

When the Cold War



Provided by the author

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Many words have been written, documentaries produced and books published about the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Yet an extremely dangerous situation not nearly as well known but of critical import prevailed

Almost Turned Hot



*The Fulda Gap
as viewed from
Observation
Post Alpha.*

not in Cuba, but in Europe a year earlier, in 1961. As in 1962, a direct and troubling face-off occurred between the United States and the Soviet Union. It became known as the Berlin Crisis. That situation came to a head and reached a crisis point in August of that year. It became by far the tensest period of the Cold War up until then. The Russians and Americans could have come as close to World War III as they did a year later. Despite the seriousness of the situation, relatively little is known about the details of that historic episode, and

East German infantrymen line up in close ranks to seal off Berlin's key border crossing point, the Brandenburg Gate, from refugees.

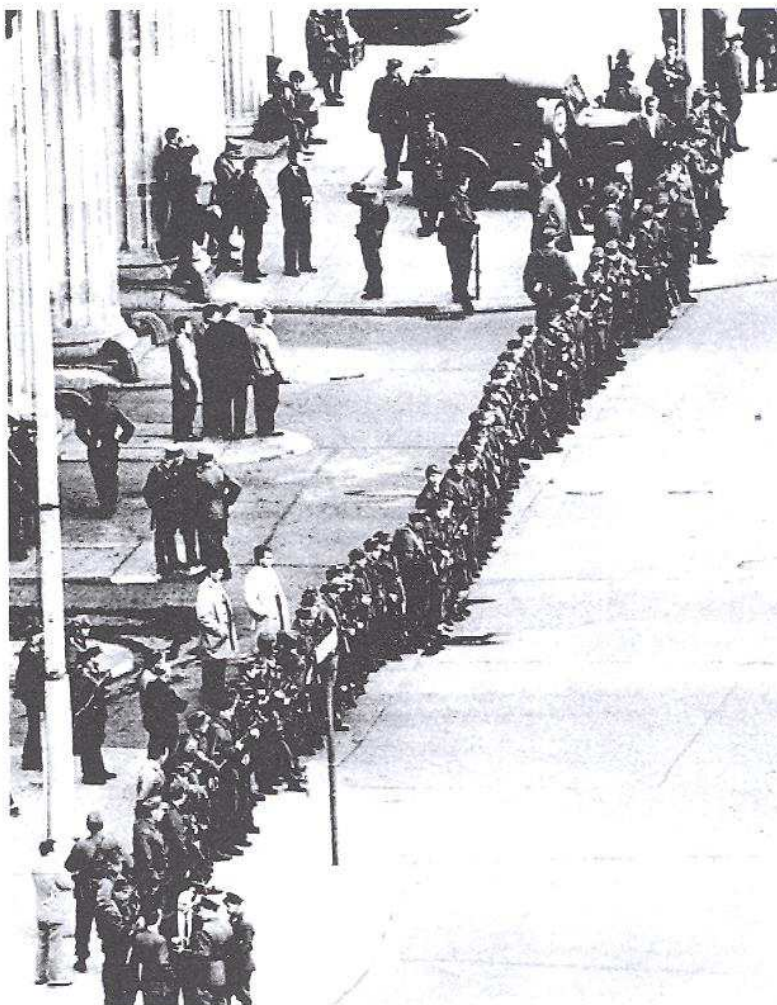
comparatively speaking, little has been written about it.

Before discussing that troubling and dangerous situation, some background information is appropriate. Early in the month of August, as it had for more than a decade, my command, the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment, was broadly deployed along the East-West German border, better known as the Iron Curtain. The 14th was a light, fast, mobile armored force of more than 4,500 men that was a combined arms team. It was equipped with tanks, jeeps, mortars, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. Its regimental headquarters was located at Fulda, little more than eight miles from the border and about 60 miles northeast of Frankfurt. Elements of the regiment were spread widely along the border with a squadron to the north, one in the center and another to the south, and an attached squadron even further to the south.

