

# The Berlin Wall

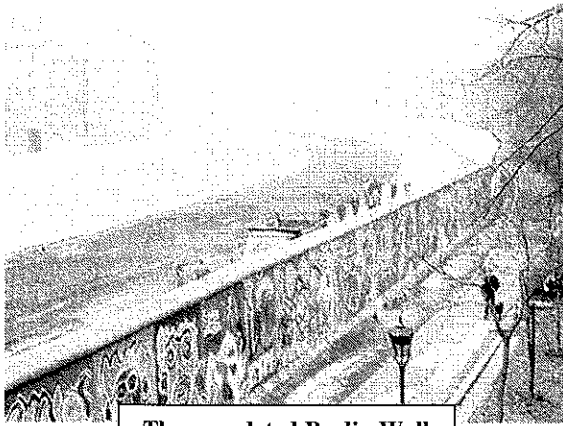
## **Background:**

After the Second World War, the Allies divided Berlin between themselves. The USSR got East Berlin and the Americans, British and French got West Berlin. There was a border between the two halves, but no wall.

## **Khrushchev's little fence**

Early in the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1961, Soviet workmen arrived at the border with wood and barbed-wire fencing. By the end of the day, the city was split by the fence that they had constructed and border guards had orders to shoot anyone who tried to cross without a permit.

## **The wall**



The completed Berlin Wall

Less than nine months later, Khrushchev's little fence had turned into a concrete wall with watch towers, machine gun posts and even minefields.

No one is completely sure why Khrushchev built the Berlin Wall, but two likely possibilities are that he wanted to stop East Berliners from leaving East Berlin and wanted to prevent the capitalists who controlled West Berlin from interfering in East Berlin's business.

## **The reaction of the Berliners**

Many East Berliners panicked and tried to get into West Berlin. Within just a week one man died from trying to jump over the wall from an upper-storey window.

The West Berliners thought that the Soviet Union wanted to start a fight. Khrushchev had already told the Americans to get out of Berlin or to expect war. The West Berliners held a huge rally on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, calling on American President John F. Kennedy to keep his troops in Berlin. Kennedy sent an extra 1500 troops in response.



People protesting on the Berlin Wall in 1989

## **War?**

Things got tensest on 27 October 1961 when Soviet

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and American tanks pulled up on their respective sides of the Berlin Wall. Everyone expected shots to be fired at any second, but none were and the tanks eventually backed down.

A tense stalemate ensued. As Khrushchev said, "It's [the wall] not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than war."

### **The wall comes tumbling down**

Due to a series of events in 1989, Communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR came to an end. One of those events occurred in November when thousands of East Germans march on the Berlin Wall and start smashing it with sledge hammers. Erich Honecker, East Germany's leader, ordered the border guards to shoot the protestors, but the guards refused.

### **Questions:**

1. What was the date of the Berlin Wall's construction?
2. What did the completed Berlin Wall have to ensure that no one would get across?
3. Give two possible reasons why Khrushchev built the Berlin Wall.
4. What was the initial reaction from the East Berliners to the Berlin Wall?
5. True or false: the people of Berlin called for President Kennedy to get his troops out of Berlin. If this is false, state what was true.
6. What was Kennedy's response to the Berliners' plea?
7. What happened on 27 October 1961?
8. True or false: Khrushchev would have preferred war than having the Berlin Wall. Use a quote to back up your choice.
9. In what year did Communism fall?
10. Do you think that the Berlin Wall had a great impact on the history of the Cold War?

*Explain your answer*