

Headline Story

Checkpoint Charlie Symbolized Germany's Division

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Even though Checkpoint Charlie was the third among three U.S. passageways between West Berlin and East Berlin, it became the most famous.

President Kennedy ordered U.S. forces to build the three checkpoints in 1961 for diplomatic corps and allied forces to enter West Berlin.

The checkpoints got their names from the first three letters of the alphabet, in the phonetic fashion the military and others use for clarity: The first two were Alpha and Bravo, but they stayed in the shadow, by comparison, of Checkpoint Charlie.

"In the early years, Checkpoint Charlie was the site of a few stand-offs between east and west, America and the Soviets, most notoriously in 1961 when American and Soviet tanks faced each other at the checkpoint," according to [A View On Cities](#) Web site. "Both Kennedy and his Soviet nemesis Nikita Khrushchev visited the checkpoint shortly after it was erected."

By 1962, the checkpoint had become the only spot where foreigners could pass between the two Berlins.

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, also chronicled Charlie, writing in National Review Online on Sept. 30, 2003, "The symbol of Germany's division was Checkpoint Charlie, the most famous border crossing.

"U.S. and Soviet tanks confronted each other at this spot; nearby bricklayer Peter Fechter died while attempting to escape," Bandow wrote. "In 1963 the Wall Museum was opened yards away.

"The Wall highlighted the triumph of the human spirit over enormous, monstrous evil," Bandow wrote. "Museum exhibits include specially designed automobiles to conceal escapees, chairlifts that were used from buildings adjoining the Wall, tunneling equipment, balloons, a motorized glider, and even a mini-submarine."

Charlie's main function was to register and provide information to members of the Western military forces before they entered East Berlin. The German authorities in West and East Berlin were not allowed to check any members of the Allied Military Forces in Berlin and in Germany.

Checkpoint Charlie was removed on June 22, 1990. The former Allied guardhouses are in the Allied Museum.

A replica of Checkpoint Charlie's guard booth was built at the original site on Aug. 13, 2000. It remains a magnetic tourist draw, along with its nearby museum.

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