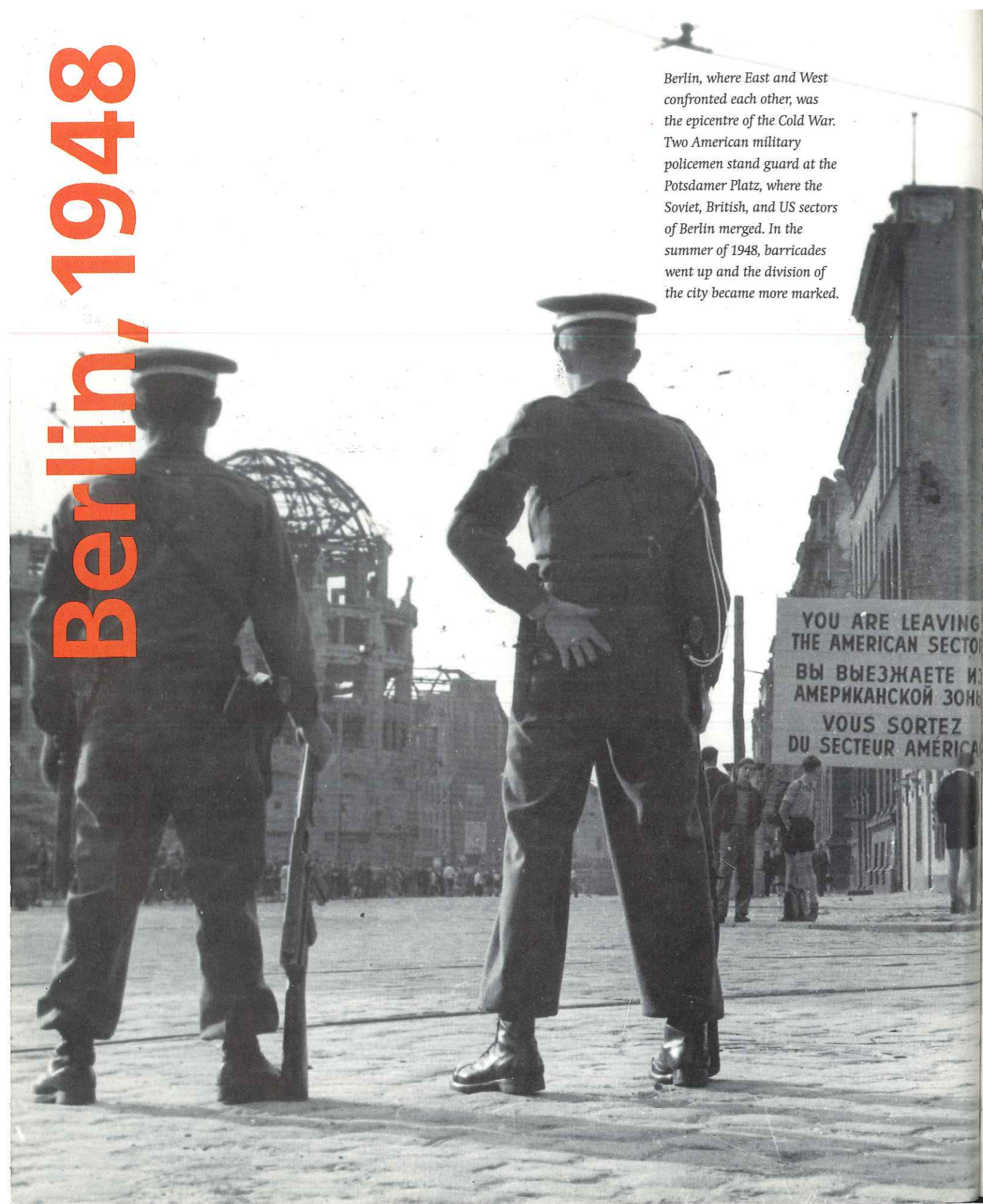


Berlin, 1948

Berlin, where East and West confronted each other, was the epicentre of the Cold War. Two American military policemen stand guard at the Potsdamer Platz, where the Soviet, British, and US sectors of Berlin merged. In the summer of 1948, barricades went up and the division of the city became more marked.



