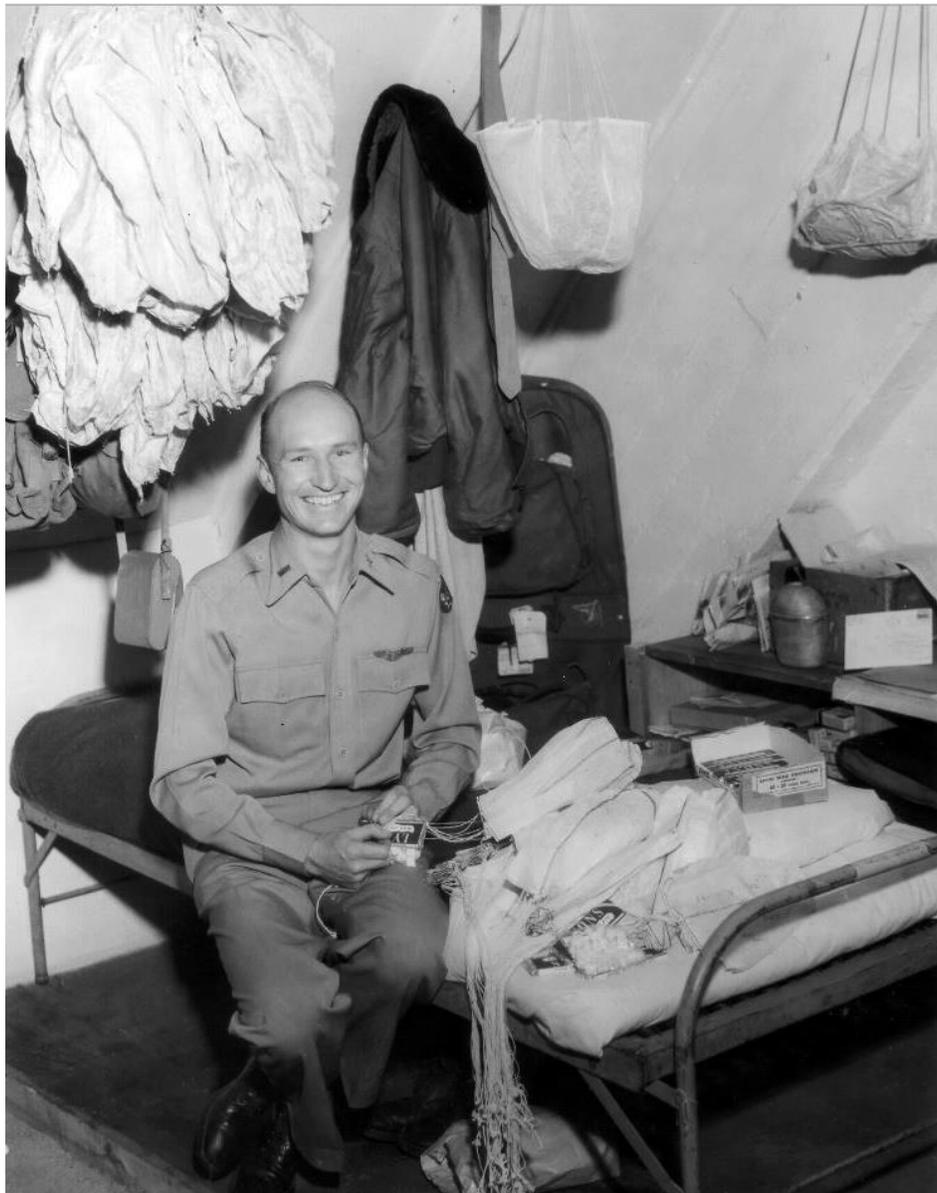


A Heartwarming Story for These Difficult Times

For those of you reading this post, who haven't heard this story before, the second video link, at the end of the text, will give you the complete picture. **The World War II-era 'Candy Bomber' turns 100. Those who caught his candy - now in their 80s - say thanks.**

Colonel Gail Seymour "Hal" Halvorsen (born October 10, 1920) is a retired officer and command pilot in the United States Air Force. He is best known as "**The Berlin Candy Bomber**" or "**Uncle Wiggly Wings**" and gained fame for dropping candy to German children during the Berlin Airlift from 1948 to 1949.



