many of the points made by Dunnigan in the rule book: Steve Patrick, 'Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War', *Strategy and Tactics*, 62.May (1977), 30-39.

³³ Rules, unpaginated 'Player Notes'.

³⁴ Rules, 3.

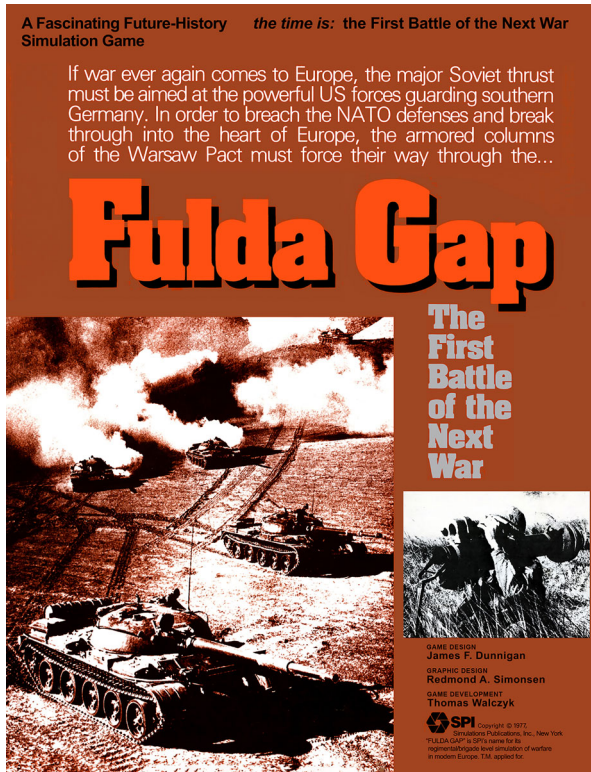


FIGURE 1.
Cover of the game box. Source: permission, Martin Spetz.

The biggest question in an unfought war is just how effective the combination of weapons, tactics, training, doctrine, etc., will be for each army. Unfortunately, the only way to find out for certain is to fight the war. The exact results are often embarrassing and, in any case, impossible to predict. Only the Americans have had any recent combat experience, and it remains to be seen to what extent the 'lessons' of Vietnam will be applicable in Europe.³⁵

The most controversial aspect of the game to later observers is the use of chemical and nuclear weapons. The rules assume that the Warsaw Pact would use chemical weapons as part of the assault, and the rules include advice on when to deploy them most effectively ('The use of chemical warfare should be timed to coincide with the point in the game when the maximum number of Untried NATO units are being engaged'). The rule book suggests that both players should consider using short-range nuclear weapons. For the Warsaw Pact player, these weapons are best employed 'while chemical warfare is in play; their combined effects can be devastating on the NATO line'. The NATO player can use nuclear weapons to blunt the offensive before it is too late. Dunnigan did concede that 'the rules do not deal with

³⁵ Rules, 16.

the larger issues of nuclear war, notably the danger that the use of tactical weapons might spark a total nuclear holocaust (which is something that neither side presumably wants).³⁶

Fulda Gap was a commercial and critical success in a crowded market. Players and game journalists praised its innovative combat system, particularly the rules for chemical weapons and for determining the effectiveness of individual units in combat. A contemporary game guide noted that the map was ‘full of interesting places to fight for: towns, roads, airfields, river crossings’ before concluding that ‘the combination of no-frills rule writing with so many exotic aspects of modern warfare accounts for the game’s continuing popularity’.³⁷

It was not until several years later, when events focused German attention on the actual Fulda Gap, that the game achieved trans-Atlantic notoriety. In the meantime, the anti-missile demonstrations began and grew, and German politics shifted with the electoral successes of the Greens. Between 1982 and 1984, as the protests over Pershing II missiles reached their apex, Germans heard and read a great deal about what might happen if an actual war broke out in Central Europe. A series of incidents in the early 1980s highlighted for many Germans how dangerous a place the Fulda Gap had now become.

