



'CANDY BOMBER' MARCHING WITH GERMAN OLYMPIC TEAM.

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02/08/02 - SALT LAKE CITY (AFPN) - Retired Air Force Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, also known as the Berlin Candy Bomber, will carry the German Olympic team placard into Rice-Eccles Olympic Stadium during the XIX Winter Olympic opening ceremonies here Feb. 8.

"I couldn't believe they called and asked me to carry the German Olympic placard," Halvorsen said. "I thought that they had the wrong guy, but then again, I did do two tours of duty in Germany, one of those as commander at Templehof Air Base, Berlin, as well as the seven months that I participated in the Berlin Airlift.

"Who would have thought that two pieces of gum would lead to this," Halvorsen said. "Those sticks of gum changed my whole life.

This life-changing event occurred in 1948 when Halvorsen, a C-54 Skymaster pilot with the 51st Troop Carrier Wing at Rhein-Main AB, Germany, saw 30 children through a barbed-wire fence.

"They hadn't had candy in a long time," Halvorsen said. "They didn't even have enough food to eat. But what surprised me most is that they didn't ask for anything, which is highly unusual, because we got a shakedown from the kids wherever we went.

"I wanted to give them something, but I only had two sticks of gum," Halvorsen said. "I broke the two in half and passed them to four of the kids. Many of the children didn't get a piece, but they didn't seem to mind, they just wanted to smell the wrapper."

Halvorsen returned the next day to see the children again. He told them that he would drop some candy from the plane and let them know it was him, because he would wiggle his wings. The pilot made parachutes from handkerchiefs and attached them to the candy.

"My biggest concern was that I'd get caught," said Halvorson, who made the drops with the candy from his rations. Soon his crew was donating rations to the cause.

"On my third drop, I almost hit a newspaper guy, who got a photo of our plane and wrote a story about the incident," he said. "Both appeared on the front page of a German newspaper.

"The general saw the story and thought I had a good idea," Halvorsen said. "He gave me permission to continue with the `project."

By then, word had spread and the whole base was contributing rations.

Word of the Berlin Candy Bomber reached the United States, and candy and gum companies began shipping their products to be included in the "operation."

Halvorsen said he even had a "headquarters" established at a grade school stateside. Children at the school would create the parachute candy bombs, an average of 850 pounds of candy every other day. They would then take the parachutes to Westover Air Force Base, Mass., for transport to Rhein-Main AB.

"When I went back to Templehof as the commander, I received many dinner invitations from those who'd received a parachute during the airlift," said the 81-years-old.

All told, Halvorsen said that they delivered between 15 to 20 tons of candy and gum.

Halvorsen is now consulting on a book and has been approached by HBO Films in Los Angeles. But he said he is concerned about the world as it is now.

"Our cities and countries are in parts," Halvorsen said. "There have been tremendous changes in the world, and we're coming together as a nation, because that's what the Olympics is all about."

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