



**William Strivers, Donald A. Carter.** *The City Becomes a Symbol: The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Berlin, 1945-1949.* The U.S. Army in the Cold War Series. Washington, DC: United States Army Center of Military History, 2017. Illustrations, maps. 346 pp. \$44.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-16-093973-0.

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In *The City Becomes a Symbol: The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Berlin, 1945-1949*, William Stivers and Donald A. Carter revise traditional accounts of the origins of the Cold War in Germany and Berlin. They blame “mutual mistrust and misunderstanding” and the revival of German party politics rather than Soviet misbehavior for the breakdown of four-power rule from 1945 to 1948 (p. 5). Their account restores contingency by pointing to collective and individual choices, German as well as Soviet and American, shaping the country’s political and economic future. Furthermore, the book resurrects the contemporary question mark that hung over the Berlin airlift: how long could the Americans and British keep it up before they would have to pull out of the city? Finally, the authors examine the first four years of the US occupation within its sector of Berlin, a time in which, for average Berliners, American soldiers went from being problems to protectors.

Much of the story is familiar from earlier works. Toward the end of World War II, the Allies agreed that they would divide the country and Berlin into four different occupation zones while maintaining political and economic unity through an Allied Control Council consisting of each power’s military governor and a four-power Kommandantura in Berlin. Cooperation broke down, how-

ever, in the debate over reconstruction versus reparations. In 1946 the Americans and the British (and later the French) realized that to revive Western Europe’s economy they must reactivate German industry, a goal that reparations hindered by draining Germany of industrial equipment. The Soviets were determined to get that equipment to rebuild their own industries first while keeping a lid on the Germans. The United States took the initiative by halting reparations payments from its zone, forming Bizonia with the British Zone, launching the European Recovery Program, beginning to form a West German government, and introducing a new Deutschmark (DM) to replace the old devalued Reichsmark. This last development provoked the Soviets to cut off Western ground access to West Berlin. The United States and United Kingdom countered with their famous airlift and after ten months the Soviets gave up. West Berlin became a symbol—in the West—of freedom triumphant in the heart of Communist territory. In the meantime, the Allied Control Council and Kommandantura dissolved, and German unity with them.

Stivers and Carter—drawing on records of the US Occupation Headquarters, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and US Army Staff, among others, and the diary of Colonel Frank L. Howley, American deputy mem-

ber of the Kommandantura—complicate this standard account in several important ways. First, they examine closely the movement of US troops into Berlin in the summer of 1945, a process that required careful negotiation with Red Army officers over numbers, sequence, timing, march route, and supply route. The Soviets made sure that the Americans left Halle and Leipzig, which wartime agreement made part of the Soviet Zone, while at the same time the Americans entered Berlin. The Soviets were hard bargainers, yet they willingly allowed the US to co-garrison a city they could easily have kept to themselves right from the beginning. Their Kommandantura representative, Major General Alexander G. Kotikov, maintained this semi-cooperative attitude well into 1947, collaborating on reviving Berlin's political, economic, and cultural life.

Second, the US determination to retain West Berlin was less than total. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that the city was militarily untenable in the face of massive Soviet superiority—they estimated that the USSR had twenty divisions in their zone compared to one in the American—and would have preferred to withdraw their garrison. They could not, to their frustration, even make military contingency plans because President Harry S. Truman refused to say whether he was willing to fight a war over the city. The airlift's success dampened pessimism only somewhat, because while it could keep West Berliners from starving and perhaps from freezing to death (by bringing in coal during the winter), it could not keep businesses open and workers employed. Sooner or later, it seemed, the US would have to fold. On the other hand, General Lucius D. Clay, the US military governor, was too eager for a trial of strength, repeatedly insisting even as the airlift went well that the army should call the Soviet "bluff" by sending an armed truck convoy from its zone to Berlin. Army Chief of Staff Omar Bradley rightly said no.

