

## THE HERALD

### Candy Bomber shows he can still wiggle.

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THE eyes of Berlin Airlift veterans welled with tears of nostalgia as the drone of the old McDonnell Douglas C54 was heard before it could be seen over Prestwick yesterday.

Then the great Candy Bomber wiggled his wings during a fly-past, just as he did exactly 50 years ago as a signal to starving children.

At 77, Colonel **Gail Halvorsen** is still able to fly the same four-engined Spirit of Freedom that gave hope to young Berliners during the Soviet siege.

Against USAF orders his story began when he shared his last four pieces of chewing gum with 30 children behind the wire fences at the city's airport.

He told them he would be back and he used all his pay to buy chocolate bars which he pushed out an emergency cockpit pipe tied to home-made parachutes.

It rapidly spiralled into an operation that had confectionary manufacturers in Britain, America, and Australia shipping chocolate over by the ton.

Undoubtedly the candy bombing of Berlin helped to raise the spirits of the children who were caught in Stalin's grip on the city in 1948.

Col Halvorsen arrived from Iceland for refuelling at Prestwick and at the end of next month will arrive back in Berlin for the climax to the 50th anniversary celebrations.

He now lives on a ranch in Utah, where he became an assistant university dean following his service ending as a commander in Berlin in 1974.

He said: "Every week we kept going and I didn't think a simple chocolate bar meant that much at first. But years later a young man who got one of the drops told me it wasn't the chocolate, it mean't that someone out there knew he was there and cared. It was hope that was important, and you can't buy hope."

The veterans who gathered on the runway apron said that even today Heathrow could not handle the amount of freight and speed of turnaround they did.

In 18 months hundreds of thousands of tons of food and clothing was lifted to Berlin with planes taking off or landing every 90 seconds.

George Smith, 69, made the 250-mile trip from Inverurie to greet the colonel on behalf of the British Berlin Airlift Association, which still has 600 members.

He served alongside Bill Anderson, also 69, of Motherwell in the RAF commander's office in Lubeck.

Mr Anderson said: "The candy bomber was a big story at the time and everyone in Berlin knew about him.

"I shook the Candy Bomber's hand back then and just hearing the sound of his engines again is one of the most beautiful noises."

Mr Smith said: "This 50th anniversary tour is all about educating the younger generations because people have forgotten that the Berlin airlift reshaped the world.

"It was what made the European Community what it is today."

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