In 1981, an event that *Der Spiegel* described as ‘a German tragi-comedy’ took place in, and also far from, the tiny eastern Hessen (*Osthessen*) village of Hattenbach (population, 631).³⁸ The American broadcaster CBS showed a five-part documentary about American defence policy that included scenes of officers at the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, working through a tactical problem over a table-top model of a German landscape. They openly discussed what would happen if nuclear weapons were used to blunt a Soviet offensive through the area. They identified the village as Hattenbach and described it as ‘likely Ground Zero’ of the next war. Austrian state television broadcast a German-language version, but it was not shown on West German television.

Hattenbachers watched the blithe discussion of their impending doom on smuggled videocassettes. The mayor of the town, a Social Democrat, told a visiting reporter that he thought that the film would only cause needless worry. ‘If I’m going to slaughter a pig’, he said, ‘I don’t go and tell him beforehand’.³⁹ The story of Hattenbach, at a time of rising German dissatisfaction with defence policy, struck a chord with people across the country who saw themselves, their families, and their communities in the experience of this rustic village.⁴⁰

The German Greens studied American plans and doctrine with remarkable attention. In the party’s archives in Berlin are folders full of documents by and about the

³⁶ Ibid., unpaginated ‘Player Notes’.

³⁷ Nicholas Palmer, *The Best of Board Wargaming* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1980), 104–105.

³⁸ This account is taken from Wilhelm Bittorf, ‘»Ich sag’ dem Schwein nicht, wann es Stirbt« Spiegel-Reporter Wilhelm Bittorf über das »Atomziel« Hattenbach und seine Bewohner’, *Spiegel*, 28 February 1982; Schregel, 164–82.

³⁹ Bittorf, 104.

⁴⁰ Schregel, 164–82.

US Army in Germany during this period. Party activists acquired an umpire's handbook for a large manoeuvre in the Fulda Gap in 1983.⁴¹ The same team found paper tags, reading 'GAS', that were left on the simulated battlefield to signify contamination, a dramatic example of a simulated conflict that looked very much like the board game. The files are also full of documents, some of which were clearly not intended for outside eyes. A handbook, written at CGSC, described scenarios for 'Conventional-Nuclear Operations' in the event of war in Germany. It laid out a plan to use short-range nuclear weapons, called Package ZEBRA. The scenario estimated about 5,000 civilian fatalities, thanks to previous civil defence planning measures. 'Although the physical damage to the city was heavy, Hünfeld suffered less damage than during the German retreat in 1945'.⁴²

The same year, one of the literary sensations in Germany was tied directly to the Fulda Gap. Gudrun Pausewang's novel *Die letzten Kinder von Schwenborn* (*The Last Children of Schwenborn*) told the grim story of the aftermath of nuclear war in the titular town, where the survivors slowly died of radiation poisoning. The book, which won several prestigious prizes and became widely adopted in German school curricula, drew from Pausewang's life in the east Hessen town of Schlitz. In an afterword, she wrote about the recent successful campaign against the construction of an American training area near Schlitz. 'For this and similar examples one can draw hope and courage to defend oneself intensely against any kind of preparation for war, so that we are all spared the fate of Schwenborn'.⁴³

Journalists and activists mobilised to describe and sometimes confront the American presence in East Hessen. This created an awkward political dynamic. While many residents of the region grew increasingly unhappy with the American military presence, it was also a deeply conservative region primarily comprised of small towns and farming communities. An American officer described Fulda, the biggest community in the region, as 'a nice town. Catholic, conservative, a real German town, full of staunch true Germans. Russian-hating Germans. They like Americans here'.⁴⁴ Alfred Dregger, one of the leaders of the arch-conservative anti-communist 'Steel Helmet' faction of the *Bundestag*, represented Fulda.⁴⁵ This was not propitious ground for German leftists.

Nonetheless, a loose network of anti-militarist organisations began to operate in the region. Some groups had ties to the national Greens, while others were purely local initiatives. Dr. Peter Krahulec, a Prague-born professor of education at the Fulda University of Applied Sciences (*Hochschule Fulda*), emerged as a prominent local organiser and guide for visitors. Krahulec and his colleagues began to organise tours of the Fulda Gap for curious visitors and activists from across the country. The 1970s witnessed a boom in 'border tourism' as visitors came to experience the

⁴¹ Umpire Handbook, Reforger 83, FTX Confident Enterprise, 3ID Circular 350-83-3, Archive Grünes Gedächtnis (AGG) B.II.1 1996 (2).

