BERLIN WALL CONSTRUCTION
On 13th August 1961, the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR) Communist government began building a barbed wire and concrete divide between East and West Berlin. Its official purpose was to keep Western ‘fascists’ from entering East Germany but, with defections reaching 1,000 people a day by the summer of 1961, it served primarily as a means of stopping the exodus from East to West.

WHAT WAS THE BERLIN WALL?
The barrier separating East and West Berlin was 27-miles long and comprised of two concrete walls. In between the walls was the so-called ‘death strip’ which contained hundreds of watchtowers, miles of anti-vehicle trenches and trip-wire machine guns, along with numerous other defences.

DEFIANT DEFECTORS
19-year-old East German border guard, Corporal Conrad Schumann, was the first to escape across a 3-foot-high roll of barbed wire two days after the border had been closed. There were many more attempts with escapees hiding in cars driven by visiting West Berliners, digging tunnels and crawling through sewers.

THE DEATH TOLL
An estimated 138 people were shot, suffered fatal accidents or took their own lives following unsuccessful attempts to cross the wall.* Ida Siekmann was the first to lose her life on 22nd August 1961 in an attempt to reach a West Berlin street below her fourth-floor East Berlin apartment. The last death was in March 1989 when an East German citizen crashed into power lines attempting a hot air balloon flight over the wall.

THE FALL OF THE WALL
The Berlin Wall fell on 9th November 1989 when the head of the East German Communist Party declared that GDR citizens could cross the border. Crowds swarmed the wall with some crossing freely into the West, while others began striking the wall with hammers and picks.

THE BERLIN WALL TODAY
While most traces of the wall were removed after German re-unification, it is still possible to visit this powerful symbol of a once divided city.

* The Centre for Research on Contemporary History Potsdam and the Berlin Wall Memorial Site and Documentation Center

SOURCES:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/places/berlin_wall
http://www.mydestinationberlin.com/usefulinfo/top-berlin-wall-locations