

## Digging begins - Tunnel 29 Part 2

When you're a group of students, who have never dug a tunnel before, where do you begin? Like every good heist, they started with maps. They borrowed them from friends in the government, and pored over them, trying to plot a route for the tunnel. They needed to find a street to burrow under, where they wouldn't dig into the city's water table. They chose Bernauer Strasse, which was a bold move.

Back in the 60s, this street was world-famous because the Berlin Wall ran right down the middle of it. Tourists would go there to take photos of the wall, so it was always busy. Choosing to dig under Bernauer Strasse was like digging a tunnel under Times Square in New York.

Now they had to choose somewhere to start digging. One morning they came across a cocktail-straw factory, set back from the road. They introduced themselves to the owner, concocting an elaborate story about being jazz musicians in need of a rehearsal space. But he guessed what they were up to. He had also escaped from the East and was more than willing to let them use his cellar.

Next, they needed to find a basement in the East to dig to. They chose a friend's flat, but rather than tell him, they persuaded someone to steal his key and make copies, so the escapees would be able to enter.

Then they started the search for more tunnellers. This was no easy task. West Berlin was full of spies working for the dreaded Stasi, the East German ministry of state security. It was the most powerful part of the East German government, combining secret police and the intelligence services. Its mission was to know everything - what you thought, who you were married to, who you were friends with. There were even jokes about it: "Why do Stasi officers make such good taxi drivers? Because you get in the car, and they already know your name and where you live." They had hundreds of thousands of informants, some of whom had infiltrated government, businesses, hospitals, schools and universities in the West.

Eventually, the tunnellers found three other students they thought they could trust, all of whom had recently escaped from the East: Wolf Schroedter (tall and charming), Hasso Herschel (a Castro-loving revolutionary), and Uli Pfeifer (distraught after his girlfriend had been caught escaping by the Stasi). Best of all, they were engineering students, so they might have a few ideas about how to dig a tunnel.

Finally, they needed tools. One night they jumped over a wall into a cemetery and stole wheelbarrows, hammers, spades and rakes. Everything was set. On 9 May 1962, just before midnight, digging began at the factory. "We had no idea where to start," says Joachim. "We'd never seen a real tunnel. But we'd seen footage of tunnels on TV, ones that had failed, and that gave us ideas about how to dig one."