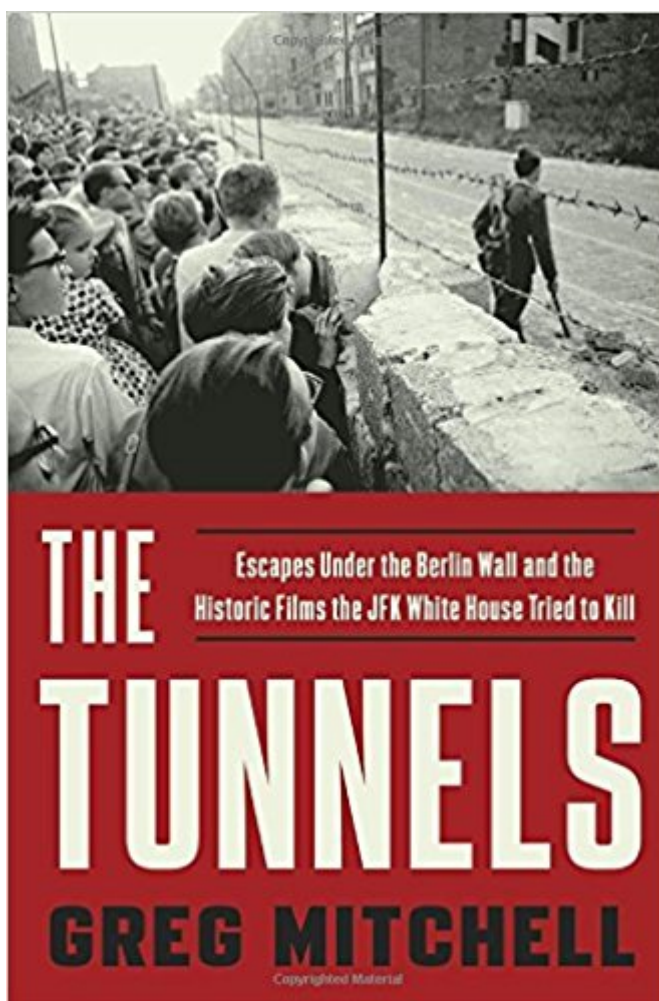


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# The Tunnels: Escapes Under The Berlin Wall And The Historic Films The JFK White House Tried To Kill



## Synopsis

A thrilling Cold War narrative of superpower showdowns, media suppression, and two escape tunnels beneath the Berlin Wall. In the summer of 1962, the year after the rise of the Berlin Wall, a group of young West Germans risked prison, Stasi torture, and even death to liberate friends, lovers, and strangers in East Berlin by digging tunnels under the Wall. Then two U.S. television networks heard about the secret projects and raced to be first to document them from the inside. NBC and CBS funded two separate tunnels in return for the right to film the escapes, planning spectacular prime-time specials. President John F. Kennedy, however, was wary of anything that might spark a confrontation with the Soviets, having said, "A wall is better than a war," and even confessing to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "We don't care about East Berlin." JFK approved unprecedented maneuvers to quash both documentaries, testing the limits of a free press in an era of escalating nuclear tensions. As Greg Mitchell's riveting narrative unfolds, we meet extraordinary characters: the legendary cyclist who became East Germany's top target for arrest; the Stasi informer who betrays the "CBS tunnel"; the American student who aided the escapes; an engineer who would later help build the tunnel under the English channel; the young East Berliner who fled with her baby, then married one of the tunnelers. Capturing the chilling reach of the Stasi secret police, U.S. networks prepared to "pay for play" yet willing to cave to official pressure, a White House eager to suppress historic coverage, and the subversive power of ordinary people in dire circumstances, *The Tunnels* is breaking history, a propulsive read whose themes still reverberate.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Crown; 1st edition (October 18, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101903856

ISBN-13: 978-1101903858

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 81 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #361,761 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #71 in Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Movies > Documentaries #165 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics

& Government > Specific Topics > Censorship #320 in [Books](#) > [Biographies & Memoirs](#) > [Historical](#) > [Europe](#) > [Germany](#)

