

90-day call-up and by the next Friday he was in the control tower at the Tempelhof Airport. At peak operation, the Berlin Airlift was requiring the services of 90 AACCS officers and 700 enlisted personnel.(59)



Muscle power, (above) not forklifts, moved those sacks of cargo from the C-54 floor onto the Army truck. (USAF photo)

As the number of ATC personnel rose, so did the reliability of their activities. They were aided by state-of-the-art electronic and visual landing aids that contributed appreciably to the airlift's success. A new area control radar was installed to track incoming aircraft 60 miles down the air corridors. Other modern radar handled closer traffic, particularly the difficult approach to Tempelhof. That airport possessed one of the worst flight paths imaginable. Placed in the middle of Berlin, and surrounded by encroaching hills, it required pilots to approach the runway between two rows of seven-story apartment buildings. It taxed the CGA personnel and the aircrews on every flight. But operations officers kept searching for the right combinations. By the winter of 1948-1949, they had created a system which allowed for operations into Berlin under most situations with a remarkable degree of safety. During the entire airlift only 17 American and seven British airplanes were lost, although there had been 276,926 airlift flights. Turner said of this effort: "Without the wholehearted support, cooperation, and technical assistance of the Airways and Air Communications Service, the success of the Berlin Airlift would never have been possible." (60)

One of the most important operational aspects of the airlift, from the perspective of maintaining the morale and support of the Berliners, was what has been called "Operation Little Vittles." It began at the initiative of Lieutenant Gale S. Halvorsen, a pilot on the airlift who decided to supplement the meager diet of some of the city's children with candy dropped by parachute from his C-54 as it approached Tempelhof. At first Lieutenant Halvorsen was concerned that Turner would disapprove, but the Task Force commander immediately grasped the morale benefit it held both for the aircrews and the Berliners. He institutionalized the "Little Vittles" airdrops by establishing collection points for candy and handkerchiefs and setting up special flights for Halvorsen to circle the city dropping candy, even to children in the Soviet sector. It was a tour de force as a morale booster, unifying force, and public relations undertaking. (61) All of these diverse elements came together to establish the Berlin Airlift as not just a juggernaut with

the ability to sustain the city on a long-term basis, but as an operation that could continue indefinitely. Several milestones were important as indicators of the airlift's success. First, on 7 July aircraft exceeded 1,000 tons delivered in one twenty-four hour period. This was especially important because of the seemingly insurmountable objective of 10,000 tons per month that had been the goal of the Hump airlift in 1943. On 30 July 1948 the airlift set another tonnage record by delivering 1,918 tons in a single day. That record, however, was surpassed by the following day and nearly every day thereafter until winter set in. But the harsh weather did not end the airlift. By 5 November 300,000 tons had been hauled on the airlift and no end was anticipated.

All of the tonnage records led up to what has been termed the Easter Parade of 16 April 1949, which was designed to stretch the potential of the airlift force and to send a message to the Soviet Union that the blockade could succeed. Turner directed maximal effort for 24 hours. His goal was to complete one mission for every one of the 1,440 minutes of the day. They did not quite make this goal. The airlift flew a total of 1,398 missions delivering 12,941 tons of food, coal, and other supplies. The aircraft flew 78,954,500 miles during the day. There had been no aircraft accidents and no injuries. It was an impressive effort, all the more so after Colonel William Bunker, an Army Transportation Officer, told them, "You guys have hauled the equivalent of six hundred cars of coal into Berlin today." He added, "Have you ever seen a fifty-car coal train? Well, you've just equaled twelve of them." (62)

The End of the Airlift

All the time that the airlift was underway, American diplomats were feverishly working to resolve the blockade with their Soviet counterparts. At first they had little success in forcing a settlement. The Soviets were convinced they possessed a strong position; that the airlift would fail; that Berlin would starve or freeze, or both; and that the western allies would be forced to vacate the city. Soviet experts, as well as some allied strategists, believed no airlift could support a city of better than 2,000,000 people by itself. All previous attempts at a total aerial resupply had failed. The Luftwaffe had failed to supply the German army adequately by air and had been cut off by the Soviets at Stalingrad during World War II. There the requirement had been for transporting only 300 tons per day, but it had failed. Turner suggested that the German airlift failure at Stalingrad "was one of the factors in the early Russian reaction to the American-British Airlift into Berlin. The Russians had never had an airlift themselves, and they didn't take ours seriously until it was too late."(63)

When they realized that the allies had the capability to deliver quite a lot of tonnage, the Soviets still refused to negotiate in good faith. They believed the airlift could not be sustained permanently, especially over a hard German winter. To be on the safe side, they began harassing airlift flights in the corridors by dashing in and out in fighters, firing anti-aircraft weapons, and taking a variety of other actions of harassment. A total of 733 incidents took place between 10 August 1948 and 15 August 1949, as shown in Table 1. These incidents became increasingly common as the airlift progressed. For instance, only 11 harassing episodes were reported through October 1948. In November, 17 more took place; the number grew rapidly until March 1949 when 146 harassing incidents were reported. After this, incidents began to decline. Fortunately, none caused any