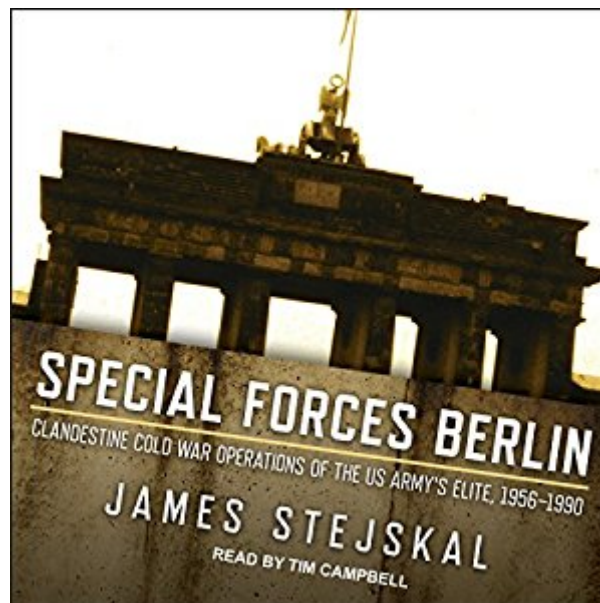




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Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations Of The US Army's Elite, 1956-1990



Synopsis

The massive armies of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies posed a huge threat to the nations of Western Europe. US military planners decided they needed a plan to slow the juggernaut they expected when and if a war began. The plan was Special Forces Berlin. Their mission, should hostilities commence, was to wreak havoc behind enemy lines and buy time for vastly outnumbered NATO forces to conduct a breakout from the city. In reality it was an ambitious and extremely dangerous mission, even suicidal. Highly trained and fluent in German, each man was allocated a specific area. They were skilled in clandestine operations, sabotage, and intelligence tradecraft and able to act as independent operators, blending into the local population and working unseen in a city awash with spies looking for information on their every move. Special Forces Berlin was a one of a kind unit that had no parallel. It left a legacy of a new type of soldier expert in unconventional warfare, one that was sought after for missions such as the attempted rescue of American hostages from Tehran in 1979. With the US government officially acknowledging their existence in 2014, their incredible story can now be told.

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Customer Reviews

Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite 1956-1990. By James Stejskal. Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers US, 2017. 333 pages. Hardcover edition, ISBN 978-1-61200-444-0. Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite 1956-1990 by author James Stejskal, has

provided an invaluable resource to historians and policymakers on the history of a unique special operations force. This history details the operations of a unique force that specialized in Unconventional Warfare based on Cold War missions, and the development of modern Counter Terrorism capabilities as the nature of conflict evolved. For students and practitioners, this history provides an invaluable insight into Special Forces in Berlin during the Cold War as well as the development of modern Special Operations Forces Counter-Terrorism capabilities prior to the 1986 Goldwater Nichols Act forming US Special Operations Command. The author had been a member of this unit and is clearly comfortable in his role as a historian and a special operations forces practitioner. James Stejskal served for 23 years with Special Forces, including two tours in Berlin, retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer 4. He then served 13 years with the CIA as a senior operations officer (case officer), in Africa, Europe and Asia. He is now a military historian and conflict archaeologist. Senior Chief Warrant Officers in the US Army Special Forces are the technical knowledge and practical experience that keeps the force evolving and aiming for new heights in their standards and missions. From this superb body of knowledge, he provides an insider's perspective for the reader. He relies not only on his own experiences but the survey and interview of fellow veterans and the use of primary documents archived at such places as the US Army Center of Military History. The genesis of the unit in Berlin is deftly told while at the same time weaving the origins of the Special Forces community, tracing it from the Office of Strategic Services during World War Two to the Father of modern Special Forces, Colonel Aaron Bank and its new missions in the Cold War. Having worldwide commitments, the US Army was searching for ways to counter Soviet advances, especially in Europe. James Stejskal provides wonderful background and detail about the Allied partition of Berlin, and the early days of Special Forces. Special Forces in the 1950s widely sought "Lodge Act" soldiers, who were emigres from Eastern Europe who could serve with language and culture abilities against the communists while earning American citizenship. These soldiers also brought their own wartime or resistance background and were a priority for both the Special Forces Detachment in Berlin and the 10th US Special Forces Group in Bad Tolz, Germany (Bavaria). Initially the unit was known as "Detachment A" and was stationed under unofficial cover in the Berlin Brigade. Members were told to develop the persona and habits of local Berliners. This included wearing civilian clothing and growing out hair and beards to resemble local Berliners. Their role in Cold War plans was to develop a detailed knowledge of infrastructure and Warsaw Pact units to be ready to disrupt and delay these units and then to connect with local resistance units the Central Intelligence Agency had cultivated for them. The extreme

