



A classic photo of the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift. "Just as a trickle of water can, if sufficiently prolonged, wear down the stoutest rock," wrote The New Yorker's E. J. Kahn in May 1949, "so the airlift, with its unostentatious but ceaseless trickle of flights, carved a hole in the Soviet blockade of [West] Berlin." A week later, Stalin ended his effort to starve the city into submission.

Berlin

During the summer of 1948, the future of West Berlin seemed to hang in the balance. On June 24, Josef Stalin finally shut off ground access to the city. Western officials wondered how ordinary West Berliners would react. An article in a local newspaper, the *Telegraf*, soon gave the answer: "What does the man in the street say? 'This too will pass' . . . He turns up his coat collar, presses his hat farther down on his forehead, and tramps home . . . Nobody complains; everybody grits his teeth." Here, Neil Spitzer tells how the Cold War split Berlin, and how West Berliners and the Western allies managed, in the face of Soviet pressures, to keep their half of the city free, democratic, and lively. And Josef Ernst describes life on both sides of the Berlin Wall today.

DIVIDING A CITY

by Neil Spitzer

In 1899, Walther Rathenau, industrialist and future statesman, returned to his native Berlin after having long worked elsewhere in Germany and abroad. Enjoying the company of the court aristocrats who flourished in Berlin under Kaiser Wilhelm II, Rathenau was struck by the city's newly acquired splendor. With a population of 2.7 million, the capital of the young German Reich had become not only Europe's third largest metropolis (after London and Paris) but also a symbol of economic and military might, of European culture and civilization.

"We had become both rich and powerful," Rathenau wrote at the time, "and we wanted to show it to the world . . . The feverish life of a great city, hungry for realities, intent on technical success and so-called achievement, clamorous for festivals, prodigies, pageants, and such-like futilities . . . all this produced a sort of combination of Rome and Byzantium, Versailles and Potsdam."

Berlin's heyday would be short-lived. Germany's defeat in World War I sparked a revolution that brought down the Reich in 1918, giving way to the fragile Weimar Republic (1919–33). During the "Golden Twenties," Berlin's cultural life would be as creative and stimulating as its politics were ominous (Rathenau, then Germany's foreign minister, would be assassinated by extremists in 1922). This was the Berlin, as historian Peter Gay has put it, of "Gropius' buildings, Kandinsky's abstractions, Grosz's cartoons, and Marlene Dietrich's legs." But Adolf Hitler's ascent to power would bring the Nazis and another ruinous World War.

Today, Berlin's aura is characterized less by grandeur than by what the Germans call *Wahnsinn*, or "madness." Split through its center by a concrete wall, Berlin, perhaps more than any other city in the world, expresses the absurd and tragic dimensions of human endeavor.

The isolation and division of Berlin is made all the more bizarre by the fact that no one deliberately planned it that way. For reasons of administrative convenience, representatives of the United States, Britain, France, and the USSR decided, during World War II, to occupy Berlin jointly after the Reich fell. But as the wartime alliance crumbled and the Cold War intensified, Berlin found itself at the epicenter of East-West conflict. The city became the focus of Stalin's efforts to drive the West out of Central Europe, and of the Westerners' determination to stand firm. Just as an Iron Curtain divided postwar Europe, along a line running "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic," as Winston Churchill said in 1946, so too would it sunder Berlin.

I THE BIG THREE

It might be said that the division of Berlin began in early 1943. By then, the Allies, having witnessed Germany's failure to conquer the Soviet Union or to block the Anglo-American landings in North Africa, could begin to contemplate the fall of the Third Reich. In March of that year, Churchill's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, visited Washington to discuss with President Franklin D. Roosevelt what the great powers would do with Germany once the Nazis were defeated. It was crucial, remarked White House aide Harry Hopkins, to reach an understanding quickly "as to which armies would be where and what kind of administration [in Germany] should be developed."

Several different notions circulated at the time. In September 1943,

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George Grosz's oil painting, Cafe. With his caricatures of weary prostitutes, smug businessmen, and one-legged war veterans, Grosz produced the kind of art-as-social-criticism for which Berlin became famous during the 1920s. His work, said one French critic, represented "the most definitive catalogue of man's depravity in all history."

the U.S. State Department recommended against total Allied occupation of Germany. "Combined contingents," a State Department report suggested, should take over only the nation's "key strategic centers." One British plan would have dispersed the various occupation units in an "interlarded" fashion throughout the conquered territory—a plan that would have preserved Germany's territorial unity. The U.S. War Department, however, opposed the scheme because it would have created serious supply and communications problems.

In any case, Eden, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov met at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943, where they signed a protocol establishing an inter-Allied European Advisory Commission (EAC). The commission's assignment: to spell out how the Big Three would occupy Germany once the Reich fell.

The EAC first convened at London's elegant Lancaster House on January 14, 1944. Sir William Strang, the British delegate, submitted a proposal developed by the Attlee Committee (named after Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee). According to the plan, an Allied Control Council, based in Berlin, would run Germany as a single unit. But for administrative reasons, they would divide Germany into three different occupation zones, in the way that New York City is divided into boroughs.

Under this arrangement, the Soviet Union would control a large eastern zone, which accounted for 40 percent of the nation's prewar territory, and 36 percent of its population.

The British, under the Attlee proposal, would control northwestern Germany, which included the key North Sea ports of Bremen and Hamburg, and the Ruhr, Germany's prime industrial area. The plan, finally, awarded the United States a region covering the Saar and southern Germany. Berlin, of course, lay 110 miles within the proposed Soviet zone. But the Allies did not want any one nation to control Germany's historic capital. Thus, the three countries' garrisons would each occupy one of three sectors in a special "Berlin area."