## Customer Reviews

"The greatest strength of *The Tunnels* is in the details... Days after finishing the book I could not escape one of Mitchell's images of a hat with a small hole in it landing softly on the Western side of the border while its owner's dead body fell back into the East, waiting for the guards to hurry it out of sight. For those who see walls as the answer to policy problems, this book serves as a stark reminder that barriers can never cut people off entirely but only succeed in driving them underground."  
—NEW YORK TIMES BOOK

"Engaging" the book vividly describes the harrowing conditions under which strong young men based in West Berlin dug the tunnels | Mitchell's interviews with the tunnelers, couriers and escapees put a human face on this dramatic experience | These are heart-racing tales, and Mitchell — author of several books on U.S. politics and history — narrates them with emotion and evocative detail... The political and media angles in *The Tunnels* are indeed intriguing... The intense drama and risks involved for the tunnelers and the escapees offer a compelling context for today's refugee crisis."  
—HOPE M. HARRISON, WASHINGTON POST

"Fascinating and deeply researched" Mitchell's book provides a welcome reminder of the ingenuity and courage that people can display when politics and walls separate them from loved ones and a better life. But it's also a testament to just how forcefully even ostensibly liberal administrations can suppress the media."  
—CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

"A story with so much inherent drama it sounds far-fetched even for a Hollywood thriller... Mitchell tells a kaleidoscopic cold war story from 1962, recreating a world seemingly on the edge of a third world war."  
—THE GUARDIAN

"Shows the trade-off behind the scenes at one of the most pivotal moments in the standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union | A fascinating and complex picture of the interplay between politics and media in the Cold War era."  
—STEPHANIE KIRCHNER, WASHINGTON POST

"A terrific new book about a heretofore obscure episode regarding the wall in 1962. A must for all the JFK fans."  
—CHARLES P. PIERCE, ESQUIRE

"Thrilling and meticulously documented" Mitchell masterfully guides the reader through a labyrinth of details, intertwining the narratives to show how the tunnelers, the NBC crew (led by correspondent Piers Anderton) and the politicians played their parts on the stage of history | A fitting tribute to the brave men and

women who did all they could to tear down the Wall." **DALLAS MORNING NEWS** "Mitchell delivers a gripping, blow-by-blow account of one grueling dig and dramatic rescue | Mitchell's tense, fascinating account reveals how the U.S. undermined a freedom struggle for the sake of diplomacy." **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY** (starred review) "The author ably captures the dedication of the men and women trying to get family, friends, and complete strangers to freedom | A gripping page-turner that thrills like fiction." **KIRKUS** "The Tunnels is one of the great untold stories of the Cold War. Brilliantly researched and told with great flair, Greg Mitchell's non-fiction narrative reads like the best spy thriller, something Le Carré might have imagined. Easily the best book I've read all year." **ALEX KERSHAW**, author of *Avenue of Spies* "Every hour of my year in East Berlin 1963/64 • the escape tunnels beneath our feet were being dug. This is their story: those who dug them, those who used them and those who betrayed them to the Stasi. Fascinating and it is all true." **FREDERICK FORSYTH**, author of *The Odessa File* and *Day of the Jackal* "Greg Mitchell is the best kind of historian, a true storyteller. The Tunnels is a gripping tale about heroic individuals defying an authoritarian state at a critical moment in the Cold War. A brilliantly told thriller but all true." **KAI BIRD**, author of *The Good Spy* "This is not just an exciting escape narrative, but also an extraordinarily revealing political thriller, centering on ruthless government attempts to control what the public gets to see. Mitchell presents us with a radically changed perspective on one of the Cold War's most dramatic episodes. His book is both priceless as history and just about impossible to beat for sheer narrative grip • a rare achievement." **FREDERICK TAYLOR**, author of *The Berlin Wall and Dresden* "Eye-opening and an exhilarating read. Not knowing who made it out of the East, and who was arrested, or worse, kept me glued to this book until the last page. The involvement of the Stasi, two American TV networks and America's State Department contribute to the historical perspective of this important work." **ANTONIO MENDEZ**, co-author of *Argo* "When you have read the last page of Greg Mitchell's *The Tunnels* you will close the book but not until then." **ALAN FURST**, author of *A Hero of France* and *Night Soldiers* "Greg Mitchell has written a riveting story focusing on one of the most powerful documentaries ever broadcast on television, *NBC's The Tunnel*. Those of us who saw it that December night in 1962 have never forgotten the experience. Now Mitchell, an exemplary journalist, goes beyond what the cameras saw, deep into the political dynamics of Cold War Berlin." **John Le Carré** couldn't

