

PICASSOfilm & FRANK Productions, Inc. & JumpingMan Productions Inc

PRESENT:

THE ESCAPE WILL NOT BE TELEVISED



In 1989, American TV networks aired the historic moment of Berliners freely crossing the Wall. But years earlier, a daring network TV special risked lives and national security to document a perilous escape beneath it.

A FOUR-PART DOCU-DRAMA SERIES

SIZZLE REEL

<https://vimeo.com/748609076/ba2cac90f0>

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SERIES SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 1962, one year after the rise of the Berlin Wall, a group of young West Germans risk prison, Stasi torture, and even death to liberate friends, lovers, and strangers in communist East Berlin. Their plan: dig a tunnel under the Berlin Wall. When two U.S. television networks hear about the secret projects, they race to be first to document them from the inside. NBC and CBS pay for two separate tunnels to be dug in return for the right to film the escapes, promising spectacular prime-time specials. CBS's special never happens, as on the night of the escape, a Stasi agent planted inside the crew betrays the operation. NBC succeeds, filming the dramatic escape live only to have the broadcast of the TV special delayed by the White House. President John Kennedy is wary of anything that might spark a confrontation

with the Soviets. Two months later, the historic prime time special is one of the highest rated programs of its time. Among the 18 million tuning in is President Kennedy, who is moved to tears.

In this four-part docudrama, we'll meet characters seemingly ripped from the pages of a spy thriller: the NBC producer who was determined to pay for a tunnel and defy the U.S. government; the Stasi informer who betrays the "CBS tunnel"; a skilled engineer who went on to build the tunnel beneath the English Channel; the young East Berliner who fled with her baby, then married one of the tunnelers; the U.S. President eager to suppress the historic coverage; and the revolutionary power of ordinary people in dire circumstances.

SERIES TONE AND TREATMENT

Set in the early 1960s, this story juxtaposes the optimism of a young, dynamic U.S. President and his emerging generation with the fear of Cold War Armageddon that gripped the United States and divided Germany.

The series combines a mixture of scripted theatrical scenes, complete with dialogue performed by seasoned actors, along with sit-down interviews, both from the era and newly shot, as well as archival footage of the actual events, to present a riveting story of courage, guile, and international intrigue in the face of

overwhelming odds. For added authenticity, the recreated scenes are not imagined, but based on the actual accounts of the participants themselves.

"The Escape Will Not Be Televised" adheres to the historical record and reflections by its participants and eyewitnesses. It is the dramatic untold story of personal human drama, global politics and media suppression told against the backdrop of a world on the brink of nuclear disaster.

EPISODE SYNOPSES

EPISODE ONE: "Going Underground"



It's August 13, 1961. Just after midnight in Berlin, the conquered and divided city of post-war Europe. East German soldiers roll out barbed wire sealing off the ninety-six-mile circumference of West Berlin. As people wake up, they suddenly find themselves abruptly and impassively divided from their families, friends, and co-workers. Border guards are under strict orders... shoot to kill- even women and children. Many citizens choose to risk their lives and escape west. To assist them, a group of students begin designing and building an underground tunnel. They call themselves the Bernauer Group.

In another part of Berlin, another tunnel project is underway (the Kiefholz tunnel) led by internationally renowned cyclist, Harry Seidel and his colleagues, the Girmann Group. At 23, Harry Seidel, loves the challenge of creating ways to cross the border.

He finds it easy to escape but needs to come up with a way to get his family out. He decides to tunnel under the wall. But Harry's brother can't wait. He has other ideas of escape for the family: fake IDs. He is caught and arrested along with Harry's mother.

Harry Seidel and the Girmann Group are unaware that a spy for the notorious East German Secret Police, the Stasi, is about to infiltrate their ranks. Siegfried Uhse, is being blackmailed by the Stasi for stealing cigarettes and being a "homosexual." Soon, Uhse will be included in every step of the Girmann's groups plans for the escape.

The early 1960s is a golden age for network television documentaries. *CBS Reports*, and NBC's *White Paper* series battle for scoops and ratings.

In the spring of 1962, NBC News Berlin correspondent Piers Anderton and his main rival in Berlin, Daniel Schorr at CBS, hear that tunnels are being built and refugees from Communist East Berlin are escaping to the West. But neither of these crack reporters is able to uncover where these secret operations are taking place.



