

Who's afraid of a united Germany?

Toronto Sun, Nov. 12, 89

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FISHER
in Ottawa



It may surprise Canadians sharing the euphoria in the western world over the breach in the Berlin Wall and East Germany's release from communism's thrall that any among them are worried, even to praying their apprehensions will prove wrong.

I am one who is edgy for several reasons, the prime of which goes back to soldiering in the armies which battled into Germany in 1945.

It's hard to wipe from memory all conclusions from war experience. You spent months in which "the front" or "the line" was something real and enormously significant, particularly if you were on or near it within shell-fire. The Germans as enemy were intensely real however much of this was conjured in the imagination.

I am not referring to hatred or loathing or contempt. Oddly, the immediacy of surviving or dying or being wounded builds an immense, respectful awareness of the capabilities of those who are trying to kill you.

We knew then (and many of us cannot forget it) that the Germans were superb soldiers by any definition and in every aspect: Well led, with good morale, intelligent, skilled with weapons and in tactical use of terrain, as brave as need be and imbued with an exceptional national spirit and brotherhood-in-arms.

To my mind, and I think to many comrades who worked variously with British, American, Polish, French and Czech regiments, whatever their various elans and unique qualities, the Germans, putting it bluntly, were the best.

Since 1945 I have returned to Western Europe many times, including tours of West Germany, Berlin, and along the route of the Wall. The recovery of both Germans would seem amazing, a resilience beyond belief to many who saw the bomb-ravaged cities and the ruined rail, road and water routes of 1945.

One also recalls that with the smashed landscape and terrible human dislocation of Germany went the agonies of defeat for a proud people and the awful revelations of crimes against humanity, especially against Jews.

Of course, the recovery to a condition where West Germany is economically the strongest country in Europe is not so amazing to those of us who saw and literally felt the German strengths in combat. Smashed to total defeat by a huge array of Allies in two devastating wars which killed off millions of their young people, the Germans have twice come surging back.

Yes, it does appear that the methods, the values, the style and the worth of parliamentary, multi-party democracy has taken hold in West Germany and has

also deeply infected many East Germans. Yet the prospect of a united Germany is now inevitable if the USSR does not balk at such a natural completion of the great German recovery.

A unified Germany scares me. Almost as serious among my fears is what Russian apprehension may lead to. Anyone who has visited the USSR knows how vividly the Russians remember the German enemy and their own suffering and struggle in their teaching and memorials. Relatively, we've forgotten it.

No genuine democrat could be mean enough to condemn a national group to perpetual division or to be held down by fear about their deeds together.

No sensible person can relish forever a global "balance of power" symbolized by the nuclear might of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Just like the settlement of the Congress of Vienna which reset the lines of Europe after Napoleon, the unexpected and very edgy poisoning of East and West which jelled hard between 1945 and 1950 had to end, either gradually or swiftly.

It is to be swift.

So this is not a prayer the world and Europe returns to the stiff frame it was in before Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the USSR. It is a plea to watch the Germans closely. Canada as a NATO power should not be in a rush to dismantle it. Canada should also appreciate the Russians will need assurances from the western alliance. Collectively the Germans are so able and industrious we must be careful.

INFERIOR MEN FEAR EXCELLENCE.