have done it better." —•BILL MOYERS—“Mitchell excels at describing the idealistic men and women who built the passageways that brought scores of refugees to safety, revealing the wall’s symbolic importance and how it endured throughout the Cold War. He provides interviews with many important players who contribute to the fast-paced narrative.” —•LIBRARY JOURNAL—“The Tunnels uncovers an unexplored underworld of Cold War intrigue. As nuclear tensions grip Berlin, a whole realm of heroes and villains, of plot and counterplot, unfolds beneath the surface of the city. True historical drama.” —•RON ROSENBAUM, author of Explaining Hitler and The Shakespeare Wars—“A compelling look at a wrenching chapter of the Cold War that chronicles the desperate flights for freedom beneath the streets of post-war Berlin and the costs that politics extracted in lives.” —•BARRY MEIER, author of Missing Man—“Enormously dramatic and extremely insightful.” —•JOHN BATCHELOR, ABC RADIO

GREG MITCHELL is the author of a dozen books, including *The Campaign of the Century*, winner of the Goldsmith Book Prize and finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady*, a New York Times Notable Book; *So Wrong for So Long*; and, with Robert Jay Lifton, *Hiroshima in America* and *Who Owns Death?* Mitchell has edited several national magazines, including *Editor & Publisher*, and he blogs actively about media and politics for the Huffington Post and other outlets. He recently coproduced the acclaimed documentary *Following the Ninth*. He lives in the New York City area.

Not normally a historical nonfiction reader, I was not disappointed with this account! I first heard about the book (and its research) on Public Radio (NPR) and was fascinated with how extensively its content was researched. I have always been fascinated with this time period in world history and still strive to find out more. This account relates the trials and tribulations of all concerned, from the abruptly-divided-families, to the stymied and suppressed press, to attitudes and stress and betrayals on both sides of the Wall, to the determination of those who sacrificed their lives to save other human beings. Good integration of Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the inner-workings of the U.S. Government at this harrowing point in time, putting things into perspective.

I learned so much about not only life as a East Berliner before the Wall came down, but also about the relationship between the US government and the press. Absolutely one of the best books this 62 year old has ever read!

Fascinating details of a time most of us don't really understand. JFK disliked the press almost as much as Nixon? Further, US government believed billing the wall would lessen tensions with Soviet Union? One of the Berlin tunnelers ultimately help dig the Chunnel! The book provides a real education. But beware the details can get a bit "deep". I think I would prefer to read this in hard copy so I could more easily flip back and forth to keep track of the actual people.

This is an interesting piece of history with exceptional detail. It had me on the edge of my chair at times. I hadn't realized the background story of Kennedy's issues with that and the connection to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the quandary he was in at the time, dealing with both. I also didn't know the background story of the media's involvement. It is an excellent historical and interesting book.

A terrific book covering a dramatic consequence of the imperfect end to WWII. Great narrative that conveys the very human desire for freedom. I was a bit disappointed by the authors suggestion of any similarity to the evil represented by the Berlin Wall and the Israeli wall and the supposed wall in the US southwest. The Berlin wall was built to keep its own citizens from fleeing oppression. Big difference.

I lived in Germany in 1972-73 and went through Checkpoint Charlie. When Berliners knew you were an American they couldn't do enough for you. This was the front line for the Cold War. This book brings it to life with the incredible story of how the news networks were involved.

Loved the book. Took me back to that era. Would buy again from seller.

This is a well written book. It has lots of details. It's not an easy read, but it is a good read and historically worthwhile.

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