



BERLINBRIGADE.COM

5 SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT THE U. S. ARMY'S BERLIN BRIGADE (1945 - 1994)

From 1945 to 1994 the United States had a military presence in Berlin the former capital of Germany. As part of the post-World War II agreements on how Germany and Berlin were to be governed after the fall of the Third Reich the US along with the UK, USSR, and French Republic each had a hand in that that governing and rebuilding. Initially, just like Germany the city of Berlin was divided into three sectors: US, UK, and USSR. Later, the western sectors governed by the United States and the United Kingdom gave up some control and ground to accommodate the French Republic's input in the governing and rebuilding of Berlin and western Germany. All was good until the Soviet Union was in a position to want the US, British, and French out of western Berlin. The post-World War II celebrations and general good mood immediately after the end of the war did not last very long. Tensions were high until November 9, 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell and German Reunification took place in October of the following year.

#1 Only US Army Unit 110 Miles behind the Iron Curtain / Behind Enemy Lines

After the Yalta and Potsdam Agreements were settled upon the division of Germany and Berlin among the Allied Powers of World War II (US, USSR, UK, and France) was to be enforced. The U.S. Army found that it had to garrison a force within the city starting 4 July 1945. As time progressed and the political climate grew hotter and hotter, once allies the US and Soviet Union turned their attention on each other. The Soviet agenda was quickly realized when it began cutting off access to the city of Berlin in the form of small temporary Blockades. However, on the 24th of June of 1948 the Soviet Union blocked all road, railway, waterway access from and to Western Germany to the city of Berlin. This made supplying the western sectors of Berlin difficult as nothing was getting in and out. Within days of the blockade, it became evident that something had to be done and being 110 miles from the Allied occupation zone of Germany made getting food, medicine, and coal a little difficult. However, as the only available way in and out of Berlin was by air the Allied forces led by the United States initiated what was to be called "Operation Vittles " or better known as the Berlin Airlift . The airlift lasted until September of 1949.

Any travel in and out of Berlin continued until the wall fell in 1989 by way of one of the three air corridors, two railway routes, or one major roadway for automobiles. Each passageway was highly monitored and tightly controlled. The roadway access began, in Berlin, at Checkpoint Bravo and ended in Helmstedt, West Germany at Checkpoint Alpha.

The 110 miles inside East German territory the US, UK, and French forces meant that in the event of a conflict (war) the Western forces were stuck and left to fight in Berlin with little chance of reinforcement or relief.

#2 Existed to ensure access to the city of West Berlin after World War II

As part of the how post-World War II agreements regarding the occupation of Germany and its capital city of Berlin the U.S. forces along with British and French forces maintained a presence in Berlin long after that the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was formed . The Western Allies in Berlin remained with steadfast resolve through the Berlin Blockade, Khrushchev's Ultimatum, the numerous blockades, and the construction of the Berlin Wall, in an effort to ensure that the agreements made in Potsdam and Yalta were enforced. Additionally, because of the threats made by the Soviets the Western Allies were reinforced in their resolve to the commitment of the rights of access to a free Berlin as afforded in those same agreements. The US Forces in Berlin were routinely trained to know why they were in Berlin and why the US presence in Berlin was essential and critical to maintaining the peace during the Cold War.

#3 Only US Army unit dedicated to fight in Urbanized Terrain

Many units of the United States Army receive training on how to conduct operations in urban terrain. However, that training is limited as operations or specialties of the units may vary. The Berlin Brigade was trained solely to fight in an urban setting, otherwise known as Military Operations in Urban/Urbanized Terrain (MOULT) or Combat in the City. As West Berlin was a fully modern city the tactics and strategies used by the Western forces in Berlin had to deviate from conventional warfare (fighting in the woods and open fields) to fighting from street corner to street corner. Therefore, in West Berlin there were two mock cities with railway stations, apartment buildings, streets, Rathaus (city hall) and even a sewer system. The mock cities were located in the American (Parks Range with "Doughboy City") and British (Ruhleben Fighting City) sectors. The U.S. mock city was located in the southern part of Berlin and was right up against the Berlin wall. When U.S. forces would be training in "Doughboy City" it was not uncommon for East German and Soviet airplanes and helicopters to fly along the frontier recording the training exercises. Additionally, at the back part of the training range an East German Guard tower was placed to strategically over watch all operations 24/7 as well as to look for and prevent any individual(s) from breaching the East German frontier into West Berlin.

