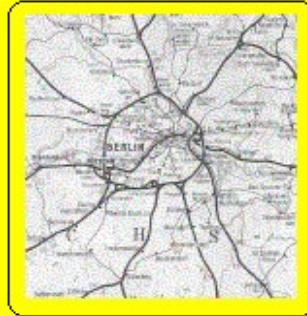


Rails to Berlin



by R. W. Rynerson
previously published in condensed form
in *Rail Travel News*.

ACROSS AN IMAGINED BORDER

For a moment, the dark tunnel of German fir trees looked familiar, the view from the seat opposite the Lokfahrrer offering me the best chance of spotting anything familiar at 150 km/h (93 mph). A temporary restriction for a highway overpass construction project brought the needle on the speedometer in the cab car down, down, and for a moment we were traveling at the old Deutsche Reichsbahn crawl across the invisible border between former West and East Germany. If the geography had not been so familiar, I would have missed it.

The last time that I rode this line was in 1971, and it then took twelve minutes of methodical steaming to travel from Marienborn in Saxon-Anhalt to Helmstedt in Lower Saxony, covering the nine kilometers at an average speed of 45 km/h (just under 30 mph). Marienborn was a dot on the map that had become the border control point for the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Soviet Zone of post-World War II Occupied Germany. And Helmstedt was the sudden border town of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), part of the British Zone. To Americans, this county seat town had become the home of Checkpoint Alpha, first of a tenuous trio of U.S. Military Police offices that ended at a street corner face-off in Berlin - Checkpoint Charlie.

From 1945 until 1990, Military Trains of the three Western Allies, the U.S., Britain and France, had traversed this line, operated by crews of the Deutsche Reichsbahn. East of Marienborn, Soviet Army trains shared the route. Today, the main line of the Cold War is a secondary service, but by linking regional schedules together, a traveler can retrace this path and observe the progress being made by today's Deutsche Bahn and the on-line communities that it serves.

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Rails to Berlin



Traveler Robert says "wiedersehen" to "Bob" the mascot of the Hotel-Pension Karolinenhof. It's too early in the day for Bob, no matter what time it is.

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During the summer of 1969, I had worked for the Rail Transportation Office of the U.S. Army's Berlin Brigade. In the summer of 2002 I retraced the route of the Duty Trains, as Americans called them. Berlin veterans were to be holding a reunion, but first there were some things that needed to be seen.

One Day in July - across the city

Hotel-Pension Karolinenhof is tucked away in a leafy corner of southeast Berlin in a suburban district once favored by the upscale prominents of GDR society. It is far enough from the international tourist circuit that I was forced to rely on my primitive German and friendly enough to work patiently with the handful of other American guests willing to plunge in without previous experience in Germany.

It might have been jet lag, but there was something dreamlike about coming from drought-stricken Denver to wake up in a place where the sound of trams on a ten-minute peak headway was filtered through a lush hardwood forest. It seems that it would have been easy to remain there indefinitely, sleeping in each morning, enjoying the home-style continental breakfast downstairs and commuting four stops on the trams to Alt-Schmoeckwitz, the tiny village center, with its three-track 1892-vintage car barn -- oh, and a rural-style restaurant, with tables offering a view of the tram terminal and its tiny feeder bus connection.

Nevertheless, all that service led somewhere, and on a Saturday morning I set out to follow the tracks and wires all the way to the Atlantic coast of the Netherlands. My entire trip from the corner down the block in Berlin to the sand dunes on the beach at Scheveningen (The Hague transit system) was to be on electric, coordinated rail services, with the longest wait for a connection to be half an hour at lunch time in Magdeburg on the Elbe. That wait was due to my own choice of the more scenic and historic rail line-- and a long pent up desire to stand on the platforms that I had so often stared out at from inside the sealed military trains.