A Divided City

By the spring of 1948 the ideological division of Europe into two rival camps was almost complete, except in Germany and the two cities of Vienna and Berlin, where Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States each governed a separate sector. The Potsdam Conference, which had divided Germany among the victorious Big Four into four zones of military occupation, also divided the city of Berlin. Agreements about free access to Berlin, which was deep within the Soviet occupation zone, subsequently were formalized in September 1945, when the four nations concurred on which road and rail lines would be used in supplying areas of the city occupied by the Western Allies. Then, in October, the Allies agreed to the establishment of air corridors across the Soviet zone between Berlin and the Western sectors of Germany. For three years there was free movement along the accepted routes of access to the city.

Berlin had suffered round-the-clock bombing in the war, by the US Eighth Air Force during the day and the Royal Air Force at night. The city also had suffered heavy bombardment by the Red Army during the final battle. The destruction of Germany's once great capital was almost total: whole districts had been flattened; entire apartment blocks were demolished; almost every building in the city showed signs of damage. Food was perpetually in short supply, and the official currency, the reichsmark, gradually became worthless. The black market flourished, and the cigarette became a form of currency in itself. Barter was widespread for whatever goods could be found. The citizens of Berlin had, literally, to dig in the rubble to scratch out a living.

Germany was the last unanswered question between the United States and the Soviet Union. Throughout the long negotiations of 1946 and 1947, the

Berlin

1948-1949



As the reichsmark, the official currency, lost value, barter and the black market took its place. Berliners traded anything for food. Cigarettes became a form of currency.

Soviets had repeatedly shown anxiety over a revived Germany. The damage caused to the USSR by the invasion and scorched-earth retreat of the Wehrmacht was so great that Russia felt justified in demanding vast reparations from Germany. Where they could, the Soviets dismantled factories they seized, almost brick by brick, machine by machine, and transported the whole lot back by train to the USSR.

The Americans and the British never put their faith in a policy of reparations. They knew what the vast and punitive reparations demanded by France after the First World War had done to keep the devastated German economy



from recovering and to promote the climate in which Nazism was to flourish. Determined to prevent conditions in which extremism might grow again in Germany, the Americans in 1947 wanted to see a revived Germany at the centre of a prosperous Europe. Ernest Bevin, Britain's foreign secretary, had no love of Germany, but he gradually accepted the West's need for that country's revival as a democratic state built upon a strong industrial base, especially the iron and steel industries in the Ruhr, which lay within the British zone of occupation.

In his Stuttgart speech of 6 September 1946, James F. Byrnes, then still the US secretary of state, had called for a higher level of industrial activity within Germany, for monetary reform, and for preparations to form a German government. At the Big Four meeting in Moscow in March–April 1947, the Western powers failed to agree on any of these points with the Soviets. The USSR still demanded \$10 billion in reparations and joint control of the Ruhr industrial region.

Friction newly stirred by the Marshall Plan put even greater strain on the situation in Germany. The Council of Foreign Ministers met once more in London from 25 November to 15 December 1947. Again there were major disagreements over the same issues: reparations, control over the industries of the Ruhr, and German unity. The meeting ultimately broke up in accusation



Berlin had been bombed day and night through the latter years of the war. Berliners and refugees arriving in the city faced a constant struggle for food, warmth, and light. The US wanted to see German recovery and currency reform.

and counter-accusation. Secretary of State Marshall summed up his conclusion during a broadcast to the American people: "We cannot look forward to a reunified Germany at this time. We must do our best in the area where our influence can be felt." If the Americans could not get Soviet support for their policy towards Germany, then they would go it alone in the Western zones.

In January 1948 the British cabinet discussed the situation. Bevin presented a paper that argued for slow movement towards a West German government, and for action on currency reform to undercut the rampant black market. Bevin thought of Britain as an intermediary between the French, who



were still fearful of German recovery, and the Americans, who were increasingly frustrated by what they saw as French obstructionism. For the United States, questions of national security were beginning to focus almost exclusively upon the Soviet Union. The French were haunted by an ancient rivalry with Germany and bitter memories of recent defeat and occupation.

