



# A CITY TORN APART

## BUILDING OF THE BERLIN WALL

27 OCTOBER 2011

*at the*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND  
RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, DC



*featured speakers*

**David Ferriero**  
Archivist of the United States

**Joseph Lambert**  
Director, Information Management Services, Central Intelligence Agency

**Dr. William Richard Smyser, *guest speaker***  
Adjunct Professor, BMW Center for German and European Studies  
at Georgetown University

*members of the historian panel*

**Dr. Donald P. Steury, *moderator***  
Central Intelligence Center

**Dr. Donald A. Carter**  
U. S. Army Center of Military History

**Dr. Hope Harrison**  
Associate Professor of History and International Affairs  
at George Washington University

**Mr. Lou Mehrer**  
Central Intelligence Agency, Retired

**Dr. Gregory W. Pedlow**  
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe





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# The BERLIN CRISIS of 1961 BUILDING the WALL

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FROM VIENNA TO CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

Thursday October 27, 2011  
9 A.M.

McGowan Theater

ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES

**David Ferriero**

DIRECTOR, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SERVICES, CIA

**Joseph Lambert**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**(pending confirmation)**

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER

**Dr. William Richard Smyser,**

Adjunct Professor, BMW Center for German and  
European Studies at Georgetown University

MODERATOR OF HISTORIAN PANEL

**Dr. Donald P. Steury**

Historian, Central Intelligence Agency

**Dr. Don Carter** – U.S. Army Center of Military History

**Dr. Gregg Pedlow** – Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

**Dr. Hope Harrison** – Associate Professor of History and  
International Affairs at George Washington University

**Mr. Lou Mehrer** – Central Intelligence Agency

For conference registration and all inquiries [berlin.1961crisis@nara.gov](mailto:berlin.1961crisis@nara.gov)



# Confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie

## THE BERLIN CRISIS OF 1961



**SECRET**

HEADQUARTERS  
BERLIN COMMAND  
Office of the AC of S, G2  
APO 742 US FORCES

OP DIVISION, BERLIN COMMAND  
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY  
REF ID: A66000 NOV 01  
(FORM #13)

1. (C) **SOVIET FORCES:**

a. (NOFORN) Sightings of equipment in vicinity of Berlin indicate presence of an estimated two battalions of 120mm howitzers. Whether these elements came from within GDR or are reinforcements from elsewhere is unknown.

b. Observations of Soviet armor stationed in courtyard west of August Bebel Platz on 301600 Oct showed no apparent change in number personnel or vehicles. Several one-story prefabricated barracks being constructed in area.

**COMMENT:** Construction of semi-permanent buildings indicates Soviet intention to remain in this installation at least until solution of sector border control dispute.

c. (NOFORN) Allied agency reports movement of Soviet dependents back to USSR cannot be confirmed. On the contrary, new arrivals of dependents have been reported.

d. (NOFORN) There were indications the past week that GDR training has possibly progressed to division-level. However, training at this time of year would normally be well advanced into Division and Army maneuvers.

2. (C) **EAST GERMAN ARMY FORCES:**

a. Major elements of the East German Army remained at home stations conducting low-level training.

b. (NOFORN) Elements 1st Mtr Rifle Regt, Oranienburg (OU 847) and 60th Mtr Rifle Bn, Babelsberg (UB 1207) moved from home stations to unknown field location on 25 Oct. Unknown if units engaged in regimental-level exercises or division or higher level maneuvers.

DOMINATED AT 12 YEAR INTERVALS  
NOT AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED  
EOP DR 5000.10

SPECIAL HANDLING REQUIRED. NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS, SECURITY INDEX.  
BY AUTHORITY OF:  
*James L. Lightner*  
LEWIS A. WATKINS, Lt Col, US  
G2, Berlin Command

Page 1 of 9 pages.  
Copy 27 of 12 copies.  
AC 804 697-61 M-133/1

\*NOTE: This ISUM does not follow standard numbering sequence due to the fact that NOFORN info contained herein.

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OP DIVISION, BERLIN COMMAND, INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY, 061600 Sep - 312000 Oct 1961

(2) BC Circular 390-5 has been revised and republished effective 1 October 1961. The new circular incorporates numerous pertinent changes in command policy for enforcing official and classified defense information. All major unit commanders and chiefs of staff divisions are urged to lend their vigorous support to assure the overall effectiveness of this new directive, the "security bible" of Berlin Command.