Tram 68 skirted the shore of the Dahme, which is sort of a river, sort of a lake, sort of a canal. Once, as Tram 86 in the previous numbering concept, it achieved a brief moment of glory in serving the 1936 Olympic rowing events. Now it rolled smartly through the super-elevated curves on its on-again, off-again private right-of-way carrying Saturday workers and early-bird shoppers and one American tourist on the basic twenty-minute headway around which Berlin schedules are built. Past the

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Rails to Berlin



The world of Alt-Schmoeckwitz: high gasoline prices and excellent transit service. Tram Line 68 starts its journey in this southeast Berlin hideaway, where the village "Krug" offers a place to have a beer and watch trams.



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reviewing stands, where international prominents saw the University of Washington 8-man rowing team take a gold medal as an exception to the general German strength on the water, past the pseudo-Western dance hall and its advertisement for Mexico Night" with Corona Bier, and on-time out of the woods and around the curve to a stop across the street from the door of the Gruenau S-Bahn station.

Lest it seem like this was a gemuetlich Shangri-La, the trees along the line had blossomed a series of yellow posters with "NEIN" in big, black letters. These expressed a community view on the threat of nearby Schoenefeld Airport. The only Berlin airport with room for expansion, the former home of Interflug, Aeroflot, Malev and other East European airlines, has been targeted to become the international-style airport that the restored German capital lacks.

Farmers were still setting up stands for fresh tomatoes and other produce from Berlin's rural hinterlands when I reached the front of the short line at the ticket window. Although the S-Bahn is a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, the clerk here could not sell an international ticket. To my surprise, recalling the dour Reichsbahn officials of 1970, he was genuinely apologetic that he could not do so, and suggested a couple of good alternatives.

Up the stairs I headed, with my tram fare being honored on the connecting S-Bahn now, unlike in 1970. For readers who have not used the Berlin or Hamburg S-Bahn third-rail networks, there is one close North American equivalent: Metra Electric in Chicago, formerly the Illinois Central Electric. Aside from technical difference in how power is collected, the systems are so alike that many times it would occur to me that they were developed over the same time frame in cities with big German populations. In many ways, remove the government aspect, and Berlin might be understood by North Americans as the Chicago of Europe.

The Bahn computer itinerary planning software said in German and English to take the S-Bahn from Gruenau to central Berlin, then catch my Regional train to Magdeburg. My heart told me otherwise. By fiddling with the inputs, the Internet program confessed that I could travel via the

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Rails to Berlin



Tram and S-Bahn took me past reminders of the 1936 Olympic rowing events, but bypassed Alexanderplatz, (seen the evening before my journey) via the Ringbahn and Wannseebahn through the south side.



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south side of the once-famous and now restored Berliner Ring, and then via the route of our former U.S. Army trains. Running twenty minutes ahead of the split-second print-out itinerary that showed my streetcar times and each connection to my Dutch destinations, I could pause at the last Berlin station on the S-Bahn and buy an international ticket.

The S-Bahn was off-limits to Allied military personnel in 1970, due to its management, which was controlled from East Berlin. The mandate to use other modes of transport was in support of a West Berlin boycott of the East German controlled system. However, railway police had an unsavory reputation and some of the stories about kidnappings into East Berlin on the citywide system were true. Now in 2002, I could relax and stretch my legs out in the lightly-loaded Saturday morning train, and watch the redeveloping city unroll beneath or above the series of fills, viaducts, cuts and other interesting elevation changes taken on the crosstown ride. The scheduled two-minute connection at Schoeneberg worked with "punktlichkeit."

Down the street from the two-level station, John F. Kennedy at the Schoeneberg City Hall had proclaimed that he was a Berliner. Mentioning his memorable "Ich bin ein Berliner" is a handy device for separating language snobs from real Berliners. Clever writers like to point out that in proper German, Kennedy was saying "I am a jelly doughnut." The genuine Berliner, however, knew exactly what he was saying, and that formulation would click with the older generations when they would ask how I knew the city.

On my way out of former East to former West, the Wall was not only gone, but required effort to place geographically. Passengers on and off the crosstown line include a younger generation that barely remembers the division of the city and dozens of immigrants who are not clear as to what the Cold War was. School groups troop through museums to see terrors that we took as everyday life - and on bad days death - in divided Berlin.

