

HORIZONT CARRIES PART II OF SERIES ON BERLIN WALL

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[Stefan Doernberg and Franz Koehler report: "August 61"--second of six installments]

[Text] The measures of the GDR Government for safeguarding its state borders all at once checked the aggressive plans of militarist circles of the FRG and West Berlin to "get back" the GDR, to incorporate it in FRG territory. Thus it is small wonder that in the morning of that noteworthy 13 August surprise, even bewilderment prevailed....

In his house Adenauer had consultations with Globke and Krone, CDR faction chairman. At that early hour the Rhoendorfer round did not dare to consult the ambassadors of the Western powers. Adenauer formulated his declaration vis-a-vis a reporter of RIAS that the Federal Republic and its allies would not recognize the GDR's measures in the rather vague words: "Together with our allies the necessary countermeasures will be taken." The professional politician, who knew all the tricks of the trade very well was careful not to define these "countermeasures" exactly. After a few hours he himself had to arrange that his provocative declaration, which had already been broadcast, would not be repeated.

Even in the morning of that Sunday it was obvious: Berlin was quiet, the measures, adopted by the GDR in accordance with international law, conveyed thoughtfulness and revealed a balance of power that was unshakeable. The influential forces of the Western powers had to take note of that. They were not prepared to risk their own security in the interest of the FRG's incurable revanchist politicians. For something irreversible had happened once that 13 August had begun.

In the Operative Staff

At 0000 Erich Honecker, secretary of the GDR National Defense Council, sounded the alarm in his central bureau, which was temporarily set up in the Berlin Police Headquarters, and thus gave the signal for a large-scale action that had been carefully prepared with the strictest secrecy. At 1600 on the day before Walter Ulbricht, chairman of the State Council and the National Defense Council, had signed the orders for the security measures at the GDR state border with West Berlin and the FRG, prepared by the operational staff. A few hours later the members of the operational staff arrived at the big building in Keibelstrasse at Berlin's Alexanderplatz. It included the SED Central Committee Politburo members--Willi Stoph, deputy chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers, and Paul Verner, first secretary of the SED Berlin Bezirk Leadership; Heinz Hoffmann, minister of national defense; Erich Mielke, minister of state security; Karl Maron, minister of internal affairs, Erwin Kramer, minister of transportation; Fritz Eikemeier, Berlin police president and others.

Erich Honecker recalls: "Within a few hours our state border around West Berlin was reliably protected. I had proposed that the political and military fighting strength of the workers class, that is, working people from socialist enterprises in the uniforms of the combat group, be deployed directly at the border. Together with the alert units of the People's Police, they were to protect the border with West Berlin. If it had become necessary, groups of units and formations of the National People's Army and the organs of the Ministry for State Security were to support them from the second echelon. Only in the event that the NATO armies interfered were the Soviet Armed Forces stationed in the GDR to take action."

Course as Planned

From the central bureau in the Berlin Police Headquarters there were constant contacts with the SED bezirk leaderships in Berlin, Frankfurt (Oder) and Potsdam, with the commanders of the combat groups and the other armed forces whose units had marched out to the concentration areas some days ago--within the framework of the maneuver operations. Constant communications lines had been established with the ministries and the other central state organs as well. The atmosphere in the central bureau was characterized by tense anticipation clear determination and quiet confidence. From the first minute of the Sunday of 13 August there started an action which had been carefully planned and which within a few hours caused tens of thousands to act resolutely and which, although carefully planned, functioned smoothly only because precisely these tens of thousands were most deeply convinced of the necessity and correctness of the measures.

The operation commands to the formations and units of the National People's Army and the alert units of the People's Police were given swiftly. The supreme command of the units of the Soviet Army stationed in the GDR alerted its troops. Now it had to be clear to all adventurers who still did not want to realize that the GDR is a sovereign state which acts on its own soil without restriction and in the interest of peace and its people that the liberty and independence of the socialist German state, also the inviolability of its borders, were also borne by the power of the socialist defense coalition.

Only a few minutes of 13 August had elapsed when the leading comrades of the SED Berlin Party organization came together. First Secretary Paul Verner discussed the tasks: Within the next few hours the complete party organization had to be mobilized.

The combat groups were to participate in the military protection of the border, the people of the capital had to be informed by the purposeful use of groups of agitators about the situation and the measures that had been taken, and it must be ensured that on Monday the work in the enterprises and managements would take its normal course.

Signals on "Stop"

At the same hour Erwin Kramer, minister of transportation, instructed the Berlin transport services to stop the direct traffic between the GDR and West Berlin. At 0110 the signals of the routes of the rapid transit railroad system between Parkow and Gesundbrunnen, Treptower Park and Sonnenallee, Baumschulenweg and Koellnische Heide were halted." Within the next 50 minutes this was extended to all routes of the border crossing traffic of the rapid transit railroad system and the German railroads. Somewhat later working staffs met in order to ensure that with the beginning of the morning traffic all transportation means of the GDR capital ran according to new schedules.

At 0200 the border at the Brandenburg Gate and at other important crossing points was closed by members of the combat groups, supported by People's Police. In the subsequent few hours the entire length of the border was taken under control. Installations securing the border were erected, at first only simple coils of barbed wire. Afterwards they were reinforced with earth walls, concrete poles and chevaux-de-frise. A motorized rifle division as well as tank and engineer units of the National People's Army arrived in Berlin in the meantime. They assumed protection over the construction of the border installations and themselves put their shoulders to the wheels as well. At the same time reinforcements of alert units of the People's Police as well as forces of traffic police were reaching the sectors of their deployment. More platoons and companies of combat groups from Berlin and the surrounding bezirke arrived. They also participated in building the border installations.

At 0600 the main part of the operation had been essentially completed: The entire length of the GDR's border with West Berlin was under control.

With this the decision of the GDR Council of Ministers, announced over the radio, was fulfilled: "In order to put an end to the hostile activities of the revanchist and militarist forces of West Germany and West Berlin such a control will be instituted at the GDR's borders, including the borders to Greater Berlin's western sectors, as is customary at the borders of every sovereign state."

No Chances for Provocateurs

The combat groups of Berlin's workers and the members of the GDR's armed forces had not only displayed a high degree of readiness for action, precision and reliability. With their resolute action and exemplary discipline they deprived all provocateurs of the opportunity of organizing dangerous incidents.

The Paris newspaper LIBERATION wrote much to the point on 14 August that "the GDR has taken measures of precaution and defense. Is it not absolutely normal that the GDR protect itself against any provocation (it is well known that the Bonn and West Berlin politicians are masters in this field)? Any measure that can prevent the powder keg from igniting is not bad for the mere reason that it comes from the east." The governments of the NATO states were a long way off from such an evaluation. They had not only tolerated the provocations against the GDR but even had promoted them. The policy of detente, proposed by the socialist states even at that time, did not fit into their concept. But they were not ready either to let themselves be involved in an adventure under conditions which made them appear to be lawbreakers and aggressors and which, in addition, would certainly have deprived them of their positions in West Berlin.