

# US Fed News

## 'CANDY BOMBER' BRINGS NEW MESSAGE OF HOPE TO GERMANY

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RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany, Oct. 26 -- The U.S. Air Forces in Europe News Service issued the following press release:

An Air Force legend whose role during the Berlin Airlift earned him the nickname "Candy Bomber," visited the Kaiserslautern Military Community Oct. 15 and 16.

Retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen** came to Germany as part of a week-long journey to visit with and motivate Airmen in Europe and Southwest Asia.

Throughout his time in the KMC, he attended the Air Force Ball, visited the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and various Ramstein units.

During a speech he gave at the ball, Colonel Halvorsen told the crowd the message he brings to the servicemembers in Germany is "Hope."

"In the scheme of life, it is important to have hope," the colonel said. "Sometimes things don't go well and we all wonder how it's going to turn out. We have to have a source of hope. Some people have a religion that gives them hope; some people have an example that gives them hope."

He added that in his case, he learned about hope from a group of German children he met at a barbed wire fence at Templehof Airfield in Berlin during the summer of 1948.

"When the weather gets so bad you can't land, don't worry about us," Colonel Halvorsen recalled the children telling him. "Just don't give up on us. We can get by on little food but if we lose our freedom we may never get it back."

This was at the end of World War II. Germany was divided into occupation zones: the American, French, and British zones in the west and a Soviet zone in the east. Inside of the Soviet zone was Berlin, which was also divided into four sectors, each administered by one of the wartime allies.

As relations between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union deteriorated, the Soviets isolated West Berlin from the rest of West Germany, making it impossible for supplies to reach the city by road. The only guaranteed means of access to isolated Berlin was by air, which led to the Berlin Airlift.

Colonel Halvorsen was impressed by the children's understanding of what it meant to be free, but the children also moved him in another way.

"I had met many children during and after the war like them in other countries who had always begged insistently for [candy and gum]," he said. "These Berlin children were so grateful for flour to be free they wouldn't lower themselves to be beggars for something more. It was even the more impressive because they hadn't had gum nor candy for months."

The colonel wanted to treat the children to something sweet, but all he had on him were two sticks of gum, which he passed through the barbed wire.

"The result was unbelievable," the colonel said. "Those with the gum tore off strips of the wrapper and gave them to the others. Those with the strips put them to their noses and smelled the tiny fragrance.

"The expression of pleasure was immeasurable. I was so moved by what I saw and their incredible restraint that I promised them I would drop enough gum for each of them the next day as I flew over their heads."

So he started to attach gum and chocolate bars to handkerchief parachutes and drop the candy from his aircraft while flying over Berlin. He would rock the wings of his aircraft to let the children would know which plane was carrying the chocolate.

He continued to make the drops as the number of youngsters grew, and when the news hit the press, American candy companies made donations, and Colonel Halvorsen had initiated what was dubbed "Operation Little Vittles."

As the news about the Candy Bomber spread, Colonel Halvorsen received many letters. In one, a little girl named Mercedes wrote that he scared her chickens when he flew over her house. However she added that "it was OK" as long he dropped the goodies where the white chickens were.

"I couldn't find her chickens so I mailed her gum through the Berlin mail," Colonel Halvorsen said.

Twenty-two years later in 1972, while assigned to Tempelhof Airfield, he accepted a written invitation to join a local family for dinner at their house. Upon arrival the lady of the house handed him a letter dated November 1948 and it read: "Dear Mercedes I can't find your chickens. I hope this is OK. Your Chocolate Uncle."

The woman then said: "I am Mercedes - step over here and I will show you where the chickens were."

After that evening, the two families remained friends throughout time. Mercedes Wild also joined Colonel Halvorsen at the Air Force Ball reinforcing his message of hope.

"Being able to hear the Candy Bomber and Mrs. Wild speak at the Air Force Ball, in Germany, was the most meaningful moment of the night because it really exemplified and illustrated the great relationship between our two nations," said 1st Lt. James Gilchrist, 86th Airlift Wing executive officer. "It really gives us hope as a nation that one day we can look back at our current engagements, and maybe have someone tell a similar story at an Air Force Ball 50 years from now to share about how they were touched by our Air Force and our military in general."

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