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Allies Wiggle Wings Over Berlin

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WEST BERLIN, June 23 -- The three Western Allies re-enacted the Berlin airlift today with a nostalgic flight on a vintage C-47 aircraft of the type used in the mammoth supply operation 40 years ago.

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On board the flight from Frankfurt to Berlin, Gen. William Kirk, commander of United States air forces in Europe and Allied forces in Central Europe, said the West, if asked, could mount the operation again.

"For all of the free world, this is a significant event," he said. "It proves that nations can pull together to maintain that little pocket of democracy behind the Iron Curtain.

The three Allies - the United States, France and Britain - have occupied the western sectors of Berlin since the end of World War II.

Seventy-eight Americans, Britons and Germans died in the 11-month operation, when Allied planes flew in supplies to western Berlin after the fourth wartime power, the Soviet Union, cut off all land links.

"The main reason why we organized this was not so much to commemorate this very important event 40 years ago but to underscore the continuing relevance of the Allied presence in Berlin," said Richard R. Burt, the United States Ambassador in Bonn.

The ceremony today marked the start of the airlift, which officially began June 26.

In the 1948-49 airlift, 400 aircraft flew 277,728 missions in an operation that cost \$250 million. The C-47, or Dakota, has a payload of 7,000 pounds whereas today's C-5 Galaxy can carry 100 tons.

The C-47 used for today, with the American, British and French Ambassadors on board, was built in 1944, and flew Churchill and Roosevelt to Yalta.

The 24-seater plane, brought over from the United States for the anniversary flight, took off from an American Air Force base outside Frankfurt, wobbling into cloudy skies after a ceremony where speakers praised the bravery of airlift pilots.

On the bumpy ride, with rounds of applause as the plane took off and landed, dignitaries were served a meal and champagne.

Gail Halvorsen, a retired American colonel who became famous for dropping bundles of candy to Berlin children from his plane, said what had impressed him most was the spirit of Berliners.

Mr. Halvorsen, who is 67 years old, said, "They had no heat, no light and almost no food and yet they were willing to forgo this for freedom."

He started the candy drops by letting little bundles of candy, chewing gum and chocolate out of the plane. As flights approached Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, children would stand around, and the load master would push the packages out.

Now a farmer, Mr. Halvorsen was known to children as Uncle Wigglywings, because he used to dip his wings to tell the children he was going to drop candy. Uncle Wiggly was a feature on comic pages in the 1930's.

"Right out of the war and from fighting each other, it was a wonderful feeling to see people working in harmony," he said.

The man who would organize any future airlift is Maj. Gen. Bill Sistrunk, commander of an American unit called the 322d airlift division.

"I think they have been planning for a future airlift ever since the last one," he said. "There are plans and they are continually being looked at."

Photo of Ambassadors to W. Germany greeting aviators (Reuters)

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