Piers Anderton, NBC News



Daniel Schorr, CBS News

In his office in Rockefeller Center, NBC News Producer Reuven Frank, Piers Anderton's boss, knows that getting the scoop on an underground escape could be the story of the decade. "Give us anything you find on refugees trying to flee," he tells Anderton. "Don't worry about getting permission. Go ahead and do it. I'll pay the bill." Anderton puts the word out to his contacts in Berlin: "Find me a tunnel!"



NBC, New York

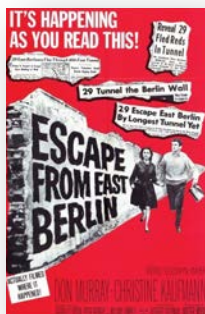


CBS, New York

Both Anderton and Daniel Schorr are in Berlin the night the wall went up and both are eager to find a way to film an escape.

Schorr pictures himself crawling through a passage with a cameraman and the ratings bonanza that will follow.

The only thing standing in his way: the US Government. Schorr's reporting, often critical of US foreign policy, has not endeared him to President Kennedy. Broadcasting a tunnel escape could inflame the Soviet Union, infuriate the White House and end his career.



While NBC and CBS search for a tunnel, Hollywood already has one. MGM's "Tunnel 28," (later changed to "Escape from East Berlin") starts rolling cameras in West Berlin. The crew builds a fake tunnel on a sound stage.

The Bernauer Group tunnelers approach MGM's publicist for the movie. They are seeking contact with American television networks that might offer the widest audience - and largest payment - for their project.

By May 1962, they are put in touch with NBC and Piers Anderton.

The Bernauer Group want \$50,000 to complete the dig. Anderton knows that will never fly with New York but asks to see the tunnel. He is blindfolded and taken there. The tunnel now stretches more than seventy feet, almost to the Wall.

NBC executives are faced with a moral dilemma: Should a news operation *pay* to cover a story? Does this compromise one's journalistic integrity?

After back-and-forth negotiations, NBC agree to finance the project for \$150,000 in exchange for exclusive rights to film the tunnelers digging their way from a former swizzle-stick factory in West Berlin into the Communist east. It is a landmark decision. For one of the first times in history, a television network has paid for the rights to film a news event as it unfolds.

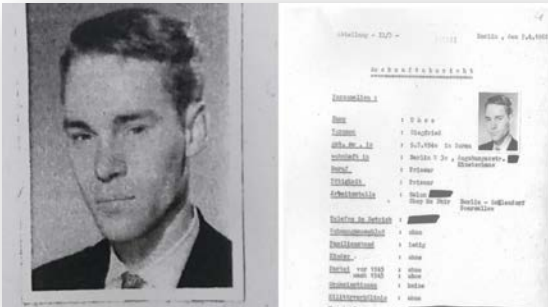


NBC News crew, Berlin.
Reuven Frank is second from the left.

EPISODE TWO: "The Shoot"

While NBC makes a deal with The Bernauer Group, Daniel Schorr at CBS, still needs a tunnel. Desperately seeking a major scoop to mark the first anniversary of the Wall on August 13, Schorr puts word out again to his contacts.

Harry Seidel continues building a tunnel that is nearly finished. Not being an engineer, the structures he and his team build are crude and in danger of collapse. Harry wants to walk away from the project and cedes his team to the Girmann Group to finish the job. Within days, they ref-fit the tunnel while Stasi informer, Siegfried Uhse, reports on their progress



Stasi spy, Siegfried Uhse

By July, a Newsweek correspondent tells CBS that the Girmann Group is looking to secure film rights to raise funds to finish Seidel's tunnel. With the tunnel nearly complete, Schorr finally finds a story that might beat out NBC.

The Girmann Group tells Schorr that at least forty-five refugees are scheduled to crawl to freedom and demands \$25,000 for the rights to film the final preparations and escape. CBS takes the deal.

With their contract signed and cash delivered, NBC, under the direction of Piers Anderton, starts filming the creation of the Bernauer tunnel. They are ordered not to help in the tunnel operation in any way.



Boulders block their path, forcing exhausting detours, two different leaks nearly flood their underground passageway, but the tunnelers slowly proceed.

At the same time, Anderton learns of the CBS tunnel and prepares to "out scoop" his competitors by positioning a camera in a window high above the escape location.

News of the CBS tunnel spreads to others, as well. The imbedded spy tips off his Stasi handlers and reveals the date of the escape, while an American diplomat is also tipped off about the CBS tunnel and warns Washington.

Officials in the State Department learn CBS is planning to film a tunnel escape and began to pressure the network to shut it down. There are rumors that the East Germans know about the planned escape, which could threaten sensitive US-USSR relations. Daniel Schorr refuses to back down and insists CBS will go ahead.



