



News Release

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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CANDY BOMBER 'DROPS' IN ON CAFB MAY 2

CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. – The Candy Bomber flew again May 2, with a little help from Team Charleston.

Retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, known as the “Candy Bomber” during the Berlin Airlift, visited Charleston AFB after spending some time at Porter-Gaud School, where candy once again dropped from the air into the waiting hands of children.

Master Sgt. Lee Woody, 373rd Training Squadron Detachment 5 superintendent and Aero Club member, and Tech. Sgt. Jeff Elliott, 437th Logistics Support Squadron and chief pilot at the Aero Club, recreated Halvorsen’s famed candy drop in an Aero Club aircraft.

With a helper on the ground radioing coordinates, Woody flew the aircraft while Elliott dropped candy bars rigged with parachutes.

“We dropped two boxes of 250 candy bars each,” Elliott said.

Elliott said the entire operation wasn’t made any easier by the windy conditions that morning.

“We made several practice runs, and every time the test drops went a different direction,” said Elliott.

In the end, many of the candy bars hit their target, even though some landed in a near-by marsh. For both Elliott and Woody, the experience was rewarding anyway.

“It’s a part of living history, getting to be part of history now,” Elliott said. “When you think back to the Berlin Airlift and the stories of the kids who shared their candy with the ones who didn’t have anything, it’s a good message.

“It was really a great honor,” continued Elliott. “It wasn’t planned, it just kind of fell in our laps, but it was an honor to meet the colonel. I really appreciate what he did.”

Woody said the opportunity to connect the young airmen he works with in the schoolhouse to the Air Force of the past was especially fulfilling.

“It was a way of connecting the current generation of the Air Force to an Air Force hero, connecting the past with the present,” Woody said. “Those airmen who met with him will carry that with them for the next 20 years and hopefully pass it on.”

Woody said Porter-Gaud students taking part in the event also wanted to “pass it on.”

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“They were already talking about raising the funds and coordinating the whole thing for other schools,” Woody said.

When Soviet authorities blocked all traffic by land and water into or out of the western-controlled section of Berlin in June 1948, the first major test of the free world’s will to resist Soviet aggression began, according to the Air Force Museum’s Web-site. Faced with the choice of abandoning the city or attempting to supply its inhabitants by air, the western powers launched the Berlin Airlift, “Operation Vittles,” and for the next 11 months sustained the city’s 2.5 million residents in one of the greatest feats in aviation history.

As a lieutenant pilot during the Berlin Airlift, Halvorsen was impressed by the friendliness of the German children outside Tempelhof airdrome and promised to drop candy to them the next day, according to the site. He did as promised and continued for days after, using handkerchiefs and scraps of cloth as miniature parachutes.

Word of his personal humanitarian mission spread to the states, where donations of thousands of pounds of candy, hundreds of handkerchiefs and other pieces of scrap cloth eventually reached him.

By January 1949, more than 250,000 mini-parachutes with treats attached had been dropped.

Halvorsen credits those children in Berlin with re-teaching him an important life lesson.

“When making decisions that affect your life, you have to put principles before pleasure,” Halvorsen said. “Those kids said, ‘We don’t need enough to eat, freedom’s more important.’ They could live on thin rations, but not without hope.”

Spreading that lesson is what Halvorsen said is the best part of being the “Candy Bomber.”

“I get to meet young people who have decisions ahead of them in life,” Halvorsen said.

“I’m interested in the decisions they face,” he continued. “I want them to know a little decision can determine one’s destiny, so make them carefully.”

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