

Jumping the Berlin Wall

Mr. Kabe, who was in his mid-forties and on welfare, first came to the attention of the police when, with a running start from the West, he jumped the Wall in mid-Berlin, heading East. Right by the Wall he had discovered a lot where abandoned rubble formed a natural staircase. He could climb it so high that he had only to push himself up by the arms in order to swing onto the Wall. Other reports mention a Volkswagen bus, whose roof Kabe allegedly used for a springboard. It is more likely that he got that idea later, after the authorities had ordered a cleanup operation because of him.

Kabe stood on the top for a while in the searchlights of the Western patrol that hurried to the spot. He ignored the calls of officials trying at the last minute to explain to him which was East and which was West, and then jumped off to the East. The guards of the other German state arrested Kabe as a border violator. Yet even under hours of grilling, Kabe displayed neither political aim nor serious desire to stay on. When asked who had sent him, Kabe replied that he had come for his own sake, that he had simply wanted to get to the other side. He wore out his interrogators, who wanted to know why he hadn't used a border crossing, by pointing out again and again that he lived right across the way and had taken the only direct path, over the Wall.

The interrogators could think of no better explanation for this extraordinary reversal in direction than that Kabe had several screws loose. They sent him to the psychiatric clinic at Buch, but the doctors could find nothing wrong with him, other than a pathological desire to overcome the Wall. Kabe enjoyed a special position at the clinic as a blockade runner whose jump had defined the points of the compass anew.

Three months later, a well-fed Kabe was turned over to the permanent delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany. They brought him back to West Berlin in a government Mercedes. There, without showing any emotion, he read the newspaper articles about his jump that a neighbor had collected. Then he shut himself up in his Kreuzberg apartment and remained incommunicado.

The Eastern newspapers sized him up alternately as a "border provocateur" and as "unemployed and desperate." A Western tabloid speculated that Kabe had been paid by the Eastern secret police to jump, so that they could point to one escapee who wasn't visible only from behind. This hypothesis drew fresh support from a journalist who claimed to have traced Kabe from Kreuzberg to Paris. Directly after his return to the West, it seemed, Kabe had taken himself to the French metropolis and, in a suspect part of town, had run up bills that could hardly have been covered by welfare checks.

The truth about this story is that, after three months of free care in the psychiatric clinic in the East, Kabe found three months' worth of welfare payments in his West Berlin account.

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In order to fulfill an old desire, he withdrew this sum and bought a ticket on the sleeper to Paris. However, once he had recuperated in Paris at the expense of the two German states, he returned to West Berlin and jumped again.

Brought back once more three months later, Kabe promptly repeated the offense. The West Berlin authorities failed in their attempts to get at Kabe by legal means. After all, he had illegally crossed a state border that doesn't exist in the eyes of the West German regime. In the language of the constitutional law experts, Kabe had merely been exercising his right to freedom of movement.

West Berlin authorities no longer found this interpretation satisfactory, once the East Berlin clinic had presented bills for Kabe's room and board. The West Berliners decided to incarcerate him in Havelhöhe Hospital for self-destructive tendencies. But the diagnosis didn't hold up under scrutiny: after all, Kabe's jumps had proved that the Wall could be crossed going East without damage to body or soul. What's more, they demonstrated that in town, the border strip behind the Wall was not mined. The doctor in charge found nothing wrong with Kabe other than an irresistible urge to overcome the Wall. Rather than a strait-jacket, he recommended that the authorities recognize the Wall as a border. They replied that the Federal Republic of Germany couldn't recognize the Wall of Shame as a state boundary just for Kabe's sake. This didn't prevent the doctor from declaring Kabe competent.

Released from the clinic, Kabe went straight back to the Wall. Altogether, he jumped 15 times and put a serious strain on German-German relations. After one of his last jumps, it occurred to the authorities to take him far from Berlin, to quieter areas where he might continue his jumps over old castle walls. He was driven in a government Mercedes to relatives in south Germany, where he behaved very reasonably for two days. On the third day, he bought a train ticket to Berlin and jumped.