#4 Only US Armed Forces Unit who had regular ceremonies and contact with SOVIET FORCES during the Cold War.

From July 18, 1947 to August 1, 1987 for 3 times every year at Spandau Prison in the western part of the West Berlin, US and Soviet forces would conduct a guard changeover ceremony as the Soviets would hand off control of the prison and its prisoner(s) to the U.S. Forces.

After World War II and when the Nuremberg Trials came to an end the Four-Power Authorities (the World War II Allies: French Republic, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and United States) agreed to house the convicted Nazi war criminals in Spandau Prison to serve out their sentences. Initially there were seven prisoners housed at the prison. The occupying nations of Berlin would alternate control of the prison on a monthly basis. The following is a breakdown of the monthly guard duty rotation schedule:

UK: January, May, September
France: February, June, October
USSR: March, July, November
US: April, August, December

Another organization that U.S. and Soviet forces interacted throughout the occupation of Berlin was at the Berlin Air Safety Center. The Berlin Air safety center served to ensure the safety of flights for all aircraft in the Berlin area, the Berlin control

zone, the three air corridors in and out of Berlin, and the adjacent control zones (Soviet zone of occupation). The BASC operated 24 hours a day with each of the four occupation forces represented by a controller, deputy, general duty comptroller, and interpreters when necessary. The Berlin Air Safety Center continued to operate until the end of 1990 when the Occupation Status of Berlin was no longer in effect as reunification of the German nation had taken place in October of the same year.

So while, the Berlin airlift, Blockade of Berlin, the construction of the Berlin wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and other Cold War conflicts were going on all over the world there were at least two places where the Soviet Union and the United States met on almost a daily basis to achieve a couple of common goals.

#5 Regularly trained with British and French Forces

Along with monthly changeover and daily operations at Spandau Prison and the Berlin Air Safety Center, the Berlin Brigade trained with members of the other Western Allies of Berlin on a regular basis. Units of the British Infantry Brigade Berlin, the Forces Françaises à Berlin, and the US Army Berlin Brigade would exchange platoon size units to conduct training operations. This allowed for the Western Allies to have more than just a passing understanding of how things were done in the British or French military. Additionally, the intensive 3-week French Commando School was a popular opportunity for members of the US Army Berlin Brigade to attend. Upon successful completion of the French Commando School the soldiers is awarded the French Commando medal and a certificate of completion. Attending this course was done on a voluntary basis when offered.

On numerous occasions, members of the British Infantry Brigade Berlin would deploy to the US Army base in Wildflecken, Germany for 30 days of training, live fire exercises, and weapons qualifications. The weapons qualifications were for those weapons that could not be live fired in the city of Berlin due to political and military restrictions imposed due to the occupied status of the city. Such weapons were the M60 7.62mm machinegun and the M2 Heavy Barrel .50 caliber machinegun. The sharing and exchanging soldiers provided an experience that can never be emulated. Additionally, learning how the other country conducts training, maintains its high standards, prepares and conducts war makes each participating soldier that much better at, not only at what they do but have a unique insight as to what the allied forces are also capable of doing when the time comes to put steel on target. Lastly, I am more than certain that such exchange programs existed between members of the US Army in West Germany and the British Army of the Rhine but it is also safe to say that those exchanges were rare occurrences as opposed to the almost day-to-day occurrences in Berlin between and among the US, UK, and French forces.

Having won the Cold War and the changing mission of the US Army the Berlin Brigade was deactivated in July 1994 and the last US soldier left Berlin in September of that same year.

Information compiled from various sources and presented by David Guerra (BerlinBrigade.com owner)

For more information, please visit the Berlin Brigade website at <http://www.berlinbrigade.com>

or follow BerlinBrigade.com on Twitter: @berlinbrigade

unless otherwise noted ©2013 BerlinBrigade.com / David Guerra