



Ronald Reagan's Berlin

by John H. Fund

BERLIN

WHO BROUGHT ABOUT THE FALL of the Berlin Wall and then the end of the Cold War? Lots of candidates for the credit were being proposed as this city commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Wall's end.

A dinner held at the posh Adlon Hotel by the Atlantic Council featured a set of awards for the contributions made by the brave people of Eastern Europe, the Western allies, and NATO. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared to show her tough side as she hailed the end of Soviet Communism's "tyranny and oppression," words I suspect didn't drip off her tongue in the 1980s. Several people at my table credited Mikhail Gorbachev with ending the Cold War by not sending in troops to keep the Soviet empire intact.

Curiously, with the exception of one brief reference in a video presentation by NBC's Tom Brokaw, the name of Ronald Reagan was never mentioned during the three-hour dinner. It was almost as if the man who stood at the Brandenburg Gate in 1987 and declared "tear down this wall" didn't exist.

Erasing Ronald Reagan's contribution to the collapse of Communism has almost become a sport in elite foreign policy circles. But a few blocks away the day before, the impact Reagan had was etched in the minds of those who gathered at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum to inaugurate a new exhibit on the Gipper.

Alexandra Hildebrandt is the passionate director of the museum, which attracts some 3,500 people



a day to its eclectic collection of Wall photos, escape vehicles, and discussions of human rights struggles around the world. After visiting the Reagan Library in California a couple of years ago, Hildebrandt returned determined to honor the man she said did so much to make her city whole again.

She partnered with Michael Reagan and his Reagan Legacy Foundation to bring together enough exhibits to fill a new room of her museum.

The collection tells a fascinating story of just how focused Reagan was on tearing down the Wall. He first visited Berlin in November 1978, and spent many minutes surveying the wall's "death strip" from the penthouse offices of the conservative Axel Springer publishing house, which stood right on the border between the two parts of the city. "You could tell from the set of his jaw and his look," says former aide Peter Hannaford, "that he was very, very determined that this was something that had to go."

Indeed, after his visit to the Springer offices then private citizen Reagan asked if he could visit East Berlin. Told that all that was required was a one-day visa and the exchange of some Western currency into almost worthless Ostmarks, he said, "Let's go." He spent several hours in East Berlin, including some time in its central department store—an establishment that Hannaford described as "a K-Mart but with almost no inventory." Upon leaving the store, Reagan was confronted with the scene of two East German "Vopo" policemen roughing up a young man. "We've got to find a way to knock this thing down," Reagan said.

In June 1982, Reagan returned to West Berlin as president and spent five minutes staring across the white dividing line at Checkpoint Charlie that separated the American sector of Berlin from the Soviet sector. At one point Reagan impishly stepped across the line to stand in Soviet-controlled territory.

Five years later, Reagan was due back in Berlin to celebrate that city's 750th anniversary. He wanted to make a clear statement about the artificial division of the city and the inhumanity it represented. After speechwriter Peter Robinson inserted the famous "tear down this wall" part of the speech, it became a topic of bitter dispute inside the administration. The National Security Council and State Department tried over and over to have the section removed as too "provocative" and theatrical. White House chief of staff Howard Baker and others believed the language could embarrass Mikhail Gorbachev. A June 2, 1987, memo from a National

Security Council aide called the speech "mediocre" and said it represented a "lost opportunity." The edited draft that was attached had the entire "tear down this wall" section crossed out.

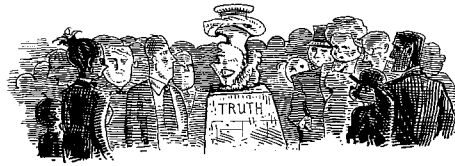
The speech was still being debated on Air Force One as the president's jet approached Berlin. But Reagan insisted on leaving his sock-it-to-'em lines in, and they proved a hit with the many thousands of people who heard it—they cheered for a full 20 seconds. Many Reagan aides remained unconvinced. "I thought to myself, 'It's a great speech, but it will never happen,'" recalled national security adviser Frank Carlucci.

Reagan, however, was confident he had laid down a marker that would build pressure for change behind the Iron Curtain. When two years later the Wall suddenly opened, he was asked by Sam Donaldson of ABC News if he had believed his statement would bear fruit so soon. "I have to tell you, I'm an eternal optimist," Reagan replied. "I believed with all of my heart, it was in the future."