⁴² 'Conventional-Nuclear Operations', RB-100-30, US Army CGSC, 6 August 1976.

⁴³ Gudrun Pausewang, *Die letzten Kinder von Schwenborn* (Ravensburg: Otto Maier Verlag, 1983), 127.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Michael Skinner, *USAREUR: The United States Army in Europe* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 6.

⁴⁵ 'Absage an »Gruppe Stahlhelm«', *Spiegel*, March 3, 1985.

rural splendour of the undeveloped region.⁴⁶ Krahulec and his colleagues offered ‘alternative border tours’ (*alternative Grenzlandfahrten*) that emphasised instead the destructive potential of the Inner German boundary. The agenda for one such tour stressed the environmental costs of ‘NATO’s war against nature’ and took visitors to the site of the proposed manoeuvre area that the people of Schlitz had stopped in a victory against ‘internal colonialism’.⁴⁷

Activists wanted to involve locals in their campaign, but frequently found their interactions with people from the region to be frustrating. Most had little interest in mobilising against the Americans, at least on the terms that the activists wanted.⁴⁸ ‘What you can’t change’, a farmer’s wife told a journalist, ‘you should leave alone’. When asked about protests, a farmer living on the edge of the American training area at Wildflecken pointed to the base perimeter and remarked that ‘As long as they are shooting in there, they aren’t shooting out here’.⁴⁹ These residents may not have been happy about the American presence in their midst, but they certainly were not ready to join activists in their effort to demilitarise the Fulda Gap.

As this rural region became a national concern, activists discovered *Fulda Gap*. The game was not easy to find in the Federal Republic, a fact that became part of the legend around it. Several contemporary and later sources assert that *Fulda Gap* was not for sale in German shops. It could only be purchased in at American Post Exchange (PX) stores and was thus only available to American personnel and their families. This claim was probably inaccurate. SPI brought the game to the Nuremberg Toy Fair in 1982, which led to protests at the fair and criticism in the local press.⁵⁰ Regardless of whether the story about the game’s unavailability in the Federal Republic is true, there is no question that this was part of the public perception. It was a sticking point because it reinforced the basic narrative about the game—it rendered German space into a playing field in which others operated freely and Germans were left to be passive observers of their own fates.

Fulda Gap became the perfect foil for German critics of the US military. It provided tangible proof of the militarisation of German space and the deadly peril of this site of superpower confrontation. Here, in board game form, was evidence of how little German lives meant to the Federal Republic’s NATO allies. At the same time, its obvious popularity among American personnel in Germany suggested that many soldiers enjoyed seeing their experience in Germany represented on the board. Americans and Germans saw the game, and what it represented, in profoundly different and conflicting ways.

⁴⁶ A.M. Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 117.

⁴⁷ Pamphlet ‘Alternative Grenzlandfahrt’, Materialien zur angewandten Friedenspädagogik, Fachhochschule Fulda: Fachbereich Sozialarbeit, 1986.

⁴⁸ This was not an uncommon experience: Stephen Milder, *Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and Beyond, 1968–1983* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 166.

⁴⁹ G.P. Hefty, ‘Fulda-Gap – Die Lücke zwischen Erwartung und Wirklichkeit’. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 1, 1984.

⁵⁰ Greiner and Röger, ‘Spielen’, 64.

In 1983–4, a number of media outlets in the Federal Republic reported regularly from the region. Two radio programmes, a televised documentary, and a book used *Fulda Gap* to focus German attention on events in east Hessen. Helmut Kopetzky, a journalist and founding member of ‘Journalists Warning of Nuclear War’, produced a radio programme called *Fulda Gap – ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (*Fulda Gap – Visiting a Battlefield*) for Sender Freies Berlin.⁵¹ The programme was structured as a series of letters to residents of German cities (*Liebe Grosstädter*) about events occurring in the Fulda Gap. Kopetzky began the documentary in Schlitz, with an account of the same successful campaign against an American manoeuvre area that Pausewang mentioned in her novel.

