

Metro News 'Candy bomber' to re-create event today

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Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, the "candy bomber" who dropped handkerchief-size parachutes filled with sweets to the children of postwar Berlin, will re-enact that historic campaign today.

Now 88 and still flying, the Arizona resident and devout Mormon is drawing attention to a regionwide day of service and a monthlong food drive sponsored by area Mormon churches.

Halvorsen, who was involved in the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift as Cold War tensions emerged, and his co-pilot will load a private plane with at least 600 tiny parachutes bearing chocolate and chewing gum at a Gainesville landing strip, and leaving Gainesville about 10:30 a.m., they will fly over a field near Flowery Branch and bombard a crowd of children with sugary packages.

It's a duplication of a one-man campaign that Halvorsen undertook during the Berlin crisis, which was soon embraced by other airmen, who eventually dropped 23 tons of candy parachutes to the children of post-World War II Germany.

The gesture gained international attention. Among the many children who remember receiving sweets during that year of starvation is Doris Galambos, who was 7 when she and her brothers shared a hard candy that fell out of the sky.

"We unwrapped it, we smelled it, we licked it for a while, the three of us," said the grown-up Galambos, 68 and a retired circus performer living in Sarasota, Fla. "It sticked to me like glue. I didn't forget this."

In fact, Galambos will be traveling to Atlanta to meet the man responsible for initiating Operation Little Vittles. "Thanks to God that he's alive," she said. "After 60 years, I get goose pimples when I think of him." It will be the first time they've met.

Martin Gaither, who flew scores of missions carrying coal to Berlin from an air base in Wiesbaden, Germany, will also attend the event.

Retired and living near Flowery Branch, Gaither, 89, said the rainy, foggy weather provided excellent training in instrument landings. "They could bring you in on radar in practically zero-zero conditions," he said. "It helped me in my career."

Halvorsen has participated in re-enactments around the United States and Germany, and still visits schools in the vintage C-54 that was used to haul coal, flour and the occasional treat. He wrote about his exploits in a 1990 memoir --- "The Berlin Candy Bomber" --- and his life has been documented in films for the History Channel.

It all began with a conversation at the barbed-wire fence surrounding the Tempelhof airport in Berlin, where, on the spur of the moment, Halvorsen handed two sticks of chewing gum to the 30 children. "Two sticks --- and they looked like they got a million dollars," he said.

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He told the group he'd bring more on his next mission and wiggled his wingtips to let them know which plane was his.

The efforts of hundreds of airmen who flew 200,000 missions to deliver staples and fuel during the Soviet blockade serve as a model for service today, Halvorsen said.

"The only real reward that's lasting, that's worth a hoot, is when you serve somebody besides yourself," he said. "It healed the wounds of war and brought us together, and brought Germans into the Western camp."

## **EVENT**

For more information about the "candy bomber" event, go to www.fiveloavesandtwofishes.org.

The event is sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Sugar Hill Stake Center, which will cap the festivities today and Sunday with community concerts at the church. Go to <a href="https://www.sugarhillldschoir.org">www.sugarhillldschoir.org</a>.

ID: 0010053877 Type: Photo Name: candybomb.0425 09 Date: 04/25/2009 Page: B4 Edition: Main Pub: AJC Caption: Courtesy of **Gail Halvorsen** From the cockpit of his plane, the Land of Christmas, **Gail Halvorsen** throws candy to the children of Berlin during the era of the Soviet blockade, which ended in 1949. ID: 0010053842 Type: Photo Name: candybomb.0425 04.1 Date: 04/25/2009 Page: B1 Edition: Main Pub: AJC Caption: Courtesy of **Gail Halvorsen Gail Halvorsen**, 88, was the driving force behind candy parachutes that were dropped on Berlin during the airlift of 1948-49.

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