Daniel Schorr, CBS News, Berlin

On the night before the escape, President Kennedy makes an 11th hour intervention and personally orders CBS to back off the escape story in the name of national security. Schorr is stunned and reluctantly agrees. Humiliated and furious, he never recovers.



President John F. Kennedy

The Girmann group proceed as planned without CBS. On August 7th, 1962, refugees show up to rendezvous points and are led to the tunnel house, which is almost directly on the border. But thanks to their spy inside the operation, the East German police and Stasi agents know when and approximately where the escape tunnel is located but are unsure of the exact address.

At 5:15pm, two Girmann operatives mistake undercover Stasi agents as refugees and offer to escort them to the tunnel house. The agents are more than happy to oblige. When a Girmann operative promptly reveals the location of the site: inside a cottage on Kiefholz Strasse, the cover is blown.

Undercover Stasi plants wait for more refugees and the escape organizer to arrive before they move in. They are accompanied by two men in uniform, armed with Kalashnikov rifles. Finally, after about fifteen suspects have gathered, the Stasi arrest them all.



The soldiers then set aside their heavy rifles and remove their boots, to more easily sneak up on the second target of the operation: the diggers. Underground, three tunnelers continue to slowly make their way towards the cottage on Kiefholz Strasse, unaware of the deadly trap being set just a few feet away.

EPISODE THREE: "NBC's Escape"



The CBS tunnel escape has dangerously imploded, with the arrest of more than a dozen refugees. Now, Stasi agents and soldiers huddle in the vestibule of the tunnel house, awaiting the arrival of three diggers from West Berlin. The soldiers are heavily armed with orders to shoot to kill.

The diggers arrive, push up a floorboard, and find themselves in the living room of the tunnel house. Something seems terribly wrong. Suddenly, warnings from the West boom over the tunnelers' walkie-talkie: "Come back, come back! There are people on the property!" They clearly did not mean escapees.

The tunnelers scramble back into the tunnel and safely make their way back to the West. Their operation effort, however, has been a complete failure.

Meanwhile NBC executives view some of the 20 hours of footage they have shot at the Bernauer tunnel. If the escape succeeds, Reuven Frank knows that the documentary will exceed all expectations.



Reuven Frank

The Bernauer tunnelers splash through the dark and claustrophobic passageway. They're up to their ankles in water that is leaking in. The threat of a collapse looms. It's mid-September when they reach their destination under a house in East Berlin. After listening for any activity in the basement above, they break through the floor. The NBC cameras record the compelling drama.



Bernauer Operatives in East Berlin organize the exodus. Refugees who left everything behind, arrive in twos and threes. They quietly find the cellar door and whisper the password. Silently, an operative leads them to the tunnel entrance.

As the escapees climb down, their helpers, who have risked everything to take them to freedom, realize that the months of digging, the blisters, the electric shocks, the water leaks, the constant threat of a cave-in, have been worth it. Splashing through the tunnel, they quietly kept their composure and disappear into the darkness.

At the other end in the West, the cameras record the first signs of life: A woman's pocketbook is placed on a ledge next to a ladder. Then a disheveled crown of hair soon reveals a young woman in a dark dress.

After crawling on all fours through puddles and dirt for the past few minutes, she is now struggling to navigate the last fifteen steps of the ladder.



That night, 29 people including mothers and their infants make their way to freedom.

At NBC's Berlin bureau, Reuven Frank has arrived from New York. It is 2 AM and the film crew has not been heard from. The crew refuses to leave the basement until the last refugee makes it through, then hauls their precious reels of film stock to a secure lab. Reuven Frank will have to wait until later that day to screen what they have captured, but the crew's eyewitness accounts make it sound like a phenomenal, heroic success and sensational television.

EPISODE FOUR: "The Broadcast & Epilogue"

On September 18, 1962, four days after the refugees make their way through the Bernauer Tunnel, news of the dramatic escape becomes public. The press has been alerted earlier but delays publishing until the flooded tunnel is permanently put out of service.

Beyond the Girmann tunnel escape, there are no other mass escapes at the border during September, but the number of scattered small successes, and horrible failures, continue to climb.

After weeks in the edit room in New York, Reuven Frank finally has his documentary. While recording the soundtrack, someone hands him a UPI story. A State department spokesman declares that airing the tunnel show is "irresponsible" and "not in the national interest."



