

On the Front Lines of the Cold War: The Intelligence War in Berlin

Donald P. Steury

"There are only a few places on this earth where misery, hopelessness, and toil in the struggle for one's daily bread and yet, at the same time, joy, hope, and great expectations have intertwined [more] closely than here in Berlin.... It is by no means immodest to claim that world history has been made in this city."

— From Conference Welcoming Statement by Claus Henning Schapper, State Secretary, Germany's Ministry for Internal Affairs

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From 10-12 September 1999, the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) and the Alliierten (Allied) Museum jointly hosted a conference on intelligence activities in Berlin from the end of World War II to the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. The event—the first public conference ever hosted by the CIA on foreign soil—was staged in the former US military SIGINT facility on the Teufelsberg (Devil's Mountain), a Cold War landmark just outside Berlin. The conference marked the culmination of a two-year cooperative effort by CSI and the Alliierten Museum. The Investorengruppe Teufelsberg, which owns the site, provided financial and logistical support.

Warmed by the sun of a Berlin Indian summer, more than 150 Cold War intelligence veterans, historians, journalists and other interested

persons gathered in the shadow of the domed towers of the "T-berg" to relive some of the most critical years of the Cold War. Some were there just to see the Teufelsberg. If any of the visitors were disappointed that it turned out to be just another dingy government building, they concealed it well. In any case, the broad windows of the dining hall offered an unmatched view of Berlin and the surrounding countryside, while the mystery of the place lived on in the still-present security arrangements, the barbed-wire fences, and the silent, empty rooms that bore the marks of 30 years of intelligence activity.

On the dais, some of the most secret aspects of Cold War history were coming to life. Featuring a mix of personal recollections and scholarly presentations, the conference presented a broad view of Cold War intelligence operations in Berlin that ran the gamut from agent operations, to the Berlin tunnel, to US Air Force reconnaissance missions. In the initial panel, Harvard diplomatic historian Ernest R. May joined Russian military historian Viktor Gobarev and German Cold War historian Wolfgang Krieger to provide a multifaceted overview of the crises in 1948 (Soviet saber-rattling in March, followed by the Soviet blockade of Berlin and the legendary US-British-French airlift). In another panel, chaired by Cambridge University intelligence historian Christopher Andrew, Benjamin B. Fischer of

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Berlin: The Intelligence War, 1945-1961 Conference at the Teufelsberg and the Alliierten Museum, 10-12 September 1999

Agenda

Welcome

- Claus Henning Schaper, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of the Interior
- Dr. Kuno Böse, State Secretary, Berlin Senate Office of the Interior
- The Honorable John Kornblum, US Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany

The March Crisis and the Berlin Airlift

- Dr. Donald Steury, Chair
- Professor Ernest R. May
- Dr. Viktor Gobarev
- Professor Wolfgang Krieger

Allied Military Intelligence in Berlin

- Dr. John Greenwood, Chair
- Dr. William Stivers
- Lt. Col. Daniel Trastour
- Col. Nigel N. Wylde

The Other Side of the Wall: KGB and Stasi

- Professor Christopher Andrew, Chair
- Dr. Richard Poplewell
- Mr. Benjamin B. Fischer
- Dr. Vladislav Zubok

Spying Without Spies

- Dr. Gerald Haines, Chair
- Dr. Kevin C. Ruffner
- Dr. Donald P. Steury
- Dr. Vance O. Mitchell

Berlin in the Wilderness of Mirrors: Agents, Double Agents, and Defectors

- Dr. Richard E. Schroeder, Chair
- Ambassador Hugh Montgomery
- Mr. Nigel West
- Mr. Jerrold Schecter