On 23 February representatives from the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, along with the United States, met in London to plan for the new West German entity, and for the participation of Germany in the Marshall Plan. News of the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia added impetus to the urgency for creating this new state.

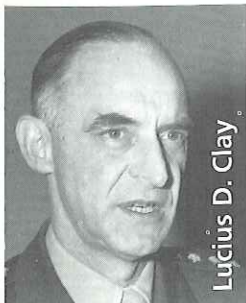
As before, spies within the Foreign Office in London passed reports to Soviet intelligence about secret discussions at the London conference. On 12 March, Foreign Minister Molotov was advised that the "Western powers are transforming Germany into their strongpoint" and incorporating it into a "military-political bloc" aimed at the Soviet Union. Molotov accused the Allies of violating the agreements of Potsdam, and announced that decisions made at the London conference were invalid.

The same intelligence reports were passed on to Marshal Vassily Sokolovsky, the Soviet military governor in Germany, who had been Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov's chief of staff during the march on Berlin. To the American,

French, and British military delegations who met with their Soviet counterparts as the Allied Control Council to govern Germany, Sokolovsky presented a cold, hard face. Among his aides, however, he was known for his sense of humour. Sokolovsky's opposite number on the American side was General Lucius D. Clay, the US military governor in Germany. Clay appeared to his aides to have an endless capacity for work, rarely stopping for lunch, which he considered a waste of time. He survived on coffee and cigarettes, smoking several packs a day. With boundless confidence in his own view of the situation, he had a certain impatience with his political masters. George Kennan reported that he never noticed a "yearning for guidance" on Clay's part. By the summer of 1948 Clay was convinced of the need to move ahead with a West German state, come what may. "If we mean that we are to hold Europe against communism, we must not budge," he told General Omar Bradley, the US Army chief of staff. He continued, "I believe the future of democracy requires us to stay here until forced out."



Vassily Sokolovsky



Lucius D. Clay

At a routine Allied Control Council meeting on 20 March 1948, Sokolovsky pressed Clay and his British counterpart, General Sir Brian Robertson, for information about the conference in London — already knowing, of course, exactly what had happened. When Clay stated that they were not going to discuss the London meetings, Sokolovsky demanded to know what was the point of having a Control Council. To the others' astonishment, the Soviets then got up and, in line behind Sokolovsky, walked out of the meeting, effectively ending the council.

On 12 March, prior to the Soviet walkout, Marshall had informed the British ambassador in Washington that the United States was "prepared to proceed at once in the joint discussions on the establishment of an Atlantic security system." Bevin's dream of committing America to the defence of Europe, which had first been encouraged by the offer of the Marshall Plan, was now becoming a reality, as discussions began on what would become the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In mid-March, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Defence Pact, which was the first step towards a West European union. Militarily, it bound the signatories to come to each other's defence. And they agreed to keep troops in Germany for a period of fifty years.

Petty Obstacles Grow

Meanwhile, around Berlin, Soviet authorities began applying a range of petty bureaucratic obstacles to the free movement of people and supplies in and out of the city. Restrictions were placed on traffic using the autobahn between Berlin and the British sector in the west. The bridge over the Elbe at Hohenwarte, the only other road-crossing point, was closed for "maintenance." The British offered to send engineers to build another bridge, but Sokolovsky turned down the offer. The Soviets announced that they would search military passengers and their cargo on the rail lines, and stated that no freight shipments between Berlin and the Western zones could be made without Soviet permission. On 1 April the Soviets halted two American and



A Russian sentry guards the wreckage of a British civilian airliner that collided with a Soviet fighter over the outskirts of Berlin in April 1948. Debris from the plane fell 500 yards past the boundary of the Soviet sector.

If we mean that we are to hold Europe against communism, we must not budge. I believe the future of democracy requires us to stay here until forced out.

— Gen. Lucius D. Clay, summer 1948

two British trains after their commanders refused access to Soviet inspectors. All this amounted to what was later called the "mini-blockade." General Clay ordered a "baby airlift" to fly into Berlin enough supplies for forty-five days.