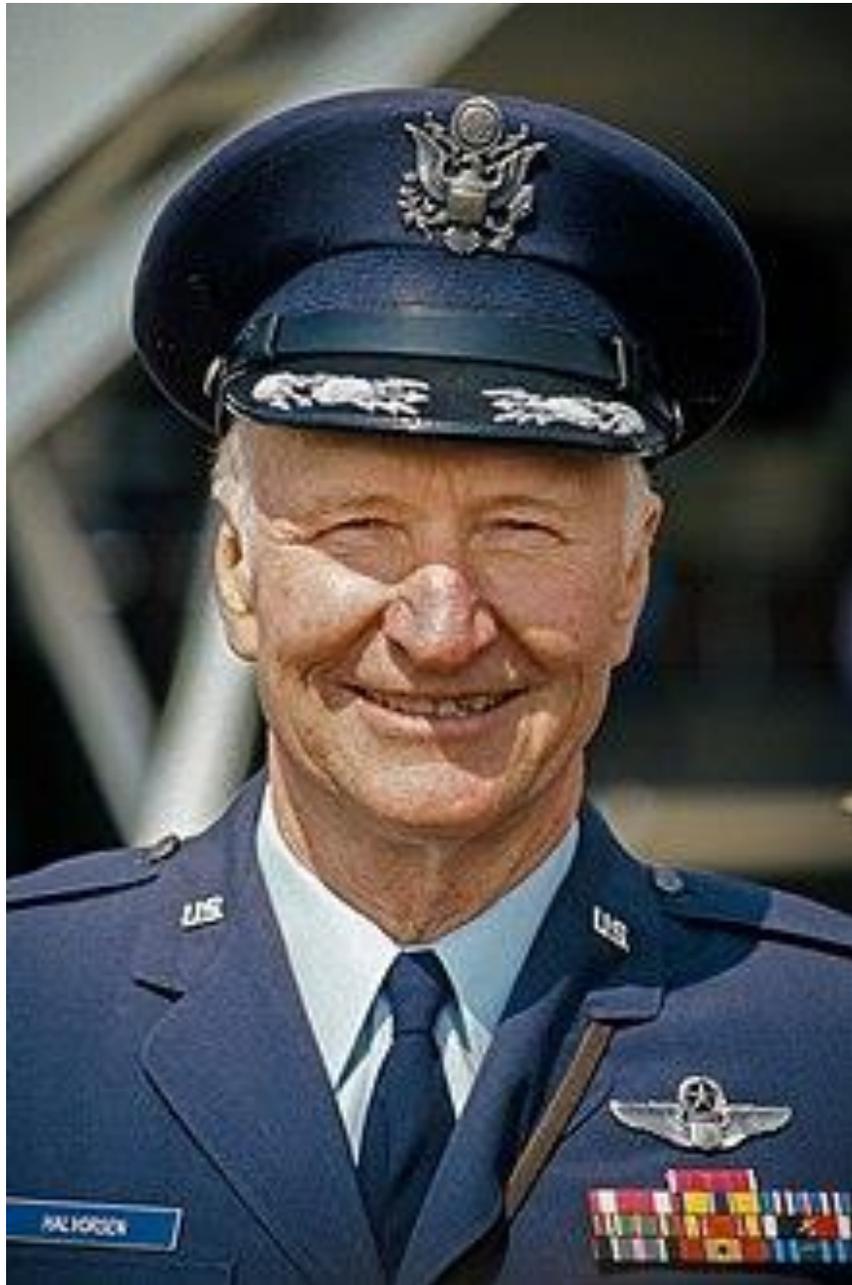
Halvorsen grew up in rural Utah but always had a desire to fly. He earned his private pilot's license in 1941, at the age of 21, and then joined the Civil Air Patrol. He joined the United States Army Air Forces in 1942 and was assigned to Germany on July 10, 1948, to be a pilot for the Berlin Airlift. Halvorsen piloted C-47s and C-54s during the Berlin airlift ("Operation Vittles").

