



Army Heritage Center
Foundation
*Telling the Army Story...
one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

COLD WAR

Highlights:

- After WW II administrative control of Germany was divided between the four major Allied powers: the US, United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union.
- Disagreements over the future of Germany contributed to growing Cold War tension between the democratic west and the communist east.
- The Soviets built the Berlin Wall in 1961 to stop East Germans from escaping to West Berlin.
- As a Soldier in the Berlin Brigade Kevin Born experienced the Cold War on a personal level, especially when traveling through communist East Germany.

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Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

Behind the Iron Curtain: Captain Kevin Born and the Berlin Brigade

(West Berlin, 1985) At the end of World War II, Germany was divided into four sectors, each controlled by one of the four major allied powers: the US, UK, France, and Soviet Union. Berlin, the former capitol, was also divided among the four Allies. While the Americans, British, and French worked to establish democracy in their sectors, the Soviets installed a communist regime in East Germany. West Berlin, occupied by the Americans, British, and French, was isolated deep inside communist East Germany. Throughout the Cold War the city remained an island of democracy and symbol of hope and freedom to people living under communist rule 110 miles behind the Iron Curtain.

For the next forty years the Soviet's pressured the US and her allies to withdraw their troops and abandon the city. The US was determined to remain, mindful of the importance of

the city as a symbol of both the values of democracy and of US commitment to defend Europe against Soviet aggression. As the years went by, a series of crises ensued.

In 1948 the Soviets blockaded Berlin, prompting the US to initiate the Berlin Airlift to provide food and other necessary supplies to the Soldiers and citizens in West Berlin. For almost a year the airlift kept West Berlin supplied until finally the Soviets withdrew the blockade.

In 1961 the communists built the Berlin Wall to physically separate East and West Berlin and halt the flow of East Germans defecting to the West through Berlin. In response, President Kennedy traveled to Berlin to make a speech in which he stated: "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." The



Checkpoint Charlie, on the border between East and West Berlin, seen here with the East German checkpoint in the background, became one of the iconic symbols of the Cold War. Photo courtesy of USAHEC, Kevin M. Born Collection.



"[This] photo is one of me in uniform in front of the Neue Wache on the Unter der Linden in East Berlin, with one of the ceremonial East German guards in the background. During East German times the Neue Wache was used as a Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism. It was one of the most visited sites in East Berlin for allied soldiers, because it was the only one that you could take photos of East German soldiers without harassment." Photo Courtesy of MAJ (Ret.) Kevin Born.

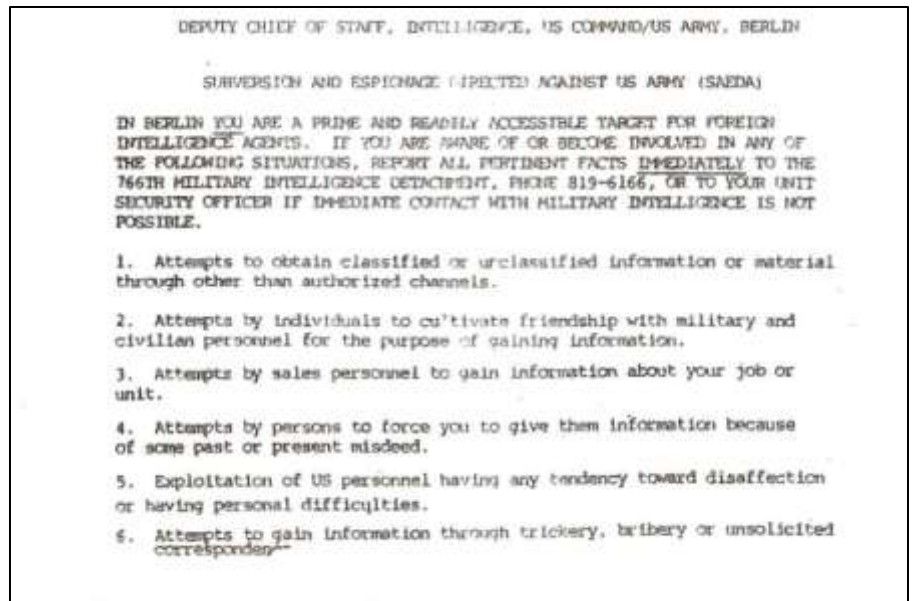
Wall succeeded in reducing the number of defectors, but it also made West Berlin an even more potent symbol of freedom.

Kevin Born joined the Army in 1981 after receiving an ROTC commission from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. In 1985 he was assigned to the Berlin Brigade. "On a day to day basis it was like being stationed anywhere else in the Army," he wrote. "However being 110 miles inside Communist East Germany did drive home the significance of the freedoms that we take for granted at home."

"The times that I really had a sense of the Cold War," Born continues, "where the hair raised up on the back of my neck, was when I crossed into East Berlin, and travelling the corridor through East Germany to West Germany by car or Duty Train. Using the telephone was also an adventure. I remember those commercials on AFN-Berlin warning that Ivan may be listening in on conversations."

Kevin Born remained with the Berlin Brigade until he was transferred to the 8th Maintenance Battalion in Hanau, Germany. From there he watched the destruction of the Berlin Wall in November, 1989, an event which signaled the end of the Cold War and set Germany on the path to reunification as a democratic state in 1990. The Berlin Brigade, having completed its mission, was deactivated in 1994. Kevin Born retired from the United States Army in 2003 with the rank of Major.

In his famous speech in Berlin, President John F. Kennedy said: "There are many people in the world who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin." Anyone seeking to understand the Cold War would do well to heed President Kennedy's advice and listen to the stories told by those who were there. Stories like those told by Kevin Born and his comrades in the Berlin Brigade.



"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."
- John F. Kennedy

The SAEDA card (front and back) was issued to all Soldiers to remind them that they might be the targets of foreign spies. Courtesy of USAHEC, Kevin M. Born Collection.