NBC schedules "The Tunnel" to air on October 31, 1962. Two weeks earlier, US intelligence discover Soviet missiles in Cuba. The Kennedy administration opposes airing "The Tunnel". On top of the safety concerns and ethical questions raised by the payments, the White House argues that NBC is dangerously heightening tensions between two superpowers at the peak of a Cold War crisis.

Bobby Kennedy, the President's brother and attorney general, sums it up to NBC executives, "That was a terrible thing you people did, buying that tunnel."

As the Cuban missile crisis unfolds, with forces on nuclear alert, Berlin is a target.

NBC executives finally concede. "In view of the critical international situation that has developed," they conclude, "this is not an appropriate time to broadcast our documentary program." NBC delays its broadcast until December 10th when 18 million viewers tune in to see what the LA Times declares, "a new and exalted plateau" for TV journalism.

Not all reviews are favorable. Jack Gould of the New York Times criticizes NBC and "The Tunnel": "Reporting the news was one thing, but manufacturing news to create a 'drama' quite another. The Cold War should not be a toy of show business." The White House and State Department remain pointedly silent. Nevertheless, Edward R Murrow orders more than 100 copies of "The Tunnel" and screens it around the world. "The Tunnel" wins 3 Emmys. In his acceptance speech, Reuven Frank blasts the State Department and hails the tunnelers for doing all the dirty work.



President John F. Kennedy at the Berlin wall, June 26, 1963

"The Tunnel" remains a poignant reminder of the courage and bravery of those who risked their lives to bring others to freedom. One tunneler even ends up marrying a woman he had rescued. Six months after its broadcast, President Kennedy becomes the first US President to visit the Berlin Wall and delivers what many consider his finest speech. Today, more than sixty years later, this story of human drama, global politics and media suppression is as impactful as ever for people who continue to struggle for freedom around the world.

EPILOGUE

- Tunnelers Wolf Schroedter and Hasso Herschel continued to work on other Berlin tunnels
- Siegfried Uhse was given one of the Stasi's top medals for infiltrating the tunnel.
- Wolf-Dieter Sternheimer, a messenger caught by the Stasi in the botched CBS tunnel episode was released from prison after two years.
- Tunneler Joachim Rudolph married Eveline Schmidt who had escaped with her daughter
- Reuven Frank became president of NBC News for two terms.
- Dan Schorr won 3 Emmys and earned a place on Nixon's enemies list. He was eventually fired from CBS in 1976
- Piers Anderton, frustrated with NBC after the Tunnel broadcast, left the network to become a national correspondent for ABC
- The MGM movie "Escape from East Berlin" failed at the box office
- NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw reports live as the Berlin wall falls on November 9, 1989
- Stasi files are made public.

POTENTIAL INTERVIEWS

Reuven Frank – NBC Producer (archive)

Piers Anderton – NBC Berlin reporter (archive)

Daniel Schorr – CBS Berlin reporter (archive)

Peter Dehmel – Cameraman, NBC

Klaus Dehmel – Lighting, NBC

James L. Greenfield – US Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs that spoke with CBS.

Richard Goodwin – Kennedy speechwriter

Neil C. Carmichael Jr. – Dir. of the National Declassification, released all tunnel documents

Fritjof Meyer – Bernauer Group rep who negotiated with NBC

Harry Seidel – original tunnel builder (archive)

Wolfhardt Schroeder – worked for Bernauer Group

Joachim Rudolph – one of the original diggers recruited by the Bernauer Group

Manfred Krebs – One of the original diggers recruited by the Bernauer Group

Fritz Wagner – financed Harry's tunnel

Luigi "Gigi" Spina – Italian student and founder of Bernauer Group, built NBC tunnel

Dominico Sesta – Italian student and founder of Bernauer Group, built NBC tunnel

Ellen Schau – Dominico (Minno) Sesta fiancé and tunnel courier

Peter Schmidt – married to Eveline Schmidt worked for Bernauer Group
Eveline Schmidt – divorced

Detlef Girmann - Founder of Girmann Group

Dieter Thieme – Founder of Girmann Group

Bodo Köhler – Founder of Girmann Group

Joan Glenn – American exchange student worked with Girmann group

Hasso Herschel –volunteered to dig for the Bernauer and Girmann tunnels

Joachim Neumann, - digger for Bernauer Group

Uli Pfeifer, - Key tunneler for Bernauer Group

Claus Stürmer, - digger for Bernauer Group

Boris Franzke, - worked with Harry Seidel on the November 1962 tunnel that gets him arrested.

Mike Conway – Author "Contested Ground: The Tunnel and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America"

Greg Mitchell – Author "The Tunnels: Escapes Under the Berlin Wall"