

**Berlin Candy Bomber meets children of today, yesteryear**

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3/25/2007 - COAST GUARD AIR STATION BORINQUEN, Puerto Rico (AFNEWS) -- The Candy Bomber met children of all ages at an open house here March 22, including a man who received chocolate dropped to him as a child in Germany.

Retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen** received his nickname for dropping candy tied to parachutes from his C-54 Skymaster to children during the Berlin Airlift.

Approximately 500 people attended the open house, which featured a C-54 on display. The aircraft was flown from this site that served as Borinquen Field and later Ramey Air Force Base from 1939 to 1973. Also in attendance were more than 90 members of the Ramey AFB Historical Association.

More than 200 children from local schools flocked to Colonel Halvorsen, who signed autographs and took handkerchiefs, string and candy bars and taught children to make candy bombs just like he did during the Berlin Airlift.

"We put a chocolate bar on a parachute," said Adriana Font, an 8-year-old third grader from Ramey School. "It was fun."

"Kids are the same everywhere," Colonel Halvorsen said. "The only difference is the circumstances they are in. We just need to give them support. They tied (the candy) on (the parachute) and then threw it up in the air and watched the parachute open up. It was like magic."

The Candy Bomber's mission began nearly 60 years ago with two pieces of gum and a promise.

"My first airlift mission was July 12, 1948. I flew every day, initially flying three missions a day that would take almost 16 hours," Colonel Halvorsen said.

On July 17, he went to the airport fence line to talk to some of the approximately 20 children who had gathered there.

"These kids did not have enough to eat," he said. "All I had was two sticks of gum and I broke them into pieces and gave them out to several kids. The kids who didn't get a piece smelled the wrapper."

The colonel promised the children he would bring more candy.

"People who are so grateful get your attention," the colonel said. "They wanted freedom and food, and we gave them both."

"The 18th of July was the first time I dropped some Hershey and Mounds candy," said the 86-year-old born in Spanish Fork, Utah. "I took my own handkerchief and tied them to the candy, just like I showed the kids today. Those two sticks of gum changed my life. There is no greater reward than helping those in need."

News of the Candy Bomber airdrops spread, and several weeks later, American candy makers sent tons of goodies to be delivered to Berlin.

More than 20,000 pounds of candy was parachuted down to Berlin children. One child living in Berlin then still remembers receiving candy from the sky one fall day in 1948.

"Getting the chocolate was like Christmas and a birthday all rolled into one short time," said Michael Kud-Kudijaroff, who was 7 years old in 1948.

The fourth child of a German mother and Russian father living in Berlin, the family searched for a place to live because the city was almost completely destroyed after World War II.

"My two brothers and I would go up and down the streets and around the city looking for anything and everything for food or to help the family," he said. "For some bread we would move piles of coal and do any work. Things were hard."

The family lived one-half mile from Tempelhof Airport, at the time the main airport in the city and very close to the Russian border. His brother Horst noticed more and more planes flying in and so one day the two brothers went to see what was happening at the airport.

"Horst saw candies coming down from the sky and said, 'Stay put here. If you don't, the Russians will take you away and you'll never see mom again,'" Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said. "My brother left and two minutes later came back with several chocolate bars. We left the area and he wouldn't let me eat the chocolate until we got home."

Once home, their mother rationed the chocolate and let each of the four children have a small piece at night for about four days.

Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said before that, he hadn't had candy in four years.

"I put the chocolate in my mouth and let it lay there," he said. "You didn't want to chew it and swallow it. I just wanted to enjoy the moment. It was savored."

"It choked me up to meet (Colonel Halvorsen)," Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said, who met the colonel during Ramey AFB Historical Association Reunion activities March 22. "I went up to him and said, 'I want you to meet one of your recipients.' The colonel replied, 'Wow, how about that!'"

"There are experiences in life that people remember like their marriage, when their kids are born, and now I met the guy who dropped the candy," he said. "This was one of those times that I really felt good about. It was a super deal for me."

During the Berlin Airlift, planes flew in every day to bring food and supplies for the city cut off by the Russians during the Cold War. Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said he became fascinated with airplanes, especially after seeing American jet fighters flying over Germany in 1953 and 1954. In 1959 he enlisted in the Air Force and served as communications specialist.

The former airman 2nd class was stationed at Ramey AFB from 1961 to 1963, and first heard of the Berlin reunion several months ago. When he found out that a C-54 was going to be on display, Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said he had to come to Puerto Rico and look at the plane that was the workhorse for the Berlin Airlift.

"Then I found out (Colonel Halvorsen) was going to be there; it was like winning the lottery," said the retired Tucson policeman. "The reunion was great, but it was 10 times better to meet him."

"I think the world would be a lot better if we had more Gails," Mr. Kud-Kudijaroff said.

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