

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS THE BERLIN WALL?



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Edited by Anna Kaminsky
on behalf of
Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist
Dictatorship in Eastern Germany

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Where in the World is the Berlin Wall?

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www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de

buero@bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de

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www.BerlinStory.de, E-Mail: Service@BerlinStory.de

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Anna Kaminsky

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North America

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Mars

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PREFACE

From the 13th August 1961, the Wall – built by the communist rulers in East Berlin – not only divided the German capital into East and West. The Wall was also a symbol of the inhuman regime behind the “Iron Curtain” and of the divided world – the Soviet-ruled communist dictatorship in the East block and the democratic states in the western hemisphere.

In the summer of 1989, the communist states were already in a state of ferment and their people had already begun to voice their protests with ever-growing courage. Neither those in the East, nor those in the West could have imagined the Wall would fall anytime soon, nor could they have imagined that the communist dictatorship would be vanquished and the Cold War would come to an end. Whilst the GDR government continued to talk at great length about the permanency of the Berlin Wall, trade union federation “Solidarity” celebrated the first legislative elections in Poland. The GDR government continued to open fire on citizens who wanted to choose their own path in life and fled to the West. At the same time, Hungary began to open the “Iron Curtain”. As late as 5th February 1989, East German border troops shot 20-year-old Chris Gueffroy as he attempted to get over the Wall and into the West. Hundreds of people were shot at the Berlin Wall and Inner-German border as they tried to flee East Germany. The inhumane border regime and the Wall destroyed the lives of countless people who lost friends, family or their homes and were often separated from each other for decades.

The Peaceful Revolutions in almost all countries in the former East Block and the Fall of the Berlin Wall make up some of the most significant events in history. With these revolutions, the people of the GDR and Central and Eastern Europe vanquished the communist dictatorships and brought about the beginning of the end of German and European division. As a result of the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Empire collapsed within a few months. As hundreds of thousands of people danced and celebrated on top of the Berlin Wall, the Wall also became a symbol for free will and the triumphant struggle against oppression and dictatorship.

Almost all traces the Wall left on the cityscape disappeared within a few years. After experiencing freedom, democracy and unity, it seemed there was a strong desire to remove any traces left by this awful past. It was not until 15 years after the Fall of the Wall, when there was almost nothing left to see of the monument that once divided the city, that the Berlin Senate began to work on a memorial concept to remember the Berlin Wall and the division of the city. What was left of the Wall should be preserved and the relationship between the remains told as part of the memorial concept.

Whilst people in Berlin began to dispose of the Wall as quickly as possible, interest in the Wall from around the world was massive. Countless sections of the Wall, which had once surrounded and walled in West Berlin (each weighing tonnes), found new homes all around the world. Today, they can be found on every continent, where they stand as historical memorials, victory trophies, symbols of freedom or as works of art and commemorate overcoming German division and the struggle for freedom and democracy. In recent years, new installations have been

added. Existing Wall monuments have been used to draw attention to recent political developments or to strengthen protests by using symbolic Wall segments. This concerned protests against Donald Trump's plan to build a Wall on the border with Mexico to stop illegal immigration to the USA, as well as the use of parts of the Wall as a reference point for demands for democracy and freedom in Belarus.

For this volume, some 170 sites around the world were located where Wall sections can be found today. More than 280 complete Wall segments are presented, as well as about 40 smaller parts that belonged to the so-called "Hinterlandmauer" that marked the border strip on the West and East Berlin sides, respectively. Some of the Wall parts included in the 2nd edition of this book cannot be found today. Perhaps they will reappear in a few years with a new message.

The owners of the pieces of Wall have been asked to tell the story behind "their" pieces of Wall. Some of the stories that have been uncovered are exciting and peculiar, some are tragic. They reflect the multifaceted and complex ways in which the Berlin Wall is remembered. There are stories of artists all over the world who wanted to create a freedom monument out of Wall remains, of school children who painted their ideas of a better world on the stone surfaces, of politicians whose political fate was decisively shaped by the Wall. There are also private individuals whose fate was connected in one way or another with divided Germany, such as Tom Kaulitz, who gave Heidi Klum a piece of the Wall as a wedding present.

