

Today, I'm going to tell you about one of the most inspiring events that occurred in my or your parents' lifetime - which is the fall of the BERLIN WALL, in November 1989.

But to understand why this was such a big event, we need to go back to 1945 - 44 years before the fall of the Wall. Germany had been defeated in WORLD WAR II, and was occupied by the Allies that had defeated it - the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union (Russia). The Soviet Union occupied the eastern part of Germany. The western half of Germany was divided into three sectors, with the top of the western half being taken over by the British, most of the bottom half taken over by the United States, and a small part of the bottom western half nearest France occupied by the French. The same arrangement applied to the German capital Berlin, which was deep inside the Soviet sector. The western half of Berlin was controlled by the British and the Americans, while the eastern half was controlled by the Soviet Union.



Once the war was over, relations between the Americans and the British, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union, on the other hand, got worse and worse as it became clear that the Soviet Union hoped to take over control over the whole of Europe - which was obviously something that the British and Americans could not allow, having already lost so many men and spent so much money trying to prevent Germany under ADOLF HITLER doing exactly the same thing. And so began a 40 year long COLD WAR between the West and the Soviet Union. It was war because the Soviet Union was trying to extend its control all over the world, and the British and the Americans were fighting back against that. But it was a COLD war, because the two sides never started shooting at each other (or worse, launching hugely destructive NUCLEAR WEAPONS at each other) - instead, they had local people do the fighting for them, when there was fighting, with local wars breaking out between forces supported by the Soviet Union and forces supported by the West in KOREA in the 1950s, and in VIETNAM (pronounced 'Vee - et - naam') in the 1960s and early 1970s.

One of the first 'shots' in the Cold War was the attempt by the Soviet Union to try to take over the whole of Berlin in 1948, and drive away the British and Americans that were in charge of the western half of Berlin. They did this by imposing a BLOCKADE around the Western half of Berlin, not allowing anything to come in or out of the western half. The idea was that the British and Americans wouldn't be able to last out without supplies - and would eventually beat a retreat back to the western half of Germany. But the British and Americans responded by organising daily AIRLIFTS, where planes would fly from the western part of Germany to Berlin and drop supplies in the western half of Berlin. After over a year of this, the Soviets saw that their blockade was being beaten, and they lifted it. But they got their revenge by declaring that the



eastern half of Germany would break away from the rest of Germany and form its own country, which would be known as EAST GERMANY. Once this happened, it was inevitable that the western half of Germany would form its own country too, and become WEST GERMANY. And that's why the 1966 World Cup Final was played between England and WEST Germany, not just Germany. West Germany lost that World Cup Final 4-2, but they made up for it by winning the 1974 World Cup Final, beating Holland 2-1.

Once Germany was split into East and West Germany, it became very easy to see the difference between what it was like to live in a communist country, where the State controls what is produced and who gets what, and a capitalist country, where free markets determine what is produced and who gets what. The communist East Germany got poorer and poorer, while the capitalist West Germany got richer and richer. And once the difference between the two countries became clear, the Soviet Union had a big problem with Berlin. Because the western half of Berlin was still under British and American control - so someone in East Germany who realised how terrible life was under communism could escape that life, and escape into West Germany, simply by walking into the western half of Berlin, and flying from there into West Germany - where they probably had relatives. Instead of thinking, 'Maybe there's something wrong with our system, that so many people want to escape from it', the Soviet Union thought instead, 'How can we stop people making us look bad by running away from East Germany and going to West Germany via the western half of Berlin?' And the idea for a wall was born - to stop people escaping from East Germany, a wall would be built down the centre of Berlin, dividing the eastern half from the western half so that no one could cross from the east to the west without very strict permission (and threats that bad things would happen to any people you left behind in the east if you didn't come back).

But if the wall was going to be built, it would have to be built really quickly - because as soon as people in the eastern part of Berlin saw it going up, and their chance of freedom disappearing with it, they would rush over to the western side. So the wall was put up almost overnight. On 13 August 1961, the East German government put up barbed wire barriers down the centre of



Berlin to make it harder to cross over, and then started quickly putting up concrete blocks to make a wall that would replace the barbed wire barriers. By 17 August, the wall was pretty much in place - though the East Germans obviously made it much bigger and more sophisticated over time. And that was that. There was now no way out for people living in East Germany. Anyone who tried to make a run for it and climb over the wall would be shot. Around 5,000 people tried, over the years, and 200 of them were shot dead by East German soldiers - shot dead for just wanting a better life for themselves. And so things stood until 1989, when the Soviet Union started falling apart (I told you about this on October 1), and started losing control over the Eastern European countries that it had controlled since the end of World War II.

The end of the Berlin Wall was triggered by a press conference on 9 November 1989, held by the leader of the Communist Party in Berlin. He had been instructed to announce a new policy, allowing East Germans to apply to visit West Germany. He was asked 'When does this policy take effect?' He didn't really know the answer and guessed, 'Well, I think it takes effect immediately.' A journalist for the DAILY TELEGRAPH called Daniel Johnson then asked, 'What does this mean for the Berlin Wall?' and the leader of the Communist party in Berlin had no real response. The poor people living in the eastern half of Berlin didn't need to be invited twice - they rushed straight to the areas where you could cross the Berlin Wall and demanded that the East German soldiers let them through. The soldiers, not knowing what to do, just let them through. The people on the western side of Berlin greeted them and a party broke out. And a few brave people climbed on top of the wall - and when the soldiers didn't react to that, a lot more people climbed on top of the wall, and soon enough people were bringing along hammers and pickaxes and getting to work at demolishing the wall. And that's how on the 10 November 1989, 51 years ago, people in the astonished West woke up to see scenes of the Berlin Wall being demolished - a huge event which symbolised the fall of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. And that is why the demolition of the Berlin Wall is one of the most historic events in my or your parents' lifetimes. You can ask them, 'Where were you when you found out the Berlin Wall had fallen?' - and I bet they would be able to tell you.

