**The Berlin Wall**

One would think something as momentous as the fall of the Berlin Wall would have followed years of negotiations and been accompanied by ceremonies and bands and waving flags.

It happened at a news conference with just a few mis-spoken words.

The badly-named German Democratic Republic had just put in a slightly less Communist government. It was even holding daily news conferences. At the end of the November 9, 1989 briefing one of its officials, Gunther Schabowski, almost nonchalantly announced that travel restrictions to the West would be relaxed.

“When?” shouted startled reporters.

 "As far as I know effective immediately,” said Schabowski.

That wasn’t actually what the East German government had intended but it was too late. Within hours the world was watching thousands of joyful people sitting on top of the hated cement monstrosity drinking champagne.

Many more were there by the time I got off my flight from DC and tried to take a taxi to the Berlin Wall.

“What, are you nuts?” was how I interpreted the taxi driver’s reply. He got me to within a mile of the Wall.

*Now what do I do?*

Get out of the cab and walk. The Strasse des 17. Juni (17th of June Street, named to commemorate a 1953 East German uprising) which led to the west side of the Wall at the Brandenburg Gate was now a pedestrian mall full of happy, celebrating, drunk people. But off in the distance I could see the forest of microwave towers and satellite dishes that meant a media village had sprung up. I headed that way and figured I’d eventually run into people I knew.

“Hey Meem, how are ya?”

And there they were. The vanguard of CBS News had done a lot of the hard work and probably hadn’t slept in two days. And it was all under control. They had arranged to have a pre-fab hut literally dropped in – from a crane - to be used as office space, had the portable satellite dish up and running and had already done lots of live television news reports back to the States.

This quick reaction was possible because TV equipment was starting to get smaller and more portable. The satellite dish shooting video and audio into space from atop of the porta-cabin/office was only about four feet in diameter, tiny by 1989 standards, and came apart so it could be packed into boxes. That’s why it was called the “flyaway”. The technology was so new the manufacturer had to send one of its engineers to make sure it was set up properly. It allowed us to feed video and get live TV signals to Tokyo, Toledo and anywhere in between.

Chaos surrounded us. Dozens of media outlets from around the world sent crews who plopped down their own portable satellite dishes and camera tripods anywhere they could find space. Adding to the madness was Deustche Telecom trying to set up phone hubs and running cables; these were still the early days of cell phones so we needed the old-fashioned hardline phones from the old fashioned phone companies for dependable communications. Video and electric lines were strung everywhere, cherry pickers were being used as camera positions, and people were attempting to deliver food and drink and port-a-potties. It had all happened in less than 48 hours, all while everyone was doing non-stop broadcasting.

For the first few days West German authorities watched this out-of-control and growing media horde oozing west from the Wall and decided something had to be done. They called us to a meeting in a nearby building to tell us, in a nice way, to get the fuck out of the middle of their street because they needed to ensure safe passage for all the people testing out this new access to the Wall.

“This is the biggest day in German history” said the man running the meeting, dressed in a leather trench coat.

*Didn’t he play an SS officer in “Stalag 17”? He sure as hell looks like an SS officer in that coat.*

“We have families reuniting for the first time in decades. This is about them and everyone else who is celebrating what has happened. We need you to move.”

“MOVE?” shouted the media horde in unison.

I raised my hand and was handed the mic for the PA system.

“With all due respect for what this means for your country, this is also a huge event for all of us. We’ve been waiting and hoping for this too. We are doing round-the-clock coverage around the world. We can’t just stop. If you want us to move you have to help us move our phone lines, move our power lines, move our office trailers.”

He gave it a moment’s thought.

“Ok.”

And by God they did it. A schedule was organized; cranes moved in to pick up the office trailers, dangle them in mid-air then drop them gently on the side of the road, Deutsche Telecom re-ran the phone lines, and the electric company re-organized power distribution. Everything ever said about German efficiency was true. Within two days we were all up and running again with little disruption to our live broadcasting. Strasse des 17. Juni was open. Order had been restored.