

EAST SIDE

Saving the people of Berlin

DANIELLE SOTTOSANTI

DANIELLE SOTTOSANTI, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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MUSEUM EXHIBIT SHOWS HOW 1948-49 BERLIN AIRLIFT MADE 'FRIENDS ALWAYS'

A traveling exhibit honoring the 60th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift is at the Pima Air and Space Museum through May 10 - its only stay in Arizona.

The "Friends Always" exhibit of historical photographs, food tins, currency and other artifacts shows the human side of the operation that kept Berliners alive during the Soviets' nearly year-long blockade from June 1948 to May 1949.

"It's touching," Walter Koenig said after viewing the exhibit at the museum, 6000 E. Valencia Road.

Koenig, who's visiting Tucson from Florida, said he found "Operation Little Vittles" especially touching. In that operation, **Gail Halvorsen** - aka "the Candy Bomber" - dropped packages of chocolate and chewing gum to Berlin children. The packages were attached to miniature parachutes.

One of the exhibit's historic photos shows a boy from Berlin holding two Hershey's chocolate bars and smiling. Another shows Halvorsen looking at thank-yous, sitting among boxes of Hershey's chocolate.

As the exhibit shows, Berliners depended on the relief effort for more than just chocolate. One display case contains tins of food staples such as nonfat dry milk and rolled oats, as well as coffee. The tins and a box showing a handshake bear the same words - "donated by the people of the United States of America."

It's a concept that struck a chord with Diane Mourton, a Californian who viewed the exhibit with her three grandchildren, two of whom are 12 and one 7.

The Berlin Airlift is something Americans can feel proud of - "a humanitarian effort that made a huge difference; something that children remember into old age, getting a candy bar from an airplane; something that the pilots felt good about, especially after a horrific war," Mourton said.

After World War II, Germany was divided into American, British, French and Soviet occupation zones. Berlin, which was divided into four occupation sectors, was located in the Soviet zone.

In June 1948, the Soviet Union stopped land and waterway traffic to and from West Berlin, which was occupied by the Western Allies, cutting off access to supplies. The American and British air forces worked together to deliver food, fuel and supplies to Berliners by air.

The Berlin Airlift carried 2.3 million tons of cargo into Berlin, including about 1.5 million tons of coal and more than 500,000 tons of food. The Soviets' blockade ended in May 1949, but the airlift continued through September 1949.

Previously, the U.S., Britain and other Allies had been fighting against Germany and other Axis countries in World War II, which ended in 1945.

What's amazing is that it took only about a year for former enemies to become friends, said Georg Schulze Zumkley, deputy director of the German Information Center USA, which is part of the German Embassy's communications department.

When the airlift started, the same pilot who was dropping flour on Berlin had been dropping bombs three years prior, he said.

The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin's Stiftung Luftbrückendank, which means Airlift Gratitude Foundation, are presenting "Friends Always" to recognize the airlift and blockade's 60th anniversary.

There are two separate but identical "Friends Always" exhibits touring the United States through August and September 2009. The exhibits will stop in a combined total of 25 cities, Zumkley said.

On March 31 the exhibit arrived at Pima Air and Space Museum, one of the museums that the Arizona Aerospace Foundation owns and operates.

Count Ferdinand von Galen, who is chairman of the foundation's Board of Trustees, was 12 years old when the airlift began. He grew up in the German countryside, not Berlin.

In postwar Germany, the airlift meant two things, Von Galen said. First, it convinced the Germans and other Western Europeans that the United States would defend them against the Soviets. Second, for the Germans, it was the first proof - which they had suspected - that the Allies would treat them as normal people again.

"The airlift is an important thing for my generation," he said.

If you go

What: "Friends Always" traveling exhibit commemorating the Berlin Airlift.

Where: Hangar 4 at the Pima Air and Space Museum, 6000 E. Valencia Road, through May 10.

Museum hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Last admittance is at 4 p.m.

Museum admission fees (through May): \$15.50 for adults ages 13 and older; \$12.75 for seniors, AAA members and military; \$9 for ages 7 to 12; free for ages 6 and younger.

For more information: Go online to www.pimaair.org or call 574- 0462. Go online to www.germany.info/Airlift for more information on the Berlin Airlift.

Sources used

The following Web sites were used for historical information, in addition to www.germany.info/Airlift:

- * U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany: germany.usembassy.gov
- * Harry S. Truman Library and Museum: www.trumanlibrary.org
- * National Museum of the U.S. Air Force: www.nationalmuseum.af.mil
- * Contact reporter Danielle Sottosanti at 618-1922 or at dsottosanti@azstarnet.com.

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