Questions about the motives of his jumping drew nothing more from Kabe than this: "Sometimes it's so quiet in the apartment and so gray and cloudy outside and nothing's happening and I think to myself: Hey, let's go jump the Wall again."

Before his arrival in the West, Walter Bolle had spent a total of seven years in DDR prisons, always for the same offense: illegal border crossing, attempted flight from the DDR, attempted border violation. As a part of the German-German skin trade, he was sold to the West in 1973 for 50,000 West marks. He received his residence permit for the Federal Republic at the emergency reception center in Giessen and left at once for U.S. military headquarters in Heidelberg. Demanding to speak to the head of counterintelligence, he told the sentry that he wanted to plan something against the DDR. He wasn't admitted. He moved into an apartment in a small town in southern Germany, and found a factory job as a metalworker. But since he didn't like piecework or living in a residence with foreign laborers, he quickly gave up his job.

Shortly thereafter Walter Bolle came to the attention of West German police when he stole a Mercedes truck from the factory's parking lot and crashed the border into Austria. He was given a six-month suspended sentence. Then he volunteered for the West German military; he wanted training in sabotage and the use of heavy weapons. The army wanted nothing to do with him. So he offered his services to the French Foreign Legion. They stationed Bolle on Corsica and gave him training in sabotage and heavy weapons, after which he deserted and returned to West Germany via Marseille and Geneva. Once there, he moved in with another deserter whom he had met in the Foreign Legion.

He tried to interest his friend in the following project: each of them would organize a commando group, one in the East and one in the West; then they would advance on a broad front against the Wall and tear it down.

No one, not even his ex-Legionnaire friend, was enthusiastic about Bolle's project. So Bolle went to West Berlin, jumped the Wall at Lübars, and told the border guards who seized him that he wanted to come home—there was nothing happening in the West. After days of questioning in which the State Security Service took part, Bolle was informed by an officer of that service that he would have to prove himself before he could come home for good.

He would have to go back to the West and do some work for the State Security Service in order to show he was worthy of the privilege of living in the DDR.

AT THIS POINT, the story begins to get lost in the clouds of restricted testimony, contradictory statements by friends and, most of all, Bolle's inconsistent memory. Later he maintained in a West Berlin court that he had anticipated his recruitment, even had sought it out. Of course, he knew that prisoners who have been bought out of the DDR can't legally return to their country. That's why he had expected not only his arrest but also the attempt to recruit him. He had pretended to go along because it was the only way to get back to the DDR and "settle a few accounts." From the beginning he had planned to infiltrate the State Security Service and betray all his co-workers to the Americans.

It is certain that Bolle carried out missions for the State Security Service. They piloted him back to the West along a secret route known as the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, and he set right to work. His first job was to follow his earlier movements in the West and provide the State Security Service with reports and pictures from each of his previous stops. No one knows how he felt about this labor of recollection. But he probably got a certain satisfaction, if not a sweet sense of revenge, out of photographing the gate to U.S. Headquarters in Heidelberg, skulking through the grounds of his metalworks, photographing the foreman, copying the menu at the workers' canteen, interviewing his onetime companions at the residence, noting their complaints about the misery of piecework and preserving them in invisible ink on sheets of sensitized paper. He must have described the customers at a bar he had once frequented with a similar vengeance, since he was supposed to look out particularly for individuals who were having secret love affairs or who showed homosexual tendencies.

With the information he had gleaned, Bolle returned to the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail at the scheduled time, flashed his identification—the decal of a Leopard tank—at the entrance, and tape-recorded everything he hadn't already written down for his contact officer. His re-

ports proved satisfactory, so he was taken on as a full-time employee of the Ministry for State Security and sent back to the West with new instructions. As ordered, he presented himself to the West Berlin political police and revealed that he was a DDR agent. He told his interrogator the incredible story of his progress—how the leader of a projected war against the DDR had become a collaborator in the Ministry for State Security—with one slight twist that may actually have been the truth: he claimed to have signed on with the Stasi only in order to qualify for the work he really wanted with Western intelligence. Then he willingly described his Eastern contact officer, gave away the man's cover, described a gold cap in his right lower jaw and a wristwatch he wore too high, probably to hide a tattoo. The only facts Bolle suppressed were that he was leaking all this on orders from the East, and that he was memorizing the corresponding features of his Western interrogator.

