

# Huebner-Malinin Agreement creates Military Liaison Missions



Photo By Amy Stork | Two U.S. Military Liaison Mission personnel prepare for a tour in East Germany in 1964. [read more](#)

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by Lori S. Stewart, USAICoE Command Historian

On April 5, 1947, Lt. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner, deputy commander/chief of staff of U.S. European Command, and Colonel-General Mikhail Sergeevich Malinin, deputy commander/chief of staff of the Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany, agreed to exchange military liaison missions in their respective zones of Germany. These military liaison missions would operate in East and West Germany throughout the Cold War.

The idea of military liaison missions began during discussions about the post-war occupation of Germany even before the war ended. Once Germany was divided following the war, the United States, Great Britain, France, and Soviet Union needed liaison organizations operating between their headquarters to stay abreast of occupation matters in each other's sector. The British signed an agreement with the Soviets in September 1946 and the Americans and French followed suit in April 1947.

While the initial stated task was liaison, as tensions worsened between the two nations in the late 1940s, liaison became secondary to intelligence collection. The United States Military Liaison Mission (USMLM) began conducting mobile collection operations in East Germany, looking particularly for indicators of a potential surprise attack by Soviet Forces or the East German Army. Armed with Soviet credentials or passes, USMLM's fourteen accredited members had nearly unrestricted access, "without escort or supervision," into and within the Soviet sector of East Germany. The only locations off-limits were "places of disposition of military units." Two-man "tours" traveled throughout East Germany, observing and documenting Soviet or East German military exercises, facilities, communications sites, railroad sidings, and any other militarily significant target. Through the late 1970s, USMLM reporting was turned over to the Defense Intelligence Agency or U.S. Army Europe for analysis.

By the 1980s, however, USMLM evolved into an effective forward-based human intelligence collection AND analysis center. Tours were assigned targets based on intelligence collection requirements from national and theater intelligence agencies. Newly introduced or modified military equipment were at the top of the target list and documents and equipment abandoned near military facilities were seized for exploitation. USMLM personnel, now augmented with civilian analysts to provide needed continuity to counter regular military turnover, analyzed these materials and produced a variety of reports documenting their analysis.

Throughout the Cold War, the missions unwittingly but notably functioned as "confidence building measures," providing all involved nations with a reasonable level of comfort that the other side was not preparing for war. Knowledge of the other nations' military capabilities also prevented any hasty movements toward conflict. USMLM personnel can also claim more concrete accomplishments. They were the primary source of most American technical intelligence on Soviet military equipment and the first to identify new Soviet weapons, like the PT-76 amphibious light tank, SS-21 tactical ballistic missile, and the T-80 gas turbine tank. They also made extremely accurate assessments of the overall strength and composition of Soviet forces in Germany and published an annual Soviet order of battle. Finally, their analyses of acquired documents focused on the Soviet soldiers' morale, health, physical treatment, and manning levels, ultimately indicated Soviet force readiness was significantly lower than initially projected. This prompted a more accurate and realistic Soviet threat analysis than previously available.

The missions were dangerous. On March 24, 1985, U.S. Army Maj. Arthur D. Nicholson was shot and killed by a Soviet sentry while on tour. The incident soured Soviet-American relations but did not stop USMLM activities in East Germany. USMLM remained active until the end of the Cold War, closing its operations on October 2, 1990.

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