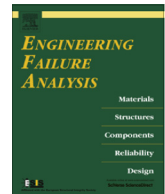




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## Failures of Berlin Freedom Bell since 1966



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### ABSTRACT

On October 24th 1950 the “Freedom Bell” rung for the first time in the tower of the former West Berlin town hall. One year after the Berlin blockade and at a first climax of the “Cold War”, the “American National Committee for a Free Europe” donated the bell to the city of West Berlin. The bronze bell has a weight of about 10 tons. Its clapper has a length of 2.40 m and a weight of nearly 1 ton. In 1966 the hanging of the clapper and in 1979 the clapper of the bell broke down. Both failures were found to be caused by fatigue fracture. In 1974, a crack in the bell body was detected. After years of periodic monitoring using non-destructive testing, the crack was closed in 2001.

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### 1. Introduction

World War II had ended with the conquest of downtown Berlin by the Red Army in May 1945 [1]. Due to Hitler's order to never surrender, Berlin had to be fought down until the last block was under Soviet control. Therefore the grade of destruction was catastrophic. In October of 1950 the “Freedom Bell” was installed in the tower of the Schöneberg town hall (“Rathaus Schöneberg”) [2]. At this time the city of Berlin has begun to recover from the destructions of World War II, but it was in the very center of “Cold War”.

On the conference of Yalta from February 4th to 11th 1945 [3] heads of government of the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain decided to divide Germany into 4 zones of occupation (American, British, French and Soviet) and the capital Berlin into 4 sectors, one sector for each ally. After the end of fighting, the western allies took over their sectors in Berlin, and in return US forces withdrew from Saxonia to give room for the red army as contracted. The nasty part of the plan was that Berlin was situated deeply in the Soviets' eastern part of Germany, about 200 km east of the demarcation line between “West” and “East”.

After 1945 it became obvious that the conjoint military administration of Berlin and Germany would not last too long. The opinions how the new Germany should be run politically were too different. At June 24th 1948 the Red Army closed the border and all land based corridors to West Berlin in an attempt to cause the western allies to withdraw from their exclave. Probably this was a direct reaction to the introduction of the new currency in West Germany, the “D-Mark”. The US Air Force initiated the Berlin Airlift to overcome the Blockade. For over a year more than 2 million inhabitants of West Berlin were supplied by air service until the Blockade was cancelled at May 12th 1949. Due to not shooting, this struggle between West and East was called “Cold War” with West Berlin as a western outpost in the Soviet hemisphere.

In 1950 the American “National Committee for a Free Europe” donated the “Freedom Bell” to the city of West Berlin in remembrance of the famous “Liberty Bell”, which is a reminiscence of the independence of the USA from Great Britain in 1776. The inscription on the Freedom Bell wishes “That this world under God shall have a new birth of freedom” [4].

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The story of ordering and inauguration of the Freedom Bell is summarized in [5] as follows: “The bell was manufactured under great pressure of time. The work was carried out by the English firm of Gillett and Johnston from June 25 to the end of August 1950. The bell was shipped from London and was taken through 26 cities in the USA, where 16 million Americans donated money and signed the declaration of freedom. After crossing the Atlantic again, the Freedom Bell finally arrived at Rathaus Schöneberg in Berlin. The tower ceiling of the belfry was reinforced with a lot of concrete for its new designation”.

As a worth mentioning coincidence the Freedom Bell reached Berlin by train and was unloaded at the American Rail Transport Office Berlin at “Lichterfelde West” suburban railway station, where the BAM has been located since 1904, just on the other side of the rail tracks, Fig. 1. From Lichterfelde the bell was going on-road to Schöneberg town hall, where it was installed at the tower, Fig. 2, [2].

Again [5] reports: “many schools and factories were closed for the dedication day on October 24 1950. About 500,000 Berliners gathered on the square in front of the town hall and gave a rousing welcome to Lucius D. Clay and the American delegation, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter and many other dignitaries. Since then, the Freedom Bell has chimed every day at midday from the tower of Rathaus Schöneberg. Its sound has become the symbol of freedom in our city, the expression of American support for Berlin and the symbol of German–American friendship”.

In [6] it is reported that “The bell is rung daily at twelve o’clock, and at midnight on Christmas Eve and on New Year’s Eve. The bell was also rung on several special occasions: The Uprising of June 17 of 1953, the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Reunification of Germany of October 3rd in 1990. On September 14th 2001, the bell was rung on occasion of the September 11, 2001 attacks, and thousands of Berlin citizens paid their respect at John-F-Kennedy-Platz in front of the former city hall of West Berlin.”

On July 17th 1954 the president of (West) Germany was elected in the “Reichstag” building in West Berlin, where before World War II the parliament of the German Reich was seated until being discarded by Hitler in 1933. This was seen as a provocation by the Soviet Union and the authorities in East Berlin. A special issue stamp was dedicated to this event, Fig. 3, and the Freedom Bell was ringing, whereas Soviet fighter planes were exercising super-sonic flights over West Berlin.

During a period of more than 60 years of daily use the Freedom Bell suffered from some failures. In this paper the activities concerning the life of the Berlin Freedom Bell are summarized and published first time.



**Fig. 1.** Arrival of the Freedom Bell at the American rail transport office at Berlin “Lichterfelde West” station October 21st 1950. BAM is located on the other side of this local station. *Source:* public record office of Berlin.

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