Eisenhower, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Wall

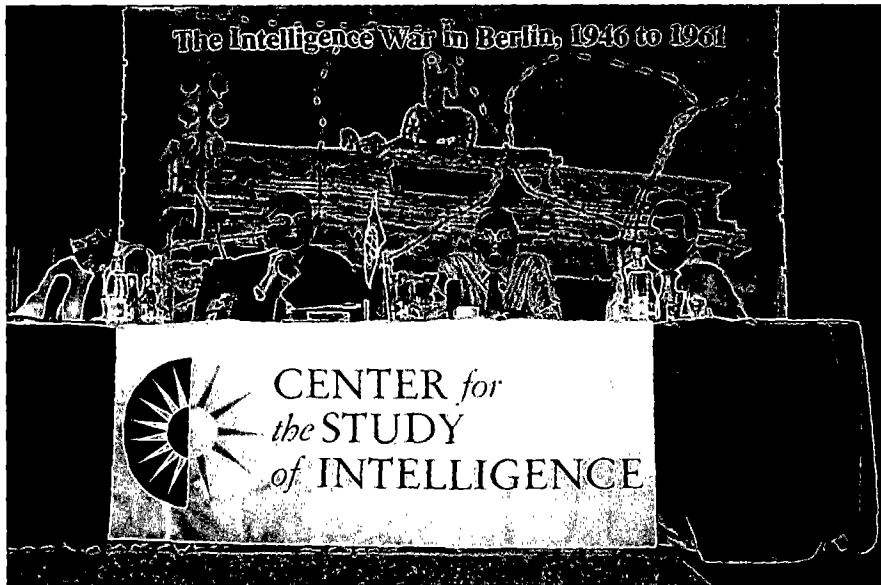
- Ambassador Raymond L. Garthoff, Chair
- Professor Egon K-H. Bahr
- Dr. William Burr
- Dr. Vladislav Zubok

Battleground Berlin: Veterans Remember

- Dr. Helmut Trotnow, Chair
- Mr. Burton L. Gerber
- Col. Oleg Gordievsky
- Maj. Gen. Oleg Kalugin
- Mr. Peter M. Sichel

From Dusk to Dawn: Berlin and the History of the Cold War

- The Honorable Vernon A. Walters, former US Ambassador to West Germany and former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
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Panel on the March 1948 crisis and Berlin airlift. From left: Donald Steury, Wolfgang Krieger, Ernest May, and Viktor Gobarev. (Photo: W. Durie)

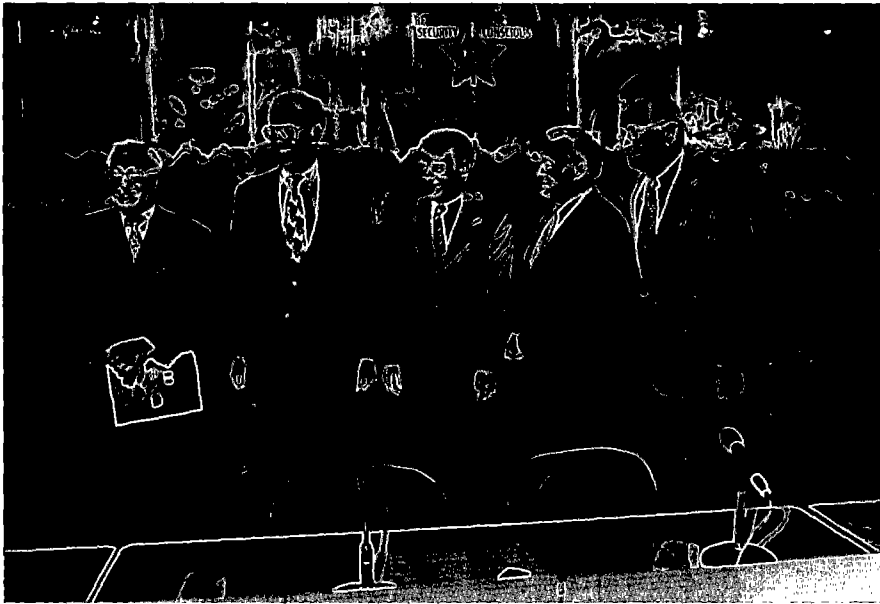
CSI's History Staff explored the Agency's penetration of the Stasi (East German intelligence and security service) in the early 1950s. The day concluded with a tour of the Teufelsberg and a reception hosted by the Investorengruppe.

The second day began with an interesting and informative panel on technical means of collection, chaired by the CIA's Chief Historian, Gerald K. Haines. That panel was followed by one of the conference's highlights—a roundtable discussion hosted by CSI Deputy Director Dr. Richard E. Schroeder and featuring veteran British historian Nigel West, American author Jerrold Schecter, and Ambassador Hugh Montgomery, a veteran intelligence officer and diplomat who now serves as a Special Assistant to the DCI. Ambassador Montgomery participated in the Berlin Tunnel operation in the 1950s.

