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After defeating Germany in World War II, the Allies divided the country into four occupying zones, a Soviet eastern zone and the western zones of Germany for an American zone, British zone and French zone. The capital city of Germany, Berlin, was about 100 miles from the border between the eastern and western zones and was also divided into the four zones. A

multi-power agency called the Kommandatura was established in June 1945 to govern the occupation of Germany. The Soviet authority became concerned about a possibility that West Berlin would become unified as a Western power right in the middle of their occupation zone. On June 15, 1948, the Soviet authority announced that the Autobahn that connected western Germany to Berlin would be closed indefinitely for repairs and halted all barge and rail traffic from entering Berlin, a maneuver the Soviet authority hoped would starve the western powers out of Berlin.

As far as the western Allies were concerned, withdrawing support of the two and one half million people of Berlin was not an option. The Allies planned to establish two air bridges into Berlin and one out to provide every daily need to West Berlin. A special Airlift Task Force was established in Germany and on July 23, 1948, MATS (Military Air Transportation Service) was directed to provide personnel and aircraft in support of an airlift code named Operation "VITTLES".

On July 29, 1948, Major General William Tunner, operations chief of MATs arrived in Wiesbaden, Germany with a staff of seasoned cargo transport experts that served with Tunner during the famous WW II air supply line into China called the "Hump" operation. Tunner's special team established a tonnage required for minimum subsistence to meet the needs of Berlin at 4,500 tons of food and supplies daily. The available transportation units were the 60th and 61st Troop Carrier commands flying C-47s and with their low cruising speed and small size would be no match to fill the requirement of daily tonnage. Within two weeks 54 C-54's (DC-4's) arrived from Texas, Alaska, Hawaii and the Caribbean. The British Royal Air Force provided 58 Dakotas (C-47's) and 40 British Yorks.

During the summer of 1948 MATS added 81 C-54 aircraft for a total of 178 aircraft manned by enough seasoned pilots to provide three full crews per plane and established a replacement training unit at Great Falls, Montana using land

based simulation of the Berlin flight corridors. MATS Navy Squadron VR-3 provided seven C-121 Lockheed Constellations to be flown from Westover Field, Massachusetts. Douglas C-74 Globemaster and Boeing C-97 Stratofreighter missions called "Goliath" were flown from Brookley AFB, Mobile, Alabama making scheduled round trips to Western Germany, constantly transporting C-54 engines and parts in support of Vittles.

Support of the Berlin Air Lift required the services of Air Communications Service and Air Weather Service. Communications was part of every phase of the Berlin Air Lift. GCA (Ground Control Approach) was only one of many electronic devices tying the various ground stations and the airplanes in the air with control from a master control station. Air Weather Service shifted three reconnaissance squadrons to Europe. Weather stations in the U. S., in the Arctic and ships at sea forwarded data for long range forecasting. British aircraft, together with American B-29's were flying weather routes over areas north, south and west of the British Isles, reporting to Airlift stations every 30 minutes. Every fifth plane flying the Lift was provided a radio operator who reported weather conditions in code at four indicated points on each of the three Lift corridors.



C-47s unloaded at Tempelhof

The available airfields were unsuitable for operations. Modernization of the airfields was done while planes landed and took off. Seven fields were used by U. S. planes and divided into two functional classifications, (Loading) of outbound engine and parts for overhaul to reach shuttle flights returning to the U. S. and Burtwood England, at Rhein-Main, Wiesbaden, Fassberg and Celle and (Unloading) of food and commodity rations, at Tempelhof, Gatow and Tegel. The British maintained and operated fields at Wunsdorf, Lubeck, Fuhlsbittel and sea planes based at Hamburg. Food flowing into Berlin measured in tonnage per day consisted of 646 tons of flower and wheat, 125 tons of cereals, 64 tons of fats, 109 tons of meat and fish, 180 tons dehydrated potatoes, 85 tons of sugar, 11 tons of coffee, 19 tons of powdered milk, 5 tons whole milk for children, 3 tons of baking yeast, 144 tons of dehydrated vegetables, 38 tons of salt and 10 ton of cheese.

