

The Berlin Crisis, 1961

The Berlin Wall

Do not confuse the Berlin Wall Crisis of 1961 with the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49.

The Berlin Wall was built because Khrushchev wanted the Western powers out of Berlin.

West Berlin (which was capitalist) was in the Soviet zone of Germany. As a result of the Marshall Plan living standards were better than in East Berlin so **West Berlin** was like **an advert for capitalism**.

Between **1945 and 1961, 2 million East Berliners** crossed the border to live in West Berlin. Many of those were **skilled or educated** people whom the East needed.

In 1961 at the **Vienna summit**, Khrushchev **demanding Kennedy** (the new President of America) **give up Berlin**, Kennedy refused.

On 13th August 1961, Khrushchev then decided to make it impossible for East Berliners to travel to West Berlin by placing **barbed wire** between East and West Berlin; this was protected with **machine guns**.

The wire was then replaced with a **wall**. This wall remained until **1989**.

The wall **separated friends and family**. Anyone trying to cross the wall was shot. More than **40 Germans** were shot trying to cross into West Berlin in the **first year**.

Khrushchev argued that by building the wall he was protecting the security of the Soviet Union.

The Berlin Crisis threatened world peace because:

- It was a **propaganda victory for the USA** but there was **pressure on Kennedy to** react by **taking direct action**. Kennedy did not want to go to war over Berlin, but he was concerned that he **did not want to be seen as weak**. This may have encouraged his reaction in the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- In **1963 Kennedy visited Berlin** and declared "Ich bin ein Berliner" **promising to defend Berlin** against the Soviets. This made the Soviets angry.
- It **showed** the USA that **Khrushchev could be just as cruel and brutal system** as Stalin.
- However in some ways **it removed an area of conflict** between the superpowers as the USA no longer feared a repeat of the Berlin Blockade (1948-49) and the USSR showed it was no longer committed to removing the West from Berlin. It also reduced the number of defectors