The EAC delegates received the Attlee plan favorably. The "glum and serious" (in Stalin's words) Soviet representative, Fedor Tarasovich Gousev, accepted this scheme without major complaints. The U.S. delegate, former New Hampshire governor John G. Winant, also viewed the plan favorably, but his superiors back in Washington did not. Roosevelt had no objections to the proposed Soviet zone. But he insisted that U.S. forces occupy the northwest, not the southwest. The United States, he reckoned, would need the North Sea ports of Bremen and Hamburg to redeploy its troops to invade Japan. Moreover, the southwestern zone would not permit direct access to American occupation forces; to get there, U.S. supply trains would have to transit war-torn France.

A Conciliatory Approach

Neither Churchill nor Roosevelt would budge on the zonal dispute. Indeed, when the Allies first signed the protocol on the occupation of Germany and Berlin on September 12, 1944, they did so without designating which zones the United States or Britain would occupy. However, Roosevelt and Churchill, meeting in Quebec several weeks later, would settle the matter. Roosevelt agreed to let the British occupy the coveted northwest zone. In exchange, Churchill granted the Americans control of the North Sea ports of Bremen and Bremerhaven, and guaranteed U.S. transit rights through the British zone. Even so, the British and the Americans quarreled over various definitions of "control."*

Ironically, the U.S. and British negotiators in London paid little attention to the issue that would loom large during the Cold War: the right of the Western allies to travel through the Soviet zone of Germany, to and from the Western sectors of Berlin. At the time, Western access to Berlin did not appear to be a problem. According to U.S. negotiator Philip E. Mosely, the Soviet delegate, Gousev, had promised his interlocutors that "the presence of American and British forces in Berlin 'of

*Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill formally approved their plans for the joint occupation of Germany at the Yalta Conference in February 1945—with one important change. They agreed that France would join in the occupation, and that its areas of occupation would be carved out of the Western zones of Germany and the Western sectors of Berlin.

course' carried with it all necessary facilities of access."

In retrospect, U.S. and British policy-makers appear extraordinarily negligent in not having insisted upon specific transit rights to and from Berlin. But in 1944, the Western allies tended to assume the best about the Soviets. Indeed, the Soviet negotiators, observed Mosely, had taken a "moderate and conciliatory approach to the problem of how to deal with postwar Germany." Besides, the whole arrangement was expected to be temporary. No one could imagine that the zonal boundaries would one day delineate the border between a (Communist) German Democratic Republic and a (democratic) Federal Republic of Germany. Roosevelt himself did not believe that American troops would stay in Europe much more than two years.

Stopping at the Elbe

As Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and their subordinates negotiated the future of Europe, the war raced toward its end. With the Germans struggling to defend their capital city, Stalin instructed the Red Army to stay put on the Oder River. Crossing the Rhine in the west, American troops, meanwhile, also had their eyes on Berlin. "From the day our invasion broke over the beaches of Normandy," said General Walter Bedell Smith, the chief of staff to Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, "the goal of every Allied soldier had been . . . to seal the defeat of Nazi Germany by seizing the capital of the Reich itself."

But Eisenhower was not keen on taking Berlin first, even though the capital was within reach of the advancing Anglo-American forces. Such an assault, said General Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. 12th Army Group, might cost 100,000 lives—"a pretty stiff price to pay," he added, "for a prestige objective, especially when we've got to fall back [into the zones of occupation] and let the other fellow take over." Hence, Eisenhower informed Stalin that he would direct his main thrust southward, toward Leipzig. That plan, Stalin replied, "entirely coincides with the plan of the Soviet High Command," adding disingenuously that "Berlin has lost its former strategic importance."

Churchill, however, was not pleased. "If [the Russians] take Berlin," he cabled to Roosevelt on April 1, 1945, "will not their impression that they have been the overwhelming contributor to our common victory be unduly imprinted in their minds, and may this not lead them into a mood which will raise grave and formidable difficulties in the future? I therefore consider that from a political standpoint we should march as far east into Germany as possible, and that should Berlin be in our grasp we should certainly take it."

Roosevelt and Eisenhower, however, could not be dissuaded. The Supreme Allied Commander ordered his Berlin-bound units to stop at the Elbe River, 53 miles from the city—which they did on April 11, 1945, the day before President Roosevelt died at Warm Springs, Geor-

gia. Six days later, the Soviets launched their final offensive against Berlin. Deploying one million men in the attack, the Soviets demonstrated that, to them, Berlin had *not* “lost its former strategic importance.” With the capital of his Reich under seige, Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30; the Germans surrendered on May 8, thus ending the fighting in Europe.

Allied bombing, and the desperate Battle for Berlin, in which some 100,000 Russians lost their lives, left Germany’s capital prostrate. During the war, Berlin’s population fell from 4.3 to 2.8 million; two-thirds of the city’s surviving residents were women. Potsdamer Platz, Alexanderplatz, and other historic squares were littered with corpses lying atop heaps of rubble. One-fifth of all buildings were destroyed. There was no electricity, no gas, and one-third of the subway line was flooded. Food was scarce, forcing people to barter furs, carpets, and jewelry for potatoes, flour, and bacon.

“A more depressing sight than that of ruined buildings,” wrote President Harry S. Truman, who saw Berlin during the Potsdam Conference of July 1945, “was the long, never-ending procession of old men, women, and children wandering aimlessly along the autobahn . . . carrying, pushing, or pulling what was left of their belongings.”



Ernst Reuter, West Berlin's anti-Communist mayor (1948-53), was an ex-party member; as a youth, he had even worked for the Bolsheviks in the USSR.

II THE COLD WAR BEGINS

With Germany defeated, the Allies were in position to reconstruct Berlin. But how would this be done? How should a new city government and new political parties be established? How would labor unions be reorganized? Should there be free elections? What about a free press? The Allies, of course, had not settled such matters before the war's end. The EAC had not addressed these questions; it had merely drafted an agreement outlining the Allied occupation.

