

Brigham Young U.: 'Candy Bomber' visits Kosovar refugees

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By Melinda Semadeni & Carolyn Moore , The Daily Universe (Brigham Young U.)

PROVO, Utah -- Kosovar children in Tirana, Albania were given hope from the air last week. They were given hope by retired Air Force Colonel and Provo resident, **Gail Halvorsen** -- otherwise known as the Candy Bomber.

Halvorsen's legacy began 50 years ago with "Operation Little Vittles" where he delivered candy to children in war-torn Berlin. This earned him the title "The Candy Bomber".

Last week, Halvorsen went on another mission, Operation Shining Hope, to do the same kind of thing he had done 50 years ago. Halvorsen made the four and a half hour trip from Ramstein Air Base in Germany to Tirana, Albania to deliver school supplies, toys, and candy to the children of an Albanian refugee camp.

Halvorsen took a tour of Camp Hope where there are currently 2,000 Kosovar refugees. This is a U.S. built facility that is expected to shelter up to 20,000 people when it is completed. Halvorsen spoke of the U.S. servicemen who were there supporting the humanitarian operation. He said it was the same thing as the Berlin Airlift. "It's the spirit... of helping people we don't even know and risking our lives to do it."

As part of the visit, Halvorsen handed out stuffed animals one by one and threw handfuls of candy to some of the children of the camp. Halvorsen said he was amazed at the children he saw in the camp. He said, "I was amazed to find these children -- who'd been sleeping out in the open just a few weeks before, deprived of their homes -- so upbeat. We have to take a lesson from that."

Halvorsen said that he is optimistic about the help the refugees are receiving. He is optimistic because he sees that people still care. He said, "Aid is help...it's hope. It's more than help." Halvorsen said the message of hope extends from crews hauling supplies to the camp, to the soldiers distributing them, down to the Kosovar children. Halvorsen also said that "without hope, the soul dies."

As far as long term aid, Halvorsen said that if other countries aren't willing to take the refugees in and help them resettle, or even help them get back into Kosovo, it's going to be tough. But again, he said he is optimistic that something can be done because people care. He expressed his appreciation for all countries who have been willing to provide aid for the refugees.

Halvorsen said that the Berlin Airlift and Operation Shining Hope have one thing in common. "These (German and Kosovar) people sacrificed the comforts of life because they believed in the same principle -- and that's freedom."

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Region	All Regions
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