compartmentalization by the CIA meant the Special Forces teams assigned this mission would not meet these groups until the war started. In retrospect, this was a high-risk mission assigned them. The soldiers assigned to this unit became experts in surveillance and counter-surveillance techniques. They also became experts in infiltration and exfiltration in an urban environment. As the Cold War evolved and Vietnam became the primary battlefield, expertise was passed on by rotating veterans to the unit. Eventually Terrorism became a concern because of the Red Army Faction, Baader Meinhof gang, PFLP, and others. The Detachment began working with other organizations such as the British SIS, Special Air Service and the West German Counter Terrorism Border Police, GSG-9. Towards the end of the book, the author recounts the tasking of Detachment A to provide two soldiers to conduct advanced reconnaissance of Tehran for the planned rescue of the American Hostages in 1979. Detachment A was also assigned as a Team the mission of rescuing three diplomats in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The part of the book that describes this includes the group with its leader, legendary SF veteran, Dick Meadows (a Vietnam Son Tay Raider), being stopped and questioned in a Tehran traffic stop. They also provided the logistical support and transportation for Desert Two, the next harbor site after Desert One for Delta Force. It also recounts the tragic incidents at Desert One and the advance force team's exfiltration from Tehran. It also describes a second operation for the rescue of the hostages which was planned and rehearsed but not executed. These lessons learned eventually gave insights to create the Intelligence Support Activity and the US Army Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) as well as the eventual establishment of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1986. Also during this period, an Operational Security (OPSEC) review made it apparent that the unit needed to be moved from its original location, and better procedures for concealing assignment and logistical and personnel support needed to be implemented. In 1984 Detachment A was deactivated and the "Physical Security Support Element-Berlin" (PSSE-B) was created, which gave an official cover of a unit that appeared to be a Military Police survey capability. This nested well with an additional mission of surveying DOD, and US Diplomatic facilities to better protect them from terrorist attack. As Glasnost and the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 are recounted in the closing chapters, the mission became less critical and the deactivation of the unit occurred in August 1990. A former SF Soldier, MG Sid Shachnow, commanded the Berlin Brigade during this period. In 1989 he was curious and asked his Soviet counterparts if they were aware of any US Special Forces in the US sector? They answered with yes, 500, which was highly inflated above the 120 or so steady state stationed through-out the Cold War. Stejskal's research also included declassified East German Secret Police (Stasi) and Defense records. These

confirmed that the unit's Cold War adversaries did not truly understand the strength, order of battle and mission of the unit, validating its vigilance over the years in its mission. I highly recommend this book to National Security and intelligence community scholars and practitioners, as well for Joint Professional Military Education. It should be placed on the US SOCOM Commander's reading list and at the Joint Special Operations University and the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, as well as the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps's professional reading list. In summary, James Stejskal has done a huge service to his nation and the Special Operations community by diligently creating this work of knowledge. It truly shows how special operations forces are strategic assets for the United States. It also is a huge testament to the professionalism of the soldiers who served in Berlin in Detachment A and PSSE-B during the Cold War years of 1956-1990. Colonel Preston McLaughlin, USMC Ret. is an Adjunct Professor of National Security at the Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security in Washington, D.C. He is also former Faculty at Marine Corps University and The Citadel. Col. McLaughlin is a combat veteran of Desert Shield and Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom. He is a former Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Platoon Commander and Company XO 1987-1989, and CO Marine Corps Security Force Regiment in 2007-2009. Col. McLaughlin is the Chief Operating Officer of Aquilae Consulting Services, LLC. Short version: Author James Stejskal has done a superb job detailing the history of a highly classified US Army Special Forces Detachment stationed in Berlin during the Cold War, 1956-1990. As a former veteran of this unit, he combines firsthand knowledge as a scholar-practitioner with official archived material and interviews of its former members to create a fascinating account of its missions. The evolution of Unconventional Warfare techniques in a complex urban environment also evolved into Counter-Terrorism capabilities that are the hallmark of today's Special Mission Units. I recommend this book for National Security and Intelligence professionals as well as for Joint Professional Military Education institutions. -Colonel Preston McLaughlin, USMC Ret.

