



Mess hall dedicated to "Candy Bomber" at McGuire

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MCGUIRE AIR FORCE BASE, New Jersey (AP) - In 1948 Berlin, gum and chocolate repeatedly floated to the Earth, the work of **Gail Halvorsen**.

He came to be known as the "Candy Bomber" and other American and Allied pilots began following his lead, arranging for sweets tethered to handkerchiefs to be dropped from aircraft over the German city.

More than 50 years later, a mess hall was dedicated in Halvorsen's honor at a ceremony Thursday.

"We're blessed to have this American military icon in our presence," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Marne Peterson, speaking at the base in the U.S. state of New Jersey.

She noted Halvorsen's 126 supply missions into Berlin during Operation Vittles in 1948 and 1949 as some of the standouts of the Salt Lake City, Utah resident's 31-year military career.

In 1948 the Soviets cut off West Berlin from supplies by land, so the United States delivered two million tons of goods through airlifts.

One day, Halvorsen, now 82, said he took a break to see the city before his next flight, but instead noticed children lined up at the airfield's fence.

"It hit me like a hammer," the retired Air Force colonel told The Philadelphia Inquirer. "I had just come from the States, and we had everything. I found myself saying, 'Come back here to the barbed-wire fence tomorrow.'"

Wanting to give his extra candy rations to the kids, but not wanting fast-falling candy to hurt them, Halvorsen improvised.

"That's why I put handkerchief parachutes on them," he said.

Halvorsen was applauded by a general with a grasp of public relations and a legend was born.

Halvorsen met a man who was 10-years-old and living in Berlin during the airlift efforts.

"He said, 'Suddenly out of the clouds came parachutes with chocolate. I was astounded. It meant somebody cares,'" Halvorsen said. "That translates to hope. It was hope that counted. Without hope, the soul dies."

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