The documentary then shifted to *Fulda Gap*. The narrator read sections of the rule book, particularly the rules concerning the use of nuclear weapons and a section about how much warning might precede the outbreak of war. ‘The scenario assumes that the war begins after a short period of rising tensions and that Western intelligence services are able to detect and correctly interpret the Soviet moves, allowing NATO to begin a partial mobilisation and redeployment of its troops’.⁵² This section of the documentary concludes with the sardonic remark ‘Length of play: 5–7 hours. Cost: \$12. In the PX shops at Downs Barracks in Fulda, *Fulda Gap* has been sold out for weeks’.⁵³

Kopetzky spoke to, and heard from, a range of individuals and opinions, including those who enthusiastically supported the US presence in the area. He accompanied a group of visitors to the battlefield, one of the tours arranged by elements of the peace movement. This tour had more than sixty participants, including students, teachers, housewives, office workers, and a dentist. A police officer from Fulda followed the bus at a safe distance. The tour stopped at several US facilities in the region, encountering both US and German security personnel who warned them to stand back from fences and gates. The implication is clear: that there were places in the Federal Republic where German law was not supreme, and thus places where Germany was not sovereign in its own territory.

The most influential German critic of the *Fulda Gap* was the journalist, Paul Kohl. Born in Cologne in 1937, Kohl built his career in the 1970s and 1980s as a keen observer of German memory culture and engagement with the past. In 1983, Kohl produced a radio programme about the game and the region for Hessian state radio called, in a mix of English and German, *Fulda-Gap oder [sic] the first battle of the next war*:

Two players sit across from each other: one NATO, the other the Warsaw Pact. In front of them is the playing area, a detailed map of the Federal Republic of Germany ... *Fulda-Gap*, which according to the game instructions was designed according to plans by the Pentagon, has been on the market in the USA since 1977

⁵¹ While I have not been able to locate an audio version, an edited transcript was published the following year as Helmut Kopetzky, ‘Fulda Gap – ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt’, *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, 15.55 (1984), 146–69.

⁵² Kopetzky, 150.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and until recently could be ordered from a New York toy manufacturer. It was one of the bestsellers on the American toy market.⁵⁴

Kohl concluded his introduction with a stern warning to his listeners. ‘Players and listeners should be made aware that their own lives will be at risk if *Fulda-Gap* were to become a reality’.⁵⁵

The following year, Kohl published a book about his experiences making the radio documentary. *Fulda Gap. Eine Reportage über die Militarisierung in Deutschland* (*Fulda Gap: A Report About Militarisation in Germany*) described Kohl’s travels in the region.⁵⁶ Armed with a copy of the board game, he approached locals and asked them to play, recording their reactions to the experience of seeing their hometowns engulfed by war.

In his account, Kohl carefully dissected the rule book, including long excerpts in both English and German. Regarding the rules for the employment of short-range nuclear missiles, he wrote: ‘What happens to the population of this country (*Land*)—not a word about it in the rules. One of the many points where the game and reality are identical. You can forget about the population. They have been forgotten’.⁵⁷ The actual residents with whom Kohl spoke had decidedly mixed feelings about their possible role on the front line of the imaginary war that he asked them to play out across restaurant tables. One couple, owners of a bar in Haimbach, enthusiastically discussed their love of hosting the family members of American personnel and their regular trips to the United States to visit American friends.⁵⁸

The same year, a team of filmmakers, including Peter Krahulec, released the documentary *Zielgelände - Notizen aus dem Fuldataal* (*Target Area: Notes from the Fulda Valley*). The hour-long film focused mostly on interviews with residents of local communities and farmers whose lives and livelihoods faced disruption from American military activity. Many of those interviewed appeared apolitical, with few voicing any strong opinions about the state of international relations. Most complained about the danger of munitions, constant noise, damage to roads, and all the other inconveniences of life lived alongside a massive military buildup. One pair of locals compared the ‘scorched Earth’ policy of the Nazi regime at the end of the war with the likely American response to an offensive in the Fulda Gap. The documentary included footage from the ‘Hattenbach Film’ and images from the report on Package ZEBRA. It also showed Krahulec leading a bus tour of military installations, described as ‘a mixture of alternative border tour and small anti-militarism demonstration’.⁵⁹ The tourists, most of whom appeared to be urban dwellers from far beyond the small towns of the Fulda Valley, watched with fascination

