

FROM THE ARCHIVE

# I say, chaps, cold war is hell with dinner at 62p

July 12, 1981: a 15% price hike has jolted the elegant life aboard the daily British military train across East Germany, finds **Brian Moynahan**

INFLATION has caught up with the British military train, which chugs each day through the East German corridor from Helmstedt, 60 miles east of Hanover on the western side of the border, to Charlottenburg station in West Berlin. By international treaty its charges, including those for meals and drinks, have been virtually frozen since it started running in 1948.

But this month travellers have been faced with savage, across-the-board increases of 15%. Dinner in the elegant dining car now costs an unprecedented 62p.

Afternoon tea is included in the price, but this has not softened the blow. "Something has to give," said a major as the Berliner, as it is affectionately known, started its 120-mile journey. "I'm leaving the soda out of my brandy." An understandable move, with brandy at 5p a tot while a bottle of soda costs 10p.

The Berliner, in its daily there-and-back traverse of the forests and watery fields of Prussia, is restricted to the forces and those civilians fortunate enough to be sponsored by the British military authorities in Berlin. Which is a pity, for it is a fine train.

It is reliable, Christmas Days apart. It has logged only one failure in 33 years: on September 20, 1980, East German Railways could not supply the Berliner's locomotive as usual because of a strike.

It is punctual. Locals set their watches by it, quartz not being common in the Eastern Bloc; you can see them doing so as you gaze out of the windows. When it's late,



Lieutenant-General Sir David Scott-Barrett, a former British commander in Berlin, marks the 10,000th run of the train in 1974

it acts as a barometer for East-West tensions. "There's just one reason for getting behind schedule — Russian troop movements on the line," says Warrant Officer Ollie Bradley, who in effect runs the train. The last delay was in April.

Train enthusiasts relish the Soviet-built Tiger class diesel that pulls the train, and the glimpse at Brandenburg of a marshalling yard with what is allegedly the world's oldest shunting hump.

The food on the train is excellent, served in style by a six-man crew on contract from International Wagons-Lits. A subsidy from the West German government ensures that the finest ingredients are used.

A chilled bottle of Mosel Bernkastel helps the pine trees and watchtowers slip past. If at 80p that

damages the pocket, Liebfraumilch is listed on the menu at 69p a bottle. The most punishing item is cider which, at 32p, costs as much as six whiskies.

The pleasantness induced by the prices aboard the Berliner is heightened by the feeling of security. To be sure, there is plenty of evidence that the East is red. There are mats of nails along the track on the East Berlin border to keep escapers back.

Forty-five miles out, there is a large Russian tank park at Kirchmoser, with a tank training ground a little further down the line. Ninety miles out, the East German political prison at Magdeburg abuts the track.

Soviet officers inspect the train's documents at Marienborn, on the

West German border, but that need not worry the passenger. The train's doors are sealed; the East Germans and Russians are not allowed aboard. The Berliner has its own officer commanding, train; train (conducting) warrant officer; a Russian interpreter; and a guard of four men with sub-machineguns.

True, the guards have only 10 rounds of ammunition each. But the train is equipped to withstand a long siege. It has a carriage full of iron rations, many of them liquid. It has its own radio and a Royal Signaller to send regular checks. It has bunks and showers.

The train has good relations with the Russians, who greet it at Marienborn twice each day. "We talk about more things than we used to... football, films," says

John Henderson, the interpreter. "It's the things we don't talk about that haven't changed."

"The train is my life," said the chief steward, Alfred Behm. "I've been on it since 1948. I came here as a young man from the German navy and a prison camp, and now I am old. I like to think that someone from the old days could get aboard now and not know the difference."

The train's future is assured. It runs even when empty, for in an affair as protocol-ridden as the status of Berlin, to lose the Berliner's passage through East Germany even for a day would be to set a most unwelcome precedent.

The service was closed in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Brian Moynahan's latest book, *Leningrad Symphony*, will be published this autumn.

## MESSAGE BOARD



One of several 'lactivists' who protested outside Facebook's European base in Dublin over its deletion of breastfeeding photos

## Facebook boobs again

The social network has blocked 'indecent' photos of nursing mothers despite condoning violent images

Christopher Clift	It's a great mystery to me why anyone would want the minutiae of their life to appear on such a site. If I want to tell (real) friends what I'm up to, I call them or email them, usually sparing them the gory details. It's time for the human race to get a life.
JMS	If people choose to post pictures of themselves or their children being breastfed on a website run by a multi-billion-dollar US corporation and then complain that they don't have control over what's accepted and what isn't... well, that's fine with me.
Nick Buckle	This line between sex and violence has always puzzled me: it's okay to show in mainstream media the most gruesome and bloody way you might leave this mortal coil, but any chance of seeing (in any detail) how you got here in the first place? Nah.
Richard Hazzlewood	I'd rather see a girl's legs than a crushed head. Don't know about everybody else.
Ian Whitlock	Oh yuck, what very American prudery — cover up those table legs.

## BIRTHDAYS

Emmanuel Adebayor, footballer, 28; Corinne Bailey Rae, singer, 33; Michael Bolton, singer, 59; Fats Domino, singer and pianist, 84; Elizabeth George, author, 63; Li Na, tennis player, 30; Sébastien Loeb, world rally-driving champion, 38; Sandie Shaw, singer, 65

## ANNIVERSARIES

1802 birth of novelist Victor Hugo; 1815 Napoleon escapes from exile on Elba; 1839 first Grand National at Aintree; 1987 Church of England's General Synod votes in favour of ordaining women; 1993 Islamists bomb the World Trade Center, New York, killing six people