Art museums and collectors display the sections of Wall at their exhibitions due to their bright graffiti. They are often put on display in historical museums and stand as

representatives of the confrontation between East and West and the victory for freedom and democracy against oppression and dictatorship. One section of the Wall was blessed by the Pope in the Portuguese city of Fátima and today, pilgrims from all over the world flock to it. There is also a section of the Wall in the gardens of Vatican City and thanks to NASA, the Wall has even left its mark on Mars. The Wall has been the starting point for many moving, artistic and sometimes funny and peculiar stories and works of art.

The remains of the Berlin Wall have thus been distributed across the globe as testimonies to the Cold War, to the confrontation between democratic and dictatorial states, as trophies or even as symbolic warnings of new borders or human rights violations. Regardless of the respective concrete interpretation of the Wall segments on site they show one thing above all clearly: the memory of German division and the joy over the fall of the Wall as a symbol for the collapse of the totalitarian communist systems. These symbols are present all over the world to this day and are repeatedly provided with new messages and a new meaning.

We would like to sincerely thank all those who have shown support or contributed to this book, be it by supplying photos, researching or anything else. Without your willingness to share your stories and experiences, photos and memories as well as going to the most remote places in search of traces, we would not have been able to show and tell many of the stories included in this book. Many thanks!

Berlin, March 2021
Anna Kaminsky

FROM THE BUILDING OF THE BERLIN WALL TO THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DIVISION

Maria Nooke

On 13th August 1961 at 1:00am, the lights went out at the Brandenburg Gate and police and members of the East German army moved towards the sector border. Ten minutes later, the GDR announced that measures were being taken which would help to “guard and control”.¹

Within a few hours, the GDR government had closed the border to West Berlin with barbed wire. An impermeable border fortification was built over the next days and weeks – the Berlin Wall. Pictures of this formidable border installation were sent around the world. Confused faces and a Wall of armed soldiers at the Brandenburg Gate have become engraved in the collective memory. On November 9, 1989, the Brandenburg Gate was once again the focus of worldwide interest: The Wall had fallen. There were images of people dancing with joy on the concrete Wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate.

The euphoria felt when the division came to an end was not only felt by Berliners, not only by Germans in the East and the West, but by people all over the world.

The Wall had divided Berlin for over 28 years. The beginning and end of the Berlin Wall marked significant landmarks in world history, which history books would later refer to as the “Cold War”. The Berlin Wall was a physical

construction which showed the inhumanity of the GDR government. A government that became known for shooting its own citizens if they tried to escape. When the Wall fell on 9th November 1989, it became a symbol for the peaceful victory over German division. The end of the GDR was sealed and the reunification of Germany became possible.²



The Brandenburg Gate after the Fall of the Wall

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GERMANY UNDER OCCUPATION AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR³

The reasons leading to the building of the Berlin Wall go back to the Second World War, which had been instigated and lost by Germany. When it became clear that Hitler was going to lose the War, the Allies began to negotiate plans to split Germany into new territories once Hitler had been

defeated. Germany was to be divided into three, later four, zones of occupation and a special status was arranged for Berlin, the capital city. The city was also to be divided into four sectors with an Allied Kommandatura.

Former borders were used to help decide where the sector borders should lie. Hitler's system of power was to be destroyed once and for all by dividing the country. At the Yalta conference in February 1945, it was decided that an Allied Control Council would be established and should govern Germany. The Allies assumed that there would be no division of power amongst the individual zones, but that they would be governed together.

On 2nd August 1945, the Potsdam Agreement by the Allies aimed to reconstruct Germany, both socially and politically. This meant democratisation of the political system, demilitarisation and denazification, radical changes to the economy and decentralisation in politics, administration and the economy. However, it became clear during the Potsdam Conference that the powers, once united, would find it difficult to agree how to govern Germany and that such an agreement was no longer possible.

The effects of conflicting interests became clear in the subsequent period, especially when looking at the varying political and economical systems put in place. In the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ), social economical conditions changed and became the basis for a people's democracy according to the Soviet model.

A communist one-party dictatorship was quickly put in place and the economy became a planned economy through communisation of property.

In the western occupation zones, in contrast, economical and political structures were put in place which reflected traditional western democracy and a private system of

ownership took shape. The relationship between the Allies deteriorated due to these conflicting positions. In March 1948 the Soviets left the Allied Control Council and plans for the Four Powers to govern Germany together failed. The two sides of Germany developed into increasingly independent states.