It is probable, though not certain, that the West Berlin political police also recruited Bolle as an agent. The fact that he wasn't arrested speaks for itself. Whether he was on a single or a double mission, it is known for sure that Bolle returned to the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail soon after unmasking himself, in order to report on his visit to the other side. In the process he was able to use almost all the phrases he had put down in the West Berlin protocol describing his Eastern chief and the man's office. Aside from the names of the heads of state whose framed portraits hung on the wall behind each of the enemy chiefs, and aside from the difference between a gold and an amalgam filling, a Zeiss and a Swiss watch, the texts proved identical. A quote from Stalin that Bolle had learned in school applied neatly: "Leaders come and go, but the German people remain." For the word "people," he substituted "lampshade," "wallpaper," "office chair."

From this point in the story, it is impossible to make out for whom or what Bolle was working: the East, the West, himself, or a united Germany—even Bolle probably no longer knew.

He subsequently joined an ad hoc Committee of Free Berliners and took part in propaganda campaigns, particularly those directed

against the Wall. Soon he attracted attention in the group by trying to radicalize its activities. He proposed that they attack the S-Bahn, form an armed defensive unit, drop leaflets from balloons sent over the Wall. His fierceness made the group leader suspicious. The leader felt that Bolle was taking an overly literal approach to the committee's declaration of war on the abuses of the socialist system, and he did his best to keep Bolle out of the real action. Bolle got his revenge by telling his Eastern contact officer that the leader was a homosexual. He also gave him credit for a project that existed only in Bolle's mind: setting up an illegal radio transmitter for propaganda that would prepare all Germans to march against the Wall. To his Western contact officer, Bolle described the same project as a provocation engineered by the East.

Still, he won the serious attention of both secret services only when he set up the ominous transmitter himself. From a garret in Kreuzberg he preached war against the Wall—and so for a while managed to carry out a part of his original plan. He confirmed the cartoonlike perception each state had of its opposite number and, by playing their projections off against each other, he lived out his own madness. Paradoxically, he could take every step in his double-crossing game with conviction. Participating in the operations of the Free Berliners' Committee must have seemed as right to him as revealing those operations to the State Security Service. Betraying his Eastern contact officer to his Western counterpart must have

seemed as necessary as the reverse. Bolle had got himself into a situation where he stayed truest to himself when he betrayed each German state to the other on orders from both.

BOLLE WENT ASTRAY ONLY when he noticed that neither of his employers was interested in destroying the transmitter. Both were awaiting developments, presumably for greater media effect when each did finally accuse the other of political meddling. At this juncture, Bolle recalled the starting point of his enterprise and set off again for U.S. counterintelligence. There he presented himself as a collaborator of the Americans who had been working without pay for a year. Under questioning, it became clear that Bolle hadn't met an operative other than his contact officer in his whole time at the State Security Service. All he could supply was the officer's code name, his physical features, and a few details of his office decor.

The Americans treated Bolle as an East German spy and turned him over to the West Berlin courts. In his summation, by contrast, the High Court judge characterized the defendant as a lost man, someone who, in his confusion, had declared a single-handed war on the DDR. The sentence, furthermore, was based on the fact that Bolle had only endangered people in the West. He was given a ten-month suspended term, including his pretrial incarceration. When I asked for Walter Bolle's address at the central housing office, they told me that he had left for parts unknown, but that a lot of people had asked for him. □

To Our Contributors:

A few suggestions:

- (1) Be sure to keep a copy of your ms—the mails aren't always reliable. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.
- (2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article.
- (3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility.
- (4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.
- (5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.
- (6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □
