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TO: DEPARTMENT OF STATE
INFO: BONN, PARIS, LONDON, MOSCOW, USAREUR FOR POLAD,
USNMR SHAPE FOR BURNS
FROM: USBER, BERLIN
SUBJ: Refugee Incident at French Sector/Sector Border Elicits
Protest

JULY 15, 1963

PARIS also for USRO

A twenty-year old East Berliner escaped unscathed into the French Sector on the morning of July 9 in spite of pursuit and shots fired by East German border guards. According to police reports, a West Berlin policeman stationed near the Behmstrasse bridge at the sector/sector border heard several bursts of fire and observed rounds landing in the French Sector. Upon investigation, the policeman saw an East German border guard who was about fifty meters within the French Sector, but who withdrew when the West Berlin policeman shouted at him. A second East German border guard who had taken cover in bushes on the French side of the sector/sector border likewise ran back into East Berlin. The West Berlin police did not fire any shots. About a quarter of an hour later the refugee reported to a nearby West Berlin police station.

The story was featured by most West Berlin papers on July 10, with several front-paging, somewhat sensational stories under the headline "Escape in a Hail of Bullets." According to the press accounts, the refugee was a member of a civilian demolition squad which was working on Reichsbahn property close to the sector/sector border. He succeeded in getting far enough away from the other workers to jump over a wall and flee down an underpass which had not been completely blocked. East German border guards who observed his flight

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at this juncture opened fire and attempted pursuit, but their efforts were thwarted by arrival of the West Berlin Police. Some newspaper reports said that the refugee jumped on an S-Bahn shuttle engine and rode to the first stop in West Berlin (Gesundbrunnen station), where he got off and went to the nearest police station. Pictures which appeared in the West Berlin papers showed the young man leaving a police station in the company of French gendarmes.

On the afternoon of July 10 the French Commandant released a statement, of which the full text follows:

BEGIN TEXT

The French Military Government in Berlin feels obliged to make the following statement concerning the incident which occurred at 0900 hours on July 9 at the Behmstrasse bridge:

Two GREPOs, who had opened fire on a refugee already on the territory of the French Sector, went about fifty meters into the Sector limits. Upon demand of the police, they withdrew immediately and the refugee was rescued by a patrol from the French Gendarmerie.

The authorities of the French Sector vehemently condemn this armed trespass on French Sector territory and protest once again against shooting which endangers the lives and properties of peaceful citizens.

END TEXT

FOR THE ASSISTANT CHIEF OF MISSION:



Arthur R. Day
Chief, Political Affairs Section

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BFE