After the War, the German people reacted to the situation in occupied Germany in their own way, and millions of people flocked over the demarcation line. They were in search of home, family members or simply looking for ways and means to survive. Migration from the Soviet occupied zone to the western zones was, from the beginning, greater than that from the western zones to the East. The majority of the refugees were displaced from the former eastern territories of Germany which once belonged to Poland. The continued economical and political sovietisation in the East was also a reason for the increasing numbers of people fleeing west. The final break between the Allies was caused by introducing a new currency in the western zones.⁴ The Deutsche Mark was introduced in the Western occupation zones on June 20th, 1948 in place of the Reichsmark and declared the official means of payment. This was done in order to initiate a stable financial and economic policy in the face of the difficult supply situation and the flourishing black market, and thus also to strengthen economic development in the Western European context. A reaction from the Soviet zone was inevitable – otherwise the SBZ economy would have crashed – the old currency flowed where it was still worth something, in particular to East Berlin. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) retaliated by introducing the East Mark within its zone on 24th June. The SMAD requested the Mayor of Berlin to make this currency compulsory for the western sectors in Berlin – this was deemed to be inoperative and the Deutsche Mark became

the official currency for West Berlin. In Berlin, there were now two currencies in circulation.⁵

At the same time the monetary reform was introduced, the Soviets began the Berlin Blockade. All access points to West Berlin were blocked. The existence of the western side of the city was under threat. Essential supply channels were cut off from one day to the next. There were no means of delivering coal, electricity or food. By depriving West Berlin of such essentials, the Soviets hoped to put the people under pressure and remove Berlin from the power of the western Allies. However, the western Allies did not give up and instead they organised an airlift to provide West Berlin with essential supplies. Planes from the American and English airforces took off and landed every minute, loaded with goods to prevent West Berlin from starvation. This resulted in a change in the relationship between the citizens of West Berlin and the western Allies: they could trust the Allies and the occupiers became friends. The airlift had a lasting effect which was seen again immediately after the Fall of the Wall when the city once again found itself in an extreme situation.

RESTRICTIONS BETWEEN ZONES AND SECURING THE DEMARCATION LINE

The foundation of the two German states in 1949 and the escalation of the Cold War had a grave influence on the safeguarding of a demarcation line between the occupation zones in Berlin.⁶

At first, the borders between the occupation zones and the sectors within Berlin only served as governing borders. However, in the course of the political developments, they became much more influential and eventually were real customs and economical borders.

Initially, it was possible to cross the Inner-German demarcation line without major problems, but aside from the official crossing points it was already illegal. As early as 1946, the German Border Police was founded in the SBZ on the basis of a Control Council directive from the SMAD, which was subordinate to Soviet agencies. At the same time, the border between the Soviet and western Zones was closed for three months to curb the huge numbers of people and goods leaving the East. From 1948, so-called border violators were increasingly searched for by the Soviet side. They were trying to curb smuggling and the black market, but also to chase down saboteurs and spies.

From 1950, the border police were given the task of surveying the crossing points. In order to better govern the flow of people moving between the borders, the Soviets introduced border passes in 1946. They were valid for 30 days and were issued for urgent family or business trips. During the Berlin Blockade, the Soviets made it compulsory to also be issued with a temporary residence permit alongside the border pass. By doing this, the aim was to reduce the flow of people travelling between the zones. Crossing the borders illegally was, however, still possible. Many still chose the less dangerous route through Berlin as Berlin was still quite accessible due to its special status.

On 1st April 1948, on orders from the Soviet zone, a police reform was put in place: a “ring around Berlin” was created along a path of 300 kilometres surrounding the entire city (including West Berlin) and controls were carried out. This made it possible to survey the open border as well as was possible at a time when the migration of people from the Soviet zone of occupation was becoming an ever increasing problem.

When the GDR was formed in October 1949, 1.9 million people had already left for the West.

Conflicting interests from the Soviets on one side, and those from the USA, Great Britain and France on the other prevented a peace treaty from being signed. In 1952, the Soviet Union made a step towards solving the problems caused by conflicting political interests and agendas, and the first Stalin Note was sent. Joseph Stalin, the Soviet head of government, offered reunification in a neutralised all-Germany, with free elections to be held under Allied control. By doing this, he wanted to prevent Germany from becoming part of the Western Defence Alliance. The western Allies rejected his offer as they feared it to be a bluff and saw it instead as an attempt to spread the Soviet influence over Germany.

