

# US Fed News

## 'CANDY BOMBER' VISIT REMINDS US OF AIRLIFT'S FINEST HOUR

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RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany, Oct. 15 -- The U.S. Air Forces in Europe News Service issued the following press release:

Retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, also known as the "Candy Bomber," is scheduled to visit the Kaiserslautern Military Community Oct. 15, 16 and 21 as part of a larger visit downrange. As part of his visit, we are honored to have him as a guest of our Air Force Ball celebrations.

His attendance is made even more special because he will be accompanied by a German woman named Mercedes Wild, with whom he has a very special connection.

For those who aren't familiar, Colonel Halvorsen is a legendary pilot from the Berlin Airlift, or "Operation Vittles," in 1948 and '49. Then-Lieutenant Halvorsen took it upon himself to help boost the morale of the children in besieged West Berlin by attaching handkerchief parachutes to chocolate bars and dropping them for the little ones below.

So the children would know which plane was carrying the chocolate, he would rock the wings of his aircraft as he came in. The German children dubbed him Onkel Wackelflugel, or "Uncle Wiggly Wings."

Soon Halvorsen's idea was expanded into "Operation Little Vittles," which garnered huge public support and donations. By the end of the airlift, 25 plane crews had dropped 23 tons of chocolate, chewing gum and other candies over Berlin.

Mercedes Wild was a seven-year-old girl among the masses of children in West Berlin who would carefully watch the skies for their favorite wiggly-winged pilot, but who was having difficulty actually getting her hands on any of the chocolate Lieutenant Halvorsen dropped. At the suggestion of her grandmother, young Mercedes wrote a letter to the "Chocolate Uncle" asking if he could please drop some chocolate directly over her house.

Eventually she received a response from Lieutenant Halvorsen, explaining that he was unable to recognize her house from the sky, but enclosed was a piece of peppermint gum. Although the letter did not lead little Mercedes to any chocolate bars, it took on much greater significance to her. She had lost her own father early in the war, and she began to see Lieutenant Halvorsen as a surrogate dad. She held the letter, her one correspondence with him, as a personal treasure.

Two decades later, retired Colonel Halvorsen was visiting Berlin on a speaking engagement when a gentleman, the husband of Mercedes Wild, presented him with the 20-year-old letter. The meeting evolved into a friendship between the Halvorsen and Wild families that continues today.

Halvorsen's efforts stand as a symbol of the wonderful relationship we enjoy with the people of our host nation. The United States has also modeled modern-day operations in Iraq after Operation Little Vittles, dropping toys, teddy bears and soccer balls to Iraqi children.

The Berlin Airlift is an operation that's near and dear to the hearts of KMC Airmen. On the geographical side, our local area was the origination point for one of the major corridors into Berlin. Nearby Rhein-Main Air Base, which

was collocated with today's Frankfurt Airport, and Wiesbaden Air Base, also near Frankfurt, both became round-the-clock operations hubs to load and launch aircraft bound for Templehof Airfield in Berlin.

The Berlin Airlift is arguably the mission that put heavy airlift on the map. It was the first major victory for Allied forces over the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and it was a tremendous success for the then-new U. S. Air Force. It also stands as a cornerstone for how we go about airlift operations today.

The area surrounding Ramstein Air Base is steeped in airlift history. Please take a moment this week to honor those great men and women in our proud airlift heritage like Colonel Halverson who have done so much to shape our Air Force today.

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