Many of the RAF aircraft involved in this humanitarian operation flew from the New Forest Airfields, from Stoney Cross, Holmsley South and Hurn. Even though this was peacetime, 39 RAF and 31 USAF aircrew died during the operation. The blockade of Berlin, by the Russians, lasted eleven months from June 1948 to May 1949 (323 days).



During that time Halvorsen founded "Operation Little Vittles", an effort to raise morale in Berlin by dropping candy via miniature parachutes to the city's residents. He began "Little Vittles", with no authorisation from his superiors, but over the next year became a national hero with support from all over the United States. Halvorsen's operation dropped over 23 tons of candy to the residents of Berlin via 250,000 tiny parachutes. He became known as the "Berlin Candy Bomber", "Uncle Wiggly Wings", and "The Chocolate Flier".

He has received numerous awards for his role in "Operation Little Vittles", including the Congressional Gold Medal. However, "Little Vittles" was not the end of Halvorsen's military and humanitarian career. Over the next 25 years, Halvorsen advocated for and performed candy drops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Japan, Guam, and Iraq. Halvorsen's professional career included various notable positions. He helped to develop reusable manned spacecraft at the Directorate of Space and Technology and served as commander of Berlin's Tempelhof Airport. He retired in August 1974 after logging over 8,000 flying hours. From 1976 until 1986 Halvorsen served as the Assistant Dean of Student Life at Brigham Young University.



'Hal' Halvorsen in 1983

It was the summer of 1948 when U.S. Air Force pilot Gail "Hal" Halvorsen noticed children clustered around a barbed-wire fence watching military planes at Tempelhof airfield in Berlin. World War II had ended three years earlier, and Halvorsen was part of an air mission to deliver food and fuel to desperate Berliners after the Soviet Union had blocked land and water access to areas of the country, leaving millions without access to basic goods, known as the Berlin Air Lift. Many of the RAF aircraft involved in this humanitarian operation flew from the New Forest Airfields.

Halvorsen, then 27, decided to park his plane and say hello to the kids at the fence. "I saw right away that they had nothing and they were hungry," he recalled. "So I reached into my pocket and pulled out all that I had: two sticks of gum." Halvorsen tore the Wrigley's Spearmint gum into small strips - one for each child, he said. Then he made the kids a promise: He would return the next day to drop a load of chocolate bars from the sky. Halvorsen recorded that he wanted to do more for the children, and so told them that the following day he would have enough gum for all of them, and he would drop it out of his plane.



Then he made the kids a promise: He would return the next day to drop a load of chocolate bars from the sky. Halvorsen recorded that he wanted to do more for the children, and so told them that the following day he would have enough gum for all of them, and he would drop it out of his plane.



According to Halvorsen, one child asked "How will we know it is your plane?" to which Halvorsen responded that he would wiggle his wings, something he had done for his parents when he first got his pilot's license in 1941. "I told them that I'd 'wiggle' my wings so they'd know which pilot had the goods," he said. "Then I went back to the base and asked all the guys to pool their candy rations for the drop."

Following his first sweet mission - hundreds of Hershey chocolate bars were wrapped in parachutes made of handkerchiefs - Halvorsen returned again and again during the 15-month humanitarian airlift. The children of Berlin soon gave him a nickname: the "Candy Bomber."

And now, some of those kids - now in their 80s and 90s - have sent cards, letters and video messages of thanks to Halvorsen in honour of his 100th birthday on Oct. 10. The legacy of the retired colonel was celebrated at an outdoor reception on his birthday for about 130 family members and friends. In addition to birthday cake, there was a helicopter flyover to drop chocolate bars and other candy to the guests, said Denise Williams, 67, the second oldest of Halvorsen's five children.



