

Rise and Fall of the Berlin Wall

Following the end of hostilities in the Second World War¹, a ravaged Europe had been liberated from Nazi occupation by either the Red Army in the east or the Allied forces in the west. Germany had been occupied by the conquering powers and divided into four administrative zones, each governed by one of the victors; USA, England, France and the Soviet Union. Berlin, the 'lair of the fascist beast' in Russian parlance, was, albeit also divided into four sectors, supposed to be governed by a quadripartite body; the Allied Kommandatura, seated in Berlin-Dahlem.

THE POTSDAM AGREEMENT of 1945 had established the political and legal framework² for this setup which had been envisioned as a temporary measure until a German government, 'acceptable to all parties' could be established. Free, democratic elections were to take place both in Germany and in all European countries, now unshackled from the chains of Nazi rule.



Photo: Kommandatura, Kaiserwertherstrasse 16-8, Dahlem. On August 1, 1948, after months of bickering over details and following by a walk-out of the Russian representative, Colonel Yelizarov, on June 16 (just days before the Soviets closed off Berlin and thus triggered the Allied air-lift), the Soviets left the Kommandatura for good. Credit: Life Magazine

As it went, however, the wartime marriage of convenience between the Western Allies and communist Russia rapidly turned sour, ending in bitter separation. Europe thus remained divided in opposing East and West states, most notably illustrated by the division of Germany and, above all, Berlin. Setting the irretrievable divorce between the mismatched partners to the stand-off that resulted in the 1948-49 Berlin airlift is not completely off the mark.

“He who controls Berlin controls Germany. He who controls Germany controls Europe”

As two different states thus rose from the ruins of Nazi Germany, the sixty-million souls in the West under a liberalist economy³ rapid outran the much smaller East and differences in living conditions became increasingly apparent. A steady east-to-west migration was the order of the day and between 1948 and 1961, an estimated 3 million people had fled the communist East Germany, representing one-sixth of the country’s population. Not surprisingly, the bulk of Easterners who chose a future in the west came from the upper echelons, educationally spoken, and this constant, unrelenting drain of skilled labor became a major concern for the authorities in the communist state.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-85346-0001
Foto: Wittig | Oktober 1959

Photo: Marienfelde Refugee Center, one of three in the west dealing with the great waves of immigration from East Germany. Refugees who made it to West Berlin were sent to Marienfelde, the reception center, to undergo medical examination/treatment and have identification papers issued, being housed in a center until they could be permanently re-settled somewhere in the West. Credit: Bundesarchiv.

While traffic between the two Berlin parts was still relatively unimpeded, the bulk of the migration went through the former German capital, where one just had to cross a painted white stripe on the pavement to be in the west. Over the years the number of ‘Republikflüchtlinge’ grew until it in August 1961 reached a number of more than 2000 on a daily basis. Harsh travel restrictions had been invoked but proven insufficient to stem the flow of people who chose to ‘vote with their feet’.

The East-Berlin authorities, realizing that they could not sustain this brain-hemorrhage in the long run and, unable to offer satisfying future prospects for the fleeing masses, had to turn to drastic methods. This realization would find its culmination in the erection of the infamous Berlin Wall.

“Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!”

IN THE WEE HOURS of August 13, 1961, then a Sunday, and just two months after the East German Chairman Walter Ulbricht at an international press conference had ensured the world media that “*No one has the intention of erecting a wall!*”⁴, night owls, early-birds and light sleepers in the eastern part of Berlin could notice a lot of commotion in the streets; trucks roaring, soldiers marching, commands being shouted and heavy boots clacking on the pavement, as poles and barbed wire by the kilometer was unloaded and installed. As morning broke and life on the streets resumed, commuters found that a well prepared, large-scale operation had been completed and that the all major crossing points between East and West Berlin had been cut off; roads were blocked⁵, train services cut and coils of barbed wire, guarded by armed troops, now marked the sector border.



