

UK and German Troops Make Strategic Crossing of the Rhine

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Exercise Grand Crossing united British, German, Italian, and Dutch troops to conduct a strategic crossing of the River Rhine, one of Europe's busiest waterways, showcasing NATO's interoperability and the engineering expertise of the unique 130 Amphibious Engineering Battalion.

Over 1,200 soldiers and hundreds of vehicles joined forces in Germany for Exercise Grand Crossing, led by the British-German 130 Amphibious Engineering Battalion, NATO's only such unit. From their Minden base, troops moved to the Sennelager Training Area for combat engineering drills, then advanced tactically to Rees on the Rhine, replicating real-world logistics including refuelling and multinational coordination, according to the UK Defence Journal.

The M3 Rig, a versatile amphibious platform capable of forming bridges or ferries for heavy vehicles such as main battle tanks, played a central role. British soldiers from 23 Amphibious Engineer Squadron, Royal Engineers, deployed 14 M3 Rigs to navigate the Rhine's strong currents. Sapper Sheldon Busby called it a career highlight: "Controlling ferries and bridges on the water is why I joined." Italian and Dutch engineers built pontoon crossings upstream, proving NATO's plug-and-play capability.

Major Ryan Ingram, Royal Engineers, praised the teamwork: "Working with allies sharpens our skills and strengthens us." The Rhine, a major barrier, demands precision to cross, especially with commercial traffic. The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) notes such exercises bolster NATO's deterrence, crucial as European tensions rise. A commenter, "Jacko," recalled a 1979 feat where 28 AER bridged the Rhine in 49 minutes, suggesting past efficiency surpasses today's efforts.

The UK government's latest defence review, under the Labour administration, has raised concerns about continued funding for specialised units. With allies such as Poland significantly boosting their conventional forces, the United Kingdom must maintain its strategic edge. Exercise Grand Crossing shows NATO can tackle complex challenges through unity, but sustaining this capability requires

commitment. As threats grow, the 130 Battalion's success proves that joint training and shared expertise are the foundation of allied defence.