The 14th shouldered tremendous responsibilities, for the missions assigned to it were critically important. The regiment had two main missions. First, it was responsible for conducting ground and aerial surveillance of more than 165 miles of that border—the Iron Curtain. Second, it was the NATO trip wire.

The border over which we had to conduct surveillance separated the west from the east—U.S. troops from those of the Soviet Union. The border markings consisted of small stones imbedded in the ground that went north and south in a very irregular pattern. Since they lay along open terrain, through woods, gullies and ridges, they were difficult to follow and identify. To make the border more distinctive, more readily recognized, prominent five-foot-high, red-topped white wooden poles were installed.

For the Soviets the purpose of the border was not only to separate us from them, but by erecting an impenetrable barrier it also would prevent East Germans from fleeing to the West for sanctuary. (Over the years, many East Germans were killed or captured attempting to penetrate that barrier.) There were several elements to the barrier located



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just inside the East zone. The Soviets installed observation towers at strategic locations that were always manned and included automatic weapons capable of producing deadly and withering fire along the border to the north and south of the towers. In addition, they installed a steel mesh fence (iron curtain), barbed wire, mines and mortars, and maintained a regularly ploughed strip about five-meters wide (ostensibly to show footprints if East Germans had attempted to flee). For the Soviets, it was a protective barrier from both the West and East.

We performed our surveillance missions on the ground with jeep patrols and in the air with helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The jeep patrols rode the border day and night, during all types of weather—rain, sleet, bitter freezing winter days, hot stifling summer days. Sundays, Thanksgiving and Christmas were merely duty days.

Because many places along the border were inaccessible to jeeps, troopers frequently had to dismount and walk or crawl to appropriate vantage points. It was here that large numbers of U.S. and Soviet soldiers were lined up close to one another, literally face-to-face. It was not unusual to find a trooper peering out, only to find opposite him a Russian peering in.

Augmenting the jeep patrols, observation posts were also used for border surveillance. These were placed at strategic locations that provided a particularly good look into the east and were well concealed. Such outposts were often manned for some hours and provided an opportunity for more lengthy and detailed observation. Both the

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Cold War Victory

The 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment served along the Iron Curtain for 25 years. It was replaced by the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which served another 20 years. Together, their border service covered the entire 45 years of the Cold War.

The 14th was but one of several hundred units, large and small, that served throughout West Germany. The peak strength of 278,000 was reached in 1962. All told, five million individuals served in Germany from the Cold War's beginning until its end. These represented two generations of American soldiers—regulars, volunteers and draftees.

The Cold War was a 45-year war. During that time, Americans not only served and sacrificed, but some died as well. During that war, they protected the East-West German border, the flash point of the Cold War; held the line in Germany; discouraged, deterred and contained communist aggression; and by their presence and actions, and without fighting a single battle, were significantly instrumental in our nation's winning the Cold War, and thus preventing World War III. Gen. George A. Joulwan, commander of V Corps (and later, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe) in 1989 said it best: "We've deterred a war here for 45 years, which is a damn sight better than fighting in one."

In the same vein, Tom Clancy, in his book *Armored Cav*, wrote, "This book is dedicated to the troopers of the 11th and 14th Armored Cavalry Regiments. As the last of them stand down from their almost five-decade vigil over the Fulda Gap in Germany, they can take pride that they won their war without a shot having to

be fired in anger. May they find, in life and beyond, the peace that they spent their lives forging and protecting for the rest of us. God bless, guys."

There remains a great irony. The Cold War produced more veterans than any other war in our history. "Yet," as an observer stated, "memories of the Cold War have receded into historical mists." The GIs who contained communism behind the Iron Curtain did so with virtually no recognition, and their accomplishments have been largely lost to history.

There have been no medals awarded for service in the Cold War; there is no Cold War ribbon on any military tunic. Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, former Army Chief of Staff, declared, "There is a victory for which

there is no battle streamer—victory in the Cold War—America's longest war."