Photo: A barefaced lie exposed on August 13; barbed wire split the Potsdamer Platz in two early Sunday morning, guarded by somewhat queasy VoPo's. [In the background right; the now demolished Haus Vaterland.] Credit: Spiegel Documentary.

It was the beginning of what would rapidly become a complete encirclement. The perimeter of West Berlin stretched over some 150 kilometers and the ringing had to be incomplete in these first crucial hours. Alerted by the commotion – and from around 04:00 in the morning by the first sketchy reports by RIAS [Radio In the American Sector] – some attentive East Berliners who had anticipated the development grabbed already packed bags and fled quickly over border wasteland, where barbed wire was not properly strung and guards had not yet taken up position. Most, however, stayed put; befuddled perhaps, but reassuring themselves that this had to be temporary measures.



Photo: Vigilant Berliners escape at a weak point of the fence while this is still incomplete. From the documentary 'The Wall'.

As the news broke in the morning, public outcry ensued and the act was condemned by the Western Allies as well as internationally as a flagrant violation of the East-West agreement. Angry Berliners assembled on the western side and hurled catcalls and insults against the VoPo's⁶. The Allied forces in the west, not knowing how to handle the situation, initially did nothing. Later that day Konrad Adenauer, West German Chancellor seated in Bonn, called for calm and reassured the citizens in the East that they would not be forgotten and that he would continue to have reunification of the country as his primary goal.⁷

These impotent declarations from the authorities and the bewildered Allied troopers did little to restore the confidence of the people on either side of the border who, rightfully as it turned out, felt that a whole new order was being imposed on them. At Potsdamer Platz some especially enraged westerners tried to trample the wire and were driven back by East Berlin bayonets.



Twenty-six year old journalist Adam Kellett-Long, Berlin correspondent for the Reuters News Agency, was the first westerner to realize that something was fishy at the border. Living in East Berlin and thus enjoying access to sources other Berlin newsmen were deprived of, he had received at tip

Saturday evening ‘not to go to bed that night’. At around two o’clock in the morning, he got in his car and drove to the Brandenburg Gate crossing. He was held back by a VoPo; “*Die Grenze is geschlossen!*”, the man said, motioning him back and Kellet-Long returned to his office cum apartment to telex his agency, beginning;

>> The East-West Berlin Border was closed earlier today...



Photo: Nikita Khrushchev [1894-1971], political commissar during the Russian Civil War, veteran from Stalingrad and survivor at the Stalin court. Soviet Primer 1953-1964.

IN THE SOVIET UNION, Primer Nikita Khrushchev, the 67 year old farmers son who had survived Stalin’s purges and fought his way to the top of the communist party to become the successor of the great wartime leader, had his own problems. Having denounced his predecessor in 1956 and abandoned his theory of a world revolution, arguing that bettering the conditions for the Russian people required a peaceful co-existence with the capitalist West, Khrushchev knew he had to deliver on the question of Berlin.

A few months ahead, the 22. Communist Party Congress would convene, and he was well aware that he might face massive criticism for his course. He had himself used previous party congresses to get rid of troublesome enemies and had no illusions of what fate would become him, if he failed.



Photo: John F. Kennedy [1917-1963], World War Two hero from US Navy, Pacific theater. United States President 1960-63. Assassinated November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.

IN THE UNITED STATES, a new President had taken office just eight months before. Almost immediately, a problem inherited from Eisenhower became a first embarrassment for the green President in his future dealings with Khrushchev. He was bamboozled into authorizing the fatal invasion of Cuba in the Bay-of-pigs episode and later that same year he was thoroughly mauled at his first one-on-one with the experienced and ruthless Soviet Primer as they – on Khrushchev’s initiative - met at the Vienna Summit in June to discuss issues. Mollified by the Soviet approach, Kennedy had allegedly felt “that if he could just sit down with Khrushchev” the two leaders could work out their interstate conflicts and was taken aback by his opponents demeanor. Khrushchev, on his part, was more interested in firmly establishing the Soviet superiority over Berlin - and he found Kennedy ‘weak’!⁸

**“Berlin is the testicle of the West.
When I want the West to scream,
I squeeze on Berlin”**



Photo: Ulbricht, a rigid and humorless man, had played a leading role in the creation of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) during the Weimar years; had spent part of the Nazi years in exile in Russia and later was instrumental in the establishment of the German Democratic Republic, the GDR. He knew the political game well.

