

Gedenkstätte
Berliner Mauer



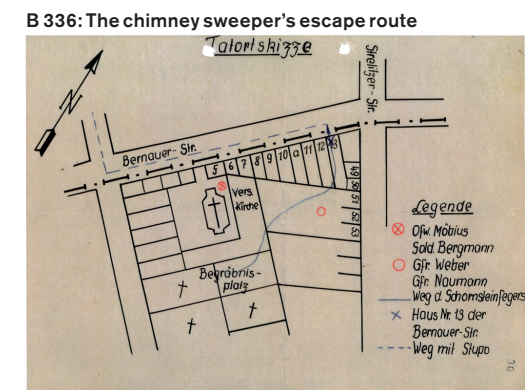
B 333
At midday on August 19, 1961,
two unknown persons slid down
a rope from the first floor of
the corner building at Acker-
strasse 43.



B 336
On January 29, 1962 a young man fled from the attic of the building at Bernauer Strasse 13. Dressed as a chimney sweeper, he was able to approach the border houses from the Elisabeth parish cemetery without difficulty. The border soldiers thought he was working there. From the attic of Bernauer Strasse 13 he broke through a window that had already been walled up and used his chimney-sweep rope to let himself down to Bernauer Strasse uninjured. The border guard posted at Bernauer Strasse 6 did not notice the escape until the man was running across the street. Disciplinary action was taken against two squad leaders.

B 338
Hildegard K. worked as a singer for East German radio. The religious mother of four children risked losing her job because of her criticism of the propaganda in songs. For this reason she decided to flee in summer 1961. She had already brought some of her belongings to West Berlin. On August 12 she sent three of her children to friends in the West. When she learned of the border closure the next morning, she tried to find a way to flee with her eldest son, Klaus-Peter. Hildegard K. knew that the Reconciliation Church stood directly on the border. After trying several times unsuccessfully to get past the many obstacles on the way to the church, they waited in a building on Strelitzer Strasse for nightfall. They worked their way through backyards to the Elisabeth parish cemetery. Shielded by the gravestones, they crawled to the Reconciliation Church, whose gate was still open to West Berlin, and were able to pass through it without being noticed.

B 339
Gerd Sch. almost succeeded in fleeing to the West on August 17, 1962, but was apprehended by border guards just before he reached the Wall at Ackerstrasse.





B 340: Ackerstrasse with barbed wire

B 340

On August 13, 1961, the border fortifications on Ackerstrasse consisted only of loosely laid-out rolls of barbed wire. A VW beetle from East Berlin sped along Ackerstrasse and rammed through this barrier at high speed. The car became entangled in the barbed wire, coming to a halt on West Berlin territory. The driver climbed out of the car to safety. Firemen extricated the car from the barbed wire.

B 341

Heinz V. had just about completed his doctorate degree at the Humboldt University in Berlin by summer 1961. He had joined the SED during his studies, but came into conflict with the official party line. After the Wall was built, he decided to flee. He belonged to the worker's militia of the Academy of Sciences. On September 24, 1961, he was assigned to assist in the evacuation of the border houses. When the border guard briefly left the balcony door, Heinz V. seized the moment and jumped from the first floor of Bernauer Strasse 6. He injured himself badly and spent many weeks in the hospital.



B 341: Escape site of Heinz V.



B 344: Mathern family's escape

B 342

Border soldiers arrested Martin M. during an escape attempt on April 25, 1980. He had climbed over the inner wall on Ackerstrasse and reached the watchtower. He had quit his job the day before.

B 343

At around 4 a.m. on August 30, 1961, five people escaped through the window of the building at Bernauer Strasse 2.

B 344

A few days after the border was closed, the first building entrances were blocked off on Bernauer Strasse to prevent further escapes. Alarmed by this, the Mathern family fled from the ground floor of Bernauer Strasse 11 on August 17.

B 345 and B 346

Following a fight with a party secretary on the evening of September 22, 1961, Horst K., who lived at Bernauer Strasse 10a, visited an acquaintance who lived in an apartment at Bernauer Strasse 13a. At approximately 1 a.m. the next day, Horst K. called the West Berlin fire department and jumped into their rescue net.

Mrs. K. and her five-month-old child also succeeded in fleeing on September 30, 1961. Mrs. K. had been evicted from their apartment, but her old address was still documented in her identity card and the border guards let her enter the border area. She went to the same acquaintances that her husband had visited and jumped out their window to the West with her child.