More than any other form of transportation, the seemingly indestructible S-Bahn embodies the story of modern Berlin, with all its ups and downs. In the original *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931 film), it symbolized the restless pace of the big city. In World War II, its lines were targeted by

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Rails to Berlin

Visited at dusk, around what would have been train time, on 18 August 2002, the Rail Transportation Office is a sleepy place. It is now home to a freight forwarding firm. A neighbor remembers the bustle as military vehicles and "POV's" (personally-owned vehicles) arrived and friends or family said farewells.

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the Allies. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reprinted a standard customer schematic map of the S-Bahn lines for the Royal Air Force and classified it "Restricted" (British equivalent of "Confidential"). In the last days of the war, trains were still running, albeit with steam engines pulling electric multiple-unit cars during power failures. In the Cold War, it was the last service split by the Wall, never completely losing its east-west links at Friedrichstrasse station in the center of the old city.

Its Cold War stories were countless-- not only the kidnappings or beatings by railway police, but the shooting of railroad workers striking to be paid in West German currency in West Berlin, accompanied by the importation of strikebreakers from East Germany. Henry Ford would have been proud of the Communist Reichsbahn's approach to labor relations. Western military planners kept a wary eye on the S-Bahn, which could have been used to put thousands of GDR Peoples Army soldiers on the streets of West Berlin in minutes. During my time in Berlin, negotiation led to some family travel being permitted, and the Friedrichstrasse S-Bahn station in Berlin-Mitte became known as the "Station of Tears" where bitter-sweet farewells between divided families were witnessed.

When I lived in Berlin, aging trains caught fire, another crashed into a preceding train when an operator at one of the manual interlocking

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Rails to Berlin



Restored Prussian station crowns lovelier-than-ever Lichterfelde-West.

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towers made an error or the train operator missed the signal. A customer needed to be a bit of a lawyer. One station on a West Berlin line was actually in East Berlin-- the Wall wrapped around the back side of the station, but customers had legally entered the Soviet Sector when they walked in off the sidewalk. At another stretch, trains of the West S-Bahn network ran on two tracks of a four-track main, while trains of the East network passed them on the other two tracks. The wire boundary ran down the middle of the rail right-of-way. Then in 1989, when the Wall came down, the S-Bahn struggled to carry thousands of new customers on its shriveled network.

Now, on my way west, signs of reconstruction were everywhere. Stations that had not seen work since the early 1930's were getting all kinds of improvements. New rolling stock replaced all but one series (477/877 motor-trailer sets) of pre-WWII equipment. And on the streets, new businesses had appeared, including the Neukoelln Wal-Mart.

At Lichterfelde-West, I caught a glimpse of the former U.S. Rail Transportation Office. The once pristine white stucco building was now covered with ugly graffiti, not an uncommon problem in Germany. Our former freight yard adjacent, and the passenger track, was now used by an intermodal container service linking Berlin with Spain.

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Rails to Berlin



Architects of 1920's Lichterfelde-West went Faux-Baroque, but west on the Wannseebahn the design of S-Bahn platforms is more functional. In its West Berlin days, the beach at the Wannsee was end of the line for electrics.

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As back then, my S-Bahn train was picking up beachgoers, heading for Berlin's lakeshore recreation areas. It was not as crowded on this train now as then, and jammed parking areas at the beaches explained why. Increased auto ownership shows itself in many ways, and more than one Berliner explains that he needs a car so he can drive out to the country and get away from the traffic.

At the Wannsee on time, I hurried to the main line ticket counter. Here it was no problem using my credit card to buy a ticket to Leiden, one of my destinations in the Netherlands, with the understanding that I could travel via Magdeburg.

One Day in July - Brandenburg Concerto

Through Berlin-Wannsee, which was the operating base and western terminal of the West S-Bahn during decades of division, Regional Bahn Route R1 carried suburban passengers out into what was the Soviet Zone of Germany on each side of the city. Booming suburban growth boosted this part of the rail network, and my 10:12 a.m. Saturday outbound train carried standees.

