

Blockade Threat Recalls Five Months In Berlin

(Courier-Journal staff writer Paul Contestable served five months Army duty in 1953 in the four-powered city of Berlin which was headline news this week as the Russians threatened to create a new political crisis there. Following is the story of his stay in the troubled city.)

By PAUL CONTESTABLE

Berlin—the city of contrasts—once more headlines the news in papers all over the world. Even as the Russians threaten another blockade to isolate the city from the Western world, news also comes from the Vatican that the Bishop of Berlin has been raised to cardinal's rank by Pope John XXIII.

What is this once powerful German capital like today? How is reconstruction of the war torn city progressing? What has Russian control of the Eastern sector meant?

My first view of Berlin came in the summer of 1953 when I spent five months Army duty as a psychological warfare officer in the four-powered city. My impression on my arrival and when I left were the same—Berlin was a city divided against itself, a city of contrasts.

In the three Western sectors, controlled by the British, French and Americans there were still signs of bombed out buildings, but rising from this rubble were beautiful new buildings—massive and magnificently constructed.

CONTRASTING to this amazing work of reconstruction was the Eastern sector of Berlin with its Russian control. The rebuilding that had been so prominent in the Western sectors was definitely lacking here. Piles of rubble were everywhere.

Even the buildings that had survived the heavy World War II bombings were in desperate need of repair. Boards were nailed across openings that once held windows. There were no stores or places of entertainment in sight.

Only along Stalin Alley was there any evidence of rebuilding. This was the showplace of the Communists. For about a mile there were uniform apartment houses eight to 12 stories high constructed of white tile. Communist party members lived in these apartments and the stores on the ground floor were built for the party members.

Behind this Communist showplace was nothing but rubble.

The contrast between East and West was even more evident among the people. The streets of the Russian sector were all but deserted compared to the crowded Western sectors.

There were no groups gathered on street corners talking and laughing. There were no smiles on the faces of the people. There were few automobiles. In place of the bustling noise typical of a big city was an almost eerie silence.

Aside from the numerous soldiers and "police" that roamed the Russian sector in pairs, machine guns over their shoulders, there were few people in sight. Of these, most of them were old people in shabby clothes.

MY FIRST contact with the Russians served as a warning of

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what to expect during my four of duty in Berlin.

When I arrived in Frankfurt I found that I would be traveling the final 125 miles to Berlin aboard a German train through the Russian zone of Germany. I also learned I was the only American aboard the train.

Night was falling when the train began its slow trek and I decided to get some rest.

A heavy pounding at the door of my compartment woke me suddenly and a loud voice burst forth in a foreign language.

I unlatched the door and saw a Russian officer, the first of many to appear during my stay in Berlin. His uniform was drab and coarse, his chest covered with medals. Behind him, silent, stood the commanding officer.

The Russian began again in a loud voice. Unable to understand him, I assumed he wanted to see my papers authorizing my travel through Russian controlled territory.

Taking the papers from my briefcase, I held them out to him. He snatched them without taking his eyes off mine.

As he glanced at the papers, he continually looked up at me—

never smiling, never changing his expression. This, they told me, was the usual reception people receive from the Russians.

Then the Russian stopped looking at the papers and stared at me for at least a minute without saying a word. I looked back trying not to show any expression on my face.

Suddenly the heavy-set Russian broke the stare and seemed to fix his eyes on something else in the room. I was puzzled as to what he was looking at but I did not turn to look. His face seemed to grow sterner.

Then as suddenly as he had come, he mumbled something, handed my papers back to me and moved quickly out of the compartment.

As soon as the door was latched again, I turned and saw what had attracted his attention—my Rosary beads.

The train schedule indicated it would be a few hours before we reached Berlin. It was midnight, so back to bed.

I awoke again about 2 a.m. The train was not moving. Lifting the blind I looked out expecting to see a railroad station of some sort. I saw nothing. It was quiet, dark and desolate.



Then two Russian soldiers appeared with Tommy guns over their shoulders. A few minutes passed and two more appeared.

Once more there was a heavy pounding at the door. I opened it and another Russian officer bolted into the compartment. He was speaking rapidly and forcefully but again in Russian.

Then an old man dressed in black appeared from the shadows behind the officer. His ragged white beard and thick mustache almost hid his face entirely.

Speaking slowly but in very good English, the old man told me not to raise the blind again. The Russian turned and quickly moved out.

THE OLD MAN stood there briefly but silently as if trying to say something. Had he too noticed the Rosary? His eyes were saying what his lips could not.

The Russian officer shouted and the man moved quickly out of the room.

It was three o'clock before sleep came again. Fortunately this time I did not awake again until we reached the Allied Sector of Berlin as dawn was breaking. A sigh of relief came over me—the crisis was reached.

Ten hours had passed and only 125 miles—a trip I'll never forget.

NEXT WEEK: An American officer is kidnaped by the Russians.

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U.S. Bishops' Group To Promote Liturgy

Washington—(NC)—The Bishops of the United States have set up an Episcopal Commission of the Liturgical Apostolate to promote and oversee the liturgical movement in this country.

(The "liturgical movement" launched by Pope St. Pius X in 1903 seeks a greater participation of the laity in the prayers and rites of Holy Mass and other Church ceremonies.)

Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter of St. Louis was named chairman of the commission. Archbishop William O. Brady of St. Paul is vice chairman and Auxiliary Bishop James H. Griffiths of New York is secretary. The other members are Bishop John F. Dearden of Pittsburgh and Bishop Vincent S. Waters of Raleigh, N.C.

THE COMMISSION was organized during the U.S. Bishops' annual meeting at the Catholic University of America here.

The Archbishop said that the first two projects of the commission will be to give the nation's bishops information on the achievements of liturgical commissions in other countries and to provide them with an authoritative commentary on

the recent instruction issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites aimed at bringing the faithful into more active participation in the Mass.

Archbishop Brady also said it is anticipated that as the national commission begins to function, individual bishops may set up local commissions in their dioceses to coordinate the liturgical movement on the local level.

The work of the national commission in regard to such local units, he said, would be to give them "a program for follow-

Worcester—(RNS)—The Marine Corps recruiter for the Worcester area, a Protestant, mirrored the corps 188¢ birth-

they here by delivering a huge birthday cake to children at St. Ann's Roman Catholic Orphanage.

Four six years M.Sgt. Joseph A. Walker has observed the Marine Corps' birthday in this manner. As usual, the cake was decorated with a tiny American flag at the top and a Marine globe and anchor at the side.

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