



Re-enactment of candy drop in Berlin in 1940s continues this weekend at Dare County airport

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RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) - As an 8-year-old living in Berlin, Karen Edmond lost out to older kids when pilots dropped chocolate bars on the city blockaded by the Soviet Union. Now in her 70s and living in Manteo, she takes her great-grandkids to the annual re-enactment of a candy drop there.

"When I saw that airplane, it was like my whole childhood came back up," the 72-year-old said of the restored 1945 Douglas C-54 aircraft that comes to Manteo and Kill Devil Hills each year to celebrate the anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight on Dec. 17, 1903. "Every 90 seconds, from '48 to '49, one of those airplanes flew over our apartment building in Berlin. We were 3 million people starving to death because the Russians blocked us off." The Berlin airlift, organized by Western Allies, carried food, fuel and other supplies as well as treats.

On Sunday, Tim Chopp of the Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation and his crew will drop 200 chocolate bars in two waves to children at the airport in Manteo. Two days later, they'll participate in a flyover at the Wright Brothers Memorial at Kill Devil Hills. Visitors also can go inside the plane, which is outfitted as a museum exhibit with letters, newspaper articles, a video and memorabilia, including the camera of Col. **Gail Halvorsen**, 93, who started the candy drops in July 1948.

The exhibit "shows more than anything else what people are willing to do for freedom," said Chopp, of Toms River, N.J., a Vietnam War veteran who worked as a mechanic. At the end of World War II, Berliners were offered the chance to go to the Soviet side of the city, where they were promised food and heat, he said. Only a small percentage of the city's residents chose to leave, he said, instead trusting their fate to the American and other Western troops who kept them alive with the food drops. And some of the troops helping the Berliners were veterans of World War II who had earlier fought the Germans.

Thirty-one U.S. troops died during the airlifts, mostly because of crashes, according to the foundation's website. The airlifts lasted 15 months, ending in September 1949 after delivering 2.3 million tons of food.

As she has since the re-enactments began in 1999, Edmond plans to attend the events, bringing her three great-grandchildren -- ages 14, 10, and 7 -- along. Not attending this year is Halvorsen, who began dropping candy over the city after offering some treats to Berlin children. Other pilots joined him, but Halvorsen was special -- he wanted the children to know it was candy dropping from the sky, not the usual supplies, so he wiggled his plane's wings to help with recognition.

In 1952, people started asking him to re-enact the candy drops in the U.S., and he's continued to do so. In November, he dropped 1,500 chocolate bars in San Antonio, Texas. And while he last visited Manteo in 2011, Halvorsen said he hopes to return to the birthplace of flight in 2014.

Dare County remains special to him, noted Halvorsen, who lives in Amado, Ariz. "The people in Dare County are sincerely interested in what happened during the Cold War," Halvorsen said in a phone interview. "And the Berlin airlift turned the whole thing around."

The re-enactments began in Manteo in 1999 after Chopp met the airport's then-manager at a trade show and agreed to re-enact the candy drops in Dare County. His ulterior motive, Chopp said, was to be invited to the celebration of the centennial flight, held in 2003. That worked out, and the re-enactments have continued.

Edmond married a U.S. soldier in 1959 and traveled with him throughout America. She came to Manteo after she lost her job at a hospital in West Virginia and a friend said she could find work on North Carolina's coast. She worked for 18 years as a cook at a Bavarian restaurant.

Edmond said she wants others to remember the heroes of the airlift and how they saved a blockaded city. "When you're hungry and have nothing, you'll never forget it," she said. "It was a hard time, and I hope and pray I never see it again."

Online:

Berlin Historical Airlift Foundation: <http://www.spiritoffreedom.org/>

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