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Rails to Berlin



Double-deck Regional train passes S-Bahn train on the narrow right-of-way through upscale Babelsberg, en route to today's end of third-rail S-Bahn service in Potsdam. From here west, towns are marked by abandoned Soviet casernes, such as this one off-line at Potsdam-Nedlitz.



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One hazard of piecing together travel on Regional trains in Germany is the lack of luggage space. Long-haul passengers have not gotten the word that marketing experts think they no longer exist off of the extra-fare, high-speed ICE network. Especially on weekends, regional trains carry customers who are expected to ride Greyhound in the U.S., and luggage was piled in aisles. My carry-on bag that fits under airline seats and in intercity bus baggage racks would not fit in the overhead hat rack in the Bombardier-built double-deckers.

Through the courtesy of an older West Berlin couple and their friend, I was able to get myself and my bags out of the aisle. In our brief conversation, I again experienced the passing sensation of being something of a celebrity to them, a phenomenon that is hard to describe when the younger two-thirds of the population regards returning GI's as ordinary tourists, neither good nor bad. They were genuinely pleased to have the opportunity to have done something for me, and that in turn was touching.

At Potsdam, enough passengers alighted to provide seats for the residual baggage from the aisles, and from there west into the Mark of Brandenburg the situation

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Rails to Berlin

French Wagon-Restaurant resides at the Allied Museum on Clayallee in Berlin.

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was more civilized. At the city of Brandenburg, it dawned on me that the electronic chimes signaling station stop announcements were playing a phrase from the Brandenburg Concerto. As a music store clerk in Kassel said to me earlier on my visit there, "Kuehlste!" ("Coolest!")

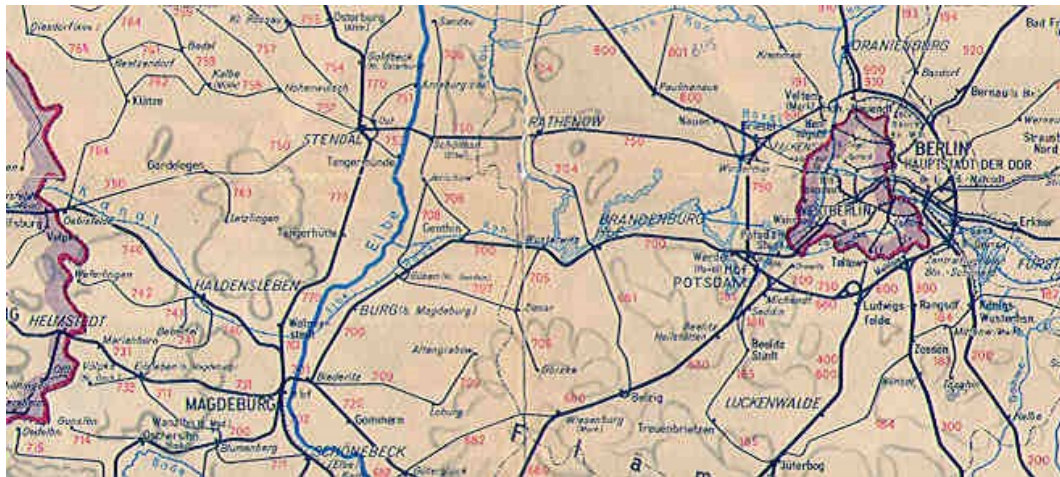
Brandenburg had an outstandingly filthy steel mill in my time, belching brownish red smoke day and night; now the German government struggles to develop replacement jobs for the horrible, inefficient industries of the East. In the Army, I had written a memo about this pollution source and its affects in West Berlin.

Now the pollution and the jobs are gone. And the sunsets over Brandenburg are nowhere near as colorful now as they were on the early evening run of the French Train Militaire (through run Berlin - Strasburg) in 1971.

