

US Fed News

AIRMEN DELIVER HOPE

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DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del., Nov. 20 -- The U.S. Air Force issued the following commentary:

By Col. Samuel Cox 436th Airlift Wing commander

Recently, I had the privilege of participating in the Falcon Heritage Forum at the United States Air Force Academy. The forum provides an opportunity for cadets to interact with people who have participated in operational missions, specifically, in this case, humanitarian airlift missions.

A total of 40 guest speakers participated in the forum; this diverse group included individuals who had been involved in a variety of missions including the Berlin Airlift, post 9/11 daily ration airdrops in Afghanistan, natural disaster assistance for hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Pakistani relief, Operation Baby Lift and combat rescue in Vietnam.

The most decorated speaker was Col. Joe Jackson, a Medal of Honor recipient who risked his life to rescue a 3-man combat control team in Vietnam. The team was surrounded by enemy combatants and rapidly running out of ammunition. In short, the situation was bleak. Despite the fact that the airfield was under attack, Colonel Jackson bravely landed his C-123 aircraft on a severely damaged runway and rescued the team.

The most famous speaker was Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, a commander of hundreds of missions during the Berlin Airlift in 1948 to 1949. Many consider the Berlin Airlift the first tangible victory of the Cold War and the gold standard for humanitarian operations. In the months preceding the Berlin Airlift, the Soviet Union had blocked all rail and road access to the city of Berlin.

In response, C-54 and C-47 aircraft were employed to deliver food and supplies to more than 2.5 million Berliners. Every day for more than a year an aircraft landed every three minutes to deliver 4,500 tons per day. To put this in perspective, consider this fact: the Dover Air Force Base Aerial Port is one of the largest in the DOD, and on average, we move between 200 and 250 tons per day - about one-twentieth of the amount of cargo delivered to Berlin during the famed Airlift.

Colonel Halvorsen gained fame by rigging small parachutes to airdrop chocolate, gum and other sweets on the approach to Berlin. Over time, he became known as simply the "Candy Bomber."

Additionally at the forum, Brig. Gen. Robert Allardice discussed his role in the post 9/11, humanitarian airdrop missions in Afghanistan. In those tumultuous months, it became clear that the United States needed to provide assistance to the Afghan people while simultaneously battling and defeating the Taliban regime. Overall, General Allardice orchestrated 198 missions, effectively dropping more than 2 million yellow packets of humanitarian daily rations.

Although many missions were discussed at the Falcon Heritage Forum, a single thread was common in every message: hope! Colonel Jackson and his aircrew not only saved three combat controllers in Vietnam, but of equal importance, sent a clear message to all American servicemen and women who might someday be placed in harm's way: our United States military will never leave you behind.

In Berlin and Afghanistan, life was not easy. The Berliners had endured the horrors of World War II, and the Afghan people had withstood years of oppression at the hands of the Taliban. In both situations, the life-sustaining supplies delivered by American forces meant more than mere survival. The supplies represented hope. A small piece of candy in Berlin and a yellow HDR in Afghanistan was a collective light that shined brightly into the future and provided a hope for democracy and freedom. These supplies symbolized the potential for a better road ahead.

Today, all of us in the United States Air Force are a part of something bigger than ourselves; we provide a beacon of light to millions around the world. Every time an Air Mobility Command aircraft takes off from any runway around the world, it carries critical supplies to fuel our nation's ability to maintain and export freedom and liberty.

Every time an Airman deploys, he or she is an integral part of the delivery of hope. Moreover, all of us who wear the uniform of the United States Air Force walk in the proud footsteps of Colonel Joe Jackson and Colonel **Gail Halvorsen**. Take this responsibility seriously and don't ever forget how important you are as a component of this formidable team.

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