



Berlin Airlift Commemorations Begin

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BERLIN (AP) - Fashions from the '40s. Gershwin tunes. Marlene Dietrich. And candy dropping from the sky.

This weekend marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the Berlin airlift, and the city is showing its gratitude with romantic tributes to 1948-49, when daring Allied forces defied - and defeated - a Soviet blockade.

Kicking off the events, the U.S. Postal Service unveiled its 50th anniversary airlift stamp Friday at Tempelhof Airport, the main base of operations for the 15-month airlift that brought coal and food to 2 million West Berliners.

The 32-cent stamp - the first ever introduced outside the United States - shows a C-54 cargo plane coming in for a landing as Berliners gaze skyward.

The stamp was flown in on the "Spirit of Freedom," a restored C-54. The plane has been turned into a flying museum about the airlift and the division of West Berlin into American, British and French sectors after World War II.

The three allies launched the airlift June 26, 1948, two days after the Soviet Union cut off all land and water routes to West Berlin in an attempt to push out the western forces. The Soviets eventually gave up the blockade after nearly a year. The airlift continued through September 1949 while ground links were inspected and restored.

"The stamp truly depicts the promise the Berlin Airlift brought to this magnificent city and the courage of the people of Berlin," said Gen. John P. Jumper, commander of U.S. air forces in Europe.

Also at the unveiling was American pilot **Gail Halvorsen**, the so-called "Candy Bomber" who initiated the practice of pilots tossing gum and chocolate from their planes to West Berlin children.

Halvorsen, 77, and others had hoped to re-enact the candy drop this weekend with flights over Berlin. But city officials nixed the idea because of security concerns, so the tiny parachute-borne candy will be dropped from construction cranes.

Although the anniversary was Friday, Berlin held its major celebrations early to coincide with a visit by President Clinton. Thousands of people came to Tempelhof Airport on May 13 to hear emotional speeches by Clinton and Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

This weekend's events are less official and more about having fun.

There will be re-enactments of the black market that operated in Berlin during the airlift - including fake transactions using Lucky Strikes as currency.

The city also is planning a fashion show featuring late 1940s attire and free screenings of "A Foreign Affair," the 1948 Billy Wilder movie starring John Lund and Marlene Dietrich that was partly shot in the city's postwar ruins.

A concert Saturday night in central Berlin is to feature swing music and works by Gershwin.

A museum dedicated to the Allied occupation of Berlin, which ended after Germany's 1990 unification, is to open Saturday. It is on a boulevard named after U.S. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, the former military governor in West Germany who started the airlift.

On Friday, workers were still rolling blue paint on the museum entrance sign that says "Wilkommen. Welcome. Bienvenue." Exhibits include occupation-era signs, such as the famous "You are now leaving the American sector."

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