



# THE BERLIN WALL



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## **Brief history:**

In 1945, at the end of World War II the city of Berlin was divided into 4 sectors: the American, British, and French in the West and the Soviet sector in the East. By June of 1946 the Soviet Union had created a demarcation line which divided Germany into the Democratic West and the Communist East. By the end of the same year in order to travel between sectors in Germany one had to possess a valid interzonepass which was only valid for 30 days.

In June, 1948 the city of Berlin was divided into two different currency zones. The Soviets blockaded the city and the Berlin Airlift began, supplying food and medical supplies round the clock to the people of West Berlin. 1949 saw the end of the Berlin blockade and the Berlin airlift but two new countries were formed. The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) were created. In 1952 the borders between East and West Germany, including those within the city of Berlin were closed.

The people of East Germany resented the conditions that had been placed upon them and in June the building workers protested against their working conditions. Their uprising was suppressed by Soviet tanks. Later that year the interzonepass was waived but any East German citizen needed written permission to travel to the West. Such visas were extremely difficult to obtain.

In December of 1957 leaving East Germany without permission was forbidden and violators were sent to prison for up to three years. In 1958 the Soviets, under Khrushchev, issued their "Berlin Ultimatum", demanding that western allies withdraw their troops from West Berlin and that West Berlin become a "Free City" within six months. In 1961 President Kennedy and Khrushchev met in Vienna in an attempt to sign a treaty between the Soviets and West Germany but all efforts failed.

Early in the morning of Sunday, August 13, 1961 the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) began to block off East Berlin from the West by using barbed wire and antitank obstacles. Streets were torn up and stone barricades were erected. Tanks gathered at crucial places within the city. The subway and local railway services between East and West Berlin were interrupted. Residents of East Germany were no longer allowed to enter West Berlin, amongst them some 60,000 commuters who had worked in West Berlin. In the days following the construction barriers were replaced by a solid brick wall.

The reaction of the western allies was moderate, since the three essentials of the American policy regarding Berlin were not affected: presence of allied troops, free access to West Berlin and the right of self-determination of the West Berliners.



The East German Side of the Berlin Wall

In 1961 the citizens of West Berlin were no longer allowed to enter East Berlin. Forced evacuation of houses situated immediately at the border of West Berlin began.

The first fatality came on August 17, 1962 when Peter Fechter, an eighteen year old citizen of East Berlin, bled to death after he was shot down by East Berlin border guards in an attempt to escape over the wall.

The German Democratic propaganda called the wall "Anti-Fascist protection wall"



A view of the wall showing the Brandenburg Gate  
This area was officially closed on August 14, 1961

On June 26, 1963 President John F. Kennedy visited Berlin on a State visit. It was during his visit that he commented on the political struggle within Berlin when he stated "Ich bin ein Berliner." (I am a Berliner) Kennedy's visit did help some West Berliners because for the Christmas holiday, in the first time in more than two years, people from the western part of the city were allowed to visit those in the east. Many families and relatives were briefly united for the holiday season. Unfortunately nothing further was done to rectify the situation of the Berlin Wall until 1971 when leniency was again showing to Westerners visiting the Eastern sector.

The border between West and East Berlin was about 50 miles. within which there was a staggered system of barriers. First there was a concrete wall about 13 feet high. In addition, the Eastern side was totally illuminated and contained a control area (or death area as it was known locally). Refugees who reached this area were shot without warning! A trench followed which was designed to prevent vehicles from breaking through the wall. Then there was a patrol track, a corridor with watchdogs and bunkers and then a second wall!

The border cut through 192 streets, 97 of them leading to East Berlin and 95 into the German Democratic Republic.

At least 100 people were killed at the Berlin Wall, the last of them was Chris Gueffroy in 1989.



Kennedy's visit to Checkpoint Charlie, the American border to East Berlin.  
Many a spy was traded at this famous bridge within the city.

One of the most famous visitors to the Berlin Wall was President Ronald Reagan. On June 12, 1987 he visited Berlin and urged the Soviet leader to remove the barrier that divided the German nation. His famous statement, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall” was heard all over the world. The political unrest within the Soviet Union and the reforms brought about under Gorbachev would soon have a major impact on Berlin. Unofficially the Cold War was coming to an end.



In 1989 there was a massive flight of East German inhabitants to the West. They found an escape route via Hungary. In the fall every Monday in Leipzig was a day of protest for freedom to the West. After weeks of discussion the leader of East Germany’s Communist Party, Gunter Schabowski, declared that the border would be open for “private trips abroad”. This created an on-rush of people. Celebrations began all over Berlin as the East German government was slowly folding and the Russian dominance was coming to an end.

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall was opened and on December 22, 1989 the Brandenburg Gate was opened to both sides. Jubilation and celebrations followed and Berlin was now a free city. On October 3, 1990 German was reunited, there was no longer any more East and West Germany, it was again one country and ruled by Democracy.

