

History of the berlin blockade



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The Berlin blockade was an event which did not occurred just overnight. The blockade by the Russians of the city of Berlin came as a resulted from events beginning in the early part of 1947. This paper will discuss these events leading up to the blockade of the city. The reasons Russian leader, Stalin decided to enact the blockade of the city and how it was completed. How the Western allied powers (United States, Great Briton, and France), reaction to the Russian blockade of city and how they would overcome this virtual act of war. How this all accumulated with the ultimate ending of the blockade almost a year later as a bitter defeat by Russian leader Stalin.

The Berlin Blockade Discussed by Events

The Berlin blockade was the first crisis to follow the ending of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. In order to understand what preceded the blockade of Berlin one must look into the days and even months prior to the end of World War II. It was during this time that the Allied powers began having some misgivings and even distrust of their Eastern Allied alliance with Russia. Russia's leader Stalin had already begun to show signs of his intentions once the war end.

Upon the conclusion of fighting Germany was divided among the Allied powers. The United States, Great Briton, and France held the Western area of Germany while Russia controlled the Eastern area. However this division of area also included the division of the German capitol city of Berlin. The city of Berlin was also divided into four sectors with each of the allied powers control a sector. This distribution therefore put Allied troops approximately 110 miles inside the Russian sector.

Events which lead up to the Berlin Blockade

Even though President Truman and Marshall Stalin agreed in 1945 that along with the separation of Germany into four sectors, the city of Berlin which would be located inside the Russian sector would also be split into four sectors. It was then three years later that the Russians would begin conducting actions leading up to the blockade of Berlin. Now during this time the western Allies which consisted of United States, great Britain, and France began instigating measures to consolidate the control of Germany. This consolidation did not mean now on powers would leave Germany however would allow the Germans to govern themselves.

The Russians who up until this time had been invaded by Germany several different times did not agree with the other Allied powers. The Russians believed this action would result in the rearming of the Germany. The Russians further believed that by the actions of the other Allied powers that they had therefore negated their rights in the city of Berlin. Furthermore since the city of Berlin was located within this Russian zone they felt they had full control over the city.

In early March 1948 the Soviet's walked out of the Allied Control Council, which was set up as the controlling power over occupied Germany. Days later the Soviet deputy military governor presented a letter to the U. S relating that on April 1, 1948 new provisions would go into effect concerning the occupation of Berlin. These new provisions were basically the prelim to the blockade of Berlin, by restricting the free access of the moment agreed upon in 1945. The Allied powers protested these new restrictions to no avail.

As identified these actions by the Soviets was only a preview of what was to come. Four during this time the western Allies had been working on a plan which would become known as the Marshall plan. This allowed for Germany to govern its own self and establish an economic base. The Russians were against this plan with their biggest objection being that of the currency which would be used in the occupied areas. After several months of negotiations in June 1948 no agreement could be reached and at that time the Allied powers in a reduced the West German mark as our form of currency.

Upon the introduction of the new currency in the western zones, the Soviets enacted a full blockade of the city of Berlin. At this point the Russians cut off all access to the city of Berlin via rail hwy and water. The only access left open for the Allies to use was the air corridors. By this action the Soviets bitterly trapped U. S. servicemen and their families along with German citizens residing in the western zones of occupation. Even though there was discussion of possible withdrawal from the city of Berlin, the western Allied powers agreed to stay enforce their rights within the city.

Now at this point in time the Soviets not only cut off the city of Berlin from any outside access by land. They also restricted movement within the zones inside the city. This meant that literally all members of the western Allied forces, dependence, and German citizens now had to rely on what they had. Then on 1 July 1948 the Allied forces began airlifting supplies into the city of Berlin to sustain those people.

The Berlin Airlift

The Soviet blockade of Berlin was an attempt to control all of Berlin. However in only blockading moment by land and water the Russians felt that this was significant in order to accomplish their mission. At the time of the blockade inside the western zones of Berlin there were only two operating airfield each with only one operating runway. Since the Russians knew this it was inconceivable that the western powers would be able to sustain themselves for any length of time by air.

The Russians were proven wrong in their assumptions that a sustained are left cannot be accomplished. As most would put it the airlift into Berlin code name operation vittles, showed some of the best work of our military and was a brilliant idea. In order to persuade the Russians not to attempt any escalation into the crisis B-29 Superfortress bombers as were sent to Germany and Britain as a deterrent.

(George Herring, 2008) “ For eleven months in what was called Operation Vittles, fleets of C-47 Skytrain and C-54 Skymaster transports flew 250 missions a day around the clock, moving an average 2, 500 tons of food, fuel, raw materials, and finished goods daily into Berlin to feed and heat two million people and maintain some semblance of a functioning economy. At the height of the blockade, planes landed every forty-five seconds.”

Even though the blockade of Berlin was lifted by Stalin in may of 1949. The airlift continued to bring in supplies to the city of Berlin until September of that year. However successful the operation was in sustaining life in the city

of Berlin it did come with the cost of losing equipment and lives. During the eleven month operation there were 40 crashes resulting in 78 deaths.

End of the Berlin Blockade

By the latter part of early 1949 the Soviets had pretty much given into the fact that the blockade was ineffective. The Soviets then began making secret contacts through the United Nations in order to broker an end to the crisis. It is ironic that the efforts of the Soviets in initially starting the blockade opened the door to the creation of other organizations with a vested interest in protecting Europe. The most notable organization to be created was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The blockade itself also failed in its attempt to halt a reorganization of Germany into a single state.

Therefore in May 1949, Stalin officially lifted the blockade of the city of Berlin. However it must be noted that the free access it was originally guaranteed in 1945 agreement, was never fully reinstated. Even though access through the Soviet sector to West Germany had been open all military traffic whether by rail or highway still had to proceed through checkpoints. Then in the early 1960s the Soviets bad guy and attempted to control movement within the city of Berlin by building a wall around the western sectors. Even though this was not officially a blockade because access was not denied. The twenty-two miles of wall which surrounded the western sectors literally made it an island within the Soviet sector.