# Berlin Wall Research

## Construction

The Berlin Wall was constructed on **13th August, 1961**. It was made overnight to avoid as much speculation as possible after the USSR had stockpiled goods for a long while. The ‘wall’ was initially a barbed wire fence around Western Berlin, but this then changed to bricks, and finally to concrete slabs which stood at over **two metres** tall! Added to this, another wall was built slightly further back from the first to double security and further minimise chances of escaping. Along the perimeter were watch towers equipped with armed guards. They were told to shoot anyone trying to escape by Khrushchev and the area of land between the walls became known as the “Dead Zone” or “Death Strip” due to how many people died.

## Geisterbahnhofe

This can be translated to “Ghost Station” in English. When the wall was erected, there was a huge limitation to free movement. Due to this, Khrushchev also decided to stop the underground trains from going into the West (and vice versa) and so public transport changed massively. Certain trains briefly passed into the East from the West, but they only really stopped at one station (called Freidrichstrasse.) The dimly lit Eastern stations were labelled “Ghost Stations” by the West Berliners as they saw the dullness and how heavily guarded they were via the windows on their trains, not to mention the barbed wire stopping any East Berliners from escaping.

## Checkpoint Charlie

Checkpoint Charlie was probably the most famous crossing area from the East to the West during the period of division. From **22nd September 1961**, the Allies used this point to cross into East Berlin with their papers to attend meetings and conferences. Firstly, they’d have to go through American customs, then secondly through the USSR customs. It was also here that the USSR and US tanks came “face-to-face,” the closest the two countries actually got to war.

## Deaths at the Wall

There were over **5000 successful escapes** from East Berlin when the wall was up! **Peter Fechter** was a man who was enclosed in East Berlin after the wall was constructed. He was a bricklayer and one of the first to die at the wall. Upon trying to escape on the wall’s Eastern side, he was shot in the pelvis and fell into the death zone where he then bled to death. Hundreds of Eastern and Western Berliners saw and were horrified: Khrushchev was telling the truth. Neither side could help him as anyone who went there would also be shot, although the West tried to throw him some medical supplies. Fechter bled out in an hour as the West shouted “Murder!” at the guards who had shot him.

Next, **Reinhold Huhn** was border guard on the Eastern side of the wall. He was shot dead by Rudolf Mueller for trying to carry out security protocol which wouldn’t have allowed Rudolf and his family to flee East Berlin. The East saw his murder as an act of “Western Warmongers” yet the West saw it as a mistake.

The **Death Zone** was the narrow strip between the two Berlin walls in which people tried to escape. Hundreds died here as Nikita Khrushchev ordered that his guards shoot anyone trying to flee the East.

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## Escapes

Conrad Schumann crossed over the Berlin Wall from the East to the West on **16th August 1961** - the third day of its standing! He survived a leap over the barbed wire fence present at the time after being told to “Come over!” by the West Berliners.

**60 Westerstrasse** was a street on the border of East Berlin where many escapes occurred, including **29 people** fleeing through the basement! Even an old lady hung out of her window to escape the East, showing how far the East Berliners were willing to go to reach freedom.

In total, there were about **5000 escapes** across the **1961 to 1989** period, so the wall was flawed, but generally much less people moved to the West and it was a success.