This rejection of terms, alleged activities of sabotage and the constant migration of people prompted the GDR officials, under Soviet influence, to close the border between the GDR and West Germany in May 1952 and gain control of movement between borders.

The border was now a real Inner-German border. A five-kilometre exclusion zone was set up on the GDR side of the border to secure the 1,378-kilometre-long border – an order from the Soviet occupiers. This area could only be entered or traversed with permission. Meetings and events were prohibited from 10:00pm.

Along the borderline, a ten-metre-wide control strip was ploughed up, and forests in this area were cleared. Behind it, the installation of ramparts, ditches and trip wires with alarms ensued. Ramparts, ditches and alarmed trip wires were installed behind the border. Crossing the ten-metre-long control strip was an arrestable offence. Border police were ordered to shoot those who did not follow their orders. A 500-metre-wide protection strip was closed around the ten-metre stripe in which approximately 110 villages lay. Inhabitants of these villages were subjected to particularly

harsh regulations: being outdoors in the 500 metre area was only permitted during the hours of sunlight and all traffic was forbidden after dark and alterations to land was forbidden without permission. Numerous restaurants and hotels were forced to close down after the protection strip had been constructed. Routes along the Brocken Railway, which linked the Harz mountain range in North Germany, had to be closed as the trains were no longer allowed to travel through western territory.

People living in the restricted area were no longer issued with passes to travel between zones, and people from West Germany were also no longer allowed to travel over the five-kilometre-long strip. To put an end to cries of outrage from the people, a special scheme was put into place which saw the forced resettlement of so-called enemies, criminals and “suspicious” people from the protection strip.

“Operation Vermin” was the name given to the actions that saw 11,000 residents forcibly moved out of the border area in a matter of days. Violence was used in part to move these people from their homes.⁷

Not only did these people lose their communities, but also a great deal of their personal possessions. Around 3,000 people avoided forced resettlement by fleeing to the West.

Closing the border also meant closing many transport links. 32 railroad lines, three freeways, 31 trunk and federal roads, 80 first-order country roads, 60 second-order country roads and thousands of local roads were closed.⁸ In the west, a “zone border area” was thus created, which had a negative impact on the economic situation in the areas near the border and on the reality of life for the inhabitants. The West German government created incentive programmes which aimed to help minimise the effect the precarious situation having on the people. People on the GDR side of

the border were kept quiet with special discounts and benefits. They were treated to pay rises, tax deductions and improved pensions. They were also supplied with better consumer goods.

In Berlin, too, there were similar incisions when the border was closed in 1952: 200 streets were closed. Almost 75 percent of transport links between West Berlin and the surrounding areas were no longer in use. Control strips were dug up on numerous sites around Potsdam and West Berlin. Vast areas of private land (often belonging to the West) fell victim to securing the border.

Compensatory damages to land owners were few and far between and many landowners received absolutely nothing. As well as the measures being taken along the border, telephone lines and electricity supplies between East and West Berlin were cut off. The GDR wanted an independent infrastructure for East Berlin. However, the number of people leaving East Berlin did not decrease.⁹ Most of the escapees continued to try their luck over the border in Berlin, which remained open. Controversial domestic political situations, like those during collective farming and the forced development of Socialism ahead of the people's uprising on 17th June 1953, were reasons for many GDR citizens to leave East Germany.

In 1953, the West German government set up a refugee centre in Marienfelde in West Berlin to help manage the number of people entering. At this refugee centre and other similar centres, refugees had to go through an official procedure. Successful refugees could obtain residency permits and be integrated into West German society.¹⁰

The western powers chose to suspend compulsory inter-zone passes in November 1953 and stopped issuing temporary permits of residence. Therefore, there were no

longer restrictions on travel in the West. In contrast, a law passed by the GDR in 1954 made fleeing the GDR illegal.¹¹

Fleeing the GDR was now punishable with up to three years imprisonment. The laws were tightened further in 1957 when preparations to flee and attempted escapes were also made punishable.¹² Restrictions by the GDR officials on approved travel to the West also followed. Permission to travel to the West depended on one's age and job. Students, for example, were not permitted to travel to West Germany or any western countries.

