

Candy Bomber drops in 65 years after Berlin Airlift

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HONDO, Texas (AFNS) -- It was 1948, World War II was over and the Cold War had begun. For many German families, living conditions were tough and food was scarce. But for the children of Berlin, there was a glimmer of hope, and it came from the sky.

Army Air Corps 1st Lt. **Gail Halvorsen**, a C-47 pilot stationed in Germany in support of the Berlin Airlift, handed two sticks of gum to local children peering through a fence near a local airport. That small gesture at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport led to Operation Little Vittles, a humanitarian mission that continued for 15 months.

After that first meeting with the children, Halvorsen decided to collect his candy rations and fasten them to parachutes made with cloth and string.

"The look in their eyes, I could see their appreciation for something so small," Halvorsen recalled. "I wanted to do something more so I told them to come back later."

His plan was to fly over and drop the candy to the children.

"They asked how they would know it was me," Halvorsen said. "I told them I'll wiggle the wings."

From that point on, he was known to the children as "Uncle Wiggly Wings." To the rest of the world, he would become the "Candy Bomber."

On Nov. 9, at age 93, retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen** took part in a re-enactment of the Berlin Airlift at the South Texas Regional Airport in Hondo, Texas. The community and service men and women gathered to participate in the event, watching as more than 160 children ran to gather the 2,000 candy bars, which descended from a vintage C-47 Skytrain.

Among the crowd was a special visitor, Berlin-native Heike Jackson. Jackson, who lived in Germany during the Berlin Airlift, remembers what it was like to see Halvorsen's plane approach and the candy drop from above.

At age 6, Jackson, like other children in the local area, would anxiously await the plane with the wiggly wings.

"He was our savior," Jackson said. "We had nothing to eat; we would've died."

Jackson later married a Army soldier and moved from Berlin to the United States while he was still in the service.

Jackson never thought she'd come face-to-face with "Uncle Wiggly Wings," but 65 years later, she did. What did she do to commemorate the event? She brought some candy along.

"It's kind of like deja vu," she said. "The feeling is hard to describe. To see that wonderful man alive is amazing. It's a full circle somehow. I'm very touched and overwhelmed."

"I did it for the children, to see the smiles on their faces," Halvorsen said.

And 65 years later, halfway around the world, he managed to get one more smile from a surviving child of the Berlin Airlift.

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