

Alconbury committee visits Berlin Wall

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"The complete break and the dismal appearance on the other side of the Berlin Wall" was one stark memory that stuck with RAF Alconbury Anglo-American Committee member David Parsons on the committee's recent visit to Berlin.

The Anglo-American Committee and their spouses visited the divided city Nov. 6-9, departing only four hours before the wall fell. The tour, spearheaded by the committee chairman Lady Blatch, was arranged to allow the members a first-person inspection of a symbol for NATO's existence, a wall that collapsed at midnight Nov. 9.

"There wasn't any indication that things were coming to a climax," Mr. Parsons said. "We switched on the news an hour after getting home and then we heard they had made a hole in the wall."

Several stops at different points of the Berlin Wall were only a part of the tour. The 23 Alconbury visitors also saw such news-making places as "Checkpoint Charlie," Potsdamer Platz where the first new crossing point was broken into the wall, and the Brandenburg Gate, site of champagne parties after the Nov. 9 announcement of free travel for East Germans.

Besides these historic sights, the Alconbury guests saw in East Berlin the Memorial to the Victims of

Fascism and Militarism, Alexanderplatz and the pristine, white eastern side of the Berlin Wall. Additionally, the gates of Babylon at the Pergamon Museum was a particular favorite of committee members.

"The Berlin Air Safety Center in West Berlin was an unusual sight with two Soviets working alongside controllers from the U.S., Britain and France," said Col. Mike McGinty, Anglo-American Committee co-chairman.

Other West Berlin sights included the Soviet War Memorial, the Reichstag, a building that was meant to be the parliament of a unified Germany, the bust of Queen Nefertiti in the Egyptian Museum, Templehof Central Airport and the Olympic Stadium where Jesse Owens won his medals.

Without the historic news of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the trip would have been memorable. However, few of Alconbury's Anglo-American Committee members will soon forget the mix of emotions on discovering the news.

"They have the wall for 28 years and we visit for three days and they take it down," committee member Cyril Bridge said, summing up the mutual awe at having been there.

Squadron Leader Angus McPhee, RAF representative to the committee, concluded, "I heard in view of our success in Berlin that they are going to send us to China next!"



Photo by Capt. Matt Swanson

East Berlin guards patrol the Berlin Wall the day before the wall "came tumbling down."