

EUROPE

Permanent Watch?

Only three months ago, Ludwig Erhard was firmly maintaining that if Charles de Gaulle insisted on pulling his troops out of the unified NATO command, he could hardly keep 72,000 of them on German soil, no matter how much he wanted to keep a watch on the Rhine. "There can be no throwback to an occupation status," Erhard declared. Then, as De Gaulle's July 1 deadline for France's NATO withdrawal began to creep nearer, Erhard allowed technical experts in Paris to negotiate a "temporary" agreement under which the French troops might stay in Germany for the time being. Last week, as De Gaulle called in Bonn for a ten-hour visit under the terms of the 1963 Franco-German agreement (which requires biannual meetings of the two heads of government), it became clear that the

TIME, JULY 29, 1966

temporary arrangement would probably become a permanent one.

From the moment De Gaulle arrived, everything pointed to success for the visitor from Paris. What with his defeat at the North Rhine-Westphalia polls fortnight ago and the constant badgering of the "Gaullist" wing of his party, Erhard presumably felt it was no time to give his enemies grounds for charging him with gumming up relations with France. In any case, he gave De Gaulle a reception that was far beyond what protocol requires for an ordinary working visit. Honor guards and anthems were in profusion, and Erhard's luncheon toast was especially cordial.

No one at the table was tactless enough to suggest that *le général* had scored another tactical victory. Instead, the story was that De Gaulle had made a "concession" to Erhard by telling him that West Germany did have a right to request France to withdraw its troops, since France had clearly abrogated the 1954 NATO agreement that allowed them to stay in the first place. Erhard replied to this face-saving gesture by informing De Gaulle that West Germany would be delighted to have the French troops remain, and he "hoped and expected" that some sort of agreement would be worked out in the next six months. In a way, it happens to be true. Foreign troops stationed on West German soil offer proof to the world that West Germany has no militarist ambitions of her own.