



## Candy Bomber recalls Berlin Airlift

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DAYTON, Ohio (AP) - The man known as the Candy Bomber and Chocolate Pilot for his airdrops of sweets during the Berlin Airlift 50 years ago says it gave him some of the greatest feelings he's ever known.

"My feeling was one of fulfillment, of helping a former enemy - flying night and day in ice and snow and fog and not expecting anything back," **Gail Halvorsen** said.

Halvorsen, 78, of Provo, Utah, was in Dayton Wednesday to speak at the United States Air Force Museum about his experience to help mark the anniversary of the airlift. Halvorsen was stationed at nearby Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1952 and flew B-25s.

"This is like home here," he said.

When Halvorsen returned to Berlin this summer to mark the anniversary of the airlift, he was approached by a German man who said he was 10 when one of the American chocolate bars fell from the sky at his feet.

"What it meant to me was that somebody outside of the blockade knew I was here, knew I was in trouble," the man told Halvorsen. "What it meant was hope. It was a symbol of hope."

After the defeat of Germany in World War II, West Berlin was divided into American, British and French sectors.

The three allies started the airlift June 26, 1948, two days after the Soviet Union cut off all land and water routes to West Berlin in an attempt to push out the western forces.

The Soviets eventually gave up the blockade after nearly a year. The airlift continued through September 1949 while ground links were inspected and restored.

Halvorsen began flying supplies into Berlin in July 1948. After arriving one day, he got in a jeep and took a movie camera to try to get photos of Berlin. He stopped outside the airport at some bombed-out apartments and was approached by 30 children aged 8 to 14.

The kids urged him to keep flying the supplies in and not to give up on them.

"They said, 'Some day we'll have enough to eat, but if we lose our freedom we'll never get it back,'" Halvorsen recalled. "These kids just blew my mind, their understanding of what was important in life."

Halvorsen said he had two sticks of gum in his pocket and gave it to the children. He then told them to be there the next day and he would drop candy from his plane. He said he would wiggle the wings so they would know which plane to look for.

Without permission from his superiors, Halvorsen tied handkerchiefs to three packages of candy and dropped them over the children.

"I can still see their faces and arms in the air waving like crazy," he said.

Halvorsen made secret drops two more times, each time to a bigger crowd of children.

When his base was inundated with letters from Berlin children addressed to Uncle Wiggly Wings or the Chocolate Pilot, Halvorsen discontinued the drops to avoid being caught. However, he later decided to make one final drop.

When a photo of the plane with its tail number appeared in a local newspaper, Halvorsen was found out by his superiors. But he was allowed to continue the drops, and other pilots also joined in. About 23 tons of candy was dropped during the airlift.

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