IN BERLIN, Walter Ulbricht, successfully taking both sides by surprise with the erection of the Wall, had managed to stem the stream of East German citizens fleeing to the West. Berlin, from being one of the easiest places in Germany to cross the border it now became the hardest.

His right-hand man, friend and later successor, Erich Honecker, at that time Party Security Secretary, had been the number one organizer behind the Wall. Under Ulbricht’s overall supervision, he had managed clandestinely to purchase and stockpile vast amounts of building materials, including barbed wire, concrete pillars, timber, and mesh wire so that everything was in place in secret depots outside Berlin for that fateful Sunday. He also commanded the more than 28.000 ‘Volkspolizei’, Factory Militia and State Security officers that partook in the operation.

Ironically, Honecker, who served time in prison under Nazi rule, was, as he took over from Ulbricht, initially prone to make changes in the rigid, East German system. However, as the period of Perestroika and Glasnost began in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, Honecker remained a hard-line, old school communist.



Photo: Erich and Margot Honecker in better days.

After the fall of the Wall, Honecker sought refuge in the Soviet Union, but after its collapse, he was extradited to the reunited Germany, where he stood trial for crimes committed during his time in office, i.e. the infamous standing order to border guards to open fire on ‘Republikflüchtlinge’, where he allegedly stated;

“Comrades who have successfully used their firearms [are] to be praised”

He was sentenced to prison, but released in 1993 due to his terminal cancer. After that he moved to Chile where his wife Margot lived with their daughter Sonja. He died the year after, and Margot in 2016.



Photo: Lucius D. Clay, the unorthodox general who fell in love with Berlin and who often, to Kennedy's distress, played the game as he found best.

WITH THE WALL IN PLACE, Ulbricht and Honecker now started tightening the screws, bit by bit challenging western sovereignty rights that were agreed in Potsdam. They would, however, find a worthy opponent in Lucius D. Clay, four-star General and the hero of the 1948-49 airlift that saved West Berlin from starvation; a straightforward, active and outspoken man whom Kennedy had pulled out of retirement to be his special representative in Berlin.

In October 1961, the hitherto unimpeded access to East Berlin by Allied personnel was put to the test as one American diplomat, Alan Lightner, who, in the company of his wife, attempted to drive into the eastern part of the city to visit the Opera. The border guard, contrary to the East-West agreement, demanded to examine Lightner's papers, although he was driving a car with official plates. Lightner refused, and, having consulted General Clay, returned with an armed escort, making the eastern guards stand down, and drew into East Berlin under the protection of western bayonets. Escalation followed, ending in a standoff, with American and Russian tanks standing barrel to barrel at the checkpoint.



Photo: Checkpoint Charlie standoff. American tanks facing Russian tanks in Friedrichstrasse for sixteen nerve-wrecking hours on October 27-28

After some sixteen hours of suspense where the world held its breath as World War Three might actually have been set in motion by a stray shot, the tanks on either side gradually withdrew. Neither Khrushchev nor Kennedy had any interest in risking a battle over Berlin and in return for Kennedy's assurance that the west had no plans of demolishing the Wall, the Soviet leader tacitly recognized that allied officials and military personnel would continue to have unimpeded access to East Berlin.

>> Some hotheads in the Kennedy administration demanded that the Western Allies tear down the Wall. Although Kennedy allegedly - briefly - pondered the suggestion, he realized it was impractical. "We could have

sent tanks over and knocked the Wall down,” he mused. “What then? They build another one back a hundred yards? We knock that down, then we go to war?”

“It’s not a very nice solution,
but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war.”