Adm. David E. Jeremiah, a vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared, "They will never hear the bands play or march through ticker tape to celebrate the end of the Cold War."



The insignia of the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

jeep patrols and the placement of observation posts had an irregular pattern and any kind of set schedule or routine was avoided. The responsibilities of the troopers of the 14th were demanding, dangerous, critical and sensitive. Their operations were as close as one could get to combat without actually being in it.

One permanent observation post was established early on and remained in place until the end of border duty. It would be known as O.P. Alpha (Observation Post Alpha). It provided the best and most breathtaking view of the Fulda Gap. From O.P. Alpha one could look for miles in all directions, particularly to the hills and mountains to the east, but most impressively one almost believed that if he reached down he could touch the broad, beautiful valley that flowed from the east right into the center of the 14th's positions.

The eyes that penetrated most deeply into the Soviet sector were located in the helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft that flew the border. Only inclement weather coming from the hills and mountains to the east prevented daily aerial patrols. Those were conducted by extremely skilled pilots. The border was difficult to follow as it zigzagged through all types of terrain, often with sharp deviations. Because of this challenge, before they were cleared to fly the border, pilots had to complete a thorough and detailed period of instruction and orientation. They flew the border time and time again, accompanied by an instructor, before they were permitted to fly it alone. The pilots fully realized that if they strayed across the border to the east side, they could receive hostile fire and create an international incident. Each helicopter and plane flew with an observer. As the pilot kept his eyes intently on the course he was flying, the observer's eyes stared widely and deeply to the east. The purpose of the ground and aerial patrols was to detect any

unusual movement or activity across the border and to note any suspicious physical changes that had been made.

For the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment to be called the NATO trip wire was not hyperbole but a truism. The regiment's mission placed it firmly and directly astride the famous, fabled, historic Fulda Gap. It was at this point that the East butted farthest into West Germany. This was the ancient invasion corridor which had served as the strategic East-West passage for six centuries. In 1961 it was still the likely invasion route into Western Europe for Soviet Bloc forces. This is the frontier where it would happen. The Fulda Gap is a series of river valleys running north and south with distinct hill masses and several open passes running through the hills that create the Gap and that wind like a huge serpent, twisting here and there to avoid rivers and forests. The gap broadens into an exceedingly wide ten-mile-long valley north of a town called Rasdorf. This valley is capable of accommodating vast numbers of mechanized and motorized vehicles. Dominant hills—known as the Three Sisters—create a natural line of defense. From O.P. Alpha near Rasdorf, the panorama that unfolds is truly spectacular.

The troopers of the 14th had no illusions about the criticality and importance of their trip-wire mission and its ramifications. Every man in the regiment was fully aware that if the Soviets decided to attack and send their hordes across the border, we would be the first of the U.S. and Allied forces to be fired upon—thus, the trip wire. It would immediately signal to the United States and the world that the West and East were at war.

Because ours was a small and relatively light force, it was a foregone conclusion that we had absolutely no chance of stopping such an onslaught and would rapidly be overrun. Realistically, our mission was to delay their advance and gain time by fighting fiercely, imaginatively, courageously—even to the last man. By slowing the enemy and gaining time, it would enable heavier forces behind us, the first of which was the 3rd Armored Division, to close up, pick up and join in the fight.

At that time Gen. Lauris Norstad, commander of NATO forces, had under his command 22 divisions with several that were badly understrength. Conversely, the Russians had a massive ground force. According to NATO intelligence estimates, the Soviet Bloc could field 60 powerful divisions almost immediately and 130 within a month. That is an absolutely staggering statistic. Thus, at least on paper, it would have been no contest.

To prepare for the eventuality and execution of our mission, we at the 14th had painstakingly examined, over a period of time, virtually every foot of terrain along and behind the border. From such extensive reconnaissance efforts we selected the absolutely best defensive positions, designated specific units that would occupy and fight from those positions and determined the fastest, quickest and best routes to them. As part of their training, units moved frequently to their positions until every man was as familiar with them as with the back of his hand.