The afternoon sessions on the second day opened with a panel on the Berlin crisis of 1958-1961. Ambassador Raymond L. Garthoff, a longtime expert on Soviet and East European affairs, led the discussion, which included historians from the US and Russia along with Dr. Egon Bahr of Germany. Dr. Bahr was a close adviser to West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, at the time that the Berlin Wall was erected in August 1961. In his panel presentation, he painted a compelling picture of the frustration and anxiety that confronted the West Berlin leadership during that crisis. Ambassador Garthoff described how intelligence influenced US decision-making in the crisis, and he presented new information on the "back-channel" contacts between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev at the height of the crisis.

Conference attendees then visited the Alliierten Museum, where they

held a roundtable discussion on Cold War espionage in Berlin. Dr. Helmut Trotnow, the museum's director, chaired the session. Participants included former intelligence officers from both sides of the late and unlamented Iron Curtain. The CIA was represented by Peter Sichel, who served in Berlin during the 1940s and 1950s, and Burton Gerber, a longtime (39 years) former Agency officer with extensive experience in Soviet and European affairs. Former KGB General Oleg Kalugin, who resigned in 1989 after harshly criticizing the KGB and now lives in the US, contributed the Soviet perspective. A unique perspective encompassing both sides of the story was provided by former KGB Colonel Oleg Gordievsky, who defected to the West in 1985 after serving as a British agent inside the KGB for 11 years. Attendees also took advantage of the opportunity to tour the museum itself, which features a comprehensive collection of



At the Allied Museum, standing in front of a section of the Berlin tunnel. From left: Oleg Gordievsky, Burton Gerber, Helmut Trotnow, Oleg Kalugin, Peter Sichel. (Photo: W. Durie)

exhibits on the Allied occupation of Berlin and the divided city's role in the Cold War.

Conference participants also embarked on a tour of Berlin that included the former Normannenstraße headquarters of the dreaded East German Stasi. Few could resist the opportunity to sit at the desk of Stasi director Erich Mielke, adorned with one of his treasures, Lenin's death mask. The tour included visits to formerly divided Berlin's two Rathauser (City Halls)—the so-called Red Rathaus in the city center, and the Schöneberg Rathaus, where President Kennedy delivered his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. The tour included a visit to former Soviet facilities in Karlshorst—once the KGB *Rezidentura* (Station) in Berlin, Soviet intelligence's largest foreign post during the Cold War.

The conference concluded with a keynote address by Ambassador

Vernon Walters, who was US Chief of Mission in Germany when the Berlin Wall went down and is a former Army General, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, and veteran of many sensitive diplomatic troubleshooting missions during the Cold War era. Those who stayed to the end were treated to a trip to the once-famous Glienicke Bridge—the site of numerous Cold War prisoner exchanges—accompanied by Oleg Kalugin and Francis Gary Powers, Jr. Powers's famous father had walked across that span when he was exchanged for Soviet "illegal" Rudolf Abel in 1962.

In conjunction with the conference, CSI released a collection of declassified intelligence documents, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: Documents on the Intelligence War in Berlin, 1946 to 1961*. This volume gathers together long-range National Intelligence Estimates, current reporting and

operational records, and raw intelligence materials—including two German-language reports from the CIA's agent inside the East German intelligence service.

Excerpts from Conference Speeches and Panel Discussions

On the Berlin Blockade:

Stalin severed ground links between West Berlin and West Germany in June 1948. The Soviet leadership was confident that this "blockade" of West Berlin would force the Western Allies to abandon their positions in the city. Instead, the US, Britain, and France mounted a massive effort to supply the city, which held out for nearly a year, at which point the Soviets backed down.

"I think it's important to set the Berlin Crisis in the general context of the Cold War... That is, it is hard to imagine a post-war

world in which there is not a high degree of conflict between the West and the East... [But] the point that seems to me to be the least predetermined... was the shift from essentially the political [and] ideological Cold War [in 1946-47] to an essentially military Cold War. The precipitant for that, in my view, was the Berlin crisis of 1948....