On 5 April a Vickers Viking of British European Airways took off from an airfield in West Germany on a scheduled flight into RAF Gatow, one of the Allied air bases in West Berlin. As it came into Berlin, in one of the agreed twenty-mile-wide air corridors, the Viking was buzzed by a Soviet Yak-3 fighter plane. It was not the first time this had happened. For a few days Soviet fighters had been carrying out mock attacks on Allied planes flying into Berlin. But this time, as the British transport plane took evasive action, it collided with the Yak fighter. Both planes crashed to the ground, killing all ten people on the BEA plane and the pilot of the Soviet fighter. The Soviets blamed the British for the collision, and the British blamed the Soviet pilot. A joint investigation of the accident broke down when the Soviets refused to allow German witnesses to testify. The British and Soviets separately concluded that the mid-air collision was an accident. But it made both sides more nervous.

With the situation in Berlin now alarmingly tense, the confrontation between Soviets and the West spilt over into Berlin's internal politics. The Berlin city council was the scene of a fierce power struggle between the East German Communists and their political foes, led by the Social Democrats. Ernst Reuter, a Social Democrat, was the leader of the anti-Communist coalition in Berlin, and a powerful orator. He and his family had been forced to flee Germany because of Hitler, but returning in 1946, he hoped to help rebuild Germany as a democratic state. His election in 1948 as mayor of Berlin (that is, of the whole city) was vetoed by the Soviets. Now Reuter feared he would have to take flight again, from another form of political dictatorship. Intimidation, blackmail, and kidnapping characterized the tactics of the Soviet-backed East German Communists, whose agents operated in both East and West Berlin. Communists and socialists came together in a new party, Socialist Unity, led by Walter Ulbricht, Stalin's man in East Germany.



Ernst Reuter

The London conference on Germany reconvened again in late April and sat through May. The British and Americans tried once more to persuade the French to agree to their plan for integrating West Germany into Western Europe, and eventually the French and the Benelux countries gave in. On 7 June 1948 the London conference issued its final recommendations. The Western powers authorized the presidents of the German Länder, the provincial assemblies, to convene a constituent assembly in the three Western zones and to draw up a constitution for a federal German state. Western military forces would remain in Germany until "the peace of Europe is secure," and prohibitions were imposed on any future German army to guarantee that Germany could never again become an aggressor. The new West German state would be economically integrated into Western Europe. Whatever the Soviet reaction, the Western nations made it clear, they intended to go ahead.

The Americans and the British, meanwhile, were secretly preparing to launch a new currency for the whole of West Germany. In the chaotic German

economy, only the black market was thriving. Replacing the reichsmark would not only wipe out the accumulated profits of black marketeers, it would complete the integration of Germany into the West. Millions of new bank notes, the Deutschmark, were printed by the US Mint and transported in great secrecy to West Germany. Control of currency was power in Germany at this juncture, and the Western commanders decided that now was the time for the West to exert its power.

Around Berlin tensions had worsened. Soviet military authorities threatened to close down rail traffic with the West. By 15 June canal boats and freight trains were the only means left of supplying the city. In this explosive situation, the Western Allies decided to introduce their new currency, which



was announced on 18 June. West German citizens could do nothing about the devaluation of their savings and pensions, but at least the new currency brought hope of some stability against runaway inflation. Sixty old reichsmarks, which would barely buy a pack of black-market cigarettes, could be exchanged for forty new Deutschmarks. To hold down their "currency" value while the new Deutschmark established itself, the Americans wisely imported 20 million cigarettes.

The Soviet military governor, Sokolovsky, immediately issued a proclamation denouncing the new currency as "against the wishes and interests of the German people and in the interests of the American, British, and French monopolists. . . . The separate currency reform completes the splitting of Germany. It is a breach of the Potsdam decisions." He prohibited the introduction of the new currency into the Soviet zone and into Berlin.

The Frontiers Are Sealed

On that same day Soviet authorities sealed off frontiers with the Western zones and announced new restrictions on road, rail, and canal traffic that would come into effect at midnight. General Clay assured his staff that he was not concerned by these developments: "If they had put in a currency reform and we didn't, it would have been [our] first move."