⁵⁴ Text available through the HR digital archive. <<https://hoerspiele.dra.de/vollinfo.php?dukey=1357098&vi=1&SID>> (accessed June 2021).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Paul Kohl, *Fulda Gap: eine Reportage über die Militarisierung in Deutschland* (Göttingen: edition herodot, 1984).

⁵⁷ Kohl, 50.

⁵⁸ Kohl, 90.

⁵⁹ Rena Giefer, Thomas Giefer, and Peter Krahulec, ‘Zielgelände - Notizen aus dem Fuldataal’ (CON VOI Film, 1984) at 16.20 minutes.

and horror as Krahulec showed them fenced-off American bases and a demolition chamber (*Sprengkammer*) built into a road to slow the Soviet advance.

Demolition chambers were a defining feature of the military geography of the Federal Republic during the Cold War. US forces began installing demolition chambers in roads and bridges in the early 1950s.⁶⁰ By the 1980s, Germans recognised that some could be used to deploy atomic demolition munitions (ADMs), essentially nuclear land mines. They were a potent symbol of the effective lack of German control over their own infrastructure. For all of its authenticity, *Fulda Gap* did not feature demolition chambers. Players could only deliver nuclear weapons through artillery, missiles, or from the air.

Bookending the documentary, and comprising its most enigmatic segments, were shots of an unnamed American, sitting at a table and wearing what might be an army uniform.⁶¹ The viewer never saw his face in full. At the beginning of the movie, he showed the camera the box for ‘the famous game *Fulda Gap*’ which he then opened and set up on a table. Slowly, with a German voice-over, he reads from the game rules in a monotone. He emphasised certain sections, mostly notably the suggestion that the game ‘is meant to be enjoyable’.⁶² At the end of the film, the American re-appeared to read the section of the rule book laying out the conditions of victory as we saw scenes of rural life in east Hessen. The implication is clear: victory by either side would come at enormous cost to those profiled in the film.

German resentment and anxiety over the militarisation of the Fulda Gap reached its apogee later in 1984, when a coalition of peace and environment-focused groups tried to organise mass protests in the region similar to the massive anti-Pershing II demonstrations of the previous years. The protest planners drew directly upon the controversy over *Fulda Gap*. They drew up a stylised map of the region, titled ‘Stop the Militarisation of Osthessen’ and labelled ‘World War 3 Could Begin Here’ (Figure 2). Along the left edge of map, in a font identical to the front cover of the game, are the English words ‘Fulda Gap: The First Battle of the Next War’. There were several different versions of the map, each slightly different, but all of them featured the title of the game. Once again, the imaginary space of *Fulda Gap* and the physical space of the Fulda Gap blended seamlessly together.⁶³

It is significant here that none of the versions of the map explicitly referenced the board game. The drafters could assume that anyone looking at the map would recognise the name and understand the context. *Fulda Gap* was by then an entrenched and widely understood symbol of the broader problem of militarisation.

The organisers hoped that this campaign of ‘interference with manoeuvres’ (*Manöverbehinderung*) would replicate the success of the massive anti-missile

⁶⁰ Public debate about the building of demolition chambers began as early as 1951: ‘Auch Mainbrücken werden zu eventueller Sprengung vorbereitet’, *Hessische Nachrichten*, 30 January 1951.

⁶¹ Giefer, at 11:18 minutes.

⁶² Giefer, at 11:34 minutes.

⁶³ Alternative versions can be found in Schregel, 172 and *Warum ausgerechnet Hessen. Hanau – Gelnhausen – Fulda – Giessen. Neue US-Militär-Strategien am Beispiel Ost-Hessen*, ed. by Neue Hanauer Zeitung in Zusammenarbeit mit den Friedens-Initiativen Osthessen (Hanau, 1983).



