

Cold War Travels

West Germany and West Berlin 1960 to 1990

I visited Germany a number of times during this, the ‘Cold War’ period. Germany had been divided after WW2 and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was established in 1949. The previous British Occupation Zone became the BAOR area, It broadly covered the North German Plain.

My first short series of visits took place in around 1962. I had been leading a project at Decca to provide the Army with 6 Battlefield Surveillance Radars nick-named ‘Robert’. They were deployed with the Royal Artillery 94th Locating Regiment in Fallingbommel – between Hamburg and Hanover.

On some visits there was free time. I remember going to Belsen, not far away. It was a chilling experience. I also remember a longer drive through Hamelin and into the Harz Mountains. The East/West border ran right through the Harz Mountains. and one could not go to the “Brocken” (where the witches gather on Walpurgis night). In fact the East Germans were developing the area as a listening station.

Later visits, all work-related, were mostly still within this BAOR area but there is little worth telling.

But in the mid-1980s, now working for GCHQ, I made several visits to West Berlin which were far more interesting! Flights to West Berlin were still strictly controlled. Only the airlines registered in U.K., U.S.A. and France were allowed, flying in narrow corridors through East Germany.

But in fact It was probably the ‘best’ time for visits. West Berlin had recovered from WW2 and was a lovely city, spacious, green, and prosperous. That is to say, away from the wall.

So I will start with the wall. This was my view of the Brandenburg Gate looking over the wall, together with a view of the graffiti-covered wall with the Brandenburg Gate beyond.



I then remember following the wall to the right beyond the Brandenburg Gate. One came to the “Lenné Triangle”. That seems to have been almost forgotten, not shown on ‘historical’ maps of the wall. Yet I remember it well! When Berlin was originally partitioned, a 4-hectare tongue of land extended from East Germany into West Berlin. And when the wall was built, this fenced area was ‘abandoned’ and the wall took a short-cut. Nature took over, and since development anywhere near the wall was unattractive, this entire area was blighted and desolate.

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Once past the “Lenné Triangle” the wall turned east, and Checkpoint Charlie was not far on.

Walking in the sunshine, the East Berlin TV Tower displayed the unintended reflection known to West-Berliners as “The Pope’s Revenge”!



Returning to the Brandenburg Gate and heading into West Berlin through the Tiergarten one soon passed the Soviet War Memorial with Russian Soldiers on Ceremonial Guard – 24 hours-a-day. That ceased in 1990.

Of course the wall completely surrounded West Berlin - almost 100 miles long. But one section was different! I went to R.A.F. Gatow to visit an Army unit. The border there, following the west boundary of the airfield, was a wire fence - with an East German tank regiment established beyond, ready to move in rapidly if the balloon went up!

Other meetings were up at the Teufelsberg (Devil’s Hill’) This is an artificial hill created in the Grunewald (within West Berlin). It is 120 m. high, created over many years after WW2, from the rubble of most of the destroyed buildings in West Berlin. Obviously this created a wonderful new vantage point for surveillance and it was entirely taken over by the U.S.A. and U.K. until 1990. (Field Station Berlin)