

Profile: Gail Halvorsen, member of the Berlin airlift, honored for his efforts to give Berliners, especially children, hope by dropping candy with supplies

561 words

13 May 1998

NBC News: Nightly News

NTLN

English

(c) Copyright 1998, NBC Universal Inc. All Rights Reserved.

TOM BROKAW, anchor:

Tonight, THE HOME OF THE BRAVE. It was 50 years ago, the beginning of the Cold War, the Berlin airlift. American planes were dropping supplies from the air to keep--essentials to keep the Berliners alive. It was called Operation Vittles. Part of the supplies, however, were not included in the official orders.

Gail Halvorsen remembers flying into West Berlin when the borders were sealed. It was the only way to get supplies to the German city.

Mr. **GAIL HALVORSEN**: I spent many hours in the cockpit of this plane, and it feels great. It feels like I was in here yesterday.

BROKAW: Three round trips per day, 18 hours in the air, and only six hours of sleep.

Mr. HALVORSEN: We flew everything the Berliners needed: dried milk, dried eggs, dried potatoes. But more than anything we flew in coal.

Unidentified Man: Welcome aboard, sir.

BROKAW: When Halvorsen returned to Berlin this week, he was carrying a special cargo, a cargo that made him a legend.

Mr. HALVORSEN: I reached in my pocket, and, boy, I hope I got something. And all I had was two sticks of Wrigley Doublemint gum.

BROKAW: At the fence surrounding the air base, Halvorsen met some of the children of Berlin.

Mr. HALVORSEN: The kids that got the half a stick, they looked like they got \$1,000. And the kids who got the tinfoil and the wrapper, held it up to their nose and smelled it. And I looked, boy their eyes got big.

BROKAW: Halvorsen promised to come back with more.

Mr. HALVORSEN: I said, "Hey kids, watch that airplane. And when you see that big four-engine airplane wiggle those wings like that, that's got the stuff. Get ready. I'll drop enough gum for everybody to have some if you promise to share it." And that took some translating. But then they said, "Jawohl! Jawohl!"

BROKAW: But dropping little parachutes of candy out of airplanes was against the rules, even in 1948 Berlin. It wasn't long before Halvorsen was called to headquarters to explain.

Mr. HALVORSEN: I ran into base operations, there's a post office full of mail in there for us. Walked up to the mail, looked at it, and it says, "To Uncle Wiggly Wings!"

BROKAW: Hundreds of letters, addressed to the chocolate flier, the bon bon pilot, the uncle of the heavens. They were all enough to tug at the hearts of the military brass.

Ms. MERCEDES VIOLD: Sweets for the children, it was--it was a desire.

BROKAW: Mercedes Viold was eight-years-old at the time.

Ms. VIOLD: When you got this parachute, it was a sign of hope.

Mr. HALVORSEN: Fifty years later, the people of Berlin finally got their day to thank the candy bomber.

Unidentified Woman: Thank you. Thank you.

BROKAW: As for Halvorsen, he has a better understanding of what his little vittles operation meant to the people of that beleaguered city.

Mr. HALVORSEN: That somebody knew and cared enough to say "We're going to support you. We're going to never give up." And the Berliners said, "We'll never give up."

BROKAW: Altogether they dropped 23 tons of candy.

Document NTLN000020120223du5d00nku

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