Berlin is really pivotal to the rest of the Cold War. It is the driver for the need for credibility because... it is... an island which the United States and the other Western powers are committed to defend and they cannot defend. They cannot defend with conventional forces. They have to be able to threaten that they will resort to strategic nuclear warfare.... So, there is this intense need for credibility which is the function of the commitment in Berlin. And Berlin remains pivotal.... It is the central point of détente, the Berlin Wall, and the fall of the Berlin Wall is the symbol of the unraveling of the Cold War.... You can write, study, think about the history of the Cold War entirely with Berlin as its focus....

— Professor Ernest R. May
Diplomatic Historian
Harvard University

“Did Stalin really want to begin a war, starting with the Berlin Blockade, and before with the March crisis? After analyzing the Soviet documents, I’ll say certainly no.... [His intention] was to challenge Western powers, especially the United States, in Berlin.... For Stalin, it was just a

natural continuation of his usual line of behavior. He did it all his life,... with his party comrades, his associates, with actually everybody in the Soviet Union.”

— Dr. Viktor Gobarev, former Soviet and Russian Army Officer Senior Risk Analyst, SAIC Inc.

“General [Lucius] Clay [American Military Governor of Germany in the late 1940s, had] a mandate to get along with the Soviet Union and I think he wisely stuck to it.... In retrospect, we can be very grateful that he did, because what Clay and his successors really preserved was the essential framework of those international treaties which... I strongly believe really kept open the option of German reunification in 1990. Without the Potsdam Agreement, of course, the international legal status of Berlin as a four-sector unit—the way it was managed throughout the Cold War—would not have been possible. His other reason... was that Clay was a very unusual man in one respect: he really believed in the possibility of rebuilding German democracy. Now when you think back on 1945 when he started this job, and up to ’49, [and] put yourself in the position of these people and of those times, this was a pretty imaginative and, in many ways, a pretty hopeless enterprise to get involved in and to try to carry out, and to believe in. Clay did believe in that and... we owe him a great deal....”

— Dr. Wolfgang Krieger,
Visiting Professor of History
Toronto University

On Intelligence Operations in Berlin:

From the end of World War II until the Berlin Wall went up in August 1961, West Berlin served as a major strategic intelligence base for the Western powers. For the Soviet KGB and the East German HVA (the foreign intelligence arm of the Stasi), the sizable Allied intelligence presence in Berlin provided opportunities for penetration of the Western services.

“The Federal Republic, with West Berlin, was the only Western state on which Moscow received even more high-grade intelligence from an allied agency—in this case, the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung [the HVA]—than it did from the KGB.... In addition to receiving a very large amount of intelligence from the HVA, the KGB depended on East German support for many of its own intelligence operations.... All the heads of the Stasi up to and including Erich Mielke were, of course, not merely Stalinist loyalists, they were Soviet agents.”

— Dr. Christopher Andrew,
Professor of Modern and Contemporary History
Cambridge University

“On the first of October 1945, I was assigned to Berlin... [as]... the acting head of OSS in Berlin, a unit of probably something like eight intelligence officers, and another twelve support people. Our targets were: ferreting out Nazis who had gone underground, members of the German Intelligence Service, members of the Gestapo, and most

importantly, finding scientists and technicians whom we could ferret out to the West and [thereby] deny to the Russians.... Our targets changed according to the information we collected on the changes in the political situation in East Germany. We did not target the Soviet movements of troops... until it became obvious that the Soviets were intent on imposing a Soviet-style government in East Germany.

"... We had from the start very good contacts with people in the government, because of the [war-time] contacts we had. Through [contacts with the German resistance] we knew people who were senior officials in government agencies during the Nazi time. Largely anti-Nazi, and therefore, ultimately anti-Communist, and as you may realize, in this country [i.e., Germany] a large portion of the civil servants were taken over by the post-war administration. There was the de-Nazification process, but if you were not guilty of any crimes, or [had not] been a senior Nazi official, you had to continue to run the country and the people who ran it before ran it afterwards. Because of that we had very good contacts—not only in Berlin, but also in Eastern Germany—to Government officials."