A real test occurred once a month. We were alerted by 7th Army Headquarters to move to our tactical positions with a simple call to the regimental duty officer. The alert would come on any day of the month and at any hour—day or night. The most demanding test came when the alert was called during the early hours of the night—1:00 A.M. to 2:00 A.M. Upon receiving the call, the duty officer had to get the word immediately to the far-flung squadrons and separate companies and receive an acknowledgment. At every location, lights went on, alarms sounded, troopers were routed out of beds in barracks, homes and apartments. There was furious and frenzied activity. Every individual, wherever located, would immediately dress in his combat gear, which was always ready. Troopers on foot at a gallop or in cars would race to the motor pools. In no time engines were running and gear was being stowed. Each unit reported to regiment when it was assembled and moving to its positions. It reported again when it was fully deployed and occupying those positions. The moment the last unit was in place, the regiment notified 7th Army. That headquarters timed the exercise from the moment the regimental duty officer had acknowledged the call until the final regimental report was received. That concluded the alert.

Those monthly alerts were realistic, superb exercises and tests. During each alert, the regiment tried to improve on its previous times, always hoping to set a new record. This self-imposed competition contributed greatly to constantly maintaining its fighting edge.

Regardless of whether it was day or night in cities such as Fulda, Bad Hersfeld or Bad Kissingen, the windows of German homes would be wide open and its occupants would be leaning out of those windows, as the tanks, jeeps and mortars raced to their defensive positions and again when the troops returned.

Dependents—wives and children—were very much a part of the regiment. Because they lived in such close proximity to the border, they were every bit as much at risk as their soldier husbands and fathers. Plans and procedures for them were in effect in case they had to flee on short notice. Every family had to have its survival provisions ready. These consisted of footlockers in basements containing food, liquids, clothing, medicine, flashlights and sanitary products—items essential to survive for a time in the event they were hastily displaced. Randomly, regimental military personnel inspected homes to ensure that their evacuation stores were ready and adequate for that family. Automobiles were required to always have their gas tanks at least half full. Plans for the evacuation of noncombatants were kept up-to-date and were occasionally rehearsed. All dependents knew how and where to go. The wives were jocularly referred to as the “border belles.”

Because of the criticality and sensitivity of the role the 14th was performing, members of the regiment had an unusual and heightened interest and awareness of national

and international events. By August the troopers of the 14th were well aware that 1961 had already been a very eventful year and had all the earmarks of becoming even more eventful. On January 20, a young John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as our 35th President. He quickly received his baptism of fire as our Commander in Chief. On April 19, the ill-fated, disastrous operation known as the Bay of Pigs occurred. Shortly after that, the President manfully took personal responsibility for the abortive invasion of Cuba.

In early June, he had his first big test on the world's diplomatic stage in Vienna. He met face-to-face with America's prime Cold War adversary, Nikita Khrushchev. On June 3 at the American Embassy, and extending into June 4 at the Soviet Embassy, over two lunches, the two leaders had 11 hours of what turned out to be a contentious, bitter, verbal duel.

Khrushchev had been pictured in American newspaper stories as colorful, impetuous, unpredictable—even irrational—a kind of buffoon. Kennedy quickly found such a characterization extremely faulty. What Kennedy confronted was instead, an impressive, formidable adversary not to be trifled with. This Soviet leader was extremely well-informed, had a broad and deep knowledge of history and was a skilled debater who could thrust forth with telling points and present logical and powerful arguments.

For Kennedy, discussions with that man were the "hardest work in the world." Try as hard as he might, Kennedy just could not find an "area of accommodation." At one point during the discussions, Khrushchev leaned hard on Kennedy, declared that he had decided to sign a peace treaty with East Germany by December and stated that his decision was firm and absolutely irrevocable. (So much for accommodation.) To that declaration Kennedy responded "If that is true, it is going to be a cold winter."