THE BERLIN ULTIMATUM AND CRISIS

In autumn of 1958, Soviet party and state leader Nikita Khrushchev triggered the Second Berlin Crisis with an ultimatum to the Western Allies.¹³ If the Allies did not comply with these orders within six months, he would carry out his planned measures within the GDR and grant it its own statehood. Khrushchev wanted to use Berlin's vulnerability as leverage for his political goals and to cement recognition of the situation in Europe created by World War II. Furthermore, he wanted to prevent nuclear disarmament and reduce the West German military.

His suggestion to make Berlin a "free city", aimed to get rid of the four-power-status and left the West fearing that the Soviets did actually intend to integrate West Berlin into their zone.

With this solution intending to weaken the West¹⁴, Khrushchev also wanted to close the loophole around Berlin and gain control of the refugee problem. The Soviets were no longer striving for reunification. However, the western Allies were not prepared to give up their rights and rejected his demands. This advance from the Soviets caused more unrest amongst the people and, in turn, led to a renewed

wave of refugees. Many GDR citizens feared that the escape route through Berlin would be lost forever.

The meeting of newly elected American President John F. Kennedy with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna on June 3 and 4, 1961, coincided with this tense situation. Khrushchev pushed for the signing of a peace treaty and threatened once again to enforce this on the GDR if America was not prepared to agree to his demands. A separate peace treaty would also be offered to West Germany. Such a treaty would mean the end of the war and nobody would be forced to surrender. This would concern the entire law of occupation as well as access to Berlin including the airlift. Khrushchev threatened that any violation of GDR ruling would be classified as a declaration of war.

Kennedy, on the other hand, made it clear that Khrushchev's proposal would deprive the United States of its legal rights to be present in Berlin and thus of its ability to fulfil its obligations to the city's two million residents. This would shake the credibility and confidence of the partners in the United States. Therefore, due to his political responsibility, he could not approve this. It was not about Berlin, it was about the whole of western Europe as well as U.S. state security, to which Berlin was of crucial strategical importance. Kennedy wanted to maintain the balance of power in the post-war order as he thought any shift would be detrimental. Both representatives of the major powers left Vienna without reaching agreement. In an address to the nation on July 25th, 1961, Kennedy once again stated the principles that applied to West Berlin and would be defended by the United States. Kennedy once again named the "Three Essentials" directing the U.S. course of action in West Berlin: 1) the right of western Allies to be present in Berlin, 2) the right to free access to the city, 3) securing the livelihood of West Berlin and its citizens. These principles

were publicized worldwide in a large-scale information campaign. Kennedy formulated them specifically for West Berlin and not the whole of the city, as the special status would have implied. This position signalled to the Soviet Union that Kennedy respected its original victors' rights in its sector and accepted border closure in the interest of avoiding military confrontation.¹⁵

THE GDR BEFORE THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

At the start of the summer holidays in 1961, the amount of people fleeing the GDR soared. Many people disguised their escape as a holiday. This was a reaction to the foreign policy as well as the dramatic economic climate and the drastic supply problems that continually escalated.¹⁶

As part of a propaganda offensive, the GDR government depicted the refugee movement as a specific method of alienation from the West. In order to prevent further escapes, the GDR set up "human trafficking committees". Alleged "human traffickers" were sentenced to harsh sentences in staged trials. By doing this, the government wanted to distract attention from the truth that people were leaving the GDR of their own free will. So-called border workers were also targeted. These were people who lived in East Berlin but worked in West Berlin.¹⁷ They were inspected more frequently at the border and some had their passports and ID taken from them so that they were no longer able to go to work in the West. Their number had risen to 56,000 due to the economic disparity between West and East Berlin before the Wall was built.¹⁸

Border workers were paid partly in West German currency and the GDR government used this as propaganda to cause jealousy and resentment amongst the people towards the border workers and also as a means to justify

the harsh state treatment towards them. Any wages paid in West German currency were subject to a compulsory exchange. Many services could be exchanged in the GDR for West German cash. In early August, the border workers were forced to give up their jobs in the West and register as job-seekers in the GDR.