— Peter Sichel,
Former OSS and CIA officer

"The era under discussion here, 1945 to '61, was really the golden age for human espionage in Berlin.... The first and most

important aspect of the situation was, of course, the vast amount of sympathy for the Western Allies as a result not only of the airlift, but then in '53, the repression of the 17th of June [East German] rebellion against the occupying Soviet forces. It did not create a wave of sympathy for the Soviet occupiers, and made Berliners and even the others in the Soviet Occupation Zone much more responsive and willing to help.... Now at the same time... another aspect of this environment which was so conducive to successful human operations was the evolution, certainly on the American side and I'm sure on the British and French sides as well, of a more focused approach to requirements and the need for certain kinds of information.... In the first period of the initial base in Berlin, the focus of operations was on essentially two things. One, the huge black-market operation and... secondly, the search for Nazi war criminals and other miscreants.

... no one in the Berlin Base in that era spoke Russian. There was no focus on the Soviets—in fact, they were still considered our allies. As a result, there was a very narrow attention span to the requirements for intelligence.... With the establishment of CIG, and then CIA in 1947, there was some clearer focus on the need for intelligence. But... the interest was mostly directed towards the threat of war and the immediate tactical concerns about what Soviet forces were up to... and a great deal of the effort of the Berlin personnel was on war

planning, stay-behind activities, rat lines—escape [routes] for downed American and allied pilots—in the event of a military confrontation....

With the passage of time, war plans began to fade into the background as more strategic objectives loomed. As a consequence, [during] the... '50s, certainly the mid-to-late '50s, human operations in Berlin took a much broader approach to intelligence requirements and the search for information. The further factor that made this such a golden operating area was the ready access at that time across the border of the sectors within the city, less so into the Soviet Zone, but still access was reasonably easy. Certainly for an East Berliner to come into West Berlin it was no problem at all unless he [was one of] a very small number of functionaries who were supposedly prevented from doing so, but with a modest amount of imagination, they, too, could cross the border. It meant for a ready approach for East Berliners... willing to help the Allies [and thus] provided an enormous pool of individuals who were anxious to tell their stories. Who not only were willing to talk, explain what they did, tell about their careers, but [also] readily volunteered the names of their friends who stayed behind but who would be willing to help the West if approached in the proper way.... Until the Wall went up, that continued and it meant that we had numerous opportunities to approach indi-

viduals and to acquire the kinds of assets we needed. It did require a high degree of selectivity....

— Ambassador Hugh Montgomery,
Special Assistant to the DCI

"The refugees, as they were coming out of East Berlin, went through a refugee processing point, which sort of worked like the old-fashioned card system. We could put stops into the system based on things we were interested in, based on targets, and anyone who hit one of those stops would be called in and we could debrief the person. Sometimes we would be trying to recruit that person...to go back and not be a refugee, depending on what their circumstances were, and work for us there. Sometimes we were asking them for the names and numbers of friends and colleagues, family members. Then we would use the refugee to invite, [in] a certain way—[that is, to get] a secure message across to the target to come over here and be interviewed and then possibly recruited."

— Burton L. Gerber,
former senior US intelligence officer

"I was connected with the...production [and] training of East German illegals, KGB illegals, and Soviet citizens...[and] East German citizens. If I had more time I would be able to tell about the very vast cooperation...between the KGB and the Stasi in the production of false West German passports, and

Austrian and Swiss and British and other passports. There were two factories, one in East Berlin and another outside Moscow, which were producing dozens and dozens [of] valid blank passports, West German passports for the numerous illegals. And also I was able to follow their training on the territory of the GDR [from the KGB Rezydentura in] Karlshorst.... It was extremely sophisticated. For example, the passports were blank, but the names, identities, dates, all the officials and stamps—it was always real. There was always a real identity behind it.... And another thing, because a big part of the audience is American here, I can tell you that in the early 1970s.... I was still attached to the business of the illegals, my department had [one]...I think he is still alive. He was very, very happy that day. Smiling and even laughing. He said, "Today is my most happy day of my life. Come, come and see it." And he pulled out the drawer of his desk and got out...[his] American blank passport. It took ten years, from 1961 to 1971, to produce, because it was so complicated. So complicated. But they produced it and there was no difference. Just impossible to find the difference...."

— Oleg Gordievsky,
former Soviet intelligence officer,
British agent and defector

On the 1958-61 Berlin Crisis:

In November 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev threatened to abrogate what remained of the quadripartite regime by signing a

separate peace treaty with the East German government and withdrawing Soviet forces from Berlin. This was seen as the opening move in an attempt to push the Western Allies out of Berlin.