As their meeting was drawing to a close, the subject discussed was Berlin and the words about it were dark and bleak. The atmosphere during those closing moments was gloomy, depressing and discouraging. What troubled Ken-

nedy greatly was the realization that Khrushchev really meant what he said when he had boasted that he intended to bury us.

As the two antagonists walked from their meeting to the front door of the embassy, they did not speak. The atmosphere was frigid. There were no smiles, back slapping or hearty handshakes. Their final act together was just that—an act, a brief pause for a hasty photograph and an equally hasty and perfunctory handshake.

Kennedy without a doubt was greatly depressed by his first encounter with the enigmatic Khrushchev, and because of the Soviet leader's uncompromising attitude, Kennedy believed that U.S. and Soviet relations were profoundly grave. There were indications that Khrushchev left Vienna still believing that Kennedy was weak and inexperienced.

Subsequent to the Vienna meeting, the Soviet leader continued to maintain his very belligerent posture. Later in June, Kennedy also flexed his muscles by rejecting some demands made by Khrushchev. A noticeable hardening of the Soviet line continued into early July. On July 8 the Soviet leader suspended planned troop reductions.

By July 25 the Berlin situation had grown to such proportions and intensity that President Kennedy decided that he had to talk to the American people once again. That evening at 10 P.M. he addressed the nation and stressed the need for partial mobilization and psychological preparation for a Berlin showdown. He asked Congress for an additional \$3.25 billion of appropriations for the current fiscal year for the armed forces and an increase in the Army's total strength from 875,000 to approximately one million. He declared, "We are clear about what must be done—and we intend to do it." He continued by adding, "I hear it said



President Kennedy greets Soviet Premier Khrushchev outside the U.S. Ambassador's residence in a suburb of Vienna, Austria.

National Archives

that West Berlin is militarily untenable. And so was Bastogne. And so, in fact, was Stalingrad. Any dangerous spot is tenable, if men—brave men—will make it so.”

He closed by saying, “We have previously indicated our readiness to remove any actual irritant in West Berlin, but freedom of that city is not negotiable. ... The world is not deceived by the communist attempt to label Berlin as a hotbed of war ... We seek peace—but we shall not surrender.”

As the days passed, the situation in Berlin grew from troublesome, to tense and then to chaotic. It was reported that the fear of their future had 1,500 East Germans a day fleeing across the border with another 1,000 being pulled off commuter trains and jailed by communist police. John J. McCloy, Kennedy’s disarmament advisor, returned to the United States from a meeting with Khrushchev, reported that the Soviet leader was in a totally belligerent mood and seemed absolutely intent on extracting what he called the “rotten tooth” of Berlin.

Fear that the East Germans would close the Berlin border caused immense consternation; the escapees became a flood, and then it happened. On Sunday, August 13, East German communist leader Walter Ulbricht began building a wall along the border. Work on this grotesque, incongruous enterprise began at 2 A.M. Large numbers of cargo trucks dumped every imaginable item that could form a barrier—concrete pillars, stone blocks, barbed wire—and the tools, picks and shovels to install them. By dawn the city was scarred and seared by a truly ugly wall that had seemed to erupt instantly out of nowhere.

It was not too many hours later, before noon, that I received information that East Germans were at work in East Berlin just inside their border constructing a barrier that would soon be recognized worldwide as the Berlin Wall.

To us on the border, that was a totally unexpected, incredible development, and we instantly recognized that the actions in Berlin were presenting an uncertain, critical and potentially explosive situation. I immediately dispatched the information to all elements of the regiment.

I instructed all commanders to be prepared on a moment’s notice to drop whatever was on their schedules and on my order to move without delay to their deployment positions. My immediate and great concern and my big question was—what action would our forces in Berlin take to try to stop or dismantle the construction? Such a confrontation, without question, could easily lead to very serious consequences. We at the regiment began holding our breaths waiting for an answer to our question. The answer was not long in coming, and that answer was—nothing.

