

FOREIGN OFFICE FILES: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Series Three: The Cold War

Part 1: The Berlin Crisis, 1947-1950

Publisher's Note

The Berlin Crisis, culminating in the massive Allied Airlift, June 1948-May 1949, was one of the first major episodes of the Cold War and helped to shape the nature and outline of modern Germany before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Disagreements over Germany led to the Russian closure of the road routes to Berlin. The massive "Berlin airlift" became the city's only supply route. In 1948 the first American B29 Superfortress squadrons arrived in Britain in East Anglia - the vanguard of a force which was to steadily expand as the Cold War intensified.

The Crisis followed swiftly in the aftermath of the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, February 1948, and the signature of the Brussels Treaty, March 1948.

In this microfilm project we offer comprehensive coverage of Foreign Office files from FO 371 for 1947-1950 on the following:-Situation in Berlin; the Soviet blockade of access to Berlin; Western counter measures and retaliation via trade channels; the massive Airlift; Berlin currency and trade; the Berlin railway strike; the administration of Western Berlin; Minutes of Meetings of Commandants, Berlin, 1947-1950; Weekly Intelligence Reports from Berlin, 1947-1950; Visits carried out by the British Military Governor, Berlin; Allied Control Council documents on Berlin; UN Security Council debates on Berlin; Operation "Plainfare" and the use of civilian aircraft for the Berlin airlift; Soviet Breaches of the Four-Power Agreement on Germany; Berlin weekly political summaries and the Tripartite agreement on the Control of the Western Sectors of Berlin. We also provide some files on discussions on the Future political structure of Germany where these have a direct bearing on events in Berlin.

As well as the strong body of Foreign Office files, which are full of high level diplomatic correspondence, telegrams, records of meetings, briefing papers and Foreign Office analyses of events, we include related AIR, CAB, FO, DEFE, Treasury and PREM files providing material on the Cabinet Committee on Germany and records of the Control Commission for Germany, the RAF Ferry and Transport Command, the British Air Forces of Occupation (BAFO) and Ministry of Defence Papers. These papers allow scholars to see the day by day and week by week workings of Operation "Plainfare", collaboration at various levels between Britain and America, the sheer volume of supplies airlifted and the manpower and expenditure involved.

For instance:

- AIR 2/10573 covers the Working Party on the civil contribution to Operation "Plainfare".
- AIR 38/377 provides a Report on activities of the Combined Airlift Task Force demonstrating co-operation between the RAF and the USAF and the complexity of organising and co-ordinating both military and civilian aircrews during the Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949.
- AIR 55/111 provides the Final Report on the Berlin Airlift, 1949-1950.
- CAB 21/1881-1892 offers complete coverage of the Registered Files of the Cabinet Committee on Germany. These cover the Berlin Supply Position (June 1948 to July 1949) and the Situation in Berlin (June 1948 to May 1949).
- DEFE 7/2051 (from the Ministry of Defence Registered Files) covers the Berlin Airlift: Execution and further planning, 1948-1956.
- T 236/1025-1026 are included to give a Treasury perspective on expenditure and costs involved.
- FO 1012 offers the Regional Records for Berlin of the Control Commission for Germany.

- PREM 8/990 gives a summary of achievements of the Berlin Airlift and includes papers on the Working party to co-ordinate civilian aircraft with the RAF.
- FO 1049 covers the Berlin transport situation.

"This invaluable microfilm collection from the archives of the Public Record Office at Kew provides an account of day to day proceedings during the crucial months of the early Cold War which will be of great use to students of the Crisis"

Gillian Staerck, Research Fellow,
Institute of Contemporary British History, London

In June 1948, the closing off of the Soviet sector from the rest of Germany produced the first major crisis of the Cold War period. Berlin began to run out of food and fuel. To avoid surrendering the city to Soviet forces, General Clay, commanding the American forces, ordered substantial quantities of supplies to be flown in from Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt to the American Base in Berlin. General LeMay, Air Force Commander in Europe, agreed the use of other European bases with France and Belgium.

On 26 June 1948, USAF C-47s delivered the first 80 tons of food supplies into Berlin after the Soviet authorities claiming "Technical difficulties" halted all traffic by land and by water into or out of the western controlled sectors of Berlin. For the next 11 months the Allies sustained the city's 2.5 million population by one of the greatest logistical feats in aviation history.

Tempelhof airbase was used in the US sector, Gatow in the British zone, whilst in the French sector, Tegel airbase was built in only 60 days using volunteer labour.

The first USAF C-47 aircraft which carried supplies into Berlin were soon supplemented by C-54s, US Navy and Royal Air Force cargo aircraft. Somewhere close to 4,500 tons of food, coal and other supplies were required daily. The British side of the airlift was codenamed Operation "Plainfare". The American operation was known as Operation "Vittles". On 15 October 1948 the Allies established a unified command, the Combined Airlift Task Force, headed by Major General William H Tunner of the USAF. America sent three Strategic Air Command bomb groups with B-29s to Europe to emphasize Allied determination to resist Soviet pressure.

At midnight on 12 May 1949 the Soviet Union re-opened land and water routes into Berlin. However, the Airlift continued until 30 September 1949 so as to build up a safe level of supplies.

This microfilm project allows scholars access to a wide range of public records and will greatly facilitate study of all aspects of the crisis.

"These files are a rich seam full of gems - primary data from inside the Foreign Office presenting an unfolding picture on the first chilling crisis of the cold war."

Dr Martin Dedman
School of Economics, Middlesex University

These British records provide a wealth of detail on decisions at Cabinet Committee level; military and civilian planning groups; high level discussions between the Allies; Foreign Office deliberations, thinking and assessments, and the crucial task of co-ordination throughout the entire operation.

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Technical Note

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microform of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. A few manuscript documents consist of faintly legible correspondence and records written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils and on paper of many different types and thicknesses. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read. A few items consist of carbon copies of documents and these again pose problems where the original is very faint.

Most of the material consists of folders containing loose papers. There are also a few volumes of material that are tightly bound. In a few cases this means that documents are partly obscured in the inner margin resulting in a small amount of text loss or distortion.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties. Subject headings and item numbers are clearly marked. Each frame is filmed with a vertical strip target which identifies the relevant Public Record Office class number and piece number.

The Public Record Office at Kew, England, has exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

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Series Three: The Cold War

Part 1: The Berlin Crisis, 1947-1950

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