

Supported by:



on the basis of a decision  
by the German Bundestag

In cooperation with:

**Germany**  
The travel destination



[www.germany.travel](http://www.germany.travel)

## STATISTICS

- Airlift duration: **15 months**
- **278,228** total flights completed
- **600,000** flying hours
- **2.3 million** tons of cargo (most of the cargo was coal)
- Peak daily delivery of **12,941 tons**
- **92+ million** flight miles (almost the distance from Earth to the Sun)
- A plane lands every **45 seconds** at the height of the campaign
- **17 American** and **8 British aircraft** crashed during the operation
- **101 fatalities** (including **40 Britons** and **31 Americans**) mostly due to non-flying accidents

**A special thank you to the following organizations for their support:**

### Allied Museum

(<https://www.alliiertenmuseum.de/en/>)

### Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation

(<http://www.spiritoffreedom.org/>)

### German National Tourist Office

(<https://www.germany.travel/>)

*"When we refused to be forced out of Berlin, we demonstrated to the people of Europe that with their cooperation we could act resolutely, when their freedom was threatened."*

~ President Harry S. Truman

## CONTACT US

719 6th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

202.467.5000

[info@gahmusa.org](mailto:info@gahmusa.org) | [www.gahmusa.org](http://www.gahmusa.org)

## COL. GAIL "THE CANDY BOMBER" HALVORSEN



### OPERATION

#### "LITTLE VITTLES"

SEP. 22, 1948 - MAY 13, 1949

Gail Halvorsen (Oct. 10, 1920 - Feb. 16, 2022) grew up in rural Utah with a passion for planes and flying. He joined the US Army Air Forces in 1942, and was ordered to Germany on July 10, 1948, to be a pilot for "Operation Vittles" better known as the Berlin Airlift. He flew one of many C-54 cargo planes used to carry supplies into the starving city. During his free time, he would wander around the city, and take pictures or record short films. One summer day, he filmed planes landing and taking off at Tempelhof, and he noticed a group of 30 children lined up behind the fence. Halvorsen gave them two sticks of gum, and the children broke them into little pieces and shared them. That night, Halvorsen, his copilot and engineer pooled their candy rations; the accumulated sweets were so heavy that he fashioned handkerchiefs into little parachutes to slow the fall of the packages. The children were excited and word spread quickly. Soon, news of the effort reached Gen. William Tunner's ears, and he ordered it expanded into "Operation Little Vittles"—a play on the airlift's name of "Operation Vittles"—which dropped over 23 tons of candy from more than 250,000 parachutes

## BERLIN AIRLIFT TURNS 75 1948-1949



**DISCOVER THE EXCITING  
STORY OF ONE OF THE  
GREATEST HUMANITARIAN  
MISSIONS OF THE  
20TH CENTURY**

GERMAN-AMERICAN  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM OF THE USA™





**June 24, 1948** was a day of destiny for Berlin and its 2.5 million residents: at 6 am local time Soviet troops had enforced a complete blockade of the city, including the areas controlled by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Post-WW II Germany was a divided and occupied country, and Berlin was no exception.

The four Allied Powers (France, the Soviet Union, the UK, and the US) had each claimed distinct territories, which were administered through the Allied Control Council. Berlin was located deep inside the Soviet zone, and could now no longer be reached by road, rail, or water.

The blockade was not a complete surprise as relations between the Allies had been plagued by growing tensions, and a failed joint attempt to establish a new currency, which would wrest economic control of the city from the Soviets, allow the flow of Marshall Plan aid, and end the widespread black market, proved to be the final straw for Moscow. The inhabitants of the still war-torn city now faced economic ruin and starvation.

The Western allies did not want to engage militarily, but not acting would mean abandoning the city to the Soviets. In response, the US and the UK created a daring plan to airlift food, fuel, and other supplies from air bases in western Germany. The Tempelhof Airfield in the American sector and RAF Gatow in the British zone were chosen as destination airports. On June 26, the Truman administration launched **“Operation Vittles”**—with the UK following suit two days later with **“Operation Plainfare”**. Air Force planners soon realized that a third, new airlift terminal facility was desperately needed. A site was selected at Tegel in the French sector. Construction began on Aug. 5, and was finished by Nov. 5.

The beginning of the airlift proved difficult as nothing on this scale had ever been attempted before, and Western diplomats continued to hope and work for a diplomatic solution. However, in time, the airlift became ever more efficient, and at the height of this massive humanitarian campaign, a plane landed at Tempelhof every 45 seconds. The operation’s success led the Soviets to lift the blockade on **May 12, 1949**. Fearing a reversal by Moscow, the Allies decided to continue continued bringing in supplies until **Sept. 30** when the Berlin Airlift officially ended.

## OPERATION VITTLES

**June 26, 1948 - Sept. 30, 1949**

The fledgling United States Air Force in Europe, commanded by Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, was given the momentous task of supplying Berlin by air. He had at his disposal 102 Douglas C-47 Skytrain aircraft with a cargo capacity of 3 tons, and two larger Douglas C-54 Skymaster planes that could carry 10 tons per plane. He received reinforcement from Brig. Gen. Joseph Smith, who called it “Operation Vittles” because, “We’re hauling grub.” The first deliveries took place on June 26, when C-47s made 32 flights into Berlin with 80 tons of powdered milk, flour, and medicine. Smith soon increased the use of his C-47s and newly arriving C-54s by dispatching aircraft according to a block system that grouped them according to type, allowing radar controllers on the ground to deal more easily with strings of aircraft having the same flight characteristics. American officials soon realized a massive airlift of indefinite duration afforded the only alternative to war or withdrawal. Experienced pilots were recalled to active duty, and often had to cope with poor weather and potential Soviet harassment.

The size of the operation exceeded the Air Force’s capacity, and led to the formation of Combined Airlift Task Force unifying the USAF and the RAF under the command of Gen. William H. Tunner whose nickname was “Willi the Whip” for his efforts to speed up cargo delivery and the landing of planes. Between June 1948 and September 1949, the airlift delivered more than 2.3 million tons of cargo, approximately 75 percent of it in American aircraft. American aircrews made more than 189,000 flights, totaling nearly 600,000 flying hours and exceeding 92 million miles.

## OPERATION PLAINFARE

**June 28, 1948 - Sept. 30, 1949**

The British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill had warned the world in 1946 in a speech in Fulton, Miss. that the alliance forged during WW II was breaking down: “From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent.” When the blockade happened, Britain was a strong advocate of an airlift to try to provide the residents and enclosed allied troops with necessary supplies. Berliners needed a minimum of 4,500 tons of goods every day, and they currently had only about a month’s extra food rations in the city and 45 days of coal. The RAF had already moved some aircraft to Germany, and could increase its numbers quickly bringing the number of British planes to 150 Dakotas (C-47s) and 40 of the larger Avro Yorks with a 10-ton payload. On July 6, the Yorks and Dakotas were joined by Short Sunderland flying boats whose corrosion-resistant hulls were great for transporting baking powder and salt. British missions brought some 580,000 tons of vital goods into the city.