G-2 Security Branch has presented briefings for the security control personnel of the command on the interpretation, implementation, and enforcement of the circular.

14. (C) **UNWELCOMED:**

a. Stainstaedtchen Exchange:

(1) US Army continues to maintain a 3-mm armed patrol in the West Berlin enclave of Stainstaedtchen.

(2) 25 refugees have been airlifted out of the area.

(3) Guards around the area have been instructed not to fire on West Berlin Police or West Berlin residents, or on Allied personnel unless they step into East German territory. They were told to fire on East Germans who approached the bunker only after they have been called to talk and a warning shot was given. They have disarmed with warning shots for persons who are in the process of exiting. Guards were told not to fire on US Army helicopters and to watch closely the activities of the 3-mm US Army patrol.

15. (C) **SMUGGLING OF SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE:**

a. On 22 October, Mr. E. S. Lightner, USHER, drove his USHER licensed POW through the Friedenstrasse crossing point into East Berlin and was denied entry by the East Germans unless he showed his identity documents, which he refused to do. After a delay, Mr. Lightner was escorted through the East German checkpoint by US Military Police in jeeps and on foot. Since this incident there have been 12 attempts by US personnel dressed in civilian attire, using POW owned vehicles to gain access to East Berlin through the Friedenstrasse crossing point. All attempts but one have resulted in a Military Police escort.

Page 10 of 11 pages.

**CONFIDENTIAL SECRET**

Copy \_\_\_\_\_  
Headquarters Berlin Command  
S-Plan (US27129) Germany  
100 742, US Forces  
300500, Nov 61

Berlin Command Plan to "MOR" Down Wall and Associated Obstacles Along US - Soviet Sector/Border (2)

Short Title: BC OPLAN 3-7 (2)

Task Organization: Annex A

1. (S) **SITUATION:**

a. General Situation: The current political situation as pertains to the 2 position in Berlin and a possible area for political and military involvement by East German Communist Forces. If the East German Communist Forces close the last access point to East Berlin by creation of physical barriers it will be of vital importance to either demolish the barriers blocking access (OPLAN 3-5) or to knock down portions of the wall and associated obstacles along the US - Soviet Sector/Border, or accomplish both actions concurrently.

b. Enemy Forces: See Current ISUM.

c. Friendly Forces:

(1) British Forces continue patrol and static security along the British-Soviet Sector/Border; continue patrolling along the British-East German Sector/Zonal border.

(2) French Forces continue patrolling along French-Soviet Sector/Border.

(3) West Berlin Police continue primary responsibility for maintenance of law and order. Force B battalions in each sector maintain one Demolition Company in a state of readiness for immediate emergency operations. Group Berlin, West Berlin Police will assist US Forces when authorized by USCOM.

(4) 7500th Aerial Support Squadron:

(a) Provides traffic control within Tempelhof Central Airport and opens gates as coordinated by US's Tank Force THREE and 2d Battle Group, 4th Infantry.

(b) Provides fixed wing aircraft for aerial reconnaissance missions as required. (Coordinated by ACOM, G2, Berlin Command).

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BY AUTHORITY OF:  
*James L. Lightner*  
LEWIS A. WATKINS, Lt Col, US  
G2, Berlin Command

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Page 1 of 6 Pages  
BC OPLAN 3-7 (2)  
AC 804 710-61  
CT 88 39 of 44

**SECRET**

RECORD COPY

US Army Intelligence Summary of 31 Oct -9 Nov 1961. ISUM #13a; pg.1; Berlin Brigade; Intelligence Reports, 1954-1962; Records of United States Army, Europe; Record Group 549; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

*Description of observed Soviet forces movements within and around East Berlin. The Soviets appeared to be digging in so as to see out the border control dispute to the end.*

US Army Intelligence Summary of 26 Sept-31 Oct 1961. ISUM #13; pg. 11; Berlin Brigade; Intelligence Reports, 1954-1962; Records of United States Army, Europe; Record Group 549; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