Movement of freight to the airplanes flying the Airlift to feed Berlin was a global operation bringing dairy products from Denmark, coffee from Brazil, sugar from Cuba and wheat from Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, and coal from the Ruhr Valley, Germany. At the very start of "Vittles", it was apparent that resupply and replacement parts to keep the round-the-clock Airlift going would create a need for an International Terminal for Critical Cargoes. Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts was selected as headquarters and shuttle routes were established so all supplies from all over the nation flowed through this point. Airplanes for 200 hour inspections were routed to Burtonwood, England. Airplanes requiring 1000 hour inspections were routed to Moffett Field, California. At Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio Texas 500 engines per month were rebuilt for "Vittles". New or rebuilt Engines arrived at the Rhein-Main, Germany build-up shop by air and sea routes.

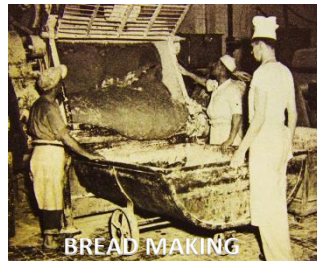


This was a battle against hunger

A complete accounting was required for each food item and coal supply that reached Berlin. Distribution was monitored on a very strict rationing basis. Daily food rations provided meals of 2,609 calories for heavy laborers and differed for children depending on the age of each person keeping the economy going in the city. Bakers were required to produce a set bread weight for each ton of coal they used. Industrial plants were given



a quota of



coal to produce a pre-determined volume of production and controls were in place for the distribution of their products.

THE FLIGHT TO BERLIN

While in the U. S. Zone of the Frankfort to Berlin route, Airlift planes kept in radio contact with traffic controllers. A predetermined flight pattern was designed so each airplane that entered the highly constricted Berlin Corridor followed an assigned course and maintained an exact position relative to all other aircraft making up the steady stream of traffic in the corridor. There were seven flight control points that governed the flight corridor before planes reached the Russian territory.

Control point Instructions included changes in direction and changes in altitude in order to navigate the corridor and to position the flight patterns of planes flying in trail three minutes apart and at altitudes of 500 feet separation before reaching the Russian territory; the last directional guide and no radio facilities until reaching Berlin.

When the pilot reached his seventh flight control point at Fulda Range he would be entering a 20 mile wide corridor over the Russian territory and would not have precision flying aids for guidance for the next 40 minutes of flight. The pilot would steer by dead reckoning, maintaining altitude and an exact air speed of 170 m.p.h. for a safe flight through that sector. Upon leaving the sector the pilot would again pick up radio communications and precede in trail over five more flight control points to make a GCA landing scheduled at intervals of every three minutes at Tempelhof Airport.

The C-54 was designed as a passenger carrier for use on long flights. Flights in the Frankfort Air Corridor between Rhein-Main and Berlin took only an hour and 40 minutes and in the Hamburg Air Corridor from Fassberg to Berlin it took under one hour. With the flight conditions of the Lift and consideration that the C-54 scarcely obtained cruising altitude when the pilot prepared for repetitive landings and takeoffs with heavy loads, the engines would receive terrific punishment in a very short time. The cargo of flour and coal also had a punishing effect with dust seeping into all parts of the plane causing damage to exposed parts.

Weather patterns in May, June and July provided the best flight conditions. Decrease in good flying weather was in November and December with 1¼ mile visibility as a result of fog, smoke and precipitation. Airlift planners had to provide a steady stream of aircraft into Berlin and when weather conditions prevented delivery, the good weather days needed to be exceptionally productive to cover the lost flying days. The communications system provided contact with the pilot when the plane taxied up for a takeoff, and stayed with the pilot until the pilot landed at his destination. Airlift planes left Western Germany airports at a constant rate and spaced so they did not arrive in Berlin faster than they could be safely landed. At Tempelhof planes followed the GCA (Ground Control Approach) even during good weather flight conditions. The area of Berlin was highly constricted with landings and take off intervals planned every three minutes at three airports.

The battle against hunger was measured in tons and delivered through aerial supply. Willingness to provide logistical support by the Allies through air routes proved sufficient to neutralize the Berlin crisis on Sept. 30, 1949.