What started out that Sunday morning in August 1961 as a primitive barbed wire fence not too difficult to negotiate soon transformed into a real ‘Wall’; a steel and concrete contraption, stretching the entire circumference around West Berlin. Over the span of three decades, the Wall spawned ever new generations until the barrier consisted of two concrete walls, standing more than three meters tall, between which was a ‘death strip’, in some places up to 150 meters wide. This barren wasteland contained hundreds of watchtowers; rows of anti-vehicle trenches and ‘Czech hedgehogs’; mines; guard dog runs; floodlights and trip-wire-automated guns.

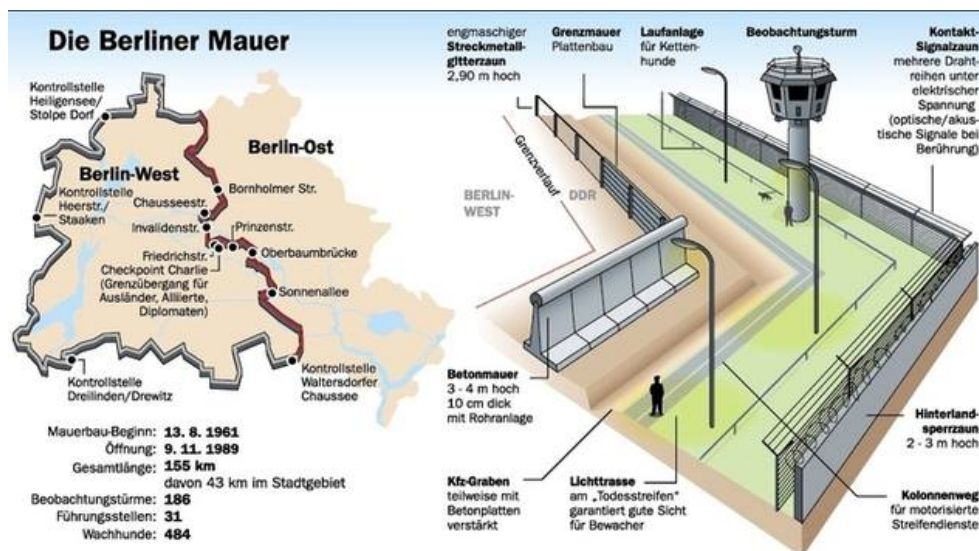


Illustration: The Wall and Death Strip as it eventually looked in its last ‘generation’. Not an easy terrain to negotiate on foot as many Berliners were to acknowledge.

Reportedly, at least 138 people⁹ were shot dead; died in escape-related accidents or even committed suicide after failed attempts to negotiate the Wall, the first victim being **Ida Siekmann**, who died on August 22, 1961, one day before her 59’ birthday. Attempting to leap into West Berlin from her fourth-floor apartment she was fatally injured and died on the way to hospital. She would be followed shortly by **Günter Litfin**, a 24 year old tailor who had the ill fortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was a ‘Grenzgänger’, working in West Berlin but living in the East. He had acquired an apartment in the American sector a few days before, but on the fateful night of August 13, he was back in the East to pick up some belongings and thus caught behind the wire. On August 24 he tried to escape by swimming the ‘Schiffartskanal’, but was shot dead in the water by officers of the Transportation Police.



Photo: For many years the Günther Lifin Memorial stood at the landing of the Sandkrug Brücke in Moabit. In 2018 I found it at the bank of the Humboldthafen (Alexanderufer), close to where the incident took place.

MANY MORE WERE TO FALL PREY to the Wall, perhaps most spectacular and heartbreaking eighteen year old **Peter Fechter**, a bricklayer's apprentice, who was shot near Checkpoint Charlie in August 1962 while trying to climb the Wall. The incident was observed by many on the western side, crying out in anger against the VoPo's as Fechter, still on the 'wrong' side of the Wall, bled to death, calling for help.

The last recorded victim was thirty-three year old **Winfried Freudenberg** who succumbed on March 8, 1989, just eight months before the Wall came down, when the hot air balloon he was employing for his attempt to cross into freedom crashed into power lines.

