

GRADE 12 HISTORY

THE COLD WAR

THE BERLIN CRISES

The city of Berlin was situated 150km inside the heart of Soviet occupied East Germany. There were many incidents surrounding the city that intensified during the Cold War, between 1948 and 1961.

As had been agreed at Yalta in February 1945, Berlin was spit into four zones of occupation, in a similar way to which the rest of Germany had been split. Thus West Berlin was occupied by the western powers who had access to the city via air, road and rail. This immediately caused Soviet resentment, as West Berlin was a capitalist window in the heart of communist East Germany.

1. The Berlin Blockade and Airlift

There are three key events that led to the Soviet blockades of Berlin: the institution of the Marshall Plan for European Recovery; the London Conferences of winter and spring of 1948; and the resultant London Program which called for a separate West Germany and currency reform as a means to reach this end. It would be the proposed unification of Germany that led to the first Berlin crisis, the Berlin Blockade.



On March 6th the communique regarding the London Program was issued, and in April the Soviets responded by constraining the military supplies entering Berlin via the Soviet zone from the west. This left the western nations with the choice of either being politically pressured out of West Berlin (which would diminish their prestige in the rest of Europe), or staying to institute the currency reform and ultimately establish a separate West German nation.

The western allies decided to stay. In mid-June the west issued a new currency in their zone (but not in western Berlin), and the Soviet Union issued a new currency in their zone. On June 23, the west introduced the new currency into Berlin. The next day the Soviets imposed a complete blockade on Berlin. Railways and highways were restricted so that no surface traffic between the western zones and Berlin could occur. The Soviets were able to do this without breaking any international laws on a technicality; the west and the Soviet Union never made a written pact in regards to the right of western ground access to Berlin. It must be noted that at the time of the blockade Stalin did not give any ultimatums, and while the blockade was in place the Soviets did keep the door open to negotiations on the matter. As a matter of fact, Stalin curiously quipped to a western diplomat during the blockade, "We are still allies."

But the western powers would not give in. To demonstrate their resolve, the Americans orchestrated a monumental airlift which flew necessities such as coal and food into the western sectors of Berlin. This airlift lasted for 324 days, and approximately 13,000 tons of supplies a day were delivered.

In the spring of 1949 it was increasingly clear that the objectives Stalin had in mind when ordering the blockade were not going to be met. The U.S. was continuing its counter blockade measures; the separate western government in Germany was about to be established, and the North Atlantic Treaty was being signed in Washington. Stalin had the choice of either continuing with the disastrous blockade, or admitting defeat and lifting the blockade. Stalin chose the latter, and in May 1949, at the final meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, the blockade was ended.

The net result of this was increased mistrust between the two super powers. Furthermore, Western nations realized the dangers of Soviet aggression and knew they had to stand together to face this enemy. So they formed NATO, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to provide collective security to its members and they promised to support each other in case of a Soviet attack. The USSR's response to this was to form Cominform and the Warsaw Pact which was a 20 year defence agreement with the USSR and her satellite states. This divided Europe even further into two hostile camps. So certainly, the first crises intensified tension and events in the Cold War.

A second result of the Berlin Airlift was the creation of a united West Germany in May 1949, when the allied leaders gave the government back to the people of Germany. The West side of Germany was named the Federal Republic of Germany with Bonn as its capital. Five months later, the Eastern side Germany was named The German Democratic Republic by the Soviets.

Information sourced from http://www.coldwar.org/articles/40s/berlin_blockade.asp

2. The Berlin Wall

Finally in 1961, Khrushchev decided that he had had enough. The USSR was embarrassed by the number of refugees fleeing East Berlin to the West. People did not want to live under communism, especially when they could see how well people in the capitalist west were living. Many were crossing into West Berlin and then flying out to the West. This was not a good advertisement for communism and between 1948 and 1961 over 3,5million refugees escaped. Thus in August 1961, Khrushchev decided to close this 'escape hatch'.