The American response was silence. It appeared that no one in Washington provided advice or suggested any immediate action or move. Even West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt had no idea what to do right then. Military commanders never seriously considered knocking down the wall. They were well aware that it was being installed on

rightful communist territory, which they legally occupied, and that if we moved against the wall, we would be invading that territory and inviting serious trouble. It presented a real political and military dilemma. We soon learned that President Kennedy finally decided that our nation would do nothing about the wall.

We on the border were left hanging. We were convinced that the situation was anything but over, and we believed instinctively that something more was going to happen, so we went about our tasks with a most uneasy feeling, still holding our breath and waiting for the shoe that would surely drop. We, of course, had been fully aware that tensions had been progressively building since Khrushchev and Kennedy had met in Vienna. The recent actions in Berlin had greatly exacerbated those tensions. We remained in an animated state for about three days and then I received the startling information from a staff officer at corps headquarters that a belligerent Khrushchev was threatening to close U.S. ground access to Berlin. If this threat were carried out, it would be a momentous, earth-shaking development. The only way U.S. ground elements could move from West Germany through East Germany to Berlin was through an established, single 110-mile corridor. That passage was the Helmstedt-Berlin Autobahn. Helmstedt, the jumping-off place, sat on the border separating the British zone from the Soviet zone. It was located between two large cities—Braunschweig to the northwest in the British zone and Magdeburg to the southeast in the Soviet zone. With passage along this axis closed, the United States would be left with but two choices, both of which were dangerous and potentially cataclysmic: to use military muscle to try to force open the passage or, in order to avoid such a major confrontation, to be reconciled to initiating an airlift as Truman had in 1948-49.

With that news it appeared that the shoe had, indeed, dropped. I spent only a moment speculating. My wartime Army commander, Gen. George S. Patton Jr., had preached, “Do something, now!” Without hesitation I ordered the elements of my regiment to move at once to their operational positions. As our vehicles moved through the streets of the German cities, the inhabitants, as always, were hanging out of their windows. This time their faces showed puzzlement, anxiety and even fear. Somehow, intuitively, they recognized that this was not a normal alert, that something important was afoot. Before we departed, our families were also alerted to be ready in the event we were forced to implement the plan for the evacuation of noncombatants.

I reported to corps headquarters that my regiment had moved and was in its forward positions. I quickly learned that with tension there had also been some confusion. I was now informed that Khrushchev had not made an overt threat to close the Helmstedt-Berlin corridor and that thus far there had been no interference with access. A moment later, however, I learned that I had made the right call. I was provided with surprising and astonishing news—the kind that is totally unexpected. President Ken-

nedy had made a critical decision, but one fraught with danger. He had decided that he would send a U.S. battle group,, consisting of about 1,500 American soldiers, to Berlin along the Helmstedt-Berlin Autobahn.

It appears that the President had grown weary of Khrushchev's belligerency and bombast. In a sense he would be calling Khrushchev's hand. He was completely within his rights. With the wall going up and with the residents of Berlin living in an intensified atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, he was ready to demonstrate dramatically that there were rights that he considered basic to Berlin; access from West Germany to the city was vital, and under no circumstances would those rights be given up or stolen away.

Kennedy was well aware that this would be a real test of communist threats, and specifically, a head-on test of the crucial rights of access. Such a deliberate move, he recognized could be viewed at least as an unnecessary irritant, or more important, as a veiled threat. He was under no illusions. He knew that if our troops were halted or interfered with, it meant that the absolute and sacred right of access was being denied to us and shooting could be the result.

From then on, because of the vital and critical importance of our mission, I began to receive regular reports from higher headquarters, which enabled me to be on top of the news as it was breaking. I soon learned that because troops in the forward positions and already facing the communists could not be spared, the troops selected for the Berlin mission were those stationed in the western part of the U.S. zone. Making the journey would be the 1,500 men of the 1st Battle Group, 18th Infantry of the 8th Infantry Division stationed in Mannheim. That city was nearly 400 miles away from the entry point at Helmstedt. The unit, however, was right on an autobahn, would be able to move out immediately and could ride an autobahn all the way to Helmstedt. On Friday, August 18, we were notified that Gen. Bruce C. Clarke, commander of U.S. Army troops in Europe, had selected Col. Glover S. Johns Jr. to lead the American battle group along that 110 miles of communist territory between West Germany and West Berlin. Col. Johns was selected, undoubtedly, because he had a fine record as a field commander during World

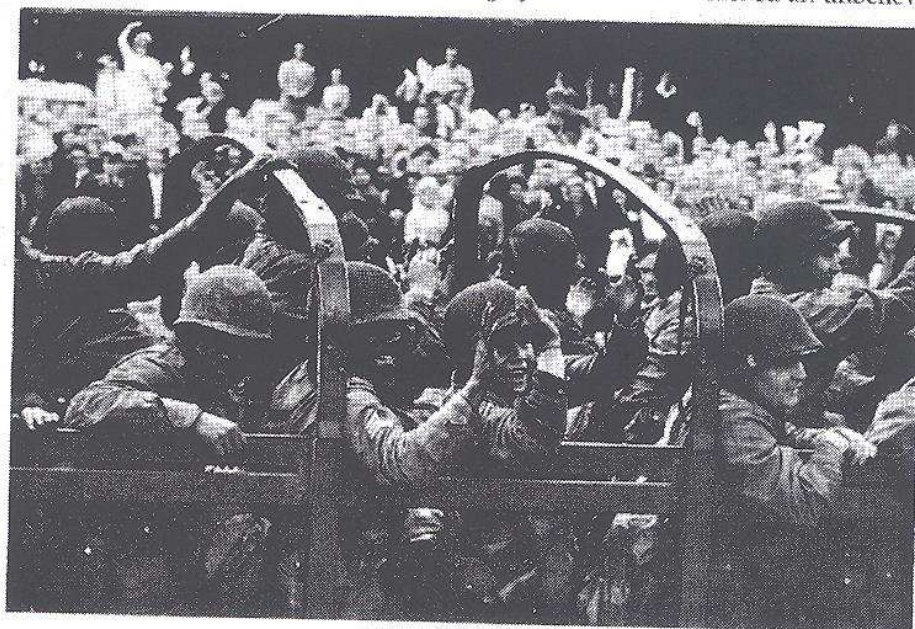
War II. He was the author of a book, *The Clay Pigeons of St. Lô*, about his experiences. He seemed an excellent choice to lead such a sensitive expedition.

Now the only question that remained was—when? It was not long before we began receiving the answer to that question. We learned that Col. Johns received verbal orders late on Friday evening. By 5:30 A.M. on Saturday morning, his troops had received an orientation about the mission, had been fed breakfast and were ready to roll the 400 miles of their approach march. Gen. Clarke was on hand as the force moved out. He sent Lt. Gen. Frederic J. Brown, V Corps and my direct commander, to Helmstedt in his command train, which was fitted with the latest communications equipment and would enable Gen. Brown to send periodic reports about the moving column. The march to the jumping-off point was long and time-consuming. By this operation the United States was telegraphing its next move. This gave the Russians considerable time to chew on it, and if they were contemplating some kind of action, this surely provided a tempting challenge for them. If they waited and did nothing as the battle group moved from Mannheim to Helmstedt, that would surely be a good omen. Initial concerns were ultimately allayed, for the battle group reached Helmstedt without incident and bivouacked for the night at an airfield.

Everything was now on a hair-trigger alert. Clarke could communicate with Norstad in an instant if he needed a response from him or the President. All forces in Europe had been alerted and instructions issued to them. Norstad was prepared to implement plans for air and ground support regardless of how limited or extensive.

