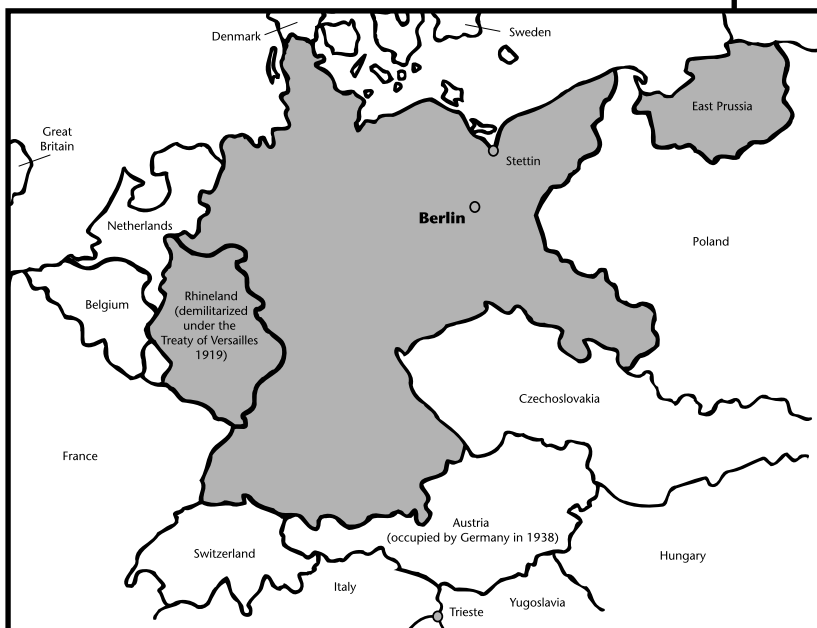
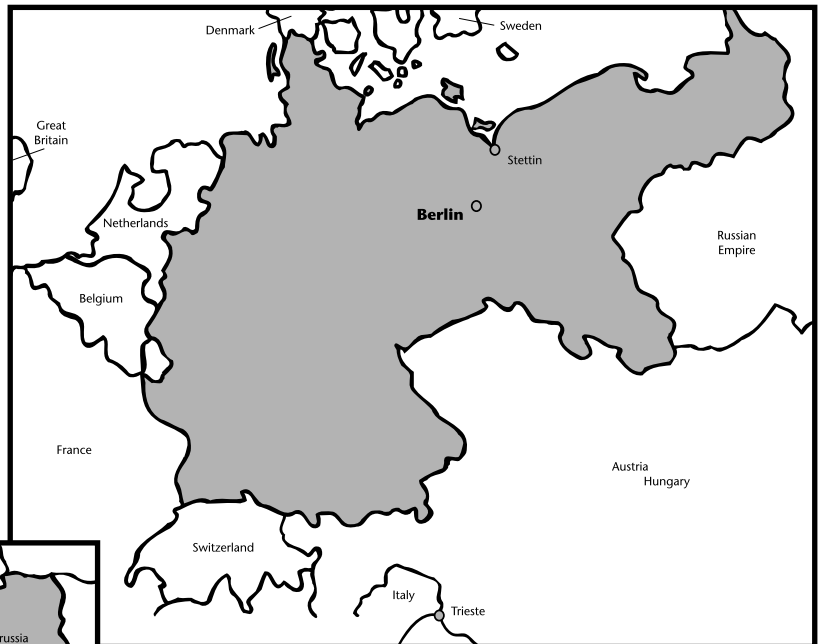


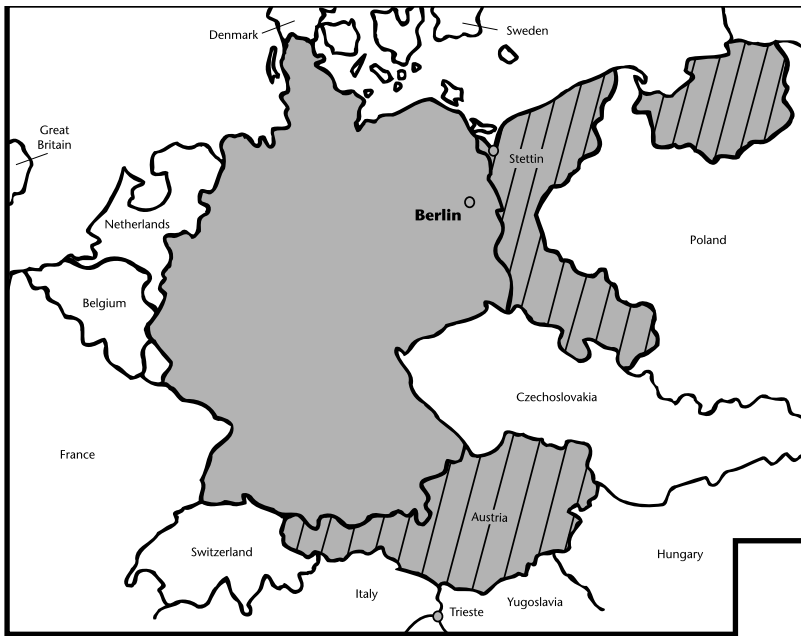
# Where was that 'Iron Curtain' anyway?