Late on 22 June the Soviet military authorities announced that a new currency, the Ostmark, would be introduced into the Eastern zone, including all of Berlin, in two days' time. The Western military commanders then declared the Soviet order null and void for West Berlin and introduced the B-mark, a

ABOVE LEFT: The Western Deutschmark, overprinted with the letter B for issue in Berlin by the Western powers. ABOVE: The Ostmark, the new currency the Soviets introduced for the Eastern zone and, they hoped, the whole of Berlin.

The Berlin blockade is depicted in this American cartoon as a Soviet bear hug.



special Deutschmark overprinted with the letter B, for the Western sectors of Berlin. Clay, who made the decision without consulting Washington, insisted it was a "technical, non-political measure." But Sokolovsky announced that the Western mark would not be permitted to circulate in Berlin, "which lies in the Soviet zone of Germany and economically forms part of the Soviet zone."

Over the next twelve hours, Berlin endured an extraordinary midsummer nightmare. On the evening of 23 June, at a meeting of the Berlin city assembly, which was located in the Soviet sector of the city, Reuter tried to persuade the assembly to approve the circulation of both the Deutschmark and the Ostmark. As thugs beat up non-Communists to intimidate them from supporting Reuter's motion, Soviet officials and Communist-controlled police stood by and watched. Nevertheless, the Berlin assembly voted to accept the Deutschmark in the Western sectors and the Ostmark in the Soviet sector.

Sokolovsky rang Molotov to ask what he should do; should he surround Berlin with tanks? Molotov told him no, this might provoke the West into doing the same, and then the only way out would be military confrontation. They decided instead to impose an immediate blockade around Berlin, and at 6:00 AM on 24 June, the barriers were lowered on all the road, rail, and canal routes linking Berlin with West Germany. That morning electricity from power stations in the Soviet sector was cut off to factories and offices in West Berlin. The official reason given was "coal shortages." So the blockade of



The Soviets attempted a complete land blockade of Berlin. Checks were intensified at every sector crossing point; one bridge over the Elbe was declared "unsafe" by the Soviets and would remain closed until the blockade ended, 12 May 1949.

Berlin began. The Soviets' purpose was clear. They wanted to force the Western Allies either to change their policies or get out of Berlin altogether.

In London and Washington there was firm political agreement that the Western powers would hold on to Berlin. "We are going to stay, period," said Truman. Bevin was equally determined, announcing that "the abandonment of Berlin would mean the loss of Western Europe." It was easy to make such statements, but much more difficult to decide what to do next.

West Berlin had symbolic status as an outpost of the democratic West inside the Communist East. By an agreement made at the time of Potsdam, the Soviets had excused themselves from the responsibility of supplying the British, American, and French sectors of the city. So 2.3 million Berliners, and the Allied military garrison there, were now cut off. The Western part of

The desperate shortage of food meant that every available square inch of ground was cultivated. This lovingly attended allotment grows vegetables as well as tobacco plants!

Berlin, 1948



Letters stamped for posting in West Berlin were additionally marked as coming from Berlin under blockade. The bear rampant is the symbol of the city.

the city relied upon the arrival of 12,000 tons of supplies each day. At the time, there was only enough food for thirty-six days, and enough coal for forty-five. The key to keeping a Western presence in Berlin clearly lay in finding a way to supply the citizens with their basic necessities. With rail, road, and canal routes blocked, the only way to get supplies in was by air. But the American C-47 transport, the military workhorse of the day, could only deliver a payload of 3 tons. Initially the prospect for an airlift to Berlin appeared to be bleak.

On 24 June the West introduced a counter-blockade, stopping all rail traffic into East Germany from the British and US zones. Over the following months this counter-blockade would have a damaging impact on East Germany, as the drying up of coal and steel shipments seriously hindered industrial development in the Soviet zone.

On that same day General Clay rang General Curtis LeMay of the US Air Force in Wiesbaden and asked him to put on standby his fleet of C-47s and any other aircraft that could be utilized. The RAF had come forward with an optimistic plan to supply Berlin by air, but Clay was sceptical. He favoured sending a convoy of US military engineers down the autobahn to force their way through the Soviet blockade, with instructions to fire back if they were fired upon. But in Washington, Truman's advisers urged caution and restraint. The president was backed into a corner. It was an election year; the American people would never support going to war with the Soviet Union just to defend