On the positive side, more than 5,000 people escaped by going over and under the Wall, the first and most famous being East German border guard **Conrad Schumann**¹⁰, who was immortalized in one of the Cold War's most iconic photos as he, at the tender age of nineteen and just two days after East Germany sealed the border, leapt over a roll of barbed wire in Bernauer Strasse, relinquishing his submachine gun in the process.

“Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect. But we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in - to prevent them from leaving us.”

Nonetheless, the Wall was to stand for almost thirty years¹¹. While the Wall was quickly dubbed 'Schandemauer' [Wall of Shame] in the west, in East German parlance, the barrier was erected as an 'Antifascist Bulwark' to keep Western fascists, spies and ideas out, or as Walther Ulbricht put it, *“We have sealed the cracks in the fabric of our house and closed the holes through which the worst enemies of the German people could creep.”*

In reality, a desperate action by the powers that be had managed to stem a brain-drain that was seriously threatening East German economy and coherence of society, but at the expense of the last vestiges of freedom for their people. In the end, that approach would be their downfall.



Photo: US President Ronald Reagan in 1987 with his famous call to Soviet Premier Michail Gorbachev; 'Open this Gate. Tear down this Wall!' The Brandenburg Gate serves as a dramatic backdrop.

OVER THE YEARS, American presidents visited the Wall and made impressive, strongly worded but somewhat impotent speeches. Most notably, of course, was Kennedy's visit at (one of) the Cold War's pivotal years as he, from the Schöneberg Rathaus, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crises, made his 1963 commitment to the United States pledge of preserving of West Berlin's freedom at all costs, culminating in his, somewhat awkward statement; "*Ich bin ein Berliner!*"¹² which produced a roar of applause from the 450.000 strong audience and today stand as the epitome of defiance, but perhaps more effective was Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech where he uttered the prophetic words, aimed directly at the Soviet Primer, "*Mr. Gorbachev; tear down this wall!*"

Two years later the Wall vanished almost as quickly and unexpectedly as it had materialized.

Endgame

During the late 1980ties, economies in most of the Eastern Block had been in a downward spiral and public outcry for more liberties; freedom of speech and freedom of travel, was rising. The creation of the first non-government trade union 'Solidarity' in Poland in 1980 bolstered the confidence of the common citizen that change within the communist system was an option and major strikes in 1988 and 89 nourished a growing discontent all over the Soviet vassal-states. In the end, it would spawn a series of radical political changes in the Eastern Bloc, ultimately leading to collapse of the communist world order.

The first tangible chink in the Iron Curtain became apparent in May 1989, as Hungary began dismantling its 240-kilometre long border fence with Austria. This contributed to the destabilization of East Germany as thousands of their citizens illegally crossed over to the West through the Hungarian-Austrian border. Eventually, in September, DDR felt compelled to close its borders to Hungary. By that time more than 30,000 had escaped to the West. Subsequently, thousands of East Germans now occupied West

German diplomatic facilities in Central and Eastern European capitals, camping outside the embassies while they waited for political reforms in their homeland.



Photo: The western side of the Wall became littered with graffiti, some of it quite artistic. Here the Wall opens and people are flowing through – at the time of creation still but an impossible dream.

Simultaneously, an increasing number of East Germans participated in the so-called ‘Monday demonstrations’ in Leipzig, eventually attracting up to 8,000 demonstrators. Starting on September 4, 1989, spearheaded by pastor Christian Führer of the Nicolaikirche, hundreds of parishioners who had attended the service and listened to the prayers for peace and freedom, congregated in a peaceful demonstration, demanding freedom of travel and the right to elect a democratic government.

“Wir sind das Volk”

As the news of the demonstrations reached the public, through word-of-mouth and through western media, demonstrations became a regular Monday event and spread to other East German cities.

A culmination came on October 9, one month prior to the actual fall of the Wall, as some 70.000 people gathered in Leipzig, shouting “We are the people” to emphasize to their leaders that their power and authority rested on the will of the citizens.



