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HISTORY OF THE U. S. ARMY'S BERLIN BRIGADE (1945 - 1994)

The US Army entered Berlin in July 1945 and remained there until September 1994. During this period, the troop command was known by several different names, Berlin Military Post, Berlin Command, US Army Garrison, Berlin and since 1961, the Berlin Brigade.

The US Military presence in Berlin had a modest enough beginning on 1 July 1945. Colonel Frank Howley led a contingent of military government personnel into the city. The Russians until then, had full control of the city and had not allowed the Americans to scout their sector before entering. As a result, hundreds of officers and men had to find places to stay in the ruins. Many wound up sleeping in tents in the Grunewald.

By the Fourth of July, Major General Floyd L. Parks, the first American commandant, together with elements of the 2nd Armored Division, had moved in to occupy the American Sector in the southwest areas of the city. Ceremonies in several parts of the US sector marked the takeover. At the Telefunken Electronic Factory, now McNair Barracks, Sherman tanks of the "Hell on Wheels" Division lined up opposite two companies of the Soviet Army.

The occupation structure was complex, General Clay's Headquarters became the office of Military Government, United States Zone. A permanent security force for the American Sector, the future Berlin Brigade, was not formed until 1946. The troops of the 2nd Armored Division remained in the city until relieved on 9 August 1945 by the 82d Airborne Division. Its Commander, Major General James Gavin, became the second US Commandant.

By 1948, the coalitions that had defeated Hitler's Germany had broken apart. Europe separated into democratic West and a totalitarian East with a divided Germany in the middle. Within Germany, the western sectors of Berlin became an outpost of freedom, a "thorn" the Soviet Union desired to remove.

At the end of June, 1948, the Soviets cut Berlin's rail, road, and canal lines of communication and commerce with West Germany. The ostensible reason was Soviet displeasure over the western plan to carry out a currency reform in West Germany that would extend to the western sectors of Berlin. In reality, the Soviets hoped to prevent the formation of a West German government and force the Western Allies out of Berlin. The Allies responded with General Lucius D. Clay's famous Berlin Airlift. In the largest airlift in history, the American and British planes transported 1,736,000 tons of coal, industrial products, food and medicine into the city. When the Soviets lifted the blockade in May 1949, they had reason to be dismayed instead of preventing the establishment of a West German government, their action had given added impetus to the adoption of a West German constitution.

The end of the Blockade was followed by a period of reorganization. The Military Government in West Germany ended and in its place the Allied High Commission, eventually located with the new Federal German Government in Bonn, was established to supervise West Germany's transition to full sovereignty. In Berlin, the remaining military government functions were combined with those of the US Commandant in a new post, that of the US Commander, Berlin (USCOB).

The next threat to West Berlin occurred in 1958, when Nikita Khrushchev threatened to turn over Soviet responsibility for Allied access to the city to the East Germans, if West Berlin was not declared a free-demilitarized city. President John F. Kennedy responded firmly to Khrushchev's "ultimatum" by reinforcing our troops in Europe, calling up reservists, and increasing draft calls. The threat eventually subsided, but not before Berlin suffered a body blow.

On 13 August 1961, the East Germans sealed all but seven of the crossing points between the Soviet Sector and West Berlin. Twenty-eight miles of barbed wire and barriers went up across the city and East German militia began construction of the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Brigade, as we know it today, was formed at the height of the Berlin Wall crisis. It was organized from units already in Berlin by General Orders from the Commander-in-Chief, US Army, Europe.

In October 1962, the crisis caused by Khrushchev's ultimatum to Berlin was overshadowed by the Cuban Missile Crisis. When that crisis ended, the threat to Berlin also came to an end. The US had demonstrated that we would not be threatened or intimidated.

The size and structure of the Berlin Brigade has remained relatively stable since 1950. Three infantry battalions form the heart of the Brigade. They are supported by a tank company, an artillery battery, and an engineer company organized since 1980 in a Combat Support Battalion. From 1950 to 1984, the 6th US Infantry, that traces its lineage to 1812, served in Berlin. In June 1984, as part of the implementation of the American Regimental System, the Berlin Brigade's three infantry battalions were re-designated the 4th, 5th, and 6th Battalion, 502nd Infantry.

The infantry, of course, is not the only branch of the US Army represented in the Berlin Brigade. Artillery, Engineers, Chemical, Signal, Military Police, Armor, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Military Intelligence, and Service Support branches are also present. Working as a team, the Brigade brings together the successors of the soldiers who first entered Berlin over 50 years ago to establish the Berlin Military Post. As a unit dedicated to excellence, the Berlin Brigade preserves the tradition of the thousands of soldiers who have served in Berlin since 1945, and who faced the challenges of the Berlin Blockade and Khrushchev's Ultimatum. Throughout all those years, the mission remained constant: to preserve the freedom and well-being of the people of Berlin, and in so doing, defend the national interests of the United States by maintaining peace with freedom in Europe.

By November 1989, the political climate had changed throughout Europe. East Germany was no exception with the easing of travel restrictions. Thus causing the Berlin Wall to fall on November 9, 1989. In 1990, East and West Germany were united under one name, again: the Federal Republic of Germany.

In July 1994, with US President William J. Clinton in attendance the Berlin Brigade was deactivated in a ceremony on the infamous FOUR RING Parade field or, now known as 4 des Juli Platz. The Berlin Brigade had achieved its mission and goals by being at the tip of the spear when the Cold War was won.

The Berlin Brigade had a brief, yet honored and unique history and tradition. 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, those that ever served in the Berlin Brigade continue to be faithful to it and all that it stood for from 1945 to 1994.

Mission Accomplished!

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

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