

# Europe's new best friends

**I**t may only have been a Bundeswehr band, but it was also the first German Army unit in Paris since World War II. In a ceremony steeped in rich symbolism, German and French military bands played one another's national anthem in the stately courtyard of Les Invalides, the shrine of French military history.

I usually visit Les Invalides on my trips to Paris. My favorite part of this vast collection of military memorabilia is the little-known top floor which was, until recent years, off-limits and highly secret. In it are large models of the most important forts built along the Franco-German border in the 19th and early 20th centuries. How appropriate that in this martial setting, redolent of so many centuries of Franco-German hatred and fighting, the leaders of the two old warrior nations came to reaffirm the peace concluded between them 25 years ago this past weekend.

French and German history is littered with peace treaties that were violated almost as soon as they were sealed. Along the Franco-German border, I have visited the sepulchral memorials to centuries of rivalry and hatred: Verdun, the mighty Maginot Line and the battlefields in Lorraine and Champagne. From 1870 to 1945, the Germans and French fought three terrible wars that not only destroyed generations of their best young men but also bled Europe until it was no longer the leading world power.

The most somber monument to this folly is on the bleak, windswept hills around the little garrison town of Verdun. Here, in 10 months of 1916, some 1.4 million gallant French and German soldiers were killed, wounded or gassed in history's most hideous and stupid battle. So it was here that France's President Francois Mitterrand and Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl came to link hands before the nightmarish Ossuaire that holds the body fragments of 160,000 soldiers.

As the soldiers and civilians assembled for the ceremony openly wept, Mitterrand and Kohl pledged that Frenchmen and Germans would never again fight.

This past weekend's ceremony had a brighter mood, and well it should because the new genera-

**ERIC  
MARGOLIS**



tion of Germans and Frenchmen appear to be rid for good of the rancor that once separated them. Germany, of course, had to make a peace of the defeated and France emerged as a victor. Even so, the open borders of the Common Market seem to have put an end to Europe's old territorial quarrels. Between Frenchmen and Germans there has grown up a common respect, good neighborliness and even liking.

In other words, the mood that existed in the 18th century exists today: It is the English who are disliked and distrusted by continental Europeans.

Equally significant, France and Germany are drawing ever closer in security matters. Recently, both nations announced the formation of a joint brigade under the command of a German-speaking French officer. While still only a symbolic act, the brigade, which is outside of the NATO command, is the first tiny step toward the dream of a unified Franco-German army.

The only way Europe can hope to offset Soviet conventional military might is by welding together the national armies of France, Germany and standoffish Britain. Doing so, and rationalizing arms procurement, will be devilishly difficult.

Politically, France and Germany are far along the way to unified policy. Germany has Europe's strongest economy, but in foreign policy the Germans still are crippled by lingering hatred and guilt from the war. Germany is also torn by mounting pacifist or leftist sentiment and spreading anti-Americanism.

And there remains that ever-present craving for reunification with East Germany, a yearning that Soviet diplomacy has cleverly exploited to drive a wedge between Germany and its NATO allies. All Europe fears the nightmare scenario of Germany quitting NATO in exchange for its lost eastern region.

France's intimate ties to Germany help prevent this and keep the Germans feeling part of Western Europe. Paris is also able to take political action on the part of Germany that Bonn cannot. Even the strains of the current INF negotiations has not shaken the Franco-German entente.

At the same time, the French are deploying a rapid response force, the FAR, that can quickly intervene in Germany in the event of a surprise Soviet attack. France, however, could do much more: Replacing its obsolescent AMX-30 tanks and beefing up its puny armored divisions. Stationing two of them in North Germany would ease a lot of NATO fears.

Most important, if Germany feels threatened from the east, she will hear the bugles of the French Army, not at her front, but from the rear, coming to her aid. Vercingetorix and Hermann — Gaul and Teuton — will stand shoulder to shoulder at last.