A barbed wire fence was first constructed on the border of East and West Berlin and 5 days later it was replaced with a brick wall. The date given is 13th August 1961.

Anyone attempting to escape, over, under or around the wall was shot. The wall was then extended to circumnavigate all of West Berlin. The wall became a symbol of Soviet inspired violence and caused the conflict between East and West in the Cold War to escalate.

When the wall was built it literally separated families, buildings and homes. Sometimes families houses were cut in half as the wall ran straight through them.

The American sector had an entrance and exit gate called "Checkpoint Charlie" which monitored cross border movements. It was very hard to get in or out of the Soviet sector without rigorous paper work that had been approved by the Soviets.



Between 1961 and 1989, about 5000 people escaped from East to West Berlin. Some dug tunnels, some were smuggled across, some hid in trunks. One man even took a woman who resembled his wife into East Berlin on a day pass, left her behind and returned with his real wife. The poor other woman spent two years in jail in East Berlin and he the man was sentenced to 7 months imprisonment by a West German courtroom.

But many died in their attempts to cross the Berlin Wall. In June 1962, an East German named Peter Fechter was shot by East German guards while attempting to escape. He was the first of 192 people to die trying to escape.

On the 26th June 1963, President John F. Kennedy during a visit to express American support for West Berlin, stood on a balcony of the city's town hall. He looked out over the wall and addressed 250 000 West Berliners in a famous speech that ended: "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. And therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words Ich bin ein Berliner (I am a Berliner)". Which when translated meant something about being a doughnut!

TIMELINE OF THE BERLIN WALL

December 11, 1957

Leaving East Germany without permission is forbidden and violations are prosecuted with prison up to three years.

November 30, 1960

Meeting between Nikita Khrushchev and Walter Ulbricht. "We must create the conditions so that the GDR economy will not be vulnerable to our enemies. We didn't know that the GDR was so vulnerable to West Germany. This is not good; we must correct this now." (W. Ulbricht)

June 15, 1961

First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR and Staatsrat chairman Walter Ulbricht states at an international press conference: "Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!" (No one has the intention to erect a wall). It was the first time the colloquial term Mauer (wall) was used in this context.

July 25, 1961

President John F. Kennedy gives a speech just days before the border between East and West Berlin is closed. He stresses the need for NATO countries to hold onto West Berlin and says any Soviet attack on Berlin would be equivalent to an attack on NATO. "Those who threaten to unleash the forces of war on a dispute over West Berlin should recall the words of the ancient philosopher: 'A man who causes fear cannot be free from fear.'" (John F. Kennedy)

August 4, 1961

Nikita Khrushchev reacts to President Kennedy's speech to the leaders of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Khrushchev was preparing to seal the borders of East Berlin with a concrete wall, but the plan was kept top secret. The speech betrays Khrushchev's concern with the new Kennedy government and the possibility of a war beginning with confrontation in Berlin — and possibly ending in nuclear destruction. "*You convinced yourself that Khrushchev will never go to war ... so you scare us [expecting] us to retreat. True, we will not declare war, but we will not withdraw either...*" (Nikita S. Khrushchev)

August 13, 1961

The Berlin border between East and West Berlin is closed. The zonal boundary is sealed in the morning by East German troops. "Shock workers" from East Germany and Russia seal off the border with barrier of barbed wire and light fencing that eventually became a complex series of wall, fortified fences, gun positions and watchtowers heavily guarded and patrolled. In the end, the Berlin Wall was 96 miles (155 km) long and the average height of the concrete wall was 11.8 ft (3.60 m). Over the course of the Wall's existence, 133 people were confirmed killed trying to cross into West Berlin according to official sources, while a victims'

group puts the number at over 200 dead. There were also some 5,000 successful escapes into West Berlin. The August 13 operation lasted 24 hours.

August 14, 1961

Brandenburg Gate is closed.

August 15, 1961

Conrad Schumann, the first East German border guard, escapes by jumping the barbed wire to West Berlin. The first concrete elements and large square blocks are used on this date. Within the next months the first generation of the Berlin Wall was build up: a wall consisting of concrete elements and square blocks.