FIGURE 2. Poster, 'Dead Area', Friedensbüro Osthessen, 1983. Source: *Warum ausgerechnet Hessen. Hanau – Gelnhausen – Fulda – Giessen. Neue US-Militär-Strategien am Beispiel Ost-Hessen.*

demonstrations of the previous years. Activists set up 'peace camps' outside of American installations and held a music festival in the center of Fulda. They planned for more than 100,000 participants, but in the end only drew about 30,000 to the chilly rural landscape. Observing a desultory human chain near Fulda, an unsympathetic German journalist noted that the protest 'had Fulda Gaps of its own'.⁶⁴ There were many reasons for the low turnout. The failure of the anti-Pershing II campaign demoralised many previously committed members of the movement. Activists were exhausted and frustrated after years of demonstrations; organisers were divided over tactics; the practicalities of demonstrating against large scale, complicated manoeuvres across a wide area proved daunting. The campaign against the militarisation of the Fulda Gap petered out with an undramatic final act.

American game publishers continued to produce games about war in Germany, and the German public continued to express concern—albeit tinged with fatalistic humour. The publication of *Berlin '85*, a much simpler game which simulated a fight across the Berlin Wall, prompted *Der Spiegel* to point to the long list of imaginary nuclear scenarios that had emerged since 'Fulda Gap, which became

⁶⁴ Adam R. Seipp, 'Running over Trees in Germany: Social Movements and the US Army, 1975–1985' in Belinda Davis, Friederike Brühöfener, and Stephen Milder, eds. *Social Movements After 1968* (New York: Berghahn, forthcoming).

relatively famous after it was adopted by the Peace Movement'.⁶⁵ The article suggested, more darkly, that games like this mirrored the goal of people like Ronald Reagan to destroy Soviet communism, even if this meant war.

The game's moment of transatlantic infamy could not save the company that produced it. By the time of the controversy over *Fulda Gap* in Germany, SPI no longer existed. In 1981, the company was acquired by TSR, publishers of the wildly popular *Dungeons and Dragons*.⁶⁶ Dunnigan continued his career as an author, game designer, and consultant.

The game and its reception in Germany have receded long into the past, but vestiges remain. A 2014 documentary, produced for the European television channel Arte and titled *Die Atombombe im Vorgarten* (*The Atomic Bomb in the Front Yard*), explored the relationship between nuclear weapons and society around the world. The last twenty minutes of the documentary focused on Fulda. Professor Peter Krahulec gave a tour of some of the atomic sites across the region, including what may be the same *Sprengkammer* to which he took the film crew for *Zielgelände* thirty years before. Sitting at his desk, he showed the camera a dusty *Fulda Gap* box, from which he retrieved a folded-up map and dozens of cardboard counters. He explained the basics of the game, and the likelihood that the NATO player would elect to use nuclear weapons. 'A nuclear response to a Red Army offensive was not only an option in the game ...' intoned the narrator, before showing US Army documents describing such a scenario.⁶⁷ When Krahulec died three years later, a local newspaper called him 'the German discoverer of the "Fulda Gap," who opened the eyes of East Hessen to the dangers of a new war'.⁶⁸

There is a thriving online community of wargaming enthusiasts, who continue to share tips, scenarios and rules modifications more than forty years after the game first appeared. A discussion on one popular wargaming website included a reference to the game's appearance in the 2014 documentary. A user commented that 'I saw a documentary in 1982 or 83 when I was living in Germany [presumably *Zielgelände*]. They seemed very exercised about the very idea of such a game'.⁶⁹

Today, visitors to the publicly funded *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany) in Bonn can see a copy of *Fulda Gap* in the museum's permanent exhibition. The museum description captures the contemporary resentment of the 1970s and 1980s about the game and its trivialisation of German anxiety. 'In this war game, Germany serves as a "playing field" of a "Third World War" ... The use of nuclear weapons is intended and necessary for victory'.⁷⁰ The controversy over *Fulda Gap* is now

⁶⁵ 'Auf Pappe. ein Brettspiel made in USA simuliert die Eroberung West-Berlins durch Truppen des Warschauer Paktes. Spiel-Zeit: August 1985', *Spiegel*, 28 July, 1985.

