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## Press Release

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### Wiesbaden Celebrates Berlin Airlift Anniversary

By Ray Johnson  
IMCOM-Europe Public Affairs

WIESBADEN, Germany – In 1948, a political and military Cold War began when Berlin nearly fell into Josef Stalin’s hands.

Stranded deep inside Soviet-controlled territory, 2 million Germans faced starvation. The resulting Allied response – the Berlin Airlift – not only saved a population, it also launched a friendship between countries that had been at war three years earlier.

Sixty years later, thousands of Americans Germans – including participants of the legendary humanitarian mission and survivors of the blockade – gathered here for two days to celebrate the airlift’s anniversary.

Speaking at a June 26 breakfast held in honor of 24 U.S. and German veterans, Col. Ray Graham, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden, said: “Today is my best day in command. I’m sure Air Force Brig. Gen. Joseph Smith felt the same way (on June 26, 1948) as he stood on the airfield and watched the first aircraft lumber off the runway and disappeared into the clouds for Berlin, signifying the start of an undertaking the likes of which the world had never known.”

It was from Wiesbaden Army Airfield that pilots, flying C-47 Skytrains, C-54 Skymasters, C-82 Packets and C-74 Globemasters, made two-hour jumps – often harassed by Soviet Yak fighter jets – to Berlin’s Tempelhof airport. All together, 28,299 airlift sorties were launched from WAAF during the 15-month operation, delivering 326,137 tons of food, medicine and coal.

As for the Berlin Airlift overall, American and British aircrews kept the beleaguered city alive with almost 280,000 flights (covering 92 million miles) that carried 2.3 million tons of supplies.

Simply put, “We brought in the things that people needed to stay alive, to stay free,” said retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, 87, renown as the Candy Bomber for dropping gum and chocolate to Berlin’s children. “That gives you the magnitude of this operation. It was fantastic.”

And while pilots, such as Halvorsen, have been recognized throughout the years for their exploits, those working on the ground also played a major role in the airlift’s success.

Crew chief Johnny Macia, a private first class at the time, said everyone involved “had a job to do and we got it done; aircraft were arriving every 90 seconds at Templehoff.”

The retired master sergeant recalled that aircraft were tearing up the runways, “(they) had men and women on the sides with shovels, sand and tar filling up the holes. It took everyone to run the operation.”

Sharing that burden were German citizens as well. Kurt Lehmann, who helped in building Berlin’s Tegel Airport, recalls the period of time as being tough for all European citizens – not just Berliners – as the Soviets enforced their will on embattled smaller countries. “That’s why we started the airlift ... why people survived.”

For these daring actions, every airlift veteran was instrumental in shaping the Europe of today, said Dr. Helmut Mueller, Wiesbaden’s lord mayor during a June 26 speech at WAAF. “One thing we can say with certainty: Without the Berlin Airlift, the reunification of Germany and Europe would not have been possible.

Wiesbaden also hosted an open house June 29, the first public event at Wiesbaden since Sept. 11, 2001. More than 10,000 people attended an eight-hour show that provided static displays – including an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III – helicopter candy drops and a meet-and-greet with the veterans, including Bill Morrissey, who labeled the tributes “overwhelming.”

“It’s been a joy ... but with sadness,” said Morrissey, who at 18 served as an American air traffic controller at the former Celle Royal Air Force Station, which was located in the British sector of post-World War II Germany.

“Remembrance is tough,” he said, referring to the 77 men – 32 American, 39 British and six German – who died during the airlift.

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## STAGE

Col. Ray Graham, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden, Germany, salutes during the playing of the national anthem for ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift. Graham, wearing a 1940s-era Army uniform, shared the stage with the city of Wiesbaden’s Lord Mayor Helmut Mueller during a flightline observance June 26, 2008, on Wiesbaden Army Airfield. (Photo by Ray Johnson)



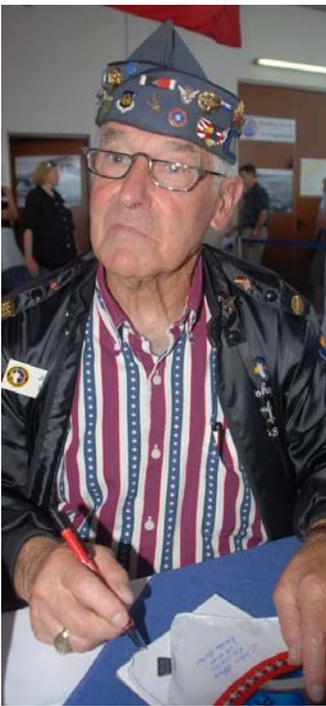
### **COPTER**

Retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, left, and Col. Ray Graham, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden, Germany, take off to drop candy during an open house celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift at Wiesbaden Army Airfield June 29, 2008. (Photo by Kelli Bland)



### **CANDYPARACHUTE**

A child opens up a pack of gum that was dropped from a helicopter by retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, the legendary Candy Bomber, during celebrations held June 29, 2008, at Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany, marking the 60th anniversary of the humanitarian mission. (Photo by Kelli Bland)



**MACIA:**

Berlin Airlift veteran Johnny Macia signs autographs and answers questions at Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany, June 29, 2008, during an open house celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift. (Photo by Ray Johnson)



**FLIGHTLINE CEREMONY:**

To celebrate the Berlin Airlift's 60th anniversary, a ceremony was held on Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany, June 26, 2008, marking the first sortie to be flown out of WAAF in support of the airlift. (Photo by Kelli Bland)

The U.S. Army Installation Management Command, Europe Region (IMCOM-Europe) is one of six regional offices created Oct. 24, 2006, (formerly known as Installation Management Agency) as part of an Army-wide initiative to focus management of Army installations around the world under one organization. IMCOM-Europe is responsible for all facets of support for U.S. Army Soldiers and families in Europe from drivers' licenses to child care to force protection. As the landlord for all U.S. Army facilities in Europe, IMCOM-Europe is responsible for infrastructure and continuing the Army's strong commitment to environmental protection. Its higher headquarters is located in Arlington, Va.