

Berlin Blockade and Berlin Airlift, 1948-49

Background

After WW2, the four allies* had agreed to divide Germany into four zones of occupation.

Berlin lay inside the Soviet occupied zone, and was also divided into four zones of occupation amongst the allies.

Access to Berlin through the Soviet zone was by way of road, rail and canal alongside three specific air corridors.

*The four allies: The USA, UK, France & the Soviet Union



On 24th June 1948, Stalin cut all land access to Berlin for the Allies. This became known as the Berlin Blockade.

Why did Stalin choose to Blockade Berlin?

Conflicting Policies

The allies wanted a strong Germany to act as a buffer against the communist states of Eastern Europe.

In contrast, Stalin wanted to weaken Germany as a punishment for the war and to make sure it could never threaten the Soviet Union again.

Marshall Aid

Using money from the Marshall Aid programme, the Allies were helping the Germans to rebuild their economy.

The USA supplied goods to German shops for workers to buy. This was a way of showing the communists that America's capitalist economy was flourishing.

Re-joining Germany

At a meeting in London in January 1948, Britain and the USA joined their zones together to create 'Bizonia' and make it easier to administer them. France would later join and they'd change the name to West Germany.



What did the Berlin Blockade mean for West Berlin?

- Berlin could now only be accessed by air, restricting travel outside of Berlin
- A food shortage, West Berlin only had enough food for 36 days
- A lack of basic goods, like food and medicine

How did the Western Allies react?

As forcing their way into the city could have led to another war, the Western Allies started supplying Berlin via air. This was expensive, but an important test for the USA's containment policy, aiming to restrict communism from spreading.

Stalin was powerless to stop the airlift, without potentially starting WW3, and at this point (unlike the USA) the USSR did not possess nuclear weapons.

The 'Berlin Airlift' lasted for eleven months until the Blockade was lifted in May 1949.