

HISTORISCHE FEIERTAGE IM JUNI

President Reagan's Speech to Mikhail Gorbachev in Berlin (der 12. Juni 1987) "Tear down this wall!" (Berlin Wall)

As US Ambassador in Berlin, John Kornblum, was also consulted on the presidential text.

"It was a time when Gorbachev in the Soviet Union was just beginning to define his new kinds of policies, and a number of people were worried that a too aggressive speech might damage the ability to have a more positive relationship with him," Kornblum, now a Lazard banking executive in the city, told dpa.

Asked who came up with the "Tear down this wall" section of the speech, surprisingly Kornblum replied: "It came from Berlin. We proposed it. But other people had it also in mind. Then, there was a big debate going on in the White House about it. It went all the way up to the secretary of state."

In "The Reagan Diaries" published recently in the US, the late president described how, after arriving at Tempelhof Airport for his 1987 visit, he and his wife Nancy were driven to the Reichstag, where "we viewed the wall from a balcony."

"Then, it was on to the Brandenburg Gate where I addressed tens and tens of thousands of people stretching as far as I could see. I got a tremendous reception," wrote Reagan proudly, and "was interrupted 28 times by cheers."

The Historic Speech

Reagan had stood on a hastily erected platform, just yards away from the Berlin Wall and in the presence of then-German President Richard von Weizsäcker, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Berlin's mayor, Eberhard Diepgen.

Reagan said: "We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness. Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet state? Or are they token gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it?"

"There is one sign the Soviets can make," continued Reagan, "that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. General Secretary Gorbachev if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

Curiously, international media reaction was subdued, even dismissive, with the press choosing "either to ignore it or to criticize it," Kornblum said.

Then on November 9, 1989, the brutal 29-year history of the Berlin Wall finally ended.

"It (Reagan's speech) wasn't really elevated to its current status until 1989, after the wall came down," said Kornblum.