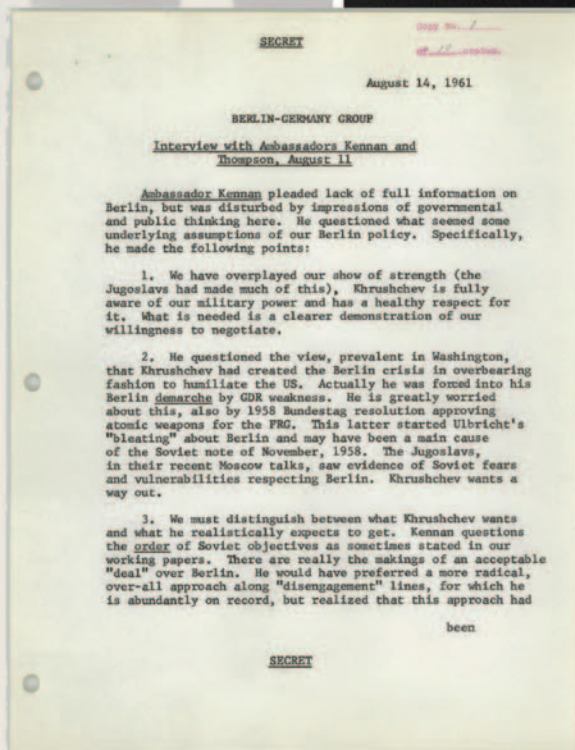
*The movement of the Soviet tanks in East Berlin is recorded in an Intelligence Summary. In what was actually the October 27th standoff between Soviet and U.S. forces at Checkpoint Charlie, the concurrent movements of U.S. forces are not mentioned.*

BC Op Plan 3-7; pg. 1; Berlin Command Ops Plans 1961; Berlin Brigade; Operations Planning Files, 1954-1965; Records of United States Army, Europe; Record Group 549; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

*An Operations Plan from November 1961 shows the intention of the Allied forces to react with force should the Communists close off all access to East Berlin.*

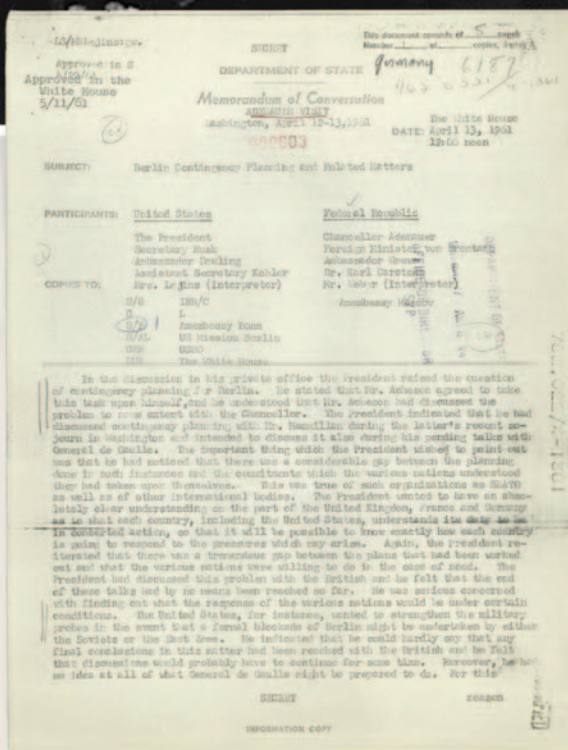
# FROM VIENNA to CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

## THE BERLIN CRISIS OF 1961



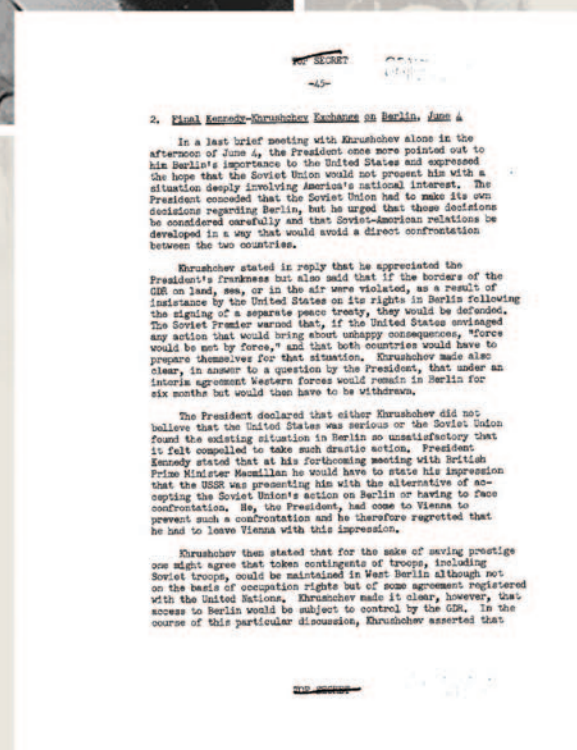
Interview with Ambassadors Kennan and Thompson, August 11; Berlin Germany Group 1961; Policy Planning Council; Subject Files, 1954-1962; General Records of the Department of State; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

*Interview with George Kennan, former Ambassador to Soviet Union, who questioned the underlying assumptions of most U.S. policy on Berlin. He thought that the USSR had been goaded into action over Berlin because of GDR weakness in the face of strong, nuclear West.*



Memo of Conversation re: Berlin Contingency Planning and Related Matters, 4/13/1961; Policy Planning Council; Subject Files, 1954-1962; General Records of the Department of State; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

*Memo of conversation with Kennedy and German Chancellor Adenauer showing Kennedy's concern over the gaps between Berlin contingency planning on paper and the actual commitments that each nation had understood to have taken on.*



Final Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchange on Berlin, June 4 United States Department of State. Historical Studies Division (February 1970). *Crisis Over Berlin, American Policy Concerning the Soviet Threats to Berlin November 1958-December 1962. Part V. Developments in the Early Phase of the Kennedy Administration and the Meeting with Khrushchev at Vienna, January-June 1961* (Research Project 614-E). Washington, D.C.: Author.

*A summary of the final exchange between Kennedy and Khrushchev in Vienna, with the two men still at loggerheads over the impasse in Berlin.*

# THE WALL GOES UP

## THE BERLIN CRISIS OF 1961



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NOFORN

SECTION III

### THE BERLIN WALL

The wall separating East and West Berlin is actually a system of barriers and obstructions of many different types, rather than a single, definite feature. For 43 kilometers, or about 26-1/2 miles, it closely parallels the sector boundary but does not always coincide exactly. The wall, like the sector boundary, mainly follows roads, railroads, canals, or other dividing lines, such as the margins of parks and cemeteries. For about 28 kilometers, or 45 percent of its length, it traverses areas that are built up on one or both sides, whereas for the rest of the distance (15 kilometers; 35 percent) it extends through relatively open areas. The wall parallels railroads for some 8 kilometers and canals for about 10 kilometers. Structurally, it is most formidable in the densely populated central core of Berlin and somewhat less so in the less populated northern and southern areas.

Roughly one-third of the wall, mainly the central section, is composed of masonry alternating with the walls of sealed buildings, generally supported by secondary obstructions. Except for a stretch where the Spree constitutes a natural boundary, further fortified by barbed wire, masonry wall extends along the bulge in the central core of the city. Other sections are formed by multiple barbed wire fences which follow canals and railway embankments and other earlier barriers to east-west movement. Secondary obstructions of masonry wall, tank barriers, pavement blocks, and cleared strips back up the main wall. Lightly constructed fences seem to have been erected mainly to cut off visual contact. Communist officials of East Germany have announced that they will clear a continuous strip 100 meters in width along the East Berlin side of the wall. This will be costly and time-consuming, and involve obliterating cemeteries, churches, and historical landmarks. To date, the cleared-strip plan seems to have been implemented near the extreme northern and southern ends of the wall, where it involved little more than removing orchards, gardens, tool sheds, and the like. Only a few changes indicate clearing in the central core area.

The wall is strongest at the Brandenburg Gate, a point of great symbolic as well as geographic significance. Here the East Germans have piled prefabricated concrete slabs in

layers forming a wall 7 feet high and 6 feet thick with steel-post reinforcement. Away from the Brandenburg Gate, the masonry wall is made of very large prefabricated concrete slabs one foot thick. Around sharp curves and awkward corners, smaller concrete blocks are used; they are also used in other places to increase the height of the wall. Generally the masonry wall is topped by Y-shaped iron rods strung with barbed wire.

Most of the wall is about 8 feet high, but some stretches along Bernauer Strasse are 10 feet high; and the boundary wall of the French cemetery is even higher. Generally, where the sector boundary follows the building line instead of curb or street line, the buildings have been incorporated into the wall by sealing doors and windows.

At authorized crossing points, obstructions have been placed across the road forming a maze with relatively narrow openings that require vehicles to zigzag slowly around obstacles.

In places the masonry wall is backed up by tank barriers. The most publicized of these are between the Reichstag ruins and Potsdamer Platz. Here two rows of heavy steel tripods are cemented into the ground behind the wall. Tank barriers are also located at each end of the masonry wall and along Zimmerstrasse from Wilhelm Strasse to Linden Strasse.

The remainder of the wall is comprised of one or more wire fences, backed by watch towers at irregular intervals. At the northern end, for example, there are 3 fences 7-1/2 feet high. The first follows the sector boundary, the second is 10 feet inside, and the third is some 150 yards to the east. The ground between the first two fences is covered with wire obstacles, whereas the area between the second and third fences has been cleared and can be lit at night. Watch towers spaced about 600 yards apart provide vantage points for the armed guards. Where the garden colony of Schoenholz formerly adjoined the boundary, everything has been leveled. The situation is the same on the southern end of the sector boundary where the garden colonies of Dahleis, Spaethfelde, Grueneck and Am Reuhlpuhl have been changed to a no-man's-land.

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External Department  
British Military Government  
BERLIN  
British Forces Post Office 45.

### SUMMARY OF REPORTS GIVEN BY REFUGEES DURING THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 28-OCTOBER 5, 1961

During the period under review a number of refugees reported that they had been actively helped by VoPo officers to climb the wall or get through the fence. In other cases VoPos have, after friendly talks with would-be refugees, looked the other way when the permit made for West Berlin. In this way at least four refugees came through a stretch of the fence in the north of Berlin where members of the 4th company of the 1st Battalion (Abteilung) of the 1st Motorized Brigade, Berlin, were on duty. One VoPo from this unit reported that since September 25 12 VoPos in this company have themselves left their unit and probably all defected to the West. On that day stricter orders to shoot at would-be refugees were issued. Several refugees told us that when going through the checkpoint for West Germany with passports borrowed from West German citizens, they were thoroughly scrutinized and in some cases had to give a sample of their signature. Two or three of these refugees were convinced that the officer carrying out the check must have been aware of discrepancies but allowed them to pass through to the West. One refugee from Leipzig told us that a friend of his, who is on duty at the sector boundary in Berlin came to see him in Leipzig to tell him that he would be patrolling a certain stretch of the border on the following day and if his friend wanted to defect he, the VoPo, would see to it that he could do so unharmed. All worked according to plan and this refugee said that his VoPo friend would have come with him but for his fear of a bad reception in the West. Ten women were helped by two VoPos through a fence in the Wilhelmstrasse area last week. In this case the VoPos said they were considering defecting themselves but said that since they had done duty at the border for over 3 weeks, their names would probably be known to the West authorities and they might possibly be punished for actively supporting the communist measures.

2. On the other hand we have, of course, heard of very severe checks at the crossing points where would-be refugees with borrowed passports were discovered and arrested. We have also heard of frustrated attempts by many young East Berliners who have been beaten up by VoPos when trying to escape in the Bernauer Strasse or the Hausbin area.

3. A refugee from Klein Machnow told us that the morale of the population in this town on the south-west side of Berlin, has dropped very sharply following reports of Western readiness to make big concessions in Berlin. He said that in his own large circle of friends and acquaintances there was not one who believed that West Berlin would be kept free indefinitely. People thought that there was likely to be a settlement if negotiations were started and led to agreement. However, on the other hand, most of the members or functionaries of the GDR whom he knew were firmly convinced that the Western Allies are so deeply committed that they cannot possibly give up just Berlin and that a compromise would be found which would

The Berlin Wall; Berlin Handbook; p. 11; Executive Secretariat: Records Relating to the Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962; General Records of the Department of State; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

A description of the first phase of the Berlin Wall, including the beginnings of the infamous "Death Strip." The description comes from "A handbook on the Berlin problem" created by the CIA in December 1961.

(ibid.)

Summary of Reports Given by Refugees During the Period September 28-October 5, 1961; Bureau of European Affairs, Country Director for Germany: Records Relating to Berlin and East German Affairs, 1957-1968; Lot 70D4; General Records of the Department of State; Record Group 59;

National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Refugees from the Soviet sector of Berlin as well as the rest of East Germany told of their experiences crossing into West Berlin. Some border-crossers were helped by East German police, while others were harassed and arrested. While the Wall was a new phenomenon, attitudes towards its enforcement were varied.