

Newsletter of the Cold War Museum Berlin Chapter November 2007

Dear Friends and Supporters of the Cold War Museum

By Baerbel E. Simon –German Affairs-

I am pleased to offer the following report on the activities and development of the Berlin Chapter of the Cold War Museum. We have had a number of interesting visits and meetings, including a special one in late August. Every year on August 27th, a group of the British Airlift Veterans travelled to Fassberg in Lower Saxony for a memorial ceremony, where they lay a wreath for fallen comrades. (www.bbaa-airlift.org.uk) At the event this year, we met members of the British Berlin Airlift Association in Fassberg, including the Deputy Chairman of the British Berlin Airlift Association (BBAA),



Geoff Smith and his wife Doreen, and Colin Cottle and his wife Josie. Mr. Smith served for the Royal Air Force as an aircraft electrician in Berlin Gatow. At one period during the Berlin blockade Gatow was the busiest airfield in the world. Mr. Cottle served with the British Army in the Royal Corps of Signals Regiment, and later in Fassberg in the unit called the 11th Air Formation Signals Regiment. Both veterans support Berlin Airlift activities actively.

Also at the meeting were Mr. Manfred Sturzenbecher and his wife Gerda from Glaisin near Ludwigslust. Mr. Sturzenbecher worked during the Berlin Airlift in Hamburg - Fuhlsbuettel with the British ground-crews as a German civilian worker.

We all had a successful conversation about further cooperation for the 60th anniversary of the airlift in June 2008 in Peterborough, England. I am working by side by side in cooperation with Mr. Bernard Howard, a co-worker of Geoff Smith at the British Berlin Airlift Association.

Fassberg during the Berlin Blockade

The Air Base at Fassberg was one of the important posts during the Berlin Airlift. The Royal Air Force Base (RAF) in Fassberg got the order to support blockaded Berlin with coal.

British and US Aircrafts flew in total 539,112 tons of freight to save the city.

In Fassberg alone up to 450 take-offs and landings a day were recorded. The last flight was made on August 27th 1949.

In only 48 hours took the British and the Americans organized a huge airlift after a complete blockade had been imposed on Berlin by the U.S.S.R. From June 26th 1948, Berlin was supplied by air mainly with food, medication and coal for the production of electricity in a project unparalleled of its kind.



13,000 tons of food had to be transported daily, and by the end of the blockade on May 12th, 1949, about 280,000 flights to Tempelhof, Tegel and Gatow had been registered.

I'm pleased to announce that US Navy Commander ret. Maurice B. Jackson donated his personal film from the airlift from the years 1948-49.

In addition to flying over 100 airlift missions he was also the Public Information Officer for VR-6 Transport Squadron

I would like to thank Commander Jackson who is helping to support the Berlin Chapter and preserve the Berlin Airlift

The US Navy during the Berlin Airlift

By Baerbel E. Simon

On the 27th of October 1948, the Commander of the Military Air Transport Service ordered the Navy Transport Squadron VR-6 and Transport Squadron VR-8 for temporary additional duty with the Airlift Task Force for participation in Operation Vittles.

At the time, both squadrons were assigned to MATS (Military Air Transport) routes in the Pacific; VR-6 was stationed at Guam and VR-8 was based in Honolulu. Transport Squadron VR-8 got the order that same day, and on 29 October its first group of six R5D (C-54) aircraft

took off for California. Transport Squadron VR-6 on Guam received its orders on the 30th of October, and on the 1st of November its first contingent of four aircraft left for the West Coast.

The aircrafts of both squadrons assembled at Moffett Field, California for pre-employment work-ups. At Moffett, high-engine-time R5Ds were exchanged or were reconditioned and inspected, and all planes were winterized. In addition, VR-6, which had a shortage of four aircrafts, was provided with the additional planes to bring it up to its authorized strength of twelve aircraft. Once they were readied, the aircraft of the two squadrons took off for NAS Jacksonville, where APS-4 radars were installed. From Jacksonville they flew to Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts for movement to Germany. VR-8's last airplane flew into Rhein-Main Air Base on 15 November, and VR-6's final aircraft arrived a week later, on 22 November.



The two Navy squadrons in Germany quickly made themselves known to their Air Force counterparts. The winter weather in Germany proved extremely trying for all of the squadrons engaged in the airlift, with cold fogs often blanketing Berlin. It was routine during these months for the aircraft to fly east and west through the air corridor on instruments and to make GCA approaches at both Berlin's Tempelhof Airport and Rhein-Main. Fortunately for the Navy planes, their crews had been required to make all their approaches on GCA (Ground Controlled Approach for starting and landing) during the years that they had been part of the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS), and so they were, on average, more skilled in instrument flying than were their Air Force counterparts.

Although their planes had been averaging six hours a day in flying time in the Pacific, VR-6 and VR-8 arrived in Germany fully manned with skilled maintenance personnel prepared to maintain a schedule of eight hours a day per aircraft. This substantial increase in flight hours, however, was soon being regularly surpassed.

During the first two weeks of flying the air route from Rhein-Main to Tempelhof, the two squadrons carried a total of 6,526 tons of cargo.

In April 1949, both squadrons flew a combined total of 8,234 hours (an aircraft utilization rate of 13.1 hours per plane per day) and delivered 23,550 tons of food and coal to Berlin.

After several months of slow stubborn negotiating, the Soviet Union finally agreed to end its blockade of Berlin if the three Western powers (Great Britain, France, and the United States) agreed to terminate their restrictions on trade. On 5 May 1949, the four governments issued a communiqué announcing that the blockade would end on 12 May.

The Blockade was lifted on the day agreed upon.

On 30 July, an official announcement was made that the airlift would end on 31 October 1949. The two Navy squadrons were released from their duties with the Airlift Task Force in mid-August and returned to the continental United States. During the months that VR-6 and VR-8 operated in Germany, their aircraft flew 45,990 hours, carrying 129,989 tons of cargo into Berlin and averaging 10.1 flight hours per plane per day for the entire period. Even though the twenty-four aircraft of the two squadrons had not been involved during the first three months of the Berlin airlift, by Operation Vittles end they had managed to deliver some 7.3 percent of the total tonnage flown into the besieged city by U.S. aircraft.

US Naval Historical Center Washington DC, USA

A last, short note

By Baerbel E. Simon

Most people later believed that all who had worked on the airlift were aircrews. This was, of course, not the case, with many people from the Royal Army and Royal Air Force and US Army, US Air Force and US Navy plus many civilians from the different nations together with Germany, were working on the ground. Where ever they worked on ground or as co-worker for other facilities in the background they and their jobs were very important. The operation never stopped, as missions continued 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They all helped to fulfil that unbelievable project to save the city.

The U.S. action was given the name "Operation Vittles," and the British one was called "Operation Plain Fare"

The French Army, meanwhile, was involved in the first Indochina War, so it could only bring up some old Junkers JU 52's (called Toucan) to support its own troops. However, France agreed to build a new and larger airport in its sector, on the shores of Lake Tegel. French and United States military engineers were able to complete the construction in less than 90 days, but not forgetting the tremendous help by Germans, of which many were women. Construction began on the 5th August 1948 and the first C54 Skymaster landed on the 5th November 1948. The airfield evolved after the crisis into the Berlin Tegel International Airport (Otto-Lilienthal-Airport TXL)

It was a grandiose achievement in the past and is should still be recognized today.

Please help spread the word about the Berlin Chapter. Together we can make this vision a reality. If you should have any questions or want additional information, please visit the German Homepage: www.coldwar.org/BerlinChapter/

or give me a call : 030.745.1980

Thank you for your support

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