At Kirchmoser, 43 km (22 mi) and 26 minutes west of Potsdam, we are finally enveloped completely by the Markish green landscape. This is countryside that in a more comfortable coach seat would induce relaxation in a few minutes: small towns, lush greenery, truck gardens, a region that was spared much of the physical destruction of World War II, then was cut off from its big city neighbors by the Wall and the long way around it on diesel and steam-powered suburban trains of the Outer Ring line to East Berlin. In 1969, I noted that a *Berliner Morgenpost* advertisement was fading away on the wall of a building in one of these towns. Apparently Berlin was such an influence on these people that it had not occurred to the authorities to paint out this reminder of the assertively anti-Communist Springer newspaper empire.

As we continued along the route of the former Military Trains, running approximately on the time slot of *The Berliner* as operated Berlin-Braunschweig for the Royal Corps of Transport, I struck up a conversation with my neighbor across the narrow aisle. He was a neatly-attired Ukrainian who had served in the Soviet Army, now in Germany on vacation with his wife and daughter. Their tank-topped son-in

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Rails to Berlin

Stops on my trip may be followed on this Deutsche Reichsbahn 1971 map. Today's -- and pre-World War II -- fast line west runs through Stendal. The route through Magdeburg became the main line of the Cold War, even though it was downsized by the Soviet occupiers.

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-law seemed bored with the whole thing, and spent his time on a cellphone, ignoring both them and his wife. It would have been too poetic for the older Kievite to have been stationed in Germany when I was-- he was not, but as we were communicating in our respective high schools' Russian and street German, it was interesting enough to figure out our parallel purposes in being on this train.

All along the way, we clipped along in a manner that felt alien to my former experience on the Reichsbahn. The GDR line of my time had been downsized by the Soviet Army. When one rode behind the pre-war steam power of the Reichsbahn or behind their first generation diesels, the single-track operation and manually controlled signals made it a slow journey. The running time on the premier Reichsbahn train for the 112 km from Potsdam to Magdeburg (with one stop in Brandenburg) was 82 minutes in 1971, after an improvement program. Now, with six stops, it was 73 minutes. And, in 1971, no other train matched the top express. Today, R1 Regional electric trains beat the old Reichsbahn express times day and night on hourly clock-pattern schedules.

No clever new proprietary technology is involved. The secret to the improvement between the old Germany and the new is that the old Reichsbahn was run remarkably like some American railroads: ripped up second main tracks, speed restrictions due to crumbling roadbeds and maintenance budget cutbacks, obsolete equipment, outdated signals and no electrification outside of the pre-WWII projects. The new service is on the same right-of-way as the old, and constructed with off-the-shelf components. It involves track and roadbed improvements, electrification, and stations and passenger rolling stock designed to speed up boarding and alighting.

Of course, the situations are different. The Reichsbahn was ravaged by war and the post-War Soviet reparations. The U.S. railroads were ravaged by government policies and quarterly-report shareholders. Effects were almost identical.

In a sociological change, gone are the all-stops local trains that existed in the mostly auto-less GDR. In 1970, the schedule included milk runs that really were milk runs. Growing up in Oregon in the 1950's and 1960's, I never dreamed that I would see light-weight steam

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engines pulling three or four cars stopping every six to seven kilometers in 1970. Most of the primitive freight service was gone, but in the middle of the 2002 run across the Markish landscape in Genthin I saw loaded lumber cars. Near there, a thumping Class 232 diesel freight engine of Soviet origins reminded me of American locomotives of 1970, and of how the Reichsbahners disliked the decision to make them buy Soviet, even though the East Germans had their own make of Diesels.

Applying lessons learned as the Deutsche Bundesbahn of the BRD, Deutsche Bahn has moved to create a system that competes with auto travel. However, as in the case of the downscale intercity travelers struggling with their baggage on the Regional trains, there are dislocated rural residents angry at having to drive to nearby towns to catch trains that rocket past their boarded up former Royal Prussian Railways stations.

Across the Elbe, three weeks before flooding endangered parts of the city, Regional Train 38012 rolled into Magdeburg. This city is a sort of footnote in U.S. military history, the place where the bulk of the American advance toward Berlin ground to a stop at the Elbe River. Ordered to permit the Soviet Army the honor of taking the Third Reich's capital, frustrated GI's busied themselves repairing war damage and securing the river crossing. A small Army plane flew to Berlin and back, returning to report that nothing stood in the way of an American advance. The area which I had just traversed had missed the War, as the last German soldiers, reservists, and youths, shattered remnants of the Wehrmacht, were sent on the surviving trams through bombed out streets to face the Soviet Army, holding the way open to the West.