MANY PEOPLE PLAYED A ROLE in sending the Berlin Wall and Communism into what Reagan once said would be "the ash heap of history." But the people who gathered to open the Reagan Room at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum were certain Reagan hasn't gotten his due. "There are Ronald Reagan streets in Budapest, Warsaw, and Cracow," Hildebrandt told me. "But in Berlin the socialist city government not only won't name a street after Reagan but they removed the more than 1,000 crosses I put up outside the museum to commemorate those who died trying to cross the Wall."

Lothar de Maziere, the conservative who served as East Germany's last president before the country was dissolved, remains hopeful. "The decision to name streets is done at the district level, so maybe something can be done with the local officials," he told me. De Maziere, who as a lawyer defended people who had failed to escape East Germany, says he has no doubt that average people give Reagan a lot more credit for the Wall's fall than do elites. "The name of Reagan is in the heart of ordinary Berliners," he says. "While many people jostle to take credit for what Reagan set in motion, in the end his legacy is secure." ❁

John H. Fund is a columnist for the Wall Street Journal and the author of *Stealing Elections: How Voter Fraud Threatens Our Democracy* (Encounter Books).



The Hospital Where I Grew Up

by Jonathan Aitken

IT IS AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE to go back to a scene of your childhood and to understand from rekindled memories where and how the first seeds of your faith were planted.

I recently had this experience, courtesy of the BBC, as a result of being the subject of one of its programs, *The House Where I Grew Up*.

It proved to be a remarkable journey down memory lane featuring a forgotten killer disease and starring a legendary Catholic nun who was the Irish equivalent of Florence Nightingale. She was Sister Mary Finbar, renowned for her nursing of child tubercular patients at Cappagh Hospital in Dublin. I spent three and a half years of my early life immobilized on a frame in the children's TB ward of this hospital—the location of the BBC's program.

To set the scene in its historical perspective of the 1940s, it has to be remembered that before the discovery of antibiotics TB was more feared than cancer is today. There was no cure apart from rest and fresh air. Small children were particularly vulnerable. I caught the infection at the age of four from an Irish nanny working at the UK embassy in Dublin. I was there because my grandfather was Britain's wartime envoy to de Valera's government. I was separated from my parents for several months of the war because my mother was looking after my father at a convalescent home in London after he had been shot down and badly burned in his RAF Spitfire.

By the time my TB was fully diagnosed, the disease had spread into both lungs and into the bones of my hips. Eminent specialists on both sides of the Irish Sea were consulted. Years later I was told that one of them warned: "This child may not live." A slightly less gloomy second opinion was: "This child may live but he will never walk." But the founder of Cappagh Hospital, an eminent surgeon, Dr. Henry MacAuley,

offered the only positive diagnosis. He thought I could make a full recovery provided I spent three years strapped down to a frame—a sort of predecessor of an iron lung—breathing lots of fresh air each day throughout this long period of total immobilization.

This cure may have sounded traumatic when described on the airwaves of the BBC 60 years after the event. But despite the incredulous and sometimes psychobabblish questioning of the interviewer, I know I was right to recall that my main memories of Cappagh were happy ones. Just as today's disabled children usually adjust to their handicaps quite cheerfully, so the young TB patients of the 1940s accepted their circumstances as normal.

I regarded my years in the hospital as competitive rather than distressing. The high points of our day were the morning and afternoon "wheelouts" when the French windows of the ward were flung open and all the patients' beds were pushed outside onto a stone terrace, where we were ordered to breathe deeply. As soon as I was taken back to that terrace I remembered the scene perfectly. Taking longer and deeper breaths of Irish ozone than Paddy or Seamus or whoever was my neighbor in the line of beds was the name of the game. The nurses clapped for you if you did well and as I enjoyed their applause I strove mightily in the breathing stakes. This was just as well because the real competition was not for breath but for life.

The life-threatening dimension of my Cappagh memories also came back to me as soon as I entered the remarkably unchanged hospital ward. There were sad occasions when our beds were put into a circle and a priest would say Mass for the soul of some little boy who had gone to heaven in the night. Despite all the sales talk about the joys of heaven I was in no hurry to go there. This was largely because life with my favorite nurse was such an earthly joy.