

# The Berlin Blockade

On 23 June 1948, the Soviet authorities in Berlin issued the following announcement: **'The Soviet administration is compelled to halt all traffic to and from Berlin tomorrow at 0600 hours because of technical difficulties.'**

The Berlin Blockade was about to begin. This Revision Bite will help you understand why Berlin was blockaded and what happened as a result of the blockade.

## The kinds of essay questions you might be asked are:

Why was there a blockade of Berlin from 1948 to 1949?

Why did the Berlin Blockade fail?

In what ways did the Berlin Blockade change relations between the superpowers in the years to 1955?

## Happening hints:

Look at the type of question you are answering. 'Why' means 'give reasons for.'

If the question is about how things have changed, then you should include information about before as well as after.

Don't confuse the Berlin Blockade with the building of the Berlin Wall, which did not happen until 1961. It's a very common mistake made in examinations!

This map will show you how the city of Berlin was partitioned in June 1948.



## **Wise-up**

### **USA**

The USA had published the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and was offering Marshall Aid. This was an economic recovery programme for Western European countries damaged by the war, and also a way of trying to persuade Eastern European countries to give up Communism.

### **Britain**

In 1947 the British and US zones of Germany were united to form Bizonia. The US and Britain wanted to get Germany back on its feet. Stalin felt threatened by this.

### **France**

In 1948 the French zone was united with Bizonia and a new currency was introduced in these areas of Germany. This would help the German economy get going again.

### **Berlin**

Berlin was in the Soviet zone and there were Allied soldiers stationed there. The three Western sectors of Berlin were already receiving Marshall Aid.

### **USSR**

Stalin wanted to keep Germany under control and was very suspicious of the West. He believed that the West was trying to build a strong Germany that could one day be in a position to attack the USSR again. The new currency would mean that the Western zones would be cut off from the Soviet zone. So Stalin blockaded Berlin in June 1948 in an attempt to drive the Western Allies out of the city. He stopped all traffic between West Germany and West Berlin by closing the road, rail and canal routes.

### **The question**

Why was there a blockade of Berlin from 1948 to 1949?

On the next page are two answers to this question.

Think about which student tackled the answer more effectively.

### **Tyron**

Berlin was blockaded because Stalin cut off the road and railway links to the city. He did this to drive the Allies out of Berlin because he was afraid that they were building a strong Germany that might be able to invade the USSR again.

### **Sarah**

Stalin blockaded Berlin because he wanted to force the Allies to leave the city. He disliked the actions that they had been taking to rebuild Germany. For example; the formation of Bizonia in 1947 when the British and Americans had united their zones. The French added their zone too in 1948. Also in 1948 the Allies announced that they were going to introduce a new currency to the West to help improve the economy. This was too much for Stalin who decided to blockade Berlin.

Which student do you think wrote the best answer - Tyron or Sarah?

### **Examiner's view**

Although Tyron's answer is sound and shows an understanding of the reasons for Stalin's actions, it does not offer a detailed explanation of the events that caused Stalin to act in 1948.

Sarah has included more detail in her answer, and by using examples has been able to explain why Stalin took such action. Reference to the events of 1947 and 1948 also helps to explain why the blockade happened when it did.

This section next section will give you some facts about the outcome of the Berlin Blockade.

### **What did the Allies do?**

They began to fly supplies of food and fuel into the city. They needed 4,000 tons of supplies every day. To provide this, planes flew into West Berlin every 90 seconds. Although planes crashed and pilots were killed, the Allies kept the airlift going. By spring 1949, 8,000 tons of supplies were being flown into Berlin every day. They were beating the blockade.

### **Why did the Allies do this?**

'When Berlin falls, Western Germany will be next. If we withdraw our position in Berlin, Europe is threatened... Communism will run rampant.'

This quote from the US commander in Berlin, General Clay, helps explain the Allies' response to the blockade. They were not going to let the Communists take over any more of Europe. (This was putting the Truman Doctrine into practice) Also, the Allies did not believe that the USSR would risk a war by shooting down their planes. Thankfully they were right, and on 12 May 1949 Stalin called off the blockade. It had not worked; the West had not given in and were still in Berlin.

### **What happened next?**

The Berlin Blockade was to have an important effect on Europe. It helped make the East and West divisions more permanent, and ended any hope of eventually reuniting Germany. The divisions were to last until 1990.

NATO was set up in 1949. This was a military alliance comprising 13 countries, including Britain and the USA. If one of the member countries was to be attacked all of the others would immediately protect it.

Many East Germans began to escape from the Soviet zone to the other three zones. The Allies created the Federal Republic of Germany, with its capital at Bonn in the Rhineland. This separate country became known as West Germany and was a democracy.

September 1949, The German Democratic Republic (East Germany) was established with its capital in East Berlin. It had a Communist political system.

The Warsaw Pact, a military alliance of Communist countries, was set up in 1955 as an equivalent to NATO. West Germany was allowed to join NATO, increasing Stalin's fears of another possible invasion of the USSR.