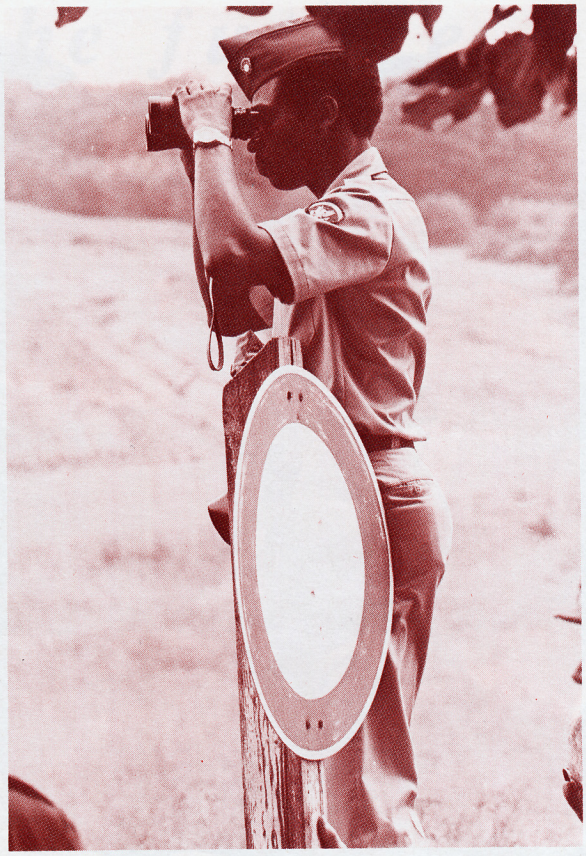
**Dozens of austere watchtowers, bunkers, emplacements, and row on row of barbed wire and electric fences; these grim barriers were designed to keep people in as well as keep them out. They serve as a stark, but crystal clear reminder to everyone free or to anyone who has aspired to be free of one important question...**

*Large 'death strip' graphs showing barriers to freedom are posted at various intervals along the border to explain how the system is set up. (US Army Photo by Joe Faccin)*

*Guards on the East German side of the border watch tourists eye-to-eye through binoculars from their tower perch. (Opposite page) Sp5 Michael Wong searches the foliage for hidden members of the 'other side.' (US Army Photo by Margot Desannoy)*

# WHAT PRICE FREE-DOM ?



**Story and photos by Margot Desannoy**

One definition of freedom is that it is an absence of constraint in choice or action. Free people can come and go as we please. There are no barriers between us and what we may choose, within reason, to do.

It's a simple concept Americans think little about because we are born into that kind of freedom and grow up expecting it never to change, or disappear, or be taken away.

For that reason alone, it becomes even harder to understand why such freedom isn't a birthright everywhere.

But it also makes it easier to see why American forces are in Europe, patrolling one side of the Iron Curtain while the communist regime patrols the other.

Eye to eye. Binoculars to binoculars. The entire 863 or more mile stretch of the East-West German border is fortified with a conglomerate of fences, guard towers, mine fields and booby traps designed to keep a lot of people on their own — eastern — side of the fence.

We're there on the — western — side making sure military troops aren't being built up over there and letting the Communists know for sure someone's here and watching their every move.

If it takes a trip to one of the border patrol sites to realize our ultimate mission in Europe, then border tours should be mandatory for soldiers and their families.

You arrive with camera and binoculars, all ready to spot the enemy in the underbrush peering back at you.

You leave with a heightened appreciation of your freedom of movement — and your ability to leave.

The 5th Signal Command and its units sponsor border tours at various times throughout the year. Such trips are popular with tourists, military and civilian alike.

Spokesmen for the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, headquartered at Fulda, Germany, estimate that since January more than 11,000 visitors toured selected spots along the approximately 240 miles of border it patrols.

Where the 11th ACR patrol leaves off in the north, the British Frontier Service picks up. Likewise, the border south of the 11th ACR's area is patrolled by soldiers from the 2d ACR.

Termed the 'death strip' by some, the snake-like border presents what must be a horrifying barrier to East Germans risking their lives to reach freedom.

On a recent trip originating from 5th Signal headquarters, SFC Carl Rosenberry, border NCO for the 11th ACR's second squadron, explained the frontier network.

Standing on the western side of the Iron Curtain, tourists first spot the three-meter high fence laced with mines and collapsible under a minimum 10 pounds of weight.

Next comes an electric fence 500 meters away. One touch sends an electric impulse to a nearby tower warning the guards someone is attempting to escape.

*SFC Carl Rosenberry explains to visitors where on the border his squadron patrols. (US Army Photo by Margot Desannoy)*

In between the two fences are mine fields; paralleling the border are patrol roads and dog paths, threatening all around are countless towers equipped with massive searchlights and manned by armed soldiers ready to aim and kill.

Visitors are warned not to gesture or yell to the East German guards or to anyone spotted on the other side of the border.

On the headquarters tour, two members of the "other side" were seen hiding in the bushes near a guard tower. They kept a keen watch on us through binoculars as we did on them.

Without an official escort, American servicemembers and their dependents are not permitted to enter the one kilometer zone just inside the border on the West German side. However, the organized tours will take visitors right to the border where they can depart their tour buses or vehicles, view the surroundings and take pictures.

There they will see white poles placed on the border by the Bavarian Border Police. Also outlining the dividing line are red-black-yellow posts that are the actual survey markers.

Metallic plaques stating the latter belong to East Germany appear on top. A fine of DM 50,000 (about $24,000) has been set to discourage would-be souvenir hunters from taking one.

Rosenberry said his squadron must cover every inch of its roughly 86 miles of border every 72 hours. Foot patrols are required to make the rounds at least once and preferably twice a week, in packs of five to 18 people.

The numbers are for safety as are the radios, through which soldiers patrolling within the one kilometer zone must remain in contact with their home base at the Border Operations Center.

Every 30 days, a new unit of the 11th ACR comes in to take over the patrol duties for that section of border. The switch-overs continue throughout the year.

Maintaining an unceasing vigilance at the border is the foundation of our early warning mission and represents the front line of defense for NATO allies.

The name of the game is defending freedom. But if words alone aren't enough to convince you, perhaps you need to see for yourself.