August 16th, 1961

The barbed wire barrier is being removed and replaced with a wall of concrete blocks. This first Wall around Berlin was two meters high, made from different building materials assembled into a rough construction.

August 26, 1961

All crossing points are closed for West Berlin citizens.

June 1962

A second Wall is being built to prevent escapes to the West. The first Wall is improved over the next years and it becomes difficult to distinguish between the first and the second generations of the Wall.

August 17, 1962

Peter Fechter, 18, a bricklayer from East Berlin, is shot and left to bleed to death in full view of western media. Bystanders in the West tried to rescue him, but were prevented from it at gunpoint.

June 26, 1963

President J. F. Kennedy visits Berlin and declares: "Ich bin ein Berliner." ("I am a Berliner.")

December 17, 1963

After 7 rounds of negotiations between the Senate of Berlin and the East German authorities, an administrative agreement is signed allowing West Berliners to visit their relatives in East Berlin on a limited basis.

1965

A new Wall generation, the third, is introduced to replace the old construction. The new one consists of concrete slabs laid between H-shaped steel concrete supports. A round, 0,40 meter large concrete tube capped the wall making it more difficult to climb over.

September 3, 1971

The Four Power Agreement over Berlin is reached. It charges the governments of West Berlin and the GDR with negotiating an accord that would regulate access to and from West Berlin from the FRG and secure the right of West Berliners to visit East Berlin and the GDR.

May 1972

The Transit Agreement is reached that arranged the matters raised in the Four Power Agreement and also secured the rights of GDR citizens to visit the FRG, but only in cases of family emergency.

December 1972

The Basic Treaty is signed in which both German states committed themselves to developing normal relations on the basis of equality, guaranteeing their mutual territorial integrity as well as the border between them, and recognizing each other's independence and sovereignty. They also agreed to the exchange of "permanent missions" in Bonn and East Berlin to further relations.

May 1973

East and West Germany establish formal diplomatic ties.

October 1, 1973

An explicit firing order is issued to a special team of Stasi agents tasked with infiltrating regular units of border guards to prevent their colleagues from defecting. "It is your duty to use your combat ... skills in such a way as to overcome the cunning of the border breacher, to challenge or liquidate him in order to thwart the planned border breach. ... Don't hesitate to use your weapon even when border breaches happen with women and children, which traitors have often exploited in the past."

1975-1976

Construction of the infamous 'Stutzwandelement UL 12.11', known also as Grenzmauer 75 (Border Wall '75) begins. This new installation — a second wall — penetrated deeper into East German territory and included a touch-sensitive, self-firing fence. The product of a large-scale development and testing program, it was made of L-shaped sections of pre-cast concrete used by farmers to build open silos. Each section was 3.60 meters high and 1.20 meters wide and was topped off by a smooth asbestos-concrete pipe 40 centimeters in diameter. Consequently, the Wall becomes harder to penetrate. Yet this did not put an end to attempted escapes. As a result, East German authorities increase their control of the border structures.

June 12, 1987

President Ronald Reagan visits Berlin and calls on Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall.

February 6, 1989

Chris Gueffroy is the last person to be killed trying to cross the Wall.

August 23, 1989

Communist Hungary removes its border restrictions with Austria.

September 10, 1989

The Hungarian government opens border for East German refugees More than 13,000 East Germans escape into Austria.

November 4, 1989

An estimated one million people attend a pro-democracy demonstration in East Berlin's main square. Within days, the East German Government resigns.

November 9, 1989

The East German government announces that visits in West Germany and West Berlin will be permitted. Thousands of East Berliners pass into West Berlin as border guards stand by. People begin tearing down the wall which is opened.

December 22, 1989

The Brandenburg Gate is opened.

October 3, 1990

Germany is formally reunited.

This information was sourced from <http://www.coldwar.org/articles/60s/BerlinWallTimeLine.asp>

Researched by museum volunteer Etienne Huygens.