GDR propaganda aimed to denounce West Berlin as a dangerous trouble spot in the East-West conflict. The GDR's campaign accused the FRG government of intensive war preparations, aiming to conquer the GDR and parts of Poland.

The increasing measures taken against refugees and border workers, as well as the fierce propaganda campaigns in the GDR, increased suspicions in the West that it would not just be individuals who were victimised by the GDR government. A televised speech by Khrushchev on 7th August 1961 caused many of those watching to fear that a Wall may be built along the Berlin border. People assumed, however, that the measures would be enforced along the "ring around Berlin". Nobody thought that the city would be cordoned off. That was a massive error of judgement, as would soon be proved.

DECISION TO BUILD THE WALL AND PREPARATIONS TO CLOSE THE BORDER

According to statements by Jan Šejna, the Czechoslovakian deputy defence minister who defected to the West in 1968, Walter Ulbricht, the chairman of the GDR's Council of State and head of the SED party, had already put forward the idea of building a barbed wire barrier through Berlin at a Warsaw Pact meeting on March 28th and 29th, 1961.¹⁹ Against this background, Ulbricht's statement at the press conference on June 15th, 1961, that no one had any intention of building a

Wall becomes understandable; the events of August 13th were to finally expose it as a lie. The fact that large quantities of construction materials such as fence posts and barbed wire were already being stored in Berlin in order to implement such barrier measures also points to longer-term planning. The decision to close the border was finally made in July and early August 1961.²⁰

After the Vienna summit and the dramatic supply crisis in the GDR, which in turn lead to increasing levels of people fleeing the GDR, Ulbricht decided upon a propaganda offensive. In it he demanded the solution of the Berlin question and the conclusion of a peace treaty. At the same time, Ulbricht urged the Soviets to close the borders immediately. Khrushchev made his decision (probably on 20th July), and insights into the intelligence agencies regarding the military strength of the western powers, American politics and planned defensive measures.²¹ The Warsaw Pact states would also be involved in the decision. From August 3rd to 5th, 1961, a conference of their party leaders was held in Moscow to discuss the problems associated with the proposal of a peace treaty and that of the open border with West Berlin. Walter Ulbricht was criticised by his counterparts for slow economic growth and high consumer spending in the GDR. Ulbricht underlined his own position that the border to West Berlin was to be held responsible and demanded it to be closed with immediate effect. However, the Warsaw Pact states feared incalculable economic sanctions in the event of a border closure, which would not only affect the GDR.

There were only two possible solutions to the problem: complete control over all access points to the West, including air corridors, or to build a wall. Since complete control of the airways was not feasible, Ulbricht's insistence on the immediate closure of the border and the position on

the problem of the open border, which had meanwhile been adopted by Khrushchev, led to corresponding support for the planned measures.²²

A central argument for the decision was the volatile economical situation in the GDR and the increasing numbers of people leaving for the West. When Ulbricht returned from Moscow, the SED politburo began putting the plans, which had been discussed in Moscow, into action. (Which, in agreement with the Soviet side, were technically already being prepared). On August 10th and 11th, the People's Chamber, the Council of Ministers and the East Berlin Magistrate adopted resolutions on border closure, the wording of which provided by the Sed. Only comrades in the highest political ranks were let in on the plans in order to keep them secret for as long as possible. At the same time, logistical preparations were being made and all the stops were pulled out on the propaganda front to prepare citizens for the radical measures.

It was via this propaganda offensive that Ulbricht invoked fears of military action from the West from which the GDR needed to protect itself. But for the GDR government, this was not actually about protecting GDR citizens, it was about preventing them free access to West Berlin. The aim was to stabilise the GDR.

The action was led by Secretary of the SED, Erich Honecker. He coordinated the complex task of closing the border. An operational group was formed at the Department for National Security to carry out the planned action. Whilst Soviet troops in the GDR and adjacent Eastern Bloc countries had been reinforced between May and July 1961 by several hundred thousands²³, cordoning off the border was to be conducted by the GDR border police, riot police and the company brigades. Entities of the National People's Army had to be on emergency standby to stop potential

attacks from the West. A third security squadron was formed by the Soviet troops at the “ring around Berlin”. The Ministry for State Security (MfS) was responsible for the internal political protection of the Wall’s construction.²⁴ The GDR Ministry of State Security was in charge of securing the building of the Wall domestically. The mission operated under the names “Mission Rose” and “Mission Ring” and took place right across GDR territory.²⁵ The records of intensive supervision of the GDR’s population were to be passed on to the Ministry hourly for the first two days. All mail in cross-border traffic was subjected to control, and telephone traffic to West Germany was completely interrupted. A state of all-encompassing supervision was to be established.

