

**Interview: Andrei Cherny and Gail Halvorsen discuss the book, "The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour"**

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HARRY SMITH, co-host:

Sixty years ago, at the beginning of the Cold War, America accomplished one of the greatest feats in aviation history, the Berlin airlift, a moment commemorated by CBS' own Walter Cronkite.

Mr. WALTER CRONKITE: On June 24th, 1948, the Russians blockade Berlin.

SMITH: When the Soviets shut down land and water routes into the city, the allies made the important decision to feed a starving Berlin by air. Hundreds of planes a day landing minutes apart delivered thousands of tons of meat and potatoes, milk and coal. This dangerous and heroic mission captured the imagination of a nation.

Operation Vittles was a peaceful weapon in Cold War diplomacy. Pilot **Gail Halvorsen** flew a restored C-54 back to Berlin 10 years ago on the airlift's 50th anniversary. Halvorsen became known as the Candy Bomber by dropping chewing gum and chocolate wrapped in tiny parachutes.

Mr. **GAIL HALVORSEN** (Candy Bomber): This is the shirt I wore during the airlift and this is one of the parachutes.

SMITH: The candy parachutes brought joy to the children of West Berlin, who called the pilots angels from the sky.

Seventy air crew members died before the Russians lifted the siege on May 12th, 1949. By September, American and British pilots had delivered over two million tons of food and supplies, but it was a simple gesture of human kindness that helped heal the wounds of war.

Joining us now, Andrei Cherny, author of "The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour," and **Gail Halvorsen** himself, the original candy bomber.

Good morning to you both.

Mr. HALVORSEN: Morning, Harry.

Mr. ANDREI CHERNY: Thanks for having us.

SMITH: I--help put in perspective for just a moment what this time was like. It's so far...

Mr. CHERNY: Yeah.

SMITH: ...so long ago. This is really--this could have been such a crucial--it could have been the beginning of World War III.

Mr. CHERNY: We were really on the verge of World War III. It's as close as we ever came to World War III, and this was just three years after the end of World War II. And this was a--what was at stake was that we were about to perhaps go into an atomic war with the Soviet Union. They'd been knocking over the countries in eastern Europe, Berlin was next, now was the testing point, either we'd win there...

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. CHERNY: ...or they'd control the whole continent of Europe.

SMITH: The United States and the allies said 'no way' and would only--even if they've got the place surrounded, we're going to fly in food. You're one of these pilots; what were those missions like?

Mr. HALVORSEN: It was a very interesting mission, Harry. Every three minutes flying to Berlin day or night two give two million people enough to stay alive and stay free.

SMITH: So, every three minutes a plane is taking off and landing, taking off and landing, taking off and landing, taking off and landing. And how did you come up with the idea to pop, you know, pieces of candy and chewing gum out the window?

Mr. HALVORSEN: It was the kids, it was not my idea. I met 30 kids at the fence, didn't have enough to eat...

SMITH: Mm-hmm.

Mr. HALVORSEN: There for an hour, started to leave, not one kid said, 'Give me something, give me chocolate.'

SMITH: Right.

Mr. HALVORSEN: They were so grateful for flour, to be free, they wouldn't beg for something more.

SMITH: Right.

Mr. HALVORSEN: So extravagant. The kids around the world would chase you for that stuff, these kids had none and they didn't ask for any.

SMITH: Didn't ask for anything.

Mr. HALVORSEN: And then I gave them what I had, two sticks of gum, 30 kids.

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. HALVORSEN: And the kids that didn't get any didn't fight, they wanted a piece of the wrapper; kids who got the half-a-stick tore off the outer wrapper and gave them a piece of paper and they just smelled it, smelled it and smelled it.

SMITH: Amazing.

Mr. HALVORSEN: And then I said I had to do something.

SMITH: So, what--so, what--so, what, did you just take a handkerchief?

Mr. CHERNY: This was the candy bar--yeah.

Mr. HALVORSEN: Took my handkerchief, I told them I'd come back the next day and drop it out of the airplane to them. I had three handkerchiefs with my candy rations for a week, popped it out of the airplane on approach, it came down just like that.

SMITH: Unbelievable. And the next thing you know, the sky's full of them, because all the other pilots started doing the same thing.

Mr. HALVORSEN: Oh, yeah, buddies were doing the same thing.

SMITH: Yeah. When you go back there now, because you've been back a number of times...

Mr. HALVORSEN: Right.

SMITH: ...how are you greeted?

Mr. HALVORSEN: Oh, it's crazy. You know, like a hero. But there's only 31 real heroes, and I'm not one of them.

SMITH: Mm.

Mr. HALVORSEN: The guys who gave their lives for former enemies that they might live.

SMITH: Mm, mm, mm. Because that's the other thing--that's the other part of this story. Here was Germany, your arch enemy, and just moments after World War II is over, the United States is trying--is really reaching out this hand of love and kindness to save these two million people.

Mr. CHERNY: It's what makes the story so amazing. You know, 60 years ago this very week, **Gail Halvorsen** came back from Europe from the Berlin airlift, and it was on all the TV shows in the year that TV started, and he became a national celebrity here at home, and thousands and thousands of Americans got behind his effort. He was flooded with donations of candy bars and he became a national celebrity. People knew about him and his story and his romance.

SMITH: And it's all in the book, "The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour." Andrei Cherny, great to have you here. Gail, what a pleasure to meet you, sir.

Mr. HALVORSEN: Thank you very much.

SMITH: Really do appreciate it. All right.

To read an excerpt from "Candy Bombers," go to our Web site, [earlyshow.cbsnews.com](http://earlyshow.cbsnews.com).

Now here's Maggie.

MAGGIE RODRIGUEZ, co-host:

Thank you, Harry.

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Subject	All Subjects
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