

The Second Tunnel - Part 6

It was now July 1962, almost a year since the wall went up. Tripwires had been added, as well as landmines, electric fences, spikes, spotlights, and should these fail to stop an escapee, the border guards were armed with pistols, machine guns, mortars, anti-tank rifles and flame-throwers.

But every month, the escapees kept coming. Some hid in cars, others used fake passports.

The tunnellers could no longer sit and wait for the tunnel to slowly dry out. Eventually, they heard about another tunnel that had been dug into the East, but left abandoned and unfinished.

The students who had planned this other tunnel asked Joachim and the others if they would be interested in joining forces. They could combine their lists of escapees and get them all through at the same time.

"It seemed too perfect an opportunity to pass up," says Joachim. "We were a group of diggers without a tunnel, and here was a tunnel that needed diggers." They were given just a few details.

The tunnel was meant to emerge underneath a cottage in East Berlin, and about 80 escapees were hoping to crawl through it. A few days later, they went to see the tunnel. "It was a complete shock," says Joachim. "It was nothing like ours." Joachim's tunnel had lights, telephones, motorised pulley systems, air pipes. This one had no lights, no air pumped in, and the ceiling was so low you could hardly crawl. Every time a car went over the road above, clay would trickle down into the tunnel.

But they decided to stick with it, enlarging it and digging the final few metres until they were directly under the cottage. The tunnel was ready. Now all they needed was a messenger to pass on details to the escapees.