Photo: Leipzig became a hotspot for peaceful demonstrations where citizens in their thousands demanded freedom and a fair government.

“He who is too late, is punished by life”

IN THE HITHERTO GERONTOCRATIC Soviet Union, a younger man had taken the seat of General Secretary in 1985 and the vast country that had been under the yoke of communism since the 1917 revolution now faced a new reality. Fifty-four year old Mikhail Gorbachev, trying to rejuvenate the communist system, initiated his policies of ‘Glasnost’ [openness] and ‘Perestroika’ [restructuring] that would change the state and eventually topple the rule of communism in Russia and throughout East Europe.

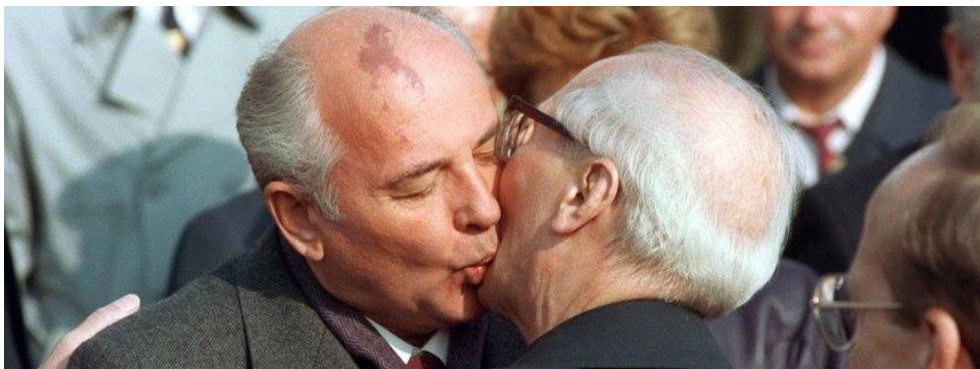


Photo: DDR 40: The 'farewell-to-tanks' kiss. Gorbachev and Honecker exchange the ritual socialist brother kiss

On October 7, 1989, the German Democratic Republic celebrated its 40th Anniversary with pomp and circumstance and with participation by all and sundry from the like-minded nations behind the Curtain. Even the new Soviet General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev was there and gave East German leader Erich Honecker the socialist fraternal kisses – which he later

may have interpreted as the kiss of Judas. During his visit Gorbachev urged the East German leadership to accept reform, famously quoted to have told Honecker; *“He who is too late, is punished by life”* and thus crushed any hope for Soviet military intervention to support the state. Nonetheless, Honecker stood his ground, vowing that all problems would be solved ‘in a socialist manner’.¹³

Just eleven days later, Erich Honecker, seriously ill from cancer, was forced by the Politburo to step down as Head of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik in favor of his deputy, Egon Krenz, and now it finally dawned on the authorities that something had to be done – and quickly. Travel restrictions had – at least to some extent - to be lifted. A new set of travel rules were drafted shortly after, enabling citizens of the DDR easier access to travel, but still requiring a lengthy visa application process.

“Nach meiner Kenntnis ... ist das sofort, unverzüglich”



Photo: “Nach meiner Kenntnis ...” Günther Schabowski at the fateful press conference that should have been a trivial event, but – in the blink of an eye – changed the world. Credit: DW

The plan was that it would be made public on November 10, with all the conditions clearly stated, but an incomplete draft was handed to politburo member Günther Schabowski on the evening of November 9, minutes before he was to hold a press conference. At the end of yet another uninspiring and predictable press conference, Schabowski thus arose attention as he prematurely announced the planned lifting of the travel restrictions.

One of the journalists, a Hamburg-based reporter, asked when the new set of rules would go into effect, and Schabowski, lacking proper information, paused a few moments and then replied; “As far as I know — effective immediately, without delay.”

The world would never be the same...