Indeed, "The EAC agreements," as political scientist Daniel J. Nelson has written, "were like a new house with no furniture in it." "None of the Allies," he observed, "seemed to have a clear idea of the kind of Europe which should result from Germany's defeat."

The Soviets, however, had thought more than a little about how to run Berlin. Even before the capitulation, Stalin had dispatched to Berlin a group of German Communists who had spent the war years in the Soviet Union. Walter Ulbricht led this "Committee for a Free Germany," which was better known as the "Ulbricht Group." "Our task," Ulbricht explained, "will be to form the organs of self-government in Berlin. We will go into the various Berlin boroughs and select those anti-fascist elements [which support] the new German administration."

Eager to get the city running as they saw fit, the Soviets tried to delay the entrance of U.S. and British forces. In June, the Soviets halted a Berlin-bound U.S. advance party 50 miles outside of the city; eventually, they would escort a trimmed-down entourage (about 200 men and 50 vehicles) through the metropolis.

"We went to Berlin in 1945," observed Colonel Frank Howley, who commanded the advance party, "thinking of the Russians only as big, jolly, balalaika-playing fellows who drank prodigious quantities of vodka and liked to wrestle in the drawing room." But Russian officers, he soon suspected, "had been briefed that we were their enemy, merely enjoying an armistice, and they regarded us as such."

With the Americans and British absent from the city, the Soviets swiftly took control in Berlin. The Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) appointed a City Council to run day-to-day affairs. They set up a Communist-run police force, banking system, and trade union, as well as newspapers, radio stations, and a five-tier food rationing system; public officials could get as many as 2,485 calories a day—about twice as much as the elderly. Perhaps most important, the Soviets dismantled machinery from mills and factories and rounded up surviving livestock, all of which they shipped back to Mother Russia. By the time British and American forces entered Berlin in strength on July 4, 1945, they faced a

Communist-dominated city administration.

Soviet efforts to reshape Berlin in their own image, however, would not go unchallenged. When the Soviets tried to merge the Communist and Social Democratic parties into a majority Socialist Unity Party (SED), some Social Democrats rebelled and formed their own non-Communist Social Democratic Party (SPD). Berliners registered a powerful protest against the Soviet regime in the first postwar municipal elections, on October 20, 1946. The Social Democrats won 49 percent of the votes, the Christian Democrats 22 percent, and the Communists just 19.8 percent. On June 24, 1947, the Municipal Assembly elected an avowed anti-Communist, Ernst Reuter (SPD) as lord mayor of Greater Berlin. The Soviets, however, refused to let him take office.

Moscow managed to maintain the upper hand in its own sector of Berlin. The city's central government, or Magistrat, could not carry out its decisions in any sector without the approval of the local Allied commander. Karl Mautner, then serving as U.S. liaison officer to the Berlin City Government, recalled how the Soviets kept pressure on Berlin's non-Communist parties: "The CDU [Christian Democratic Union] chairman, Walther Schreiber, was no longer permitted to attend meetings at CDU headquarters in East Berlin because of his 'anti-Soviet' attitude . . . SPD meetings in the Soviet sector were banned or the scheduled meeting place suddenly became unavailable . . . Mrs. Ella Kay, [the elected] mayor of Prenzlauer Berg [in the Soviet sector] was dismissed on the grounds that she was 'incapable of providing the people with firewood for the coming winter.'"

The Fulton Speech

By this time, the Western allies were no longer surprised. The Soviets were merely doing in Berlin what they were doing across the continent: implanting Communist regimes. Moscow would set up "People's Governments" in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. By March 5, 1946, when Winston Churchill made an appearance with President Truman at Fulton, Missouri, a clear pattern of Soviet behavior had already emerged. Now the leader of Britain's parliamentary opposition, Churchill said that:

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory . . . From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere . . . this is certainly not the Liberated Europe we fought to build up.

From then on, Washington would become progressively less conciliatory in dealing with the Soviets. George F. Kennan, head of the State Department's Policy Planning staff, penned a now-famous article in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* that would reflect Washington's new view of Moscow. "It is clear," Kennan wrote, under the pseudonym "X," "that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."

III THE BERLIN BLOCKADE

The Western allies would employ "containment" not only in Southern Europe* but also in the Western sectors of Berlin. Finding that they could no longer collaborate with the Soviets, representatives from the United States, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg met in London on February 23, 1948, to begin planning the eventual merger of the three Western zones of Germany into a Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the introduction of a new currency there. At the March 20, 1948, Allied Control Council meeting in Berlin, Soviet delegate Vassily Sokolovsky demanded to know what had transpired at the London conference. When the allies refused to tell him, Sokolovsky stalked out.

The Russians retaliated by imposing a "mini-blockade" of West Berlin, interfering with truck and rail deliveries to and from the city. Undaunted, the Western allies introduced a new currency, the *Deutschmark*, into their three zones of Germany on June 20. The Soviets responded by imposing their own currency reform, valid for the Soviet zone of Germany and *all four* sectors of Berlin. The Western allies retaliated by introducing the new *Deutschmark* into their three sectors of the metropolis.

On June 23, Communist-led demonstrators, some carrying red banners, prevented the non-Communist City Assembly from convening on time at City Hall, in the Soviet sector. Inside, they crowded the City Hall chambers; outside, they broadcast speeches by Walter Ulbricht over a loudspeaker. Assemblymen demanded added police protection, but the police never arrived. A headline in the Communist newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, would later complain: "Majority of the Magistrat, Against All Reason, Favors Double Currency and Customs Barriers in Berlin—

*Under the "Truman Doctrine," in 1947 the United States gave Greece and Turkey \$400 million in military aid to offset Soviet pressures there.

