

LOCAL

"CANDY BOMBER" BACK, JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

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Children peered into the sky, their arms raised pleadingly to the plane that was heading toward them.

"Here, here, here!" they shouted.

Three tries, but each time, the candy tossed from the aircraft flew afield.

"He dropped it and the wind took it," Patrick O'Neal told his son Bryce, 6, as they watched the Cessna 172 circle around. "Not yet. Not yet. There it goes - that might make it."

Even as the 35 mph wind took the parachute-rigged Hershey bars for a sideways ride before releasing them, the children and parents watching the "Candy Bomber" demonstrate his magic at Dare County Regional Airport on Saturday cheered gleefully when the plane tipped its wings backed and forth as it roared past them.

As retired Air Force Col. **Gail Halvorsen** stepped out of the plane after it landed, he said that seeing the children's joy from the air, like he did when he dropped chocolate and gum during the 1948 Berlin Airlift, was great.

Before he dropped the candy, he had always wiggled his wings to let the German children know it was him.

"It was just like old times," Halvorsen said, beaming. He later handed out chocolate bars to the children who couldn't keep up with the wind-driven candy, and autographed the parachutes.

Halvorsen, 82, was supposed to be tossing the candy out of "The Spirit of Freedom," a C-54 cargo plane like the aircraft he flew during the yearlong airlift. But engine problems delayed the plane's arrival in Manteo.

Weather and mechanical problems, in fact, grounded all the headliners at Saturday's kick-off to the 99th anniversary celebration of flight at the airport. The Skyship 6000 blimp was unable to make its "float-over" from Elizabeth City because of high winds. And the 1928 Fairchild, flown for the National Park Service by Hatteras' first commercial pilot, had mechanical troubles and never arrived from the Midwest.

The airport's festivities are a warm-up for Tuesday's big event at Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills, where the 99th anniversary of Wilbur and Orville Wright's dramatic first flight at the site on Dec. 17, 1903, will be marked by a two-hour flyover of 99 planes.

Scheduled aircraft that will fly over include the B-2 stealth bomber, the F-117 fighter, the C-54 and numerous other combat, vintage, private and commercial aircraft.

The Golden Knights, the elite U.S. Army parachute team, will also be performing at the centennial event. There will also be numerous exhibits at the site, including two NASA state-of-the-art spacecraft.

Although there was not much to look at in the air at the Dare airport Saturday, there were plenty of planes parked in or near the hangar for the 400 to 500 people who attended to see. A 10-passenger Cessna Caravan and eight-passenger Beechcraft King were even open for folks to climb in and look around.

During the ceremony that preceded the candy drop over the tarmac, the Centennial Quilt, designed and sewn by the Tea Cup Quilters, was unveiled. Depicting eight airplanes positioned near the Outer Banks, with scenes of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the Wright Brothers monument, seabirds, boats and seashells, the quilt illustrates the history of aviation within the county.

"Every airplane there has a link to Dare County," said Harry Bridges, curator at the Dare County Regional Airport Museum.

Besides the 1903 Wright Flyer, the quilt also shows: the Martin MB-2 bomber, flown by Billy Mitchell off Hatteras to demonstrate combat air power; the Fairchild FC 2W2, the first National Park Service plane flown by Dave Driskill; the Stinson 10-A, used by the Civil Air Patrol during World War II; the Corsair F-4U, flown by Ray Beacham during World War II; the Hellcat F-6F, part of a squadron that trained here during World War II; the TBM Avenger, a torpedo bomber flown by Charles Wood; and the B-2 stealth bomber "Spirit of Kitty Hawk."

"To me, it's just breathtaking," Bridges said after the ceremony, "because of the craftsmanship and of course, I have a special thing for all the airplanes."

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Caption: DREW C. WILSON COLOR PHOTOS/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT
Candy bars tethered to parachutes drop from a Cessna 172 on Saturday at the Dare County Regional Airport. Piloting the plane is retired Air Force Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, who dropped chocolate and gum for children during the Berlin Airlift.

RETIRE COL. **GAIL HALVORSEN** handed out chocolate bars to the children who couldn't catch the wind-blown candy.

CANDY DROPPING FROM THE SKY was an awesome sight for children who attended the event, like Preston Wilkinson, 5, of Kitty Hawk.

DREW C. WILSON PHOTOS/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Lauren Thomas, left, of Kill Devil Hills, shows her cousin Easton Knoff, also of Kill Devil Hills, what it is like to sit in the cockpit of a helicopter during the kickoff celebration of the 99th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight.

Tom Cherry, left, and David Thompson portray Wilbur and Orville Wright during the unveiling of the Centennial Quilt, made by members of the Teacup Quilters.

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