It was a strange feeling to sit on a platform bench of the Magdeburg station and eat my pizza left over from time spent the night before in Alexanderplatz. (Note to food critics: yes, this was Italian, but my German contacts chose the place, and it was good pizza!) This station always had a food association for me, because in both directions the timetable led to the British Army dining car serving meals while in Magdeburg.

(Visit [Berlin 1969](#) for the timetable.)

Exigencies of single track operation resulted in us being held in the Magdeburg station on normal occasions. No one could board or alight there; Military

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Rails to Berlin



Lokfahrrer Berndt _____ leans out of cab window as he watches for the starting signal. We had an enjoyable discussion about how much the work environment had improved since his Reichsbahn days on steam locomotives.

Rails to Berlin



Double track ahead, offers the engineer (engine driver in British terms) a different view than the rough single track of my 1969-71 era in "travel goal Berlin."

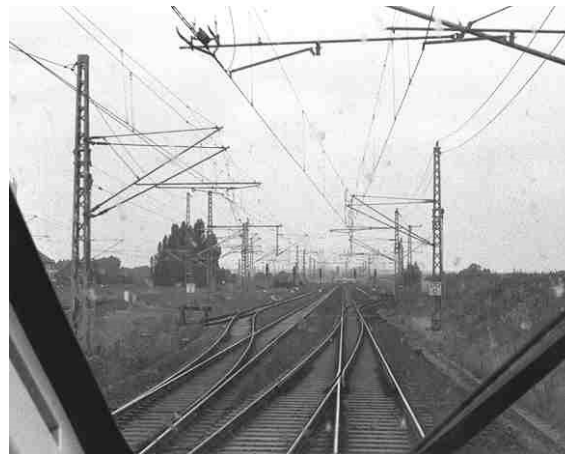
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Police were on the watch against escape attempts using our trains, but the British seemed to take a perverse delight in letting the Germans see them having dinner (lunch) westbound and high tea eastbound. American trains passed through Magdeburg in the night, and only insomniacs or history buffs or a few railfans saw this city that became briefly part of our history. For me, Magdeburg was the place where I would get a quick look at Reichsbahn electric power on the converging line from Halle. By the time of the merger between the two German systems, the Reichsbahn electrification covered the north-south main lines through Magdeburg. As my train pulled into Magdeburg Hauptbahnhof in 2002, we traveled under a web of wires spun in every major direction.

One Day in July - Across an Imagined Border

While I finished off the tasty pizza, I noticed the conductor and engineer (Lokfahrer) for my next train. They were pacing back and forth, because it was being delivered late to them. Their concern struck me as admirable, and I was eager to get rolling, too. This *InterRegio* service would take me from Magdeburg to Hannover, across the former death strip built by the GDR to effectively divide the two halves of Germany. On the spur of the moment, I wiped the pizza crumbs away and went up to them to introduce myself. We discussed the fact that I was a former Army railroader who now worked for an urban

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Flowing turn-outs ('points' for the British) invite the engineer to "open the throttle" and at the same time offer passengers a ride smooth enough that some are not aware of the speed that their regional train is achieving. Few Americans enjoy the use of such a physical plant, considered essential here on this secondary Deutsche Bahn main line.

Rails to Berlin



We whipped into villages where border congestion had often brought military trains to planned or unexpected halts. Eilsleben (above) was a scheduled six minute wait for the Bremerhaven train in 1970. Wefensleben was the start of the border defense area, and last station before the "national border."



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transit system, and that it would be difficult to see the former border line from the train. I also learned that the engineer was a former Reichsbahn locomotive fireman at the end of the steam era, and that the conductor was a fan of U.S. railroading, having already traveled extensively on Amtrak.