Although it's a few weeks early for Halloween candy, Halvorsen said he was happy to see another candy "bombing" run. "I've always had a sweet tooth," he said. "But I have to be honest. I'd rather have black licorice than chocolate." Williams, who now helps care for her dad, said she had initially invited a large contingent of grateful German candy recipients to the party, but then the coronavirus pandemic hit. "There are hundreds of people who will never forget my dad dropping those candy bars during the Berlin airlift," she said. "He's beloved around the world for his positive attitude and giving heart."

Several of those children from the 1940s now live in the United States and shared tributes to Halvorsen via Zoom at the party, Williams said. Ingrid Azvedo of Sacramento was among them. Azvedo, 86, said she was with the group of kids who were handed small strips of gum through the wire fence from Halvorsen that hot July day in 1948. "There was no food or clean water in Berlin; we were starving to death," recalled Azvedo, who was 14 at the time. "Then along came this tall and skinny pilot, who reached into his pocket to give us all that he had. A kindness like that stays with you for a lifetime." Azvedo didn't eat her gum, she said, but instead placed it under her pillow. "I would smell it every night," she said. "And when he came back to drop chocolate instead of bombs, we could hardly believe it. Nobody had tasted chocolate for a very long time."

Christel Jonge Vos, who now lives in Keizer, Ore., said she was never able to catch a chocolate parachute because the teenage boys in Berlin ran ahead of her. "But that was not important to me or the other kids who did not get one," said Vos, now 86. "We knew there was an American pilot called the Candy Bomber who cared about us. He laid the ground stone to the fact that enemies could become friends in Berlin."

Halvorsen said he grew up on a sugar beet farm in the small city of Garland, Utah, and became a Civil Air Patrol pilot after Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, launching the United States into World War II. He later joined the military and was assigned to the South Atlantic Air Transport Command, he said, but when word came after the war that the Soviet Union had blocked West Berlin, he volunteered to fly in supplies on humanitarian missions. More than 2 million tons of food and fuel were airlifted into the city over nearly 280,000 flights, Halvorsen said. But just weeks into the effort, he saw another need. "When I dropped those first candy parachutes and saw the kids racing for them, I knew I had to keep going," he said. Operation Little Vittles, as it was called, ended up delivering more than 23 tons of candy and chocolate to children throughout western Berlin, he added.

More than seven decades on, the lanky C-54 pilot is still in pretty good health, according to his children, and he flew as a co-pilot as recently as last year in North Carolina during a re-enactment of one of his candy bomber flights. "He certainly has his physical challenges, and his short-term memory isn't what it used to be," said son Bob Halvorsen, 63. "But he still has a vivid memory of dropping those chocolate parachutes in Berlin years ago." After Germans had watched American planes drop bombs during the war, to see a pilot drop candy made a lasting

impression, he added. "My dad helped to create an attitude shift in Berlin about America," he said. "I'm amazed at the number of people who continue to write to him about that airlift. They tell him that it's the one time they finally had hope."



Dagmar Snodgrass, now 86 and living in Springfield, Mo., is among those regular pen pals. "I was 14 and had seen too much evil to believe in anything good, when the Candy Bomber made a place for himself in the heart of every West Berlin child," she said. "When a gust of wind carried that little parachute to me, you cannot imagine what it meant," said Snodgrass, who finally met Halvorsen for the first time in 2015. "Because of [Halvorsen], we started to believe that good could come out of bad."

Halvorsen said that's exactly the lesson he had hoped people would take away from his sweet humanitarian missions. "My advice to people is the same today: Don't hate and don't be mad at your next-door neighbour," he said. "If you want to get the best out of life, you have to forgive." And sharing a bit of chocolate with someone now and then can't hurt either, he said.

