

Famed 'Candy Bomber' honored at JB Charleston

935 words

19 June 2012

Department of Defense Documents

DODDOC

English

Copyright © 2012 Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc.

U.S. Air Force Releases

6/19/2012 - JOINT BASE CHARLESTON (AFNS) -- Retired Col. **Gail Halvorsen's** Air Force legacy is built on chocolate, bubble gum and hope.

Leaders here renamed the C-17 Aircrew Training Building after Halvorsen June 15 with a dedication ceremony in honor of the legendary "Berlin Candy Bomber."

In 1948, World War II was over and its aftermath had left Berlin in ruins. Allied bombings had reduced the city's once historical buildings to demolished shells. The streets, once filled with busy urban life, were left littered with debris. Its people, many of whom were children, were scared, homeless and hungry.

A boy cries for help and the sound echoes faintly into silence. It seems nobody can hear his plea.

Suddenly, through the darkness of clouds and smoke, a tiny parachute attached to a candy bar falls to the ground. The candy bar symbolizes hope. It softly lands at the boy's feet. To him, it wasn't about the chocolate. It was the subtle reminder that somebody knew he was in trouble and that somebody cared.

That somebody was then, Lt. **Gail Halvorsen**, forever referred to as "The Candy Bomber" in Germany for his actions during the 1948 Berlin Airlift, known as "Operation Vittles."

His simple act of kindness gave hope back to the children of a war-torn Germany.

"When I first flew over Berlin, I could look through the buildings," said Halvorsen. "I didn't understand how two million people could have lived there."

Halvorsen dropped candy from his C-54 Skymaster for the German children below. His kindness inspired other crews to do the same. Halvorsen, along with more than 20 other candy bombers, dropped more than three million pounds of chocolate, gum and other candies for the German children.

"Col. Halvorsen is, in large part, a symbol of hope and kindness for an entire nation," said Col. Erik Hansen, the 437th Airlift Wing commander, during the Halvorsen C-17 Aircrew Training building dedication ceremony. "His greatest accomplishment was found, not only from his extraordinary aviation skill, but also from his compassion."

It was Halvorsen's compassion that sparked a flame of inspiration throughout the city of Berlin. The inspiration eventually caught on with American school children. They made their own parachutes and donated candy for the German children.

"Halvorsen's kindness provides the 'why' to what we do day in and day out as an airlift wing," Hansen said. "His inspiration played a major role in saving Berlin and proved the concept of airlift as a strategic tool during the Cold War years and beyond."

Although Halvorsen is an Air Force legend, he remains humble and wishes for the training building to be a reminder of those who sacrificed their lives in the name of freedom.

"There are 31 American heroes and 39 British heroes of the Berlin Airlift," Halvorsen said, during the building dedication ceremony. "And, I'm not one of them. Today's dedication is not mine; the dedication is for those who gave their all for the cause of freedom. So, I'm not here for myself, I'm here to represent them."

In addition to remembering the heroes of yesterday, Halvorsen spoke about the importance of our country's future generations.

"It's important young people know their heritage and why they have freedoms and blessings that others are denied," said Halvorsen. "The United States is dedicated to freedom today, like our forefathers were yesterday."

According to Halvorsen, those freedoms are provided, in large part, by the mobility mission of yesterday and today.

"It is easy to measure the military and diplomatic success through the vital supplies flown into Berlin," Hansen said. "The statistics are clearly impressive and directly responsible for the eventual collapse of the Soviet blockade in Berlin. What can't be measured is the hope, delivered symbolically by Col. Halvorsen and his impact on the global struggle for freedom."

The single hope of freedom and giving back to others, a hope engrained so deeply in Halvorsen's heart during his years as a lieutenant is more alive than ever. Today, at age 92, Halvorsen remains as optimistic about the idea of freedom as he was more than 60 years ago.

"In man's search for happiness, sometimes he'll chase for riches," said Halvorsen. "But, money doesn't buy happiness. The only real reward you get in life is getting out of yourself and helping others and that's worth more than anything money can buy."

"As time goes by, we look in the rear view mirror of the past to learn," said Halvorsen. "But, you can't look in the rear view for too long and wonder 'what if' or else you'll miss a turn on what you might become. We need to look into the windshield of the future and give hope to the young people of what their life can be."

It is Halvorsen's hope that tomorrow's Airmen carry the military torch brightly into the future while emphasizing the importance of helping others and remembering their heritage.

"I was looking for ways to link our mission today with the airlift heritage and heroes of the past," said Hansen, in regards to naming the C-17 Aircrew Training building. "The Halvorsen C-17 Aircrew Training Center will be an unbreakable link of the hope Col. Halvorsen and his fellow Airmen gave to the people of Berlin and the hope Team Charleston provides to people everywhere around the world today."

Document DODDOC0020120620e86j0000a

Search Summary

| | |
|----------|------------------|
| Text | "Gail Halvorsen" |
| Date | All Dates |
| Source | All Sources |
| Author | All Authors |
| Company | All Companies |
| Subject | All Subjects |
| Industry | All Industries |
| Region | All Regions |
| Language | English |