Then came the news that brought goose pimples and butterflies in our stomachs. The battle group would kick off at 6:00 A.M., Sunday, August 20, for the 110-mile test ride to Berlin.

On the border, in our deployed positions, tension that had been increasing by the hour now reached an unbeliev-



Shouting greetings to the people of West Berlin, members of the 18th U.S. Infantry enter the city August 20 to reinforce the garrison there.

National Archives



Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson greets Col. Glover S. Johns Jr., commanding officer of First Battle Group, 18th U.S. Infantry, as the reinforcement unit arrives in West Berlin, August 20.

able pitch. It became so tight and crisp that it virtually crackled. We were holding our breaths. It was not inconceivable that we might soon be in a firefight, so we were leaning well forward in our foxholes. We tried to visualize the possibilities and probabilities. The convoy could proceed to Berlin without any attempt to stop it. The convoy could be stopped by a physical roadblock covered by military troops and ordered to return to the west, or it could be fired upon by Russian forces, perhaps including tanks. If either of these two provocations occurred, what would be the actions of the U.S. forces? What orders had Col. Johns received from the President? If he had been told that his mission was to get to West Berlin and to shoot it out if necessary, World War III could well be hanging in the balance. If U.S. forces returned the fire, the Russians, with massive troops nearby and at the ready, could escalate the situation by moving to the west in strength.

We learned later that President Kennedy and his immediate staff were even more concerned than we were, if that was possible. It was said that back at the White House "tension hung in the corridors like a ground mist before sunup." One member of that staff later declared, "It was a much greater crisis than people know. Talking to President Kennedy then was like talking to a statue." There was a feeling there, as on the border, that the mission could escalate into shooting. An advisor declared, "If a single day can be pointed to when the President felt the nation was entering the danger zone, it is August 20 when the troops raced those 110 miles into West Berlin." It was Kennedy's most anxious moment during the prolonged Berlin Crisis.

The first news was good news. We learned that the lead elements left Helmstedt and moved out onto the autobahn without incident heading for the Berlin Gate. Unit after unit followed unhampered. We received periodic reports that all was well, and as they ate up the miles without incident, tension eased immeasurably. Then came the elec-

trifying news that we had breathlessly awaited. The lead elements had just entered West Berlin.

We learned somewhat later that the operation had been carefully planned, scheduled and timed so that Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and Gen. Lucius D. Clay, President Kennedy's direct representatives, would be on hand to show the flag to the Berliners, to greet Col. Johns and his troops and to remain until every man had moved safely into West Berlin. For Vice President Johnson it was a momentous day as thousands upon thousands of West Berliners greeted him and the U.S. battle group. Johnson cried out, "This is the time for confidence, for poise and for faith—faith in ourselves. It is also a time for faith in your Allies, everywhere throughout the world. This island does not stand alone." President Kennedy had graphically and decisively accomplished his mission of raising the spirits of the residents of Berlin and had brought them reassurance, confidence, optimism and even great excitement. Most important, he had courageously showed Khrushchev the hand that he was playing.

The world heaved a great sigh of relief. On the border, when the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment received the news that it was all over, there was a collective gush of breath; it was as though the helium escaped simultaneously from a thousand balloons. We were like the rubber band that had snapped and was lying wrinkled and listless. The tension that had been so tight for so long had in an instant completely vanished. We were literally weak with relief.

A now unfettered, jubilant but whipped and completely wrung-out group of 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment troopers disengaged from their forward positions and in record time were heading back home. An unbelievable week with endless possibilities, many of them truly alarming, ended on an absolutely upbeat note. As always, the Germans were hanging out of their windows, but this time they cheered the returning warriors. They were keenly aware of the tense situation that had prevailed to the east and knew full well that they had been very vulnerable and that had events taken a different course, they, too, would have had to contend with the boots, wheels and tracks of Soviet hordes.

Fortunately, that would never happen.