B 347

Wilfried K. was arrested by border guards right in front of the Wall at Ackerstrasse at around 1:15 a.m. on September 25, 1961. When he was interrogated by the East German police, he admitted his escape attempt.

B 348

On August 26, 1961, a woman jumped to the West from the first floor of a building at Bernauer Strasse 2. The West Berlin police brought the injured woman to safety.

B 349

On October 17, 1961, Rudolf K., a transport worker, was assigned to assist in the apartment evictions on Bernauer Strasse 8. East German policemen monitored the workers to prevent escapes. Rudolf K. was able to sneak unnoticed into a room facing Bernauer Strasse. He called West Berlin policemen over and they positioned a truck beneath the window. K. jumped from the first floor onto the truck which drove off immediately. When the East German police broke open the door, Rudolf K. had already made it safely to the West.

B 350

Monika Schaar, who originally came from East Berlin, got married on September 8, 1961. Because of the border closure, the bride's parents, who lived at Bernauer Strasse 9, were not able to attend the wedding ceremony in West Berlin. When Monika Schaar and her husband visited her parents, they presented the newlyweds with flowers.

B 351

Mrs. K., her daughter-in-law and her grandson fled to the West from Mrs. K.'s apartment on September 19, 1961 at around 11:30 p.m. They jumped from the second floor of Bernauer Strasse 10 into the rescue net of the West Berlin fire department.

B 352

On September 22, 1961, the F. family fled from their third-floor apartment at Bernauer Strasse 7 into the rescue net of the West Berlin fire department. Their neighbors notified the border police. When Mrs. F. was standing on the window sill, a border guard from the building next door ordered her to climb back into the apartment immediately. West Berlin police fired tear gas at the border guard who had fired a warning shot from his machine pistol to stop the woman from escaping. Mrs. F. jumped into the rescue net. As border guards were forcing their way into the apartment, her husband dropped their five-year-old son down before jumping himself.

B 353

On December 5, 1961, a 27-year-old man was able to flee to the West from the first floor of the building at Bernauer Strasse 2. He managed to reach the border houses, most of which had been evacuated, by crossing through backyards unnoticed. He knocked a few bricks out of a walled-up window, squeezed himself through the hole and jumped down about seven meters. The border guards did not notice him until he was hanging in front of the building. West Berlin police picked the man up and carried him away.

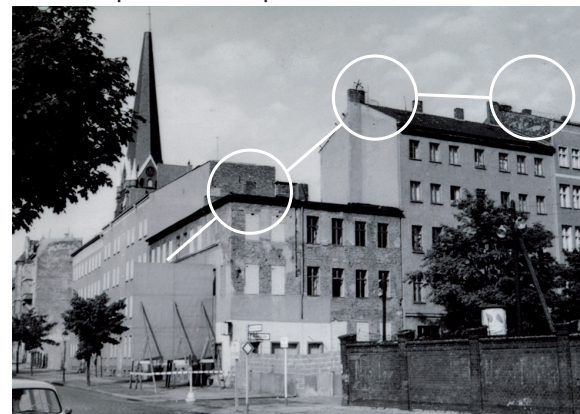
B 354

On the night of October 26, 1961, two men crept onto the roof of the building at Ackerstrasse 41. They climbed over to the house next door and using a clothes line, slid down to the roof of Ackerstrasse 43 that was ten meters lower. They waited there until morning. West Berlin firemen spread a rescue net out in front of the building at about 9 a.m. Members of a construction squad that was erecting border obstacles on the grounds of the Sophien parish cemetery reported this to the border guards. But they did not notice the escapee R. until he jumped from the roof of the building to the West. The other man went completely unnoticed.

B 357

Karl-Heinz S. fled through the window of his apartment at Ackerstrasse 43 around 3 a.m. on September 5, 1961, along with two other people and a child. West Berlin police assisted the escape by keeping the East German border guards at bay behind the cemetery wall with drawn weapons. The border guards were blinded by the glare from mirrors. Firemen placed a ladder against the side of the building so that the fugitives could climb down from the second floor to Bernauer

B 354: Escape across rooftops



Strasse. When East Berlin police stormed the apartment, all they found was a rope hanging from the window that had been used to drop possessions down to the west side.