"During the late 1950s and early 1960s, East-West tensions over Berlin were the most critically difficult and complex foreign policy problems faced by US Presidents. Although by no means as risky as the Cuban missile crisis, the Berlin crisis helped make this period the most dangerous days of the Cold War. Intelligence analysts believed that the Soviets did not seek war over Berlin. Nevertheless, over four years... US Presidents [and other] US leaders wondered whether the Berlin problem would lead to open conflict. But conflict was avoided and both sides found ways to live with disagreement over Berlin."

— Dr. William Burr,
Senior Analyst,
National Security Archive

The second Berlin crisis cannot be understood other than by looking at Khrushchev's personality. The major explanations [for provoking the crisis] could only be found in Khrushchev's head, not in any policy papers, nor in any policy analysis. In fact, we don't have any documents that convincingly present...any schematic preparations or calculations that explain a radical change in policy towards Germany in 1958, inside the Kremlin, inside even Khrushchev's close circle.... One psychological explanation...is that Khrushchev was a person

who was increasingly dissatisfied...with the results of his foreign policy in general, but particularly for his normalization of relationships with the United States....

Khrushchev faced a huge problem of legitimacy inside the Communist Bloc and inside the Soviet Union.... He...defeated the opposition, which constituted the vast majority of the Politburo, but he clearly couldn't fill Stalin's shoes.... Domestically he expected to move more successfully...than Stalin had ever planned towards Communism. Inside the Bloc he aimed at improving relationships primarily with China and Yugoslavia. By 1958,...Khrushchev's personal diplomacy towards Yugoslavia and particularly towards Mao, towards China, was in deep, deep trouble.... Khrushchev had to do something to improve his credentials as a statesman, something radical....

— Vladislav Zubok,
Senior Research Fellow,
National Security Archive

On the Berlin Wall:

East German troops closed the sector border between East and West Berlin over the night of 12-13 August 1961, first with barbed wire and then began building the Berlin Wall. The Allied powers felt unable to respond, except through military action, which probably would have led to war. Egon Bahr was Press Secretary and adviser to West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt (later West German Chancellor). At the conference, Dr. Bahr gave vent to the frustrations experienced by the

German Berlin administration during this tragic period, which physically divided families and cut off the livelihoods of thousands of Berliners.

"It took hours to convince the [Allied] commandants to give orders that [would put] at least some armed, uniformed people in jeeps patrolling the line. It took more than 24 hours before the commandants got permission to transmit a small, weak protest to their Soviet colleagues on the other side in East Berlin. It took more than 48 hours before the...High Commissioners, the four Ambassadors, established the protest from Bonn to East Berlin. It took 72 hours before the first protests came from Washington, Paris, London, to Moscow. This was the reality. After three days, when it was absolutely clear for the Eastern side and the Communists that no major tough reaction could be expected from the Western side, they started to build up the Wall."

— Dr. Egon Bahr,
former adviser to
Mayor Willy Brandt

Question from the audience: [During] the three days that the barbed wire was up, before the Wall went up, what would have happened had the West German people come forward, and with their own wire cutters, for example, began removing the barbed wire on their own?"

Oleg Kalugin, [former KGB General]: *"They would have been shot."*

"I'm 60 years old. I spent 22 years of my career in the KGB, [advancing] from Lieutenant to Colonel.... I finished my career in London as acting head of the KGB station in London. Meanwhile, in the last years of my career as an operations officer in...the KGB, I was also a British secret agent, working for the British Secret Intelligence Service until my downfall, when I was found out, seized, and taken from London. Sent from London to Moscow [and] put under house arrest....

