

# THE BERLIN WALL

13<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 1961 – 9<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1989

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

## THE FALL OF THE WALL

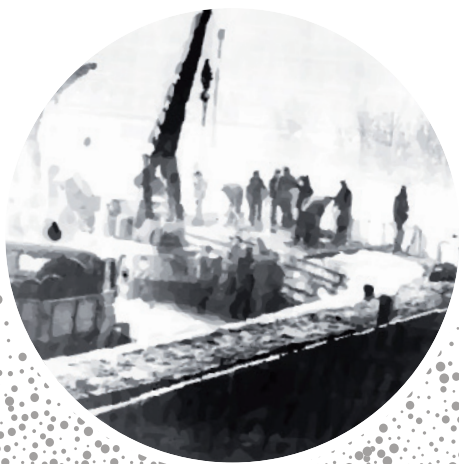
The Berlin Wall fell on 9th November 1989 when the head of the East German Communist Party declared that GDR citizens could cross the border. Crowds swarmed the wall with some crossing freely into the West, while others began striking the wall with hammers and picks.

The demolition officially commenced on 13th June 1990 and was completed by 1992.

## 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.

More than a kilometre in length, the largest remaining stretch of the wall stands at the East Side Gallery. This international memorial for freedom is made up of a series of paintings that tell the story of Berlin and the movement towards freedom.



**Watch tower**  
Located next to  
the first wall/fence

**Concrete wall/  
wire-mesh fence**  
Some fitted with electric  
warning device

**Steel stakes**  
Planted in the  
ground

Barbed wire

Bunker

**Border patrols**  
Patrol vehicles and  
armed guards

Anti-vehicle ditch

**Concrete slab wall**

WEST

**Wire-mesh fence**  
2m high

**Dog Patrols**

3.6m

**27 miles**  
Wall length between  
East and West Berlin

## SOURCES:

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