We are all (hopefully!) very familiar with the most famous line from Winston Churchill's 1946 'Sinews of Peace' address- 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic and iron curtain has descended across Europe. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia'. Churchill was speaking before the post-war division of Europe became either formalized or permanent. What or perhaps where, did Winston Churchill mean by that line? There was, at the time he delivered the speech, no 'Berlin wall' (not until 1961) and actual physical division of Germany until 1949. In fact if you draw a line from Stettin to Trieste you will discover that Berlin far from lying behind that line i.e. to the East is in fact to the west! Paradoxically, Vienna is also listed as being behind the 'iron curtain' yet, as the setting for many of John Le Carre's spy cold war novels it was in fact firmly in west (albeit as the capital of a resolutely neutral Austria). In fact if you can find Stettin on a map of Europe today you will have done a tremendous job as it no longer exists having been part of a huge swathe of eastern Germany ceded to Poland and the USSR as part of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. This short article is intended, via a series of maps, to illuminate some of the confusions that still exist about where, precisely, this 'iron curtain' was and also the extent to which Germany has moved around the map of Europe.

Germany, as a single political entity dates only from 1871 when Prussia unified the country under its leadership and established a national capital in the Prussian city of Berlin.



In addition to 2 million war dead Germany paid a hefty price for losing the First World War (1914-18). The Treaty of Versailles (1919) blamed Germany for starting the war and imposed a raft of punitive measures including the loss of major tranches of territory and population, mainly to the new state of Poland. East Prussia was now effectively separated from the rest of Germany and many thousands of Germans found themselves citizens of new countries. These territorial adjustments, and the vocal German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia, would help Hitler in his efforts to reverse the judgment of Versailles. In 1938 Hitler, with the support of many Austrians, occupied his native Austria in what became known as the *Anschluss*. This effectively made Austria an integral part of Nazi Germany and only with Germany's defeat in 1945 did Austria regain its independence.

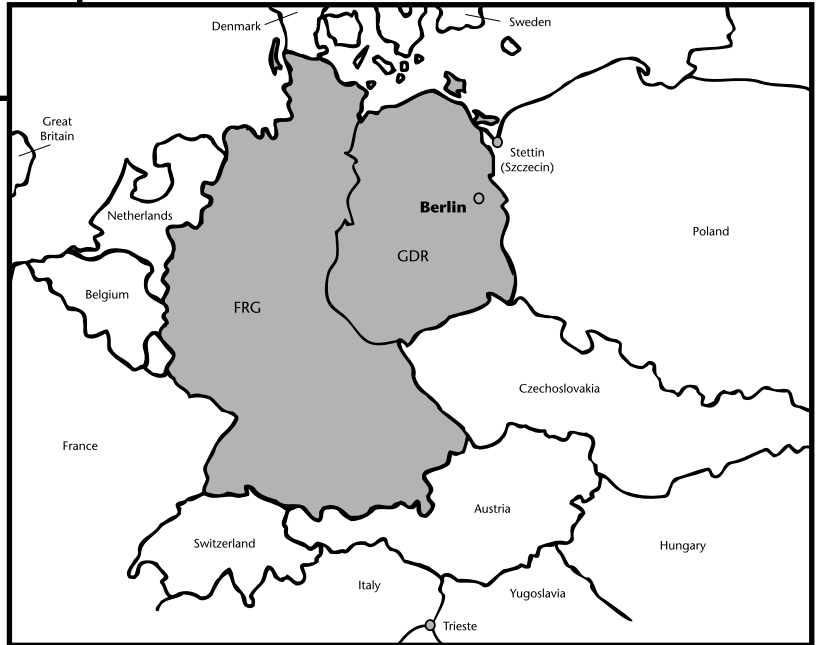


After World War Two, and courtesy of the conferences at Yalta and Potsdam, Germany ceded yet more territory to Poland (and some to Russia) and Poland moved 'as if on wheels' some 200 miles westward giving up major territory to the USSR and claiming, in return, sizeable areas of Germany.

So in 1946 when Churchill spoke, Germany's new eastern border was roughly the line of the Oder-Neisse rivers- with the German city of Stettin (on the western bank) also finding itself being incorporated into Poland and eventually being given a new name: Szczecin (hence the problem of finding it on a map!). Incidentally, adjacent to Stettin is Swinemunde (now called Swinoujście) site of Germany's V1 and v2 rocket testing centre.

In 1949 the temporary division of Germany become permanent with the 'Russian Zone' becoming the German Democratic republic (GDR) or East Germany with its capital at Berlin and the three western Zones becoming the Federal republic of Germany (FRG) or 'west' Germany with its capital at Bonn.

Now, with the formation of a communist German state Churchill's prophetic 'iron curtain' comments came true with a vengeance except this iron curtain was some several hundred miles to the west of his original one! Berlin however, nestled in the middle of east was similarly divided into zones but not until 1961 did a steel and concrete barrier go up to stem the tide of east Germans trying to head west (into west Berlin from where they could fly to west Germany). This, the most visible symbol of the 'iron curtain', ironically was one the last elements to be constructed.



Another city that Churchill mentions in his address, Vienna, was at the time very much within the Soviet sphere in 1946- divided like Berlin into Allied occupation 'zones' and with the country of Austria also split. This division was not to be permanent along the lines of Germany, however. A united Austria was not the potential threat that a reunited, resurgent Germany would have been and neither the USSR nor the western powers had much objection to Austrian reunification and subsequent neutral status. For 40 years Germany was divided into two separate nations one, West Germany became one of the most prosperous nations in the world and a stalwart of NATO and the west. The other, East Germany, was stripped of industrial plant and resources to pay reparations to the USSR. Eventually, East Germany became a central component of the Warsaw pact- and remained occupied by the Red Army until the early 1990s.

By 1989 the economic impact of the cold war had weakened the USSR and both the will and the means to retain control over the Warsaw Pact states meant that the East German government no longer had an ally to help maintain it in power. Popular protest brought down first the wall and then the government. In 1990 Germany was reunited unitary German state we find today.

Much reduced in size from 1870.