With that, I was asked if I would like to ride in the cab of the control car on this push-pull train, running in push mode. Normally I am not one to collect cab rides, but this was a tremendously helpful gesture on their part. The cab car (Class 51-80-80) was rated at a top speed of 200 km/h (124 mph), with a note restricting it to 160 km/h (100 mph) on Austrian Federal Railways. *InterRegio* Train 2334 had 9 coaches, including a snack car, and was departing Magdeburg ten minutes late.

The line out of Magdeburg snakes past a prison that I remembered from before-- some government functions never go out of style. Then it settles into more open-country fast running of the sort seen on the Brandenburg side of the Elbe. Fortunately, as east of here, the Autobahn is some distance away, and so the countryside is still rural.

It was hard to compare running times on this segment with the old Reichsbahn, because there were no Express schedules west of Magdeburg to the border in my time, except for the Interzone trains and Military trains. These only made operating stops in Magdeburg. We were scheduled to race from Magdeburg to Helmstedt non-stop in 28 minutes.

About half way along the route at a point near Ovelguenne (and if your map shows that village, it is a thorough one), the train began to cant for curves interspersed with short tangent sections as the line skirts the outermost foothills of the Harz Mountains. My attention focused on details of the line, trying to place scenes that were often seen at 60 or 70 km/h in the night from American troop sleepers into the context of sunshine and steady speeds of over 100 km/h. I half expected to hear the slogging steam of Reichsbahn multi-purpose 2-10-0 engines, some built as late as

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Tracks fan out to side platforms for Marienborn. Twin express tracks expedite our train's dash through what once was a 15-minute or longer border halt.



Rails to Berlin

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1960. It seemed as though we should head into a siding at any moment, then wait for the whoosh of a post-War rebuilt 01-class Pacific locomotive on the head-end of a "fast" opposing Interzone train.

Instead we clipped along, and electric freight and passenger trains whizzed by in the opposite direction without a pause. It was here, more than anyplace else, that the end of the division between the two Germanys was so apparent. Economic development still shows the retarding effect of having been dominated by military purposes for five decades, but new construction is visible everywhere. (One Berliner wit told me that the Soviet Army was great for the environment, because it had tied up so much land with military training areas, preventing development. Of course, as in the U.S., the clean-up of this land is a slow process.)

In 1969, trains approached the Marienborn border control station almost hesitantly. Rail traffic was constantly jammed up in that segment, given the downsizing of the network and placement of the border crossing at an "unnatural" point in geography. (See Dr. Wolfgang Bauer's account in [*Letter from Dr. Bauer*](#) . No

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In a scene that captures the goal of many past travelers, our *InterRegio* train clears Marienborn and heads West. Old fears and bittersweet memories rise up and then are swept into the swirling dust of history -- the GDR is gone.

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relevant facilities existed prior to the sudden division of Germany. Initially, the East Germans saw the situation as temporary, until the Western Allies would leave Germany to them.

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Rails to Berlin

Inadvertent beauty in the calm of the "tree tunnel" planted to obscure the view of the death strip. And then the sweeping panorama of Lower Saxony to the West. View was best seen in 69-71 on the daylight British train.



The road overpass (far left photo) was in West Germany, making a useful landmark in the post-midnight passage of the U.S. trains. At left, Helmstedt at midday is sleepy, too. Checkpoint Alpha here also had tales.

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Now, in 2002, our train rushed toward the invisible border. Here on the right was the multi-story barracks for border troops. There, a few minutes later on the left was the new Marienborn suburban-style platform with glass waiting shelters. Our train was on one of the

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Rails to Berlin



The story of Helmstedt, with Jay Daves' photos, is described in [Berlin 1969](#). After stopping and gaining a clear signal, our *InterRegio* enters Hannover Hauptbahnhof. Numerous Saxon bugs were harmed in the making of these increasingly blurred photos. Last leg of this trip in 1970 from Braunschweig was covered in the night by the U.S. Bremerhaven run.



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center express tracks, with only the two outer tracks having platform access. The engineer's eyes focused on the way ahead, mine on tiny remnants of a past that had once been so important.

