



The unlikely tractor

■ By Ian M. Johnston

The blockade

In the year 1946, the Cold War was at its height. The Soviet Union, bristling with demonic arms, not the least of which included a rapidly expanding arsenal of nuclear weapons, occupied the eastern half of Germany.

A broad 7000 km long corridor, festooned with death-trap mines and patrolled by heavily armed East German communist guards, separated the Soviets from the British, French and US allies. German families, in an endeavour to reach forcibly separated loved ones, were slaughtered mercilessly, if they dared attempt a crossing of the hundred metre wide 'no-man's-land'.

Berlin, the capital city, was also divided, but in this case by a weaving barbed wire encrusted high stone wall. The Brandenburg Gate, through which military and political dignitaries irregularly passed, for the fruitless purpose of attending endless non-productive peace talks, was also heavily guarded and was the only access between the two sectors.

Berlin was located in the communist Eastern Block, with the hitherto population of 4.3 million, reduced by the ravages of war and forced migration to 2.8 million. Its location placed it 160 km east of the allied Western Sector.

The infamous Soviet's Berlin Blockade occurred in 1948–49. The East German Commander General Vasily Sokolovsky abruptly banned all road, rail and canal traffic access into the city. Accordingly, all food, fuel and other essentials had to be flown in by RAF, New Zealand, Canadian and US Airforce transports.

A remarkable 200,000 sorties landed at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport during the 323 day blockade, amounting to an average 12,000 tons of supplies each day! The density of the air traffic was unprecedented in aviation history. Therefore, sadly but not surprisingly, numerous accidents occurred resulting in the loss of 70 aircrew members.



Berlin 1945.

The Tiergarten

Astonishingly, in the midst of the ruins and devastation of a shattered post war Berlin, there remained a remote corner of hope, enterprise and expectation. By some miracle, the engineering firm of Orenstein and Koppel, founded way back in 1876, had escaped the devastation of war and conflagration. The red brick factory was located a short distance from the resplendent and world renowned Tiergarten.

Today the Tiergarten is the heart of Berlin's soul. It is comprised of 519 magnificent acres of stunning velvet green parkland, liberally sprinkled with colourful deciduous trees and through which meanders a gently flowing tributary of the River Spree. Remarkably this vast green oasis is situated in the epicentre of the city, adjacent to such famous landmarks as The Reichstag, Potsdamer Platz, Brandenburg Gate, and The Schöneberg Zoological Gardens.

During World War 2, the Tiergarten was obliged to suffer the indignity of the hostilities. Thousands of starving citizens descended upon it armed with spades and axes. The spades for the growing of desperately required vegetables and the axes for the hewing down of trees to be used as firewood for the provision of warmth. Others fled to the park simply seeking refuge from the danger of collapsing bombed buildings.

Upon the cessation of hostilities, a descendant of the founder of Orenstein and Koppel, Carl Orenstein, often escaped from his office in the company's factory building, and strolled to the nearby Tiergarten. There he experienced a feeling of profound sadness at the state of the once grand park.

Two years prior to the outbreak of the conflict, his firm had produced the first of a range of high quality innovative



The Tiergarten today.