Photo: One of the most famous photos from that night; the Bornholmerstrasse crossing at Bösebrücke shortly after the gate was opened. Credit: Tagesspiegel

The message that border crossings had opened was broadcast live on national TV and quickly spurred thousands of East Berliners to the nearest crossing. At the Bornholmer Strasse checkpoint, locally known as the ‘Bösebrücke’¹⁴, the officer on duty, Lieutenant Colonel Harald Jäger, had watched TV too. Outside his office, a mob grew in size and frustration, shouting; “*Tor auf, Tor auf!*” [Open the Gate!].

Desperately seeking instructions from his superiors – was he to shoot or not? - but receiving only his standing orders, the overwhelmed Jäger eventually, at 11:30 p.m. that evening in November, opened the border crossing at his own behest. As the news channels covered the torrent of people swarming over the bridge, the other Berlin checkpoints soon followed.¹⁵

The premature words uttered by a bewildered Schabowski and Jäger’s consequent acting upon them thus toppled the Berlin Wall and in effect heralded the end of the Cold War.

Aftermath

- ▶ John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963, aged 46, and would not see the fall of the Wall.
- ▶ Nikita Khrushchev was deposed in 1964 and died in September 1971 at the age of 77 while the Soviet Union was still strong.
- ▶ Walther Ulbricht clung to his chair until 1971, where he reluctantly – under pressure from the Soviet Primer at the time, Leonid Brezhnev – was replaced by Honecker. Ulbricht suffered a stroke in the summer of 1973 and died two weeks later, eighty years old.
- ▶ General Lucius D. Clay on return to the United States withdrew into retirement once again and died peacefully on April 16, 1978, in his home in Massachusetts, barely making eighty.

- ▶ Erich Honecker died in 1994, aged 81, in his exile in the La Reina district of Santiago, Chile.
- ▶ Günter Schabowski served prison time for his collusion with the East German regime, but, as a post-wall strong critic of the DDR, he was pardoned after only eight months. He worked as a journalist, later editor of a small paper and in his senior years lived in Berlin with his Russian-born wife. Schabowski died on November 1st, 2015 at the age of 86.
- ▶ Colonel Harald Jäger was not reprimanded. Like other officers of the Nationale Volksarmee he soon found himself unemployed, taking on various menial jobs. In the late 1990ties he had been able to save up enough money to open a newspaper shop in Berlin with his wife. He has since written a book about his experience called 'The Man Who Opened the Berlin Wall'. 78 years of age, he lives in a Berlin suburb today.
- ▶ Although several holes were punched in the Wall in the days and weeks to follow November 9 and new passages created, actual demolition did not start in earnest until 1990, and was not completed before 1992. Today, only remnants have been left as 'landmarks' of an era most Berliners would like to put behind them and only a few remember with positive feelings. However, almost 30 years later, a reunified Germany still feels the effects of the Berlin Wall and the terms 'Ossie' and 'Wessie' are randomly used to denote ones allegiance.

Trivia

November 9 is, as most will know, 'ein Schicksalstag'¹⁶; a fateful day in German history where momentous events have played out:

1918: Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated after the defeat in WW1.

1923: Hitler's 'Bierhalle Putsch' was crushed in the streets of Munich.

1933: The infamous 'Kristallnacht'; night of broken glass, played out.

1989: Fall of the Wall.

November 9 was considered for the date for German Unity Day, but due to the dark points in its history, the date was considered inappropriate as a national holiday. Thus, the date of the formal reunification of Germany, 3 October 1990, was chosen as the date for this German national holiday.

February 5, 2018, an equal number of days had passed since the fall of the Wall as the number it stood: 10315 days.

The evening of November 9th and the time that followed is aptly and humorously described in the motion picture '**Goodbye Lenin**'. Another great motion picture is '**The Lives of Others**'; a somewhat grave and noir portraying of a surveillance society we thought fell with the Wall, but, perhaps, one we should be alert of today. Both films are excellent!

Further reading:

Kempke, Frederick; **'Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth'** © 2011

Gelb, Norman: **'The Berlin Wall'**, © 1986.