B 358

The border policeman Lutz M. fled to the West through a window at Bernauer Strasse 1 on October 23, 1961. Serving duty on Ackerstrasse with another policeman, he found an excuse to move away from him. Lutz M. had already established contact with West Berlin policemen while he was serving duty on Ackerstrasse days before. He broke into an evacuated apartment on the first floor at around 9 p.m. and jumped to the pavement below. The police were waiting for him there and brought him to safety in a patrol car. His decision to flee had evolved over a long time. Two comrades with whom he was friendly had deserted before him. Lutz M. found border duty and the pressure to fire at people fleeing unbearable.

B 356

In May 1962, Dieter T., who was only 18 years old, and four friends tried to flee to the West from the apartment building at Ackerstrasse 43. Their escape failed. Dieter T. had managed to flee to the West just after the Wall was built in 1961, but had returned to East Germany. In July 1962 the group planned a third escape near the Charité Hospital, but it was discovered in the planning stage.

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B 359

A newspaper from the West reported that in 1984 two teenagers were able to escape to the West near the Reconciliation Church.

B 332 and B 357: Border guard on Ackerstrasse



B 360

On the evening of September 25, 1961, Rudolf B. fled with his wife and son from their second-floor apartment at Bernauer Strasse 5. The family slid down a rope from their apartment. The border guards did not notice the escape until a group of spectators had gathered and the firemen arrived.

B 361

On the evening of August 22, 1961, a young woman, pretending to be paying a visit, was able to finagle past the rearward border guard and enter the building at Bernauer Strasse 7. She jumped out a window on the first floor two hours later. She injured herself badly and remained lying on the pavement until the West Berlin police arrived.

B 362

Border guards apprehended the apprentice Michael B. from Freital on June 9, 1981 during an escape attempt on Ackerstrasse.

B 363

At midday on September 19, 1961, residents of the building at Ackerstrasse 42 informed the border guards that they had heard suspicious-sounding noises coming from the attic. The border guards discovered a young man on the roof of the building next door that stood right on the border. Ordered to halt, he swung himself over the

edge of the roof and tried to get a foothold on the window below. But he missed the window cross and fell down three floors to the pavement. The man suffered several broken bones and was retrieved by a West Berlin ambulance.

B 364

On October 7, 1961, border guards apprehended Klaus Sch., a resident of Swinemünder Strasse, in the building at Bernauer Strasse 10. He had reached the border house through the Elisabeth parish cemetery with the intention of fleeing.

B 365

On the morning of September 23, 1961, border guards on Ackerstrasse observed a person jumping from a border house into the rescue net of the West Berlin fire department.

B 366

On October 15, 1961, at around 9 p.m., the next-door neighbor Richard S., a voluntary assistant of the East German police, witnessed an escape from Ackerstrasse 43 and reported it to the border guards. A man had wanted to climb down on a rope from the second-story staircase window facing Bernauer Strasse. But the rope broke and the man fell to the pavement. Passers-by carried him to the other side of the street. He was soon taken away by the West Berlin fire department.

B 367

On September 19, 1961, a person fled across the rooftop of the building at Ackerstrasse 42.

B 368

After the Knittel family decided to flee from Bernauer Strasse 8 on September 19, 1961, they notified the West Berlin fire brigades. Firemen arrived with a rescue net around 10 p.m. Helga Knittel, who was heavily pregnant, was the first to jump out the second-story window. She was followed by her daughter Marina and then the father. The escape had been well-prepared, allowing them to take some of their personal belongings with them. Three days after the escape, Helga Knittel gave birth to her second daughter in West Berlin.

B 369

On August 11, 1971, the border troops arrested a person on Ackerstrasse who was trying to escape.

B 370

The evacuation of the border houses on Bernauer Strasse began on the morning of September 24, 1961. When the eviction troops arrived, Marianne S. spontaneously decided to flee. She used a clothes line to slide down a rope from a window at Bernauer Strasse 8, but crashed to the pavement five meters below. She was brought to safety by the West Berlin police. Her friend, who was handicapped, remained behind in the apartment and was transferred to Brunnenstrasse the same day.

B 371

Just after midnight on September 20, 1961, border guards watched as five fire trucks drove up to Bernauer Strasse 10 and positioned themselves with rescue nets. Two people jumped out the window to the West a little later.

B 372

Heinz K. worked as a truck driver for the Murante company at Strelitzer Strasse 53. After the Wall was built, the company was situated within the border area and Heinz K. had a permit to enter it. On September 22, 1961, he parked his truck between site huts so that the border guards could not see him. He fled unnoticed over a back fence and the five-meter-high wall covered with broken glass that stood between the buildings at Bernauer Strasse 11 and 13.