⁶⁶ Dunnigan, 145.

⁶⁷ Rudolph Herzog, 'Die Atombombe im Vorgarten' (ZDF Enterprises, 2014). Excerpt from 42.00 minutes.

⁶⁸ "'Kämpfer für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit" - Prof. Dr. Peter Krahulec (74) Tot', *Osthessen News*, 30 June 2017.

⁶⁹ <<https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1877877/five-just-seen-game-television>> (accessed June 2021).

⁷⁰ Jachimciak, 'Tanks, Terrain', 340. See also <<https://sint.hdg.de/SINT5/SINT/?wicket:interface=:1:2:::>> (accessed June 2021).

enshrined in the most important official memory site for the history of the Federal Republic.

The Fulda region, no longer a militarised border between Cold War blocs, has embraced tourism related to its frontline past. Visitors can tour a reconstructed US base near Point Alpha to learn about ‘the coexistence between the people in the Federal Republic and the American soldiers’.⁷¹ At the memorial (*Gedenkstätte*) Point Alpha, in a glass case at the centre of a room, is a game board and a handful of cardboard tiles from *Fulda Gap*.

As the presence of US military personnel in the Federal Republic continues to shrink, there has been a degree of nostalgia for the days of the free spending ‘Amis’. A municipal official in a town on the southern flank of the Fulda Gap told a reporter in 2016 that ‘We don’t miss them, but we weren’t wanting them to leave either’.⁷²

A generation has grown up in a profoundly different geopolitical environment. Parents and teachers now must educate young people about the region’s turbulent history. In 2015, a group of students at an academic high school (*Gymnasium*) in Bad Neustadt staged an exhibition they organised called ‘70 Years After Hiroshima—the World in the Shadow of the Bomb’. The exhibit included the *Fulda Gap* game, which helped the students connect their lives and their hometown with the increasingly distant past. A school administrator called the project ‘a powerful argument against the forgetting of history’.⁷³

The story of a table-top game simulating the outbreak of World War Three helps us to understand better the dynamics of the transatlantic security alliance during a dangerous time in the global superpower competition of the Cold War. *Fulda Gap* was not predestined to be a flashpoint in German-American relations. The disjuncture between a game whose designer wanted it to be ‘an enjoyable experience’ for players and the reaction of Germans who learned about the game largely through the media highlights the weakening of the anti-communist consensus and the changes in West German political culture in the wake of the upheavals of the long 1968. It is also a reminder that the transatlantic relationship was not just a matter of relationships between governments or security establishments. It was based on decades of proximity between American forces and German society. The Federal Republic of Germany grew up in the shadow of a war gone by and another war that might yet come. Germans could imagine war in the physical space of the Fulda Gap, and many came to resent the idea that Americans could, by playing *Fulda Gap*, turn their anxiety and likely wartime fate into a source of entertainment.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Germans paid close attention to events unfolding in a rural, isolated region near the border between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. The Fulda Gap became an outsized symbol of the militarisation of German space during the Cold War, the dangers of superpower confrontation, and the anxieties that many Germans felt about what might happen

⁷¹ <<https://www.pointalpha.com/en/memorial/u-s-camp/>> (accessed June 2021).

⁷² ‘Go Home, Yankee’, *The Economist*, 13 August 2016.

⁷³ Sarah Zübel, ‘Die Welt im Schatten der Bombe’, *Main Post*, 29 June 2015.

if war broke out. *Fulda Gap* helped to make the possibility of war in the Fulda Gap seem more possible, more thinkable, and perhaps more likely. The game seemed to symbolise the state of German-American relations, one in which Germans faced death to serve the Cold War ambitions of the United States. At a time in which more Germans questioned their country's role in the international order, the game became a source of horrified fascination and a mobilising tool to raise questions about how to build a more peaceful future.

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