Third, the airlift could not and did not save West Berlin by itself, but it did not have to because the Soviets were only blockading Western land routes, not completely sealing off the half-city from all outside contacts. Businesses were able to trade with the Soviet Zone and individuals could leave Berlin to sell goods and buy foodstuffs or other commodities. Industrial production remained at near 70 percent of the pre-blockade level and unemployment at a tolerable 10.6 percent (p. 279). In other words, West Berlin was never "under siege."

Fourth, the powers continued negotiating over currency reform during the blockade. Would West Berlin use the new DM or the new Eastern Zone currency? The Social Democrats' (SPD) "elected but unconfirmed mayor" Ernst Reuter and his supporters demanded exclusive use of the DM as did General Clay. Yet in Moscow, American emissary Walter Bedell Smith reached a tentative agreement with Joseph Stalin in which the Soviets would lift the blockade while the Americans would allow West Berlin to use the Eastern currency, provided that West Berliners had equal access to banking and credit and that the four powers could jointly control the Eastern bank of emission through a financial commission. Unfortunately, negotiations then broke down in Germany because Clay and his Soviet counterpart, Marshal Vasily D. Sokolovsky, could not agree on control of trade arrangements or the financial commission's scope of authority. When the blockade ended in May 1949, it was because the Soviets dropped all conditions except that the Western Allies should end their counter-blockade of the Soviet Zone and agree to a later meeting of foreign ministers.

Fifth, the Berlin airlift may have been a propaganda triumph for American policy and a vindication for pro-Western German politicians, but the DM was an economic disaster for West Berlin. During the blockade, businesses were able to pay for goods and labor in Eastern marks while holding onto Western ones. After the blockade, they

had to rely exclusively on the DM. Without the Eastern mark, trade with the Eastern Zone was far more difficult, and by the end of 1949 unemployment reached 25 percent (p. 287).

Stivers and Carter also add to the growing literature acknowledging that American troops engaged in criminal and violent behavior during the early occupation years, though on a lesser scale than the Soviets.[1] Soldiers of the 82nd Airborne and then the 78th Infantry Division looted, molested women, committed burglary or armed robbery, and dealt in black market goods until Berliners called them “Russians in pressed pants” (p. 97). African American soldiers made the best impression on civilians but also suffered far higher venereal disease rates than whites—900 per 1,000 as compared to 240—for more than a year (p. 125). As the problems worsened, the high command in Berlin tried to restore discipline by scheduling training exercises, establishing a separate constabulary, expanding recreational activities, and improving soldier-civilian contacts through new youth clubs. The most effective means, however, proved to be reducing troop numbers from around thirty thousand to less than seven thousand and bringing in military wives and children.

I do have some criticism of *The City Becomes a Symbol*, as valuable as it is. The role of Reuter and his SPD supporters in fomenting division appears in a somewhat unfavorable light, but there does not seem to be new information here. Existing literature on the US occupation and the origins of the 1948-49 crisis receives only cursory discussion; readers would benefit by understanding exactly where the authors differ from their predecessors. Most important, the introduction far too modestly understates the book’s contribution. More than a “more nuanced approach,” it reverses the traditional view (p. 6): not the Soviets but the Americans and the West German SPD bore greater responsibility for Germany’s division. One gets the feeling while reading this account that

greater flexibility on both sides, but especially the American, could have made the four-power regime work, producing a neutralized and demilitarized but united Germany rather than the two-state, two-system nation of the next forty years. In fairness, the authors do allude to the Sovietization of Eastern European states and discuss the forced merger of the Soviet Zone’s SPD with the Communists, creating the so-called Socialist Unity Party (SED), an incendiary act that outraged West Berlin’s SPD. They also concede the awkwardness of the Soviet position in claiming to champion German national unity while throttling West Berlin. Still, I would have liked more thorough explanation for why American attitudes hardened. Clay, for example, receives credit early on for a lack of “preconceived anti-Sovietism” but later appears as a decisive influence for turning Berlin into an anti-Soviet outpost (pp. 55, 215-216). Howley went through a similar transformation. Putting this book alongside Norman Naimark’s *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (1995), which does appear in the bibliography and footnotes, would provide a clearer view of the reasons for US and West German anxieties.

#### Note

[1]. See, for example, Miriam Gebhardt, *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Munich: Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH, 2015).

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