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The Fall of the Berlin Wall

The Fall of the Berlin Wall was one of the most significant events of the last century and was a turning point in history, not only for Germany. With a combination of peaceful pressure and courageous perseverance, the people of East Germany helped bring down the infamous Wall on November 9th, 1989. For 28 years, the Wall had separated families, friends and loved ones in East and West.

Germany's fate as a divided nation was sealed at the end of the Second World War when discord erupted between the victorious allies over the political future. As a result of this already smouldering East-West conflict, the Federal Republic of Germany was founded in the zones occupied by the United States, Great Britain and France. The Soviet Union oversaw the founding of the German Democratic Republic in the eastern zone of occupation. Berlin was at the center of a Cold War.

Hundreds of thousands of people had fled from the GDR by 1952 when East German authorities fenced off the border to the West. Initially, Berlin remained open, but as East Germany continued haemorrhaging its population, the regime ordered the building of the Wall.

Berlin was divided within just a few hours on August 13th, 1961. The order was issued that anyone trying to flee the East across the border should be shot. Nevertheless, the event was marked by many spectacular escape attempts with people jumping from windows or running through barbed wire barricades to reach West Berlin.

During the 28 years the Wall stood, tens of thousands of people tried to flee communist East Germany and hundreds paid with their lives. In the 1980s, a new era in Soviet politics heralded far-reaching changes in East Germany. The advent of "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" brought with them democratic reforms. As Hungary and Czechoslovakia eased their border controls, the first holes began appearing in the Iron Curtain.

Without the hermetically-sealed border to the West, East Germany's days were numbered. Thousands began fleeing to the West again. By late 1989, the 40th anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic, unrest and rebellion were growing among the population. After years of repression, the people dared take their protest back onto the streets.

When the East German leadership finally announced an easing of travel restrictions on November 9th, 1989, the floodgates were opened. The border crossing at Bornholmer Strasse was the first to open at 22:30. Although the event could have ended very differently, this marked was one of the most exciting and joyous moments in German history.

The fall of the Wall signified the end of an era in world politics. The events of November 9th, 1989 not only led to the demise of East Germany, but also to German reunification. The Cold War was over.