THE 1948-49 AIRLIFT

When Josef Stalin first imposed a blockade of West Berlin on June 24, 1948, public officials in Washington, London, and Paris were not optimistic about maintaining a foothold in the city. After all, the Soviets, as U.S. Army Secretary Kenneth Royall put it, "have most of the trump cards." Indeed, they controlled access by water, road, and rail to the old German capital. Nevertheless, the 6,500 British, American, and French garrison troops and their dependents would remain, Royall said, "until the Soviets make life unbearable for even a small group."

What could the Western allies do? Various plans of action were proposed at the time. Royall suggested to General Lucius D. Clay, the military governor in the U.S. zone of Germany, that, for safety's sake, he evacuate American dependents from Berlin; Royall also wanted Clay to slow the introduction of currency reform (which had precipitated the blockade) in the Western zones of Germany and the Western sectors of Berlin.

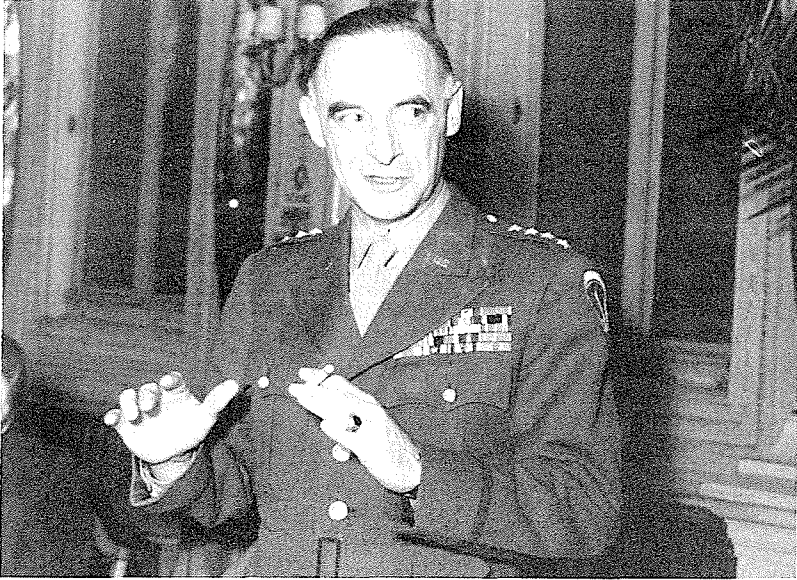
But Clay refused to consider either move. Given the U.S. monopoly on the atomic bomb, he believed that the Soviets would not maintain the blockade by force; he proposed that the allies put together a convoy of about 200 trucks, supported by a U.S. Army regiment, to run the blockade along the Helmstedt-Berlin autobahn. The group would be "directed to clear all obstacles and to avoid shooting unless resisted by force."

The British, however, considered Clay's plan reckless. "If you do that, it'll be war," warned Britain's General Sir Brian Robertson. He urged that the allies supply Berlin by air. Clay, in turn, thought it "absolutely impossible" to feed 2.5 million West Berliners with an airlift. But officials back in Washington sided with Robertson. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, feared that Clay's proposed foray might "shift the stage from one of local friction to that of major war." The Chiefs saw what the Germans would later call a *Luftbrücke*, or "air bridge," as a safe way to buy time.

Clay had no choice but to go along. "I may be the craziest man in the world," he told Berlin's Lord Mayor-elect Ernst Reuter, "but I'm going to try the experiment of feeding this city by air." President Harry S. Truman approved the decision and vowed to keep West Berliners supplied, "even if it takes every Piper Cub in the United States."

"Operation Vittles" began on June 26. The Royal Air Force, Clay figured, could provide only 150 planes. And the French, who were busy fighting Ho Chi Minh in faraway Indochina, could contribute ground personnel but no aircraft. The United States had only 102 transports in Europe. Thus, the allies initially would have to rely on several hundred relatively small planes, such as the two-engined Douglas C-47, to carry most of the cargo. These "Gooney Birds," as they were known, lumbered along at 160 miles per hour, and carried just three tons each. Not surprisingly, the East Berlin Communist daily, *Neues Deutschland* declared: "The *Amis* are leaving."

The *Luftbrücke* started slowly. But larger U.S. aircraft, such as the C-54



General Lucius D. Clay

transport, soon joined in. Before long, allied planes, which together flew as many as 1,000 daily sorties, were bringing 8,000 to 9,000 tons of supplies (everything from bags of coal and flour to vitamin tablets and typewriter parts) into the city every 24 hours. Poor weather and occasional Soviet harassment sometimes made the one-hour, 40-minute flights hazardous. On "Black Friday," August 13, 1948, a ceiling of fog descended over the city's rooftops, causing three crash landings near Tempelhof Airport. From then on, pilots who broke their flight patterns or missed their landing approaches were instructed to circle back to western Germany.

The adequacy of the *Luftbrücke* relied, in the end, on ordinary West Berliners. Consider, for example, how they shared electricity—which was severely limited after the Soviets cut off all utilities running from East to West Berlin. Under a rationing scheme, which allotted energy supplies to vital industries first, West Berliners would receive one or two hours of electricity daily, usually at night. In practice, each family would leave a single switch turned on in the evening, and when a light bulb lit up, they would do whatever had to be done. For instance, the Schmidts might use their one hour of electricity to boil potatoes for several other households, the Webers to cook string beans.

In the end, the Berlin airlift was a clearcut British-American success, even though 65 men perished, most of them in accidents. Total U.S. expenditures: about \$300 million. For the Communists, the blockade, which Stalin lifted on May 12, 1949, was a Cold War fiasco. The Soviet leader had prodded "the capitalist world with the tip of a bayonet," Nikita Khrushchev later observed, but the confrontation had been "badly thought out."