Outstanding book, very well written true account of one Of America's Top Secret Forces. James Stejskal has "broken the code" as a key member of this very special organization. Jim has been able to gather, organize and succinctly tell the history and true story of Det-A/PSSE, the US Army's covered Special Forces Detachment and it's Cold War missions deep behind enemy lines. A great tribute to all of the dedicated American's who served in this organization over the years.

Special Forces Berlin Book Review

Special Forces Berlin, Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite, 1956-1990 by James Stejskal, is a gripping factual account of the history of secret Special Forces operations behind the Iron Curtain in (the former) West Berlin, known as the "Divided City."

Stejskal is uniquely qualified to research and write the history of the two Special Forces company-sized detachments who operated in the "City" as he is not only a military historian, but a former member of this elite force who later went on to work for the CIA as a Case Officer. Stejskal's factual contribution ensures this Special Forces unit's history was not lost forever.

The author sifted through classified and unclassified sources and interviewed many former unit members to create a masterpiece of military history, including the formation of Special Forces in 1953, the creation of Detachment "A" (39th Special Forces) in 1956 and the Physical Security Support Element "A" Berlin (410th Special Forces) in 1984 until the Iron Curtain fell in 1990.

The book covers the history of the Unit and its various evolving missions including Guerrilla Warfare (GW), Unconventional Warfare (UW), Counter Terrorism (CT), Direct Action (DA), and Special Reconnaissance (SR) all while operating behind enemy lines. The early history is extremely interesting; many members of the unit were non-Americans hailing from countries throughout Europe, many of which were Lodge Act Soldiers with an accelerated path to US citizenship. English was not often spoken in the "Team Rooms" as the "Detachments" carried out their wartime training missions with the deadly seriousness of men who fought the enemy in their homeland.

I found the account of Det "A"'s participation in "Operation Eagle Claw" particularly riveting. The mission to rescue the US hostages from Iran in 1980 illustrated the Unit's professionalism and proficiency. Notably members of the Unit clandestinely infiltrated Tehran to collect information on the city and the targets and then successfully exfiltrated to brief the mission planners headed by General Vaught, the JTF 1-79 Commander. A second Det "A" element worked alongside the main force to rescue hostages held at a separate location from the Main Force's target, the US Embassy Compound.

There are a number of other declassified mission discussed in the book. Stejskal's uncanny ability to capture the formerly secret unit's (almost lost) history is fascinating and very insightful into the Unit and its Operators. Anyone who is a military buff or enjoys Special Operations type action books, fact or fiction, will love this work of factual Special Forces history.

Ron F. former Det "A" and PSSE member

Much of Army Special Forces history focuses on Southeast Asia (with a smattering of Latin America). This is essential for the SF history bookshelf. The author, who was a member of the unit at one point, did a great job telling the story of this "cold war" (in quotes because it wasn't really all that cold at times) facet of SF missions and the dynamics of operating in an environment that was both electric and foreboding - focused as nearly everyone was on the Soviet threat of the time. There are many great quality photos put together and the chronological approach tells the history very well. The usual low-keyed but razor-sharp sense of humor often found in SF Soldiers is also evident throughout so, yeah, there are plenty of "you had to be there" moments related along the way. It's about time someone was finally able to write such a book.

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