My eyes snagged for a moment on the spot where for one short moment in 1969 my Train Commander lieutenant and I both had wondered whether we were going to die. Somewhere in today's weeds was the place where we had realized that we were the victims of a crude joke and a simple misunderstanding, and that we were then considered regular, macho guys by skylarking Soviet soldiers -- the sort of stupid thing that could have started World War III had we been armed.

That event had passed too quickly for us to show the fear that we felt, and now in 2002 what had been an entire grim movie-set of a border inspection is nothing. Our *InterRegio* train rushed into the dark, green forest that had been cultivated as a tunnel to screen the actual death strip area, then curved out into peaceful fields under bright sunshine.

Oh, the rest of the trip clicked off beautifully, but I should mention that one thing never changes. Coming into Hannover, as a I pulled my things together to get ready to change trains, an approach signal brought an end to our speed run, and then we stopped within sight of the Hannover main station. It was the same block signal where the Bundesbahn connection from the British Military Train had always been held up in my time in Germany. We had made up the lost time and pulled into Hannover punctually.

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Some places to see traces of the Military Trains:

(They're gone, but they left their tracks.....)

1. **Berlin - Allied Museum on Clayallee.** The ever-witty French donated a dining car from the Train Militaire to the museum. First of all, it conforms to the stereotype-- their train always seemed to have the finest rolling stock and the most convivial atmosphere. Second, the French and the Germans had a thing going with dining cars in the Twentieth Century's great wars. This dining car as a gift says to let bygones be bygones.

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2. **Fort Eustis, Virginia - U.S. Army Transportation Corps Museum** has relics of the Duty Trains, including the most interesting item, an Army caboose. Because most Army railroaders came from diverse U.S. companies, the American controversy about cupolas versus bay windows was settled by having both on this European-equipped car.

3. **Bahnhof Lichterfelde-West** - as described in the story here. Visit at sunset in the summer. A lady in the neighborhood in my August 2002 visit described to me how the streets would be busy with Army vehicles and American personal autos coming and going. The Bundespost truck would arrive with first class mail for West German border points (the GDR opened mail and read it when it was shipped on their trains, it was secure with the U.S. Army). A new DR diesel would pull the six to nine-car Frankfurt train away, and then the smaller Bremerhaven train would be ready for boarding. Three-quarters of an hour later, a 2-10-0 DR steam engine would whistle off, and the neighborhood would go back to its usual suburban peace.

If you visit Lichterfelde-West now, there are several restaurants and a konditorei (pastry shop) to make this a pleasant stop. Pause a moment at Kadettenweg near there and reflect a moment. Siemens opened the first "full-scale" electric rail line in the world here. The Botanic Gardens are nearby.

4. **To ride the main line of the Cold War** - request itineraries via Magdeburg between Berlin and Western Europe. The excellent Intercity Express (ICE) service bypasses Magdeburg on all but a handful of trains, running on Germany's restored traditional East-West high speed line through Wolfsburg. The Magdeburg line also offers the opportunity for a stopover in the royal Prussian city of Potsdam.

####

Acknowledgements:

Book:

Dittfurth, Udo and Braun, Dr. Michael; *Die elektrische Wanneseebahn - Zeitreisen mit der Berliner S-Bahn durch Schoeneberg, Steglitz und Zehlendorf*; Gesellschaft fuer Verkehrspolitik und Eisenbahnwesen (GVE) e.V.; Berlin; 2004; ISBN 3-89218-085-7.

Maps:

[*\(Continued\)*](#)

[*\(Continued\)*](#)

Pharus Freizeitkarte - Mueggelsee, Dahme-Spree, Gruenheider Wald- und Seengebiet, Kruepelsee; Pharus-Verlag; Berlin; 2002; ISBN 3-935130-08-2; www.pharus-verlag.de .

And publications of the BVG (Berlin transit system), Deutsche Bundesbahn; Deutsche Reichsbahn and Deutsche Bahn.

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Errors:

Any errors in this website are mine. Please send corrections or comments to me at rw.rynerson@worldnet.att.net .

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The dash across the former Soviet Zone of Germany on the *InterRegio* service put old memories into new perspective.

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