For Chaos, Hunger, and Unemployment.”

The first of the three major Cold War-Berlin crises began at 11 P.M. on June 23, when the East German (ADN) news agency's teletype machine at the British sector newspaper, *Der Tag*, began to clatter: “. . . Transport Division of the Soviet Military Administration, is compelled to halt all passenger and freight traffic to and from Berlin tomorrow at 0600 hours because of technical difficulties.” Moscow also cut off the flow of electric current, coal, food, and other supplies from the surrounding territory to West Berlin. The Berlin Blockade was on.

With this move, Stalin apparently believed he was delivering an ultimatum to the citizens of West Berlin: Either submit to Communist rule or starve. Moscow defended the blockade, saying that the Western powers, by setting up separate administrations in West Germany, had undermined not only the four-power control commission but also their right to participate in the administration of Berlin.

The Soviets did not imagine that the 2.5 million West Berliners would be able to survive a blockade. Few Westerners did either. The population would need some 4,000 tons of supplies daily to stay alive. But West Berlin, emplaced deep within Soviet-controlled territory, had become a Cold War symbol of the vigor of Western democracy, and a crucial place for the Western powers to make a stand. As General Lucius D. Clay, the military governor of the U.S. zone in Germany told Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall: “We have lost Czechoslovakia. Norway is threatened. We retreat from Berlin. When Berlin falls, western Germany will be next. If we mean . . . to hold Europe against Communism, we must not budge.”

A Worldwide Embarrassment

But rhetoric alone would not enable West Berliners to survive. After much debate, the Western allies decided to supply their sectors of the city by air—a measure, they believed, that could only last for about 30 days. But British and U.S. transports, leaving every few minutes from nine different airfields in their zones of Germany, delivered enough coal, food, and medical supplies to sustain the West Berliners indefinitely (see box, p. 110). The longer the “air bridge” worked, the less pressed were the Western allies to consider making concessions to the Soviets.

Recognizing that the blockade had failed to expel the Western allies from Berlin, and suffering considerable worldwide embarrassment, Stalin began looking for a way out of the stalemate. The Soviet leader quietly told Kingsbury Smith of the International News Service on January 31, 1949, that he could see “no obstacles to lifting transport [and trade] restrictions” if the Western allies agreed to postpone the formation of a West German state, and if the Council of Foreign Ministers met to consider the German problem as a whole.

Stalin's conditions were not met, but after several months of secret

negotiations, Moscow agreed to lift the blockade on May 12, 1949. West Berliners, General Clay said, "had earned their right to freedom," and, he added, thus "atoned for their failure to repudiate Hitler when such repudiation on their part might have stopped his rise to power."

The airlift, however, did not solve the political impasse over Berlin. Soviet agents continued to disrupt the City Assembly at City Hall. Unable to conduct business, non-Communist members of the assembly repaired to the Technical University in the British sector on September 8. Their Communist colleagues stayed behind, claiming to run the entire city. On November 30, 1948, delegates from the *Kulturbund*, the Free German Trade Union Federation, and other Communist organizations met at the Admirals-Palast and drafted a new constitution that they said would be the sole legitimate basis for governing Berlin.

The Marienfelde Experience

Now Berlin had two de facto governments, each of which could make good its claims only in its half of the city. The Soviet and the Western sectors of Berlin would develop under opposing ideologies. East Berlin and West Berlin each became closely tied to (but officially separate from) the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, or the GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany, or the FRG), both of which were created in 1949.

East and West Berlin would not easily coexist. After a slow start (due to the blockade), West Berlin made stunning economic progress, thanks, in part, to Marshall Plan aid. The value of its exports rose from \$3 million in 1950 to \$30 million in 1954; by that year local industrial production had returned to about 70 percent of its prewar level. Once again, shoppers and tourists crowded West Berlin's now-refurbished boulevard, the Kurfürstendamm. East Berlin, from which the Soviets had stripped much manufacturing equipment, lagged behind. For East Berlin's workers, wages were low and hours were long. A pound of butter cost 10 marks (then, about \$2.50), a pound of coffee, 75 marks (\$18.75); new clothing was scarce.

For East Berlin officials, the presence of affluent, brightly-lit West Berlin made it difficult to generate popular zeal for the Communist New Age. West Berlin's newspapers published photos of East Berliners shopping in West Berlin's most fashionable stores. Savings-minded Westerners crossed into East Berlin, where they traded West German marks for cheap East German marks, and proceeded to clear the shelves in East Berlin's *Handelsorganisationen*, or state stores.

Most humiliating to Walter Ulbricht's regime was the unrelenting exodus of East German citizens—most of them young and well-educated—to the West, via West Berlin. During the 1950s, the trip was neither expensive nor dangerous. Residents of Leipzig or Potsdam left Ulbricht's "Communist Workers' Paradise" merely by taking a train to

East Berlin, then boarding a subway car to West Berlin. There, they would make their way to the Marienfelde Refugee Center, where they received food, temporary shelter, and, presumably, a schedule of airline flights from Tempelhof Airport to the destination of their choice in the Free World—often Hamburg, Frankfurt, Paris, or London.

The East German regime tried desperately to cut off the West-bound brain drain. They severed telephone communications between East and West Berlin, reduced the number of intracity crossing points, and constructed a 100-meter-wide “death strip” along the West German frontier. Still, by February 1953, some 30,000 East Germans, voting with their feet, were fleeing their homeland every month.

To increase factory output, the Ulbricht regime, on May 14, 1953, proposed a 10 percent increase in individual production quotas. For workers, theoretically the prime beneficiaries of communism, this was the last straw. On June 16, several thousand construction workers marched to the East German House of Ministries, where they demanded the government’s resignation and the holding of free elections.

Word of the protest spread rapidly. By the following morning, thousands of workers across the city had gone on strike. Demonstrators burned Communist Party banners along Unter den Linden (the city’s main boulevard), stormed local Communist Party headquarters, smashed



The East Berlin uprising of June 17, 1953: Soviet tanks were sent in not only to quash the revolt but also to deter West Berliners from joining the fray.

the windows of state grocery stores, and set fire to police stations. A crowd of 50,000 demonstrators marched to the Brandenburg Gate and tore down the Red flag flying above it. For a brief moment it appeared that a popular revolt, the first in Eastern Europe since World War II, would topple the Communist state.

Some Americans and West Germans wanted the new Eisenhower administration to give the rebels a hand. But despite all of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's earlier talk about "liberating" Eastern Europe from communism, Washington quickly decided not to intervene. The United States, President Eisenhower declared, "planned no physical intervention on the Soviet Union's side of the Iron Curtain."

Soviet tanks and troops quickly moved in. During the fighting, an estimated 260 demonstrators lost their lives. East German courts sentenced another 19 people to death. On June 18, West Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter warned the Communists in a solemn radio broadcast that "a people cannot be held in submission in the long run, with martial law and bayonets and tanks." The exodus to the West continued.

Throughout the 1950s, the impasse over Berlin proved a reasonably accurate barometer of the Cold War. At times, the crisis atmosphere seemed to wane, only to wax again when East-West tensions rose elsewhere. The next major Berlin confrontation would not occur until 1958, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, perhaps emboldened by Soviet accomplishments in space,* resolved to dislodge what he called "a bone in Russia's throat" once and for all.

IV

KHRUSHCHEV'S ULTIMATUM

The second Berlin crisis commenced on November 10, when Khrushchev told a visiting delegation from Poland that the right of the Western powers to cross East German territory, to travel to and from West Berlin, would have to be negotiated with the German Democratic Republic. The British, French, and Americans, Khrushchev said, had created "a kind of state within a state," in West Berlin, from which their agents were conducting "subversive activity" against East Germany. The Soviet leader went on: "The [West] German militarists are thinking of swallowing up the German Democratic Republic, annexing Poland's western lands and staking claims on the territory of Czechoslovakia and other Socialist countries."

On November 27, Khrushchev issued a formal note to the Western allies, which compared the Berlin situation to a "smoldering fuse that has

*The Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first artificial earth satellite, on October 4, 1957.

been connected to a powder keg." He demanded that the Western allies evacuate Berlin, allowing the establishment of "an independent political unit—a free city, without any state." Western failure to do so, the Soviet premier threatened, would simply result in the Soviets giving the East German government control over the access routes to Berlin. The Soviet leader added that the Kremlin would "make no changes in the present procedure for military traffic [between West Berlin and West Germany] for half a year." Only "madmen," Khrushchev concluded, "can go to the length of unleashing another world war over the preservation of privileges of occupiers in West Berlin."

Whatever the actual intent of the Soviet note—its contents, when read in full, were highly ambiguous—President Eisenhower considered it an "ultimatum." In its formal reply to the Soviets, Washington said that it "would not embark on discussion with the Soviet Union upon these questions under the menace [of an] ultimatum." The U.S. press was a good deal more excited. The Soviet note, said the *New York Times* on November 29, "displays such contempt for truth and common intelligence and appeals so openly to brute force as to raise serious questions about the state of mind now ruling in the Kremlin."

Over the next few months, Moscow would conduct a war of nerves as the "deadline" (May 27, 1959) to the six-month ultimatum approached. On Christmas Day 1958, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko warned the West that "any provocation in West Berlin," could start "a big war, in the crucible of which millions upon millions of people would perish and which would bring devastation incomparably more serious than the last world war." Perhaps sensing Western resolve, Khrushchev, on March 19, broke the stalemate by saying what the Western allies had been arguing all along: "I believe that the United States, Britain, and France do have lawful rights for their stay in Berlin. These rights ensue from the fact of German surrender as a result of our joint struggle against Nazi Germany." The crisis faded.

The Three Essentials

As politicians in Washington, Paris, and London wondered if the world would survive the next Berlin crisis, West Berliners themselves enjoyed an ever-higher standard of living. "The last time I strolled down the Kurfürstendamm [in 1948], it had the vitality of a lump of putty," wrote journalist John Gunther in 1960. "Hungry people stood in line for spoonfuls of naked corned beef out of a can; you could buy a girl for a cigarette. But today the fashionable area of Berlin has chic shops magnificently filled with merchandise from the ends of the earth."

Thanks to Western affluence and freedom, East German emigration continued apace. In 1960, some 240,000 East German "visits" to the West were one-way trips—and about 80 percent of them were made through West Berlin. By now, both Khrushchev and Ulbricht were des-



East Germans at West Berlin's Marienfelde Refugee Center, April 1961. More than half were under 25. The first words that an East German baby learned, went the joke, were "mama," "papa," and "Marienfelde."

perately seeking ways to shut off the exodus. At a March 1961 Warsaw Pact meeting, Ulbricht proposed that his government seal off the "escape hatch" to the West by closing the border between East and West Berlin. But Khrushchev still favored his old "free city" plan, which he proposed to the new U.S. president, John F. Kennedy, at their Vienna summit meeting on June 4, 1961. Khrushchev insisted that a "peace treaty" be signed between the four allies and East Germany, making the Communist regime responsible for access to Berlin.

Kennedy rejected the Soviet proposal outright and declared that the Western allies would, if necessary, resort to military force to guarantee "three essentials": continued allied presence in Berlin; unrestricted use of access routes to and from the city; and freedom for West Berliners to choose their own form of government. Khrushchev responded: "I want peace, but if you want war, then that is your problem."

Kennedy's West European allies encouraged him to hold the line with Moscow. "When Khrushchev summons you to change the status of Berlin, in other words, to hand the city over to him, stand fast!" French president Charles de Gaulle told Kennedy. "That is the most useful service you can render to the whole world, Russia included." On July 25, Kennedy addressed Americans on television: "West Berlin," the presi-

dent said, “has now become—as never before—the great testing place of Western courage and will.”

At this point, East Germans began to sense that *something* was about to happen. Since 1949, some 2.8 million of their compatriots—one in every six—had fled to the West. Those who had considered leaving reckoned that it was now or never. About 4,000 East Germans would flee during the last weekend of July. Surely, the Eastern Bloc could not sit idly by while the GDR, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted, was “hemorrhaging to death.”

V

THE WALL GOES UP

When the Warsaw Pact Council met August 3-5 in Moscow, Ulbricht pointed out to Khrushchev that Kennedy had limited his “three essentials” to the protection of *West* Berlin—thus signaling NATO’s intention of doing nothing as long as the East did not encroach on its rights. This time, the Warsaw Pact members saw little choice but to back Ulbricht’s plan to seal the escape hatch.

Shortly after midnight on August 13, 1961, East German soldiers, riding atop army trucks, streamed down Unter den Linden, Berlin’s majestic eight-lane boulevard. Peeling off at various points, the troops and workmen began erecting a 103-mile barrier, which ran through the center of Berlin and between West Berlin and East Germany. In Potsdamer Platz, where many East Berliners crossed into West Berlin every day, members of the People’s Police (*Vopos*) and border police (*Grepos*) dug up cobblestones to put up fenceposts, between which they strung barbed wire. The barrier ran down the middle of streets, through neighborhoods and school yards, along canals, following the border between the Soviet and the Western sectors of the city.

“The present situation regarding the traffic on the borders of West Berlin,” explained a Warsaw Pact communiqué, “is being used by FRG ruling quarters and intelligence agencies of the NATO countries for undermining the GDR’s economy . . . Through deceit, bribery, and blackmail, [Bonn] makes some unstable elements in the GDR leave for Western Germany. These deceived people are compelled to serve with the [West German Army], or are recruited to the intelligence agencies of different countries to be sent back to the GDR as spies and saboteurs.”

Berliners were outraged by the events that took place on the day they would later call *Stacheldrahtsonntag*, or “Barbed Wire Sunday.” By 11 A.M., some 2,000 people gathered on the Western side of the Brandenburg Gate, yelling “Put down your guns” and “Hang Ulbricht” (the East German leader) to the silent *Vopos*. Some East Berliners clambered over the Wall at weak spots; others swam to West Berlin

across the Teltow Canal.

The East German move caught the CIA off guard and Western leaders on vacation. Charles de Gaulle was resting at his country home at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises. Britain's prime minister, Harold Macmillan, was heading for a hunting holiday in northern England. And Kennedy was relaxing aboard his sailboat, *The Marlin*, off Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, when he was summoned by radio. Back on shore, Kennedy telephoned Secretary of State Dean Rusk in Washington.

Rusk told the president that neither the East Germans nor the Soviets had entered the Western sectors of Berlin. And they had not cut off access to West Berlin from West Germany. Indeed, this was an "internal security" measure, Rusk concluded, not "a play against Berlin." How would Washington respond? U.S. troops in Berlin, the president knew, could not fire on the East German *Vopos*, tear down the new barrier, or otherwise intervene in the Soviet sector of Berlin without risking World War III. "Go to the ball game as you had planned," Kennedy said to Rusk. "I am going sailing."

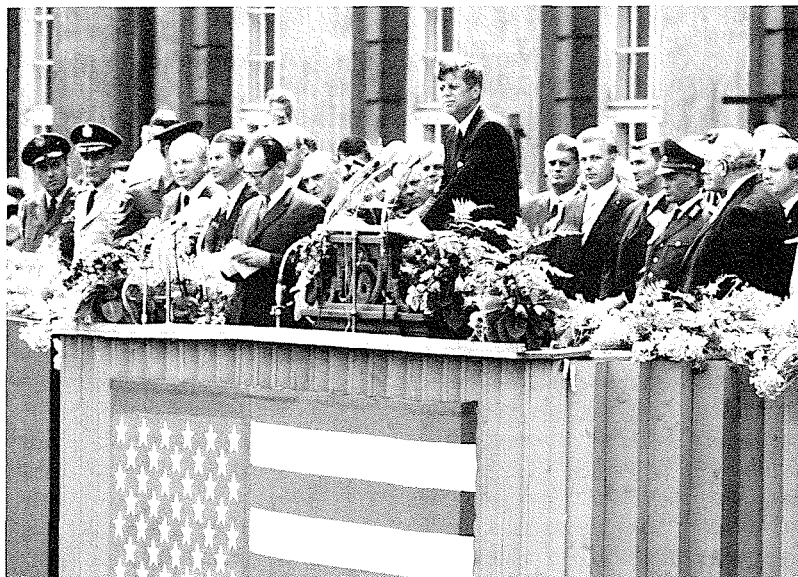
Many West Berliners clamored for allied action against the East German regime. JFK dispatched a U.S. motorized column to West Berlin, but the Western leaders were simply not willing to risk a military confrontation by knocking down the barrier. Besides, had they done so, observed Howard Trivers, a U.S. diplomat, the East Germans could simply have "moved back 200 or 400 yards and commenced to rebuild the barbed-wire fence there."

"Berliners raged and grieved," British journalist Norman Gelb would later observe, "but what the Communists were doing to them and their city meant far less to the president than the awesome fact that he had been prepared for a war in which millions of people, including Americans, might have died, and suddenly it looked like it wasn't going to happen—not yet."

Checkpoint Charlie

President Kennedy assigned General Lucius Clay—who was beloved by Berliners as a hero of the 1948–49 airlift—to serve as his personal representative in Berlin. Shortly after arriving, the general found himself in a new confrontation. The showdown began when East German *Vopos* began demanding that U.S. officials show their passports when crossing into East Berlin in cars bearing American license plates. This represented a clear violation of Berlin's four-power status: Under Allied protocols, Western officials had as much right to move freely about East Berlin as they did in West Berlin. If U.S. officials went along with these demands, they would be formally recognizing East German sovereignty over East Berlin.

Employing "get tough" tactics, General Clay, on October 25, stationed 10 U.S. M-48 Patton tanks and three armored personnel carriers



John F. Kennedy in West Berlin on June 26, 1963. Overwhelmed by the warm reception, the president said to his speechwriter, Ted Sorensen: "We'll never have another day like this as long as we live."

on Friedrichstrasse at Checkpoint Charlie, the U.S. border crossing point at the new wall. Each time the East German *Vopos* stopped an official American vehicle, jeeps equipped with machine guns were sent in to escort the vehicle over the border, forcing the *Vopos* to step aside.

On October 27, the Soviets decided to meet intimidation with intimidation by positioning 10 tanks on their side of the checkpoint. With U.S. and Soviet tanks face to face, just 100 yards apart, millions of Americans wondered if the long-feared U.S.-Soviet clash over Berlin was finally at hand. But to Clay, the mere presence of Soviet armor in effect reaffirmed Western rights because it destroyed "the fiction that it was the East Germans who were responsible for trying to prevent Allied access to East Berlin." After 16 hours, the Soviets broke the tension by withdrawing their tanks from Checkpoint Charlie, as did the Americans 30 minutes later.

The showdown at the checkpoint would mark the last time that Moscow and Washington would come close to an armed conflict in the old German capital. There are several reasons why. First, neither side seriously believed it was worth risking a war over Berlin. Second, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962—perhaps the most dangerous crisis of the Cold War—forced leaders in Moscow and Washington to rethink the hazards of Soviet-American confrontation. Finally, with regard

to Berlin, the United States and its allies were willing to tolerate the status quo. West Berlin, after all, stood as a powerful symbol of the West's determination to defend freedom, even where it was most vulnerable; and the Berlin Wall stood as concrete evidence that the Communist system was not only unworkable, but inhumane.

John F. Kennedy enjoyed one of the most spectacular moments of his presidency on June 26, 1963, when he addressed 150,000 cheering Berliners from a platform outside West Berlin's City Hall:

There are many people in the world who really don't understand—or say they don't—what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin. There are some who say that Communism is the wave of the future. Let them come to Berlin. And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere, 'we can work with the Communists.' Let them come to Berlin . . .

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.'

VI

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

The Berlin Wall would have many symbolic and many tangible (and paradoxical) effects on the city of Berlin, and on East-West relations.

The Wall upset the daily lives of many Berliners. Suddenly, 53,000 East Berliners who had been employed in West Berlin could not get to work. For them, travel became severely restricted, emigration nearly impossible. (Since 1961, only 5,000 East Germans and East Berliners have escaped illegally; at least 72 have died at the hands of the *Vopos* while trying.) The Wall also barred relatives who lived on opposite sides of the divide from visiting one another. For more than two years (from August 1961 to December 1963, when West Berliners were again allowed to visit East Berlin), the barricade separated parents from children, brother from brother.

But the Wall, ironically, also brought a certain calm. By ending the exodus of East Germans to the West, it made West Berlin less of an embarrassment to Ulbricht, and thus eased the threat of further Soviet attempts to drive the Western allies out of the city. It enabled Willy Brandt, West Germany's chancellor (1969–74), to initiate *Ostpolitik*—his policy of reconciliation with East Germany. In other words, "the Berlin Wall," as Harvard's Timothy W. Ryback has observed, provided "a simple solution to complex social, political and economic problems," which explains why it "will remain in place for the foreseeable future."

Finally, the Wall—or at least the political stability it helped produce—enabled the foreign ministers of France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union to negotiate and sign the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin on June 3, 1972. The accord did not resolve the “Berlin problem”; it merely reaffirmed the wartime protocol. Under the agreement, the four powers pledged to “mutually respect their individual and joint rights and responsibilities, which remain unchanged.” The agreement reasserted the right of all four Allied victors to occupy Berlin jointly. It guaranteed access to West Berlin and the right of West Berliners to visit East Berlin.

The document stipulated that West Berlin could not become part of the Federal Republic of Germany, although “ties” between the two could be maintained. (The Bonn government keeps a liaison office in West Berlin, and represents the city in international forums. But West German politicians may not perform “constitutional or official acts” in West Berlin.) In a sense, the Quadripartite Agreement represented a victory for the West. The accord, at least on paper, killed the Soviet Union’s long-cherished goal of controlling all of Berlin. Today, West Berliners live in a bustling democratic enclave, albeit 110 miles inside a nation under Communist rule.

Yet, few Germans can be happy about what has happened to Berlin since World War II. Today, 43 years after V-E Day, a once-great metropolis remains occupied and divided with a wall running like a scar down its center and around the periphery of its Western sectors. The scar remains there in part because many of the key decisions regarding Germany’s future were made in 1944–45, before the Western allies fully understood what the Soviets had in mind for Eastern Europe.

Indeed, during World War II, Churchill reflected in 1953, many Westerners even feared that Josef Stalin would *stop* fighting Hitler once the Red Army regained the prewar frontiers. Little wonder, he wrote, that “the question of the Russian zone of occupation in Germany therefore did not bulk [large] in our thoughts.” With Western leaders trusting in Stalin’s goodwill, many of the more sophisticated plans for Germany’s future, Churchill said, “lay upon the shelves as the war crashed on.”