B 374

In September 1962, a border troop patrol discovered a hole in the signal fence between Ackerstrasse and the Reconciliation Church. Footprints led up to the next fence obstacle. Evidently the person had given up there because the tracks led back into the rear border area.

B 375

Werner U. was arrested in the border area at Ackerstrasse on November 30, 1974. He was suspected of wanting to pass through the border fortifications. He denied having any intention of escaping.

B 376

After the Wall was built, a few people tried to escape to the West through the sewage system. On October 4, 1961, border police arrested three men on Ackerstrasse who were trying to flee through the sewage tunnel to West Berlin. The manhole was open and two of the men had already climbed in.

B 377

Irma B. fled to the West from her apartment at Ackerstrasse 43 at about 2 a.m. on September 23, 1961. Irma B. had barricaded her apartment door shut and notified the West Berlin fire department. The firemen leaned a ladder against the building so that Irma B. could climb from the first floor down to the pavement.

B 372 and B 379:

Escape over the Wall

B 378

On May 5, 1980, East German police arrested a person at Ackerstrasse who was suspected of trying to escape.

B 379

Günter Tr. worked for the Murante company in the border area. On the morning of September 6, 1961, he arrived at work as usual and was checked by border guards. His work colleague Günter W. smuggled his wife into the border area unnoticed. With her, Günter Tr. used a company work ladder to climb over the Wall between Bernauer Strasse 11 and 13. The colleague W. was arrested a short time later by the police on orders from the secret police.

B 380

Private Klaus Sch. was assigned duty at Ackerstrasse on the morning of January 16, 1962. When his squad leader left to pass a search dispatch on to the next guard, Klaus Sch. switched off the border lights and used a stool to climb over the Wall.

B 381

Between December 1964 to November 1965, 19 people at Ackerstrasse alone were arrested in connection with the border regime.

B 382

When Anni M. returned from vacation on September 27, 1961, the evacuation of the border houses had already begun. She decided to flee that very day. Late in the evening a neighbor heard suspicious-sounding noises and notified the border guards. When they broke open the apartment door, they found a rope hanging from the window that was wrapped around the sofa. At around 9 p.m., Anni M. had taken her valuables and escaped down the rope to the pavement on the west side.

B 383

On October 19, 1979, border guards arrested a person in the border area at Ackerstrasse.



B 384: Bricked up ground level, August 23, 1961

B 384

To prevent further escape attempts from the border houses, the windows facing West Berlin were gradually bricked up. On August 22, 1961, the apartments on the elevated ground floor of Bernauer Strasse 7 were the first to have their windows walled up. First the windows of deserted apartments were sealed. After the border houses were evacuated, all the windows and doors facing the West were systematically bricked up.

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Escape Tunnels

Two escape tunnels were located in exhibition area B. Both were dug beneath the street from the basement of a bakery on the west side at Bernauer Strasse 97. The first tunnel took five months to complete, but it ended in a coal depot located directly behind the border fortifications. The tunnel was discovered there on January 8, 1964, leading the escape agents to give it up. Three young women, however, were able to escape through the tunnel the night before.

After this tunnel failed, one of the most famous tunnels, known as "Tunnel 57", was dug from the same bakery to Strelitzer Strasse 55. On October 3 and 4, 1964, 57 people were able to escape through it. The tunnel was betrayed on the second night and shots were fired between border soldiers and a tunnel builder. Sergeant Egon Schultz was fatally hit by a bullet fired from the gun of a border soldier. The SED presented this incident as a planned murder and concealed what actually happened from relatives and the public. Schultz was made into a hero and a border regiment, streets and schools were named after him.

In 1965 the underground escape routes led the secret police to take counter measures. It dug its own tunnels diagonal to suspected escape tunnels and installed listening devices in them and in "tunnel-endangered areas" in the border strip to prevent further tunnels from being built.

Credits:
B 331 Alex Waldmann
B 332, B 357 Günter Malchow, Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer
B 334 Der Abend, 8. 7. 1968
B 336 Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv
B 340 Beck, Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer
B 341 Photographer not known, Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer
B 344 Horst Siegmann, Landesarchiv Berlin
B 354 Photographer not known
B 372, B 379 Jutta Schusky
B 384 Horst Siegmann, Landesarchiv Berlin

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Project coordinator Dr. Günter Schlusche
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