



## CANDY BOMBER STILL DELIVERS.

By U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AIR FORCE.

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RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany (AFPN) - From the Berlin Airlift 50 years ago, to Joint Task Force Shining Hope in Albania, the Candy Bomber still delivers.

One man's kind gesture at the end of World War II blossomed into a major operation with one mission - to airdrop candy to the children of war-torn Berlin.

For the Candy Bomber, retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, the legacy continues.

Halvorsen, one of the Berlin Airlift's most famous figures and the impetus behind Operation "Little Vittles," visited Albania May 18, to make yet another delivery to the Kosovar Albanian refugees fleeing Serb oppression in Kosovo.

The Candy Bomber made the 4 1/2-hour trek to Tirana aboard a C-130 transport plane from Ramstein's 37th Airlift Squadron. While there, he saw similarities between the nearly 600 U.S. service members supporting humanitarian operations and the airmen who did the same for West Berlin in 1948.

"I saw the same spark in the folks here today. It's reflected in the crews and the ground folks," Halvorsen said. "I was impressed with their professionalism, how they went about their tasks and worked together as a team."

It's the same thing as the Berlin Airlift, he said in reference to Joint Task Force Shining Hope. "It's the spirit ... of helping people we don't even know and risking our lives to do it."

Halvorsen's trip included a 30-minute ride aboard a Navy CH-46 helicopter to Camp Hope, where he delivered school supplies, toys and candy to the children. The U.S.-built facility is currently home for more than 2,000 refugees, and is expected to shelter up to 20,000 people upon completion.

Although no children had heard of the Candy Bomber, their curiosity alone was enough to draw a crowd.

"They just ran out. It was the same in Berlin," said Halvorsen. "Kids naturally know GIs are a 'soft touch' for gum and candy."

I was amazed to find these children - who'd been sleeping out in the open just a few weeks before, deprived of their homes - so upbeat. We have to take a lesson from that," he said.

"These children taught me a lot today. Your heart bleeds for them, but when you see them adapting like that, it renews your faith," he said. "If you have the right attitude, well then, the whole world is a different color. These kids have that attitude."

For Halvorsen, the visit was a great experience he'll never forget - an experience like the one in Berlin 50 years ago.

"The Berlin Airlift and Operation Shining Hope have one thing in common. These (the German and Kosovar) people sacrificed the comforts of life because they believed in the same principle, and that's freedom," he said.

"They may not have had enough to eat, but they put aside the hunger for the principle of being free," he said. "We need to understand the trials of people like them and learn to have an appreciation for the little things in life." (Courtesy of U.S. Air Force in Europe News Service).

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