It started probably in Berlin. The 11th of August, 1961, I arrived here in Berlin as a young diplomatic trainee. First I had a conversation with a man who later became Soviet Ambassador to Germany, and he said, "You know what, if you want me to describe the situation to you here, the whole republic is sitting on their suitcases. If something drastic doesn't happen in the near future, no people will be left in the republic...[by] Christmas.... Then there was another man, [a] Second Secretary, who obviously knew what was going to happen. The night of the 13th I heard the tanks and the artillery equipment and other heavy military vehicles going in the direction of the Brandenburger Tor. Next morning I went for a walk, I went to the Brandenburger Tor and there it was. Barbed wire, guards, many troops, tanks hidden on the corners.... As a young and idealistic student, I was really very depressed. Excited over the political scale of the event but very depressed because of the German

people... I don't know how it was in 1989, but in 1961 the great majority of the people in East Germany were against Communism, against the system, against the tyranny, and they took it very seriously as a new serious test of their resilience, their preparedness to fight... The churches were full... It made a tremendous impression on me. But meanwhile, I had given already the promise to become an officer of the KGB. But the mood of the German people remained in me, and when, in 1968, the Soviet and other East European troops... invaded Czechoslovakia, I said, "This is the end of it. I don't want to work for that regime."

— Oleg Gordievsky,
Former KGB officer
Defector to the West

"I had lunch with the Soviet Ambassador... [on November 1st], here in Berlin, and I said to him, 'You want to try and win over the Germans, and you built that wall that keep husband and wife, and father and mother and children apart.' He said, 'That wall serves a useful purpose, and it will be here in a hundred years.' I said, 'Mr. Ambassador, if you really believe that, you've lost contact with reality.' By this time, there were millions of people fleeing the DDR [the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany], coming out through Hungary. The Embassies in Prague and Warsaw and everywhere else were filled with people. I said, 'You know, your party song, the Internationale, says, "the volcano is

thundering in its crater. The final eruption is at hand.'" I said, 'It is, but it's not the one you're looking for!'"

— Ambassador Vernon Walters,
Ambassador to Germany, 1989-91,
former DDCI, adviser to several
Presidents

The Berlin Wall was torn down on 9 November 1989.

On the Tank Confrontation of October 1961:

On 27-29 October 1961, a border crossing incident involving a US State Department officer on official business escalated into a standoff between US and Soviet tanks at Checkpoint Charlie.

"Our lead tanks [in the tank confrontation] had bulldozer attachments for the purpose of clearing away trucks or barbed wire, whatever kinds of impediments that might have been placed temporarily in the road, but they also could have been used for hitting the Wall. [A few days earlier,] General Clay had ordered the commandant [in Berlin] to have the American Engineer Company set up a mock section of the Wall in the forest and use some tanks with bulldozer attachments to practice knocking down the Wall... This [exercise]... had not been authorized from Washington and, indeed, was not known by anyone in Washington. General Bruce Clark, the Commander in Chief of US Forces in Europe, learned of it... and was very angry. Even though he had once been a subordinate of General

Clay, [General Clark] bawled him out... but didn't report it back to Washington. But Soviet intelligence—presumably with East German operatives—had seen and photographed this exercise and this [intelligence] was presented, we know now from other former Soviet officials, to the Politburo a few days before [the tank confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie], about the 20th or 21st of October... So we have, I think, a rather interesting situation in which intelligence had provided rather strong circumstantial evidence for a faulty conclusion on the part of the Soviet leaders with respect to our intentions.

— Ambassador Raymond Garthoff,
former intelligence analyst,
Senior Fellow, Brookings
Institution

"... The Soviets [normally] did not have their tanks in East Berlin. On the day in question, two teams, each team made up of a CIA officer and a State Department officer, went to East Berlin separately, with no communication between them, with firm instructions as to what they would do and what risks they would take, and when they would be back to West Berlin... one [of them] in the morning, one in the late morning... The first team did indeed find the tanks without markings. Unclear as to what they were. Observation didn't help. But they watched them, and the CIA case officer got an idea and threw a rock at one of the tanks. The top popped off, and a lieutenant came up and he yelled

out, "Chto eta?" ["What was that?"]. In the meantime, the other team found them, at just about the time the world was beginning to find them as they approached Checkpoint Charlie.... That team noted that there was no communication going on between the tanks, but they had kept open those microphones that exist on the side of tanks so the infantry can communicate with the tank commander. They got up as close as they could, and at a certain

point they did hear one of the outside people speaking into the tank in Russian. So this information was brought back, and so they did know that...the tanks...they were facing were Russian. It did make a difference, of course, whether you [were] dealing with Russian or with East German tanks.

— Burton L. Gerber,
former senior US intelligence
officer