

Embry-Riddle in Berlin

Less than 35 years old, Embry-Riddle's Extended Campus already has a rich educational legacy. Its 3,300 faculty members deliver academic degree programs to students from Fort Bragg to Baghdad to Berlin.

The city of West Berlin played a particularly poignant role in that history. Aeronautics professors Steve O'Brien and Ernie Dammier were teaching at the EC resident center at Tempelhof Weltflughafen ("Airport"), only a few blocks from the Berlin Wall and a couple of kilometers from Checkpoint Charlie, when the Iron Curtain started crumbling and the Berlin Wall fell.

The International Campus, as EC was known then, had an extensive network of centers throughout Western Europe during the Cold War, a reflection of America's massive military presence there in the 1980s.

Tempelhof, now slated for closure, is arguably the most historically significant airport in the world. Located on the site of a former Prussian military parade ground, its grassy fields were used by Orville Wright in 1909 to wow disbelieving Berliners with early flying feats.

But it did not become a legitimate airport until the 1930s, when Nazi architect Albert Speer proclaimed that the site would become the most important airport in Germany and, ultimately, Europe. Top German architect Ernst Sagabel designed the facility, whose most recognizable feature is a curved, preposterously gigantic air terminal building that stretches for nearly a mile. Tempelhof's austere façade and larger-than-life dimensions reflect its early moniker as "Hitler's airport." Ironically, Sagabel had earlier worked for a Jew, architect Erich Mendelsohn, a great mentor who had fled the Nazis in 1933.

Yet the most important event in Tempelhof's history began in 1948, after the Soviet Union shut road, rail, and canal service into West Berlin in an attempt to starve the city, situated within communist East Germany, into submission. In response, the U.S. and Britain organized a massive airlift that supplied West Berliners with all of their daily needs.

Every three minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, a military plane landed at Tempelhof with supplies. In just



over one year, 2.3 million tons of cargo were flown into West Berlin, dwarfing any other airlift before or since. On May 12, 1949, Stalin capitulated and ground routes into West Berlin were reopened.

The construction of the infamous Berlin Wall in 1961 was the harbinger of a longer, darker period for Berlin.

During the Cold War years, Tempelhof served as a joint U.S., British, French, and West German military facility, the ominous presence of the Berlin Wall just a few blocks away. Although the International Campus had previously opened centers at U.S. military bases throughout West Germany, the university didn't come to Tempelhof until the late 1980s.

A few years later the Berlin Wall fell and Embry-Riddle closed its Berlin Center. A sign of the times.

— Alan Bender

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Help Embry-Riddle Preserve Its Heritage. "A Heritage Moment" is a series about Embry-Riddle's rich history, featuring memories, photographs, and mementos submitted by alumni, friends, and others who have had a connection with the institution, from its earliest days as a flight school at Lunken Airport in Cincinnati, Ohio, through its emergence as a global university.

If you or someone you know has stories to tell or artifacts, photos, or documents to share for the Embry-Riddle Heritage Project, we want to hear from you today. Contact Robert Rockett at (386) 226-6026 or rockettr@erau.edu, or visit www.erau.edu/about/heritage.html.