CLOSING THE BORDER AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF BUILDING THE WALL²⁶

On Sunday, August 13, 1961, the systematic sealing of the 160-kilometre-long border around West Berlin began. Members of the People’s and Border Police, as well as members of the Combat Groups of the Working Class were deployed along the border. They had 30 minutes to seal off 81 streets. At 1:30am, the forces also entered numerous train stations and rail traffic between the two halves of the city was permanently blocked. The station at Friedrichstraße was the only exception and remained in service as an interchange station for inter-sector traffic. Passenger trains from the West also stopped at this station.

The streets were sealed off in the following three hours. During this period, pavements were torn up, train track connections were separated, road barriers were erected and barbed wire was lain. When the city began to wake at 6:00am, everything had been closed off. Only 12 road links remained open where people could pass between East and

West and they were strictly regulated. The Brandenburg Gate was cordoned off in the following days as well as further streets. Only eight crossings remained and strict controls were carried out at such crossings.

On 15th August, two days since the border's closure, East Germany's National Defence Council decided that the border should continue to be fortified by the military. In the hours of darkness between 17th and 18th August, work began to replace the barbed wire with concrete blocks. Contrary to Ulbricht's claims two months earlier, construction workers were now standing at the border and sealed off the city once and for all: The Wall became more insurmountable by the day. The Wall became more and more insurmountable with each day that passed.

Citizens in both East and West looked on, bewildered. They faced the Wall, furious and powerless.

Members of the People's Police kept citizens at bay with machine guns under their arms. Those who protested were arrested. An agitated crowd also gathered on the western side. West Berlin police had also been deployed along the border to move people away from the Wall and help prevent the situation from escalating. Everyday life in the city had been turned on its head overnight. Tens of thousands of families were torn apart by the Wall, couples were split, parents kept from their children, friends hips destroyed and neighbourhoods ruined. Countless people lost their jobs, their way of life and their prospects. Indescribable human tragedy went on as the world watched. Some people still managed to escape the East where it was possible. Many broke through the barbed wire or jumped from windows onto safety blankets held out by the West Berlin fire brigade. In September and October, more than 2000 people were evicted from their homes along or near the border.

People at the Inner-German border were also forced to resettle as a result of “Operation Consolidation”.

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Extrablatt

Seit heute früh:

BLOCKADE über Ost-Berlin verhängt!

Meist stärker bewölkt / 20 Grad

WETTER:

**Panzer an allen Grenzen
Stacheldraht um Sowjetsektor
Verbot für alle Grenzgänger
Interzonenverkehr normal**

POLITICAL REACTION

The world held its breath. Would the West tolerate the massive operation at the most sensitive point of the "Iron Curtain"? Indeed, Willy Brandt was publicly criticising the closing of the border and referred to it on 13th August as an "outrageous injustice", but could do little more than to call the protecting powers.²⁷

The break with the Four-Power-Agreement by the Soviet Union was also a blow to Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the FRG. He made sure not to lose sight of the goal to reunify.²⁸

Adenauer, however, came under criticism for his restraint, especially since he assured the Soviet Union that he would not take any steps that might further strain relations between the Federal Republic and the USSR and worsen the international situation. The situation was tense and fears grew that the outbreak of war was imminent. 300,000 citizens of Berlin gathered in front of Rathaus Schöneberg (in the West) on 16th August 1961. They called for serious action to be taken by the western powers and safeguards for West Berlin. The Allies had hardly reacted and anything they had done in reaction was only by means of verbal protest. The people's discontent was evident on the banners: appeals such as "70 hours without action – doesn't the West know what to do?" or "Paper protests don't stop tanks"²⁹ made clear the fears of having been abandoned by the West. Willy Brandt wrote a letter to the American President in which he wrote "Berlin expects more than words, Berlin expects political action". Addressing the East, "all functionaries of the zonal regime, all officers and enlisted men", Brandt appealed in his speech: "Don't be