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When James Donovan went to Berlin, to negotiate an exchange of Rudolf Abel for Francis Gary Powers, he entered a city divided by a wall. This image depicts construction of the Berlin Wall during August of 1961, about six months before Donovan arrived in Berlin. Image by Corey Hatch, University of Utah. Fair use for educational purposes.

With the federal government's approval, Jim Donovan sent a letter to "Frau Abel," agreeing to meet with her in East Berlin.

Already a walled-in city, East Berlin - to some people - seemed like an ominous place. Once inside the wall, was a person free to leave?

Donovan agreed to meet with Frau Abel, at the Soviet Embassy, at noon on February 3, 1962.

There were two other Americans being held by the Soviet Bloc - one in East Germany (a Yale student, from Michigan, named Frederic L. Pryor) and another in Kiev (a University of Pennsylvania student, Marvin Makinen) - who could be part of an exchange.

Donovan's priority, however, was to negotiate a deal exchanging Abel for Powers. He would work with an East-German lawyer named Wolfgang Vogel.



Without knowing for sure whether he could trust “Frau Abel” and the East-Berlin lawyer - Wolfgang Vogel - Donovan went to Berlin. Exemplifying the current state of affairs between America and the Soviets, the weather was cold and snowy.

Meeting with Ivan Alexandrovich Schischkin - the second secretary of the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin - Donovan made clear his mission:

*I have come to Berlin for only one reason. An East German lawyer named Wolfgang Vogel sent me a message that Mrs. Abel believed that if I could arrange the release of her husband, this would free Powers, the American student, Pryor, held in East Germany and the American student Makinen now in prison in Kiev.*

*Upon this understanding I have obtained a pledge from my government that we will deliver Abel to any point you designate in Berlin, within forty-eight hours after an agreement is reached. (See *Strangers on a Bridge*, by James Donovan, at [page 387](#).)*

When Schischkin wondered why the proposed swap included three Americans for one Russian, Donovan wryly replied:

*One artist is always worth more than three mechanics. (Strangers, at [page 390](#).)*

As negotiations gave way to tentative plans, Donovan raised the possibility of exchanging the prisoners on a bridge which connected the American sector of Berlin to Potsdam. The site of the Potsdam Conference, at the end of WWII, was now part of East Germany.

The bridge, Donovan had suggested, was the Glienicke. In the not-too-distant future it would have another name: "Bridge of Spies."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JAMES-DONOVAN-GOES-to-BERLIN-Bridge-of-Spies>

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## Media Stream

### Construction of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961

James Donovan needed to make a trip to East Berlin to negotiate the exchange of his client, Rudolf Abel (Willy Fisher) for Francis Gary Powers.

To do so, he had to cross into a divided city where a wall separated East from West Berlin. Construction of the Wall began on August 13, 1961.



The great divider was barely six months old when Donovan made his trip to East Berlin during February of 1962.

This photo depicts construction of the Wall during August of 1961. Click on it for a better view.

Construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961—photo from University of Utah, by Corey S. Hatch. Copyright, Corey S. Hatch and University of Utah, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Image included in the 2008 Master's Thesis of Martiena Schneller, "Resurrecting an Old Place with a New Purpose," at page 16.

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### Wolfgang Vogel and Rudolf Abel

After Francis Gary Powers was convicted as a spy, in Moscow, Wolfgang Vogel negotiated the exchange of Soviet-spy Rudolf Abel (Willy Fisher) for Powers. His negotiating partner, for the US, was James Donovan.

This image depicts how Vogel appeared on November 26, 1959. He was in Berlin, at the time. Vogel completed the Abel-Powers negotiations, with Donovan, in February of 1962.

The two men, plus Frederic Pryor—an American student who'd been taking graduate-level courses at the Free University of West Berlin, since 1959, but was being held in East Germany without charge—were exchanged on the 10th of February, 1962.

Image of Vogel by an unnamed photographer and placed online via "Der Spiegel" (the German-language newspaper). Copyright AP, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

The photo is described, by "Der Spiegel," in this German-to-English translation: "Archive photo, from 1959, showing the GDR [German Democratic Republic] lawyer Wolfgang Vogel. Vogel apparently had a key role, as a lawyer, for the GDR."

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