Berlin Story Verlag (Book & DVD); **'The Berlin Wall 1961 – 1989'**, © 2013

Pegasus DVD; **'The Berlin Wall – Escape to freedom'** © 2008

Notes:

¹ The end of hostilities in Europe that is. WW2 did not end until after the surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945.

² The outcome at the Potsdam Agreement was tainted by the lack of experience of the western leaders; Harry Truman had taken over the presidency of the United States only a few weeks earlier after the death of President Roosevelt on April 12, who had kept him in the dark in relation to international affairs, and Clement Attlee had become Prime Minister of England ten days into the conference when Winston Churchill lost the election on July 27. The two newcomers were no match for sly 'Uncle Joe', who, by and large, got things his way.

³ The infamous Morgenthau Plan that aimed to 'punish' Germany by de-industrializing was swiftly abandoned as the western victors realized it would be counterproductive in the long run. From the currency reform in 1948 onwards, massive support to German industry was the name of the game.

⁴ As Ulbricht spoke, plans for the barrier were already fixed; the acquisition of concrete poles and barbed wire were in full swing and the date had almost certainly been set. It would have to be a Sunday where traffic was limited; people would sleep late and all the 'Grenzgänger', some 55.000 of them, could be caught on the east side of the fence. All that was now needed was Khrushchev's blessing of the project.

⁵ Of 81 streets linking East with West, 67 were sealed off on August 13 and the remaining 14 furnished with checkpoints.

⁶ VoPo: Nickname for Volkspolizei, the national police force in the German Democratic Republic.

⁷ In all fairness, reunification of Berlin (and Germany) was also Honecker's goal, but under his own aegis of course.

⁸ Kennedy would not really get on par with Khrushchev on the world stage until the Cuban Missile Crisis a year later 16-28.11.1962, when it was the Soviet Primers turn to back-pedal and lose face. Two years later, almost on date, he was removed from office.

⁹ This figure is contested by some researchers, putting the number considerably higher.

¹⁰ Schumann gained freedom but struggled with his conscience and feeling of guilt ever after, suffering from repeated depressions. On June 20, 1998, he committed suicide, hanging himself in his home near the town of Kipfenberg in Upper Bavaria.

¹¹ It has been argued by some historians that the Berlin Wall may have been exactly what the world needed at the time it was built. It offered a sort of stability at a time when the Cold War was dangerously close to erupting into a very warm conflict. Kennedy himself is quoted to have said that the Wall wasn't pretty – but that it was 'a hell of a lot better than a (nuclear) war'. That might have been the perspective from the upper echelons, but for thousand of Berlin families it meant separation for almost three decades; separation from family, friends and loved ones; from the work they had in the West; from the freedom of movement they had enjoyed thus far.

¹² It has evolved into an urban legend that Kennedy made an ass of himself by including the indefinite article 'ein', thus changing the meaning to a statement of being a doughnut. As

Kennedy was speaking in a figurative sense (after all he was, in fact, not a Berliner), the use of the article is entirely correct. Furthermore, the Berlinerish word for a doughnut is not 'Berliner', but 'Pfannkuchen'.

¹³ Protests by youths outside the Palace of the Republic on the night of the anniversary were crushed by army units while plainclothes secret police operatives infiltrated the crowd. Many protestors were beaten up and there were 500 arrests.

¹⁴ Even though 'Böse' means 'bad' or 'evil' in German, this is not a reference to the border crossing or the Wall. The bridge is named after Frederick Wilhelm Böse, a German communist and resistance fighter, executed by the Nazis in 1944.

¹⁵ This has been contested by at least one East German officer, colonel Heinz Schäfer, who in 2009 claimed that he had opened his crossing at Waltersdorf in the south of the city a few hours earlier.

¹⁶ Elsewhere in the world; Neville Chamberlain, former British PM passed away on November 9, 1940. Charles de Gaulle, former French President died on the same date in 1970, and Markus Wolf, former Head of DDR Security Services, ironically, expired on November 9, 2006.