

Berlin Spy Tunnel - I

Lead: In 1954, at the height of the Cold War, the CIA and British MI6 dug a tunnel under divided Berlin to spy on the Russians. They thought it was a secret.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The city of Berlin during the 1950s was divided east and west and was the focus of much tension between the Soviet Union and the western Allies. It was also crawling with spies. One of those was the CIA's station chief in Berlin, William King

Harvey. He received information that the Soviets had laid three telephone and telegraph cables 18 inches beneath the soil near the road to Shönefeld Airport. Over these lines the Soviet military command in Berlin communicated with Moscow. Building on the experience of the British who had conducted a similar but smaller operation against the Soviets in Vienna, Harvey convinced his bosses to construct a tunnel, intercept the cables and tap them.

The closest the Allies could get placed their end of the tunnel in a rather desolate and open part of the American sector. That meant the shaft would have to stretch over 1400 feet and would generate 3100 tons of dirt.

To cover the construction, beginning in August 1954, the CIA constructed a false radar station. Attached to it was a warehouse with a deep basement filled with dirt from the tunnel.

A few inches of soil were cleared away at a time, a giant ring shaped the walls which were kept in place by a circular section of steel liner, coated with rubber to prevent noise. Once the tunnel reached a point directly under the lines, the British took over and dug the vertical shaft. They created an underground chamber so that workmen could tap the lines and maintain the connections. To protect the tap chamber from moisture, it was sealed from the rest of the tunnel with

a heavy steel and concrete door.

When the tunnel was complete, six hundred tape recorders were poised to capture the stolen conversations. Some of the data was good, such as that revealing the poor condition Eastern Bloc railroads. Some of it was just gossip: the wife of a general was caught smuggling oriental rugs back to the Soviet Union. But there was one major problem: The Russians knew it was there. Next time: the mole does his job.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Huntington, Thomas. "The Berlin Spy Tunnel Affair,"
American Heritage of Invention and Technology **10** (4,
Spring, 1995), 44-52.

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