Worksheet #6 The Berlin Blockade

The Berlin Blockade and airlift

In this worksheet you will learn about the causes of the Berlin Blockade crisis of 1948 - how Stalin was eventually forced to abandon the plan that could have cost the lives of thousands living in divided Berlin or started another war.

Summary of the Berlin crisis

How Germany was divided in 1945
The USSR had already disagreed with Britain and the USA at Potsdam (July 1945) about what should be done with Germany. Germany had been split into four zones.

There had been particular disagreement about reparations: Britain and America had wanted Germany to recover economically, but the Russians had gained the right to take 10% of the industrial equipment of western Germany, and as whatever they wanted from their own zone in eastern Germany:

In June 1948, Britain, France and America united their zones into a new country, West Germany. On 23 June 1948, they introduced a new currency, which they said would help trade.

The next day, Stalin cut off all rail and road links to west Berlin - the Berlin Blockade.

The Soviet Union saw the 1948 Berlin crisis as an attempt to undermine Soviet influence in eastern Germany; Stalin said he was defending the east German economy against the new currency, which was ruining it.

The western powers said Stalin was trying to force them out of Berlin and an attempt to starve Berlin into surrender, so they decided to supply west Berlin by air.

The Berlin Blockade lasted 318 days. During this time, 275,000 planes transported 1.5 million tons of supplies and a plane landed every three minutes at Berlin's Templehof airport.

On 12 May 1949, Stalin abandoned the blockade.
Causes and results of the Berlin Crisis of 1948

Important dates and events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 1947</td>
<td>Britain and the USA join their two zones together into Bi-zonia (two zones).</td>
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<td>December 1947</td>
<td>London Conference: America, Britain and France meet to discuss Germany's future. Russia is not present.</td>
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<td>January 1948</td>
<td>Russia starts to stop western literature being sold in the Soviet zone.</td>
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<td>March 1948</td>
<td>The USA offers Marshall Aid. Stalin forbids Cominform countries to take part.</td>
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<td>April 1948</td>
<td>Russia imposes a partial blockade of west Berlin - Allied transport into the city has to apply for a permit and is inspected.</td>
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<td>1 June 1948</td>
<td>America, Britain and France announce they wanted to create a new country of West Germany.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 June 1948</td>
<td>America, Britain and France introduce a new currency - this causes economic chaos in the Russian zone as everyone tries to get rid of their old money and change to the new currency.</td>
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Now consider this quote from the US commander in Berlin, General Clay:

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

General Clay
Develo

Results of the Berlin Crisis of 1948

1. Germany was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany) until 1990.
2. The Iron Curtain became permanent.
3. The Cold War broke out into open confrontation, and the two superpowers began an Arms Race.
4. In 1949, the Allies set up the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a military alliance to resist Soviet Russia.

Airlift Facts

The blockade lasted 318 days (11 months).

In the winter of 1948–49 Berliners lived on dried potatoes, powdered eggs and cans of meat. They had four hours of electricity a day.

The airlift was codenamed 'operation Vittles'; the first flight was on 26 June 1948.

The Soviet authorities offered to provide West Berlin with essential supplies - this offer was rejected.

275,000 flights carried in 1½ million tons of supplies. A plane landed every 3 mins.

On 16 April 1949, 1400 flights brought in 13,000 tons of supplies in one day – Berlin only needed 6,000 tons a day to survive.

Some pilots dropped chocolate and sweets.

The airlift continued until 30 September 1949, in order to build up a reserve of supplies.

The USA stationed B-29 bombers (which could carry an atomic bomb) in Britain.

The American airmen were regarded as heroes.
WORKSHEET #6 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain **how** the Allies divided Germany in 1945.

2. **Why** was there a crisis in Berlin in 1948.


4. **How** the Berlin airlift is a good example of the Cold War.
Developments in the Cold War 1948-61

5. How the Berlin crisis of 1948 affected the Cold War.

6. Assess these three different historical sources regarding the Berlin Blockade and provide a response for each:

**Source 1**
The crisis was planned in Washington behind a smokescreen of anti-Soviet propaganda... The self-blockade of the Western powers hit the West Berlin population with harshness. The people were freezing and starving. In the Spring of 1949 the USA was forced to yield

From a Russian history book.

**Source 2**
We demonstrated to the people of Europe that we would act resolutely, when their freedom was threatened. Politically it brought the people of Western Europe closer to us.

President Truman, speaking in 1949.

**Source 3**
Neither side gained anything. The USSR had not gained control of Berlin. The West had no guarantees that land communications would not be cut again. Above all confrontation made both sides even more stubborn.