

Former officer contributes photos to museum

[The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star, Norfolk, VA, Nov 12, 2009](#) |

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During the 1960s, John A. Fahey witnessed something many others didn't.

Fahey, now 86, was an American Liaison Officer assigned to the Soviet Army in East Germany from May 1960 to June 1962 - a year before and after the Berlin Wall was erected.

Between overt reconnaissance trips, high-speed chases and dodging bullets, Fahey would spend his "free" time flying over the Wall in a helicopter or walking its perimeter to shoot photos.

"I took the only aerial photos of the wall and a lot behind the wall that nobody has seen, especially of the American sector in West Berlin," said Fahey, of Southern Points, who was a Russian interpreter and translator.

His wife, Barbara, now 83, and their three children resided in West Berlin during Fahey's assignment behind the Iron Curtain.

"The whole thing was like being in Alice in Wonderland; it was overwhelming," said Barbara Fahey. "I didn't know which way to turn or what to do, but I was young so I could do it because I was really kind of nave about things."

Barbara Fahey admits she feared for her husband's safety and often felt alone because they were the only Navy family stationed in Berlin at the time.

She penned a book, "Berlin Wall Flower," and John Fahey wrote "Licensed to Spy" - each about their unique experiences at that time.

"After I got back, no one would say much about what we did in East Germany; it was considered classified," John Fahey said.

Now they are volunteer consultants assisting Baerbel Simon, CEO of the Cold War Museum in Berlin, in preparation of the Museum's 2010 Exhibition of the Berlin Wall in June.

"We want to help preserve the history of American contributions to Berlin," said John Fahey, who is contributing never-before-seen photos. "I get real disturbed sometimes about history; a lot of events are inaccurate or have gaps that are not known."

John Fahey, who served as a combat airship commander in World War II and then flew airships in hunter-killer operations from aircraft carriers, retired from the Navy as a commander in 1963. He taught history at Cox High School for a year, Russian at Norfolk Academy for two years and then 22 years at Old Dominion University.

"I took my first pictures with a 25-cent plastic camera as a child," said Fahey who made photography his hobby and showed his work at local art shows. "I never knew there'd be an

exhibit that would want the photos. I did it for my own use and interest, and it gave me something to do while I was over there."

Barbara Fahey said she never saw the photos that her husband shot of the Berlin Wall until many years later.

"He didn't show me anything when we were over there," she said.

The development of the Berlin Wall exhibit will take place at the Museum's headquarters at the Harnekop Memorial site in Berlin with additional spots at the Brandenburg Gate, Bernauer Strasse and Check Point Charlie, the former American entry into East Berlin.

John Fahey is also working on a history of the USS Muliphin, an attack cargo ship he served on from 1955 to 1957.

"I had many interesting and unusual assignments during my Navy career, but my duty in Germany was the most fascinating, dangerous and rewarding," said John Fahey.

As for the time spent living overseas, Barbara Fahey said they met so many great people and had a lot of fun in the process.

"But," she said, "it was the wildest thing I ever did in our 64 years of married life, and our life has never been dull."

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