

Gail Halvorsen Interview

Interviewer: Okay, is the sound okay?

Gail Halvorsen: One, two, three, four, five. Five, four, three, two, one.

Interviewer: I guess it's all right -- they'd let us know. Gail, we're really honored to have you with us today at KUED and, uh, we want to ask you where you were on December 7th, 1941, and what you were thinking and what got you involved in the service of our country.

Gail Halvorsen: Well, on December the 7th, 1941, it was a Sunday. And I was getting ready for church and things were going slow and I went outside for a minute and I hear the radio and all of a sudden, it sounded like something was going on big and I came back in and it was Pearl Harbor. I, uh -- we were expecting it because they'd been recruiting people that trained to be pilots before this happened. Mr. Hinckley, from Utah, who was head from the FAA -- so-called FAA or CAA then -- started a non-college pilot training program. And I was a farm kid. I didn't have any money to go to school and I was tied to a sugar beet up in northern Utah and, uh, the (inaudible) came by, "If you want to compete for a scholarship, then apply and go to grad school." Well, I won the scholarship. I had my pilot license before the 7th of December. I was in the Civil Air Patrol. This had barely started. So I was ready to go and as soon as I could, I met the board over at Logan -- the evaluation board for aviation cadet and that's how I got going.

Interviewer: And, uh, what high school did you attend?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, there's only one (laughter) – that's Bear River High School (laughter). So you cheer for Bear River High, and all that stuff.

Interviewer: Uh, and then, uh, so you enlisted right there and tell us about basic training. Where you went and –

Interviewer: Well, I didn't meet the, uh, Aviation Cadet Evaluation Crew until May of, uh, 1942, and got signed up and went to Basic Training later on. The pipe lines for pilots were pretty filled, but Wichita Falls, Texas in the spring and March. Went in to active duty in March of 1943, went to Utah State for 2 quarters, waiting for my call. And, uh, went to Wichita Falls in the mud, and that was something else. And then we went to pre-flight later on.

Interviewer: And then after basic, where did you go after that?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, after basic, they put me in college training holding pattern -- pilot line was still lined up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma State University, and we got called in to the Aviation Training Center in San Antonio, Texas. And, uh, that's where -- we were cadets, what they called us, and all that sort of stuff -- and one day, I came back from our exercises and there was a note on the board: "Anybody that wants to apply for the Royal Air Force on exchange program to get your pilot rating, sign up." So I signed up, RAF -- you can't beat that. So I got my wings first and then the RAF. With the RAF as a -- training as a fighter pilot in Miami, Oklahoma. They had their training bases in Canada and the United States because of the weather and

congestion in England. And they wanted a few Yankees to train with them to evaluate their training program, which was different than ours, and to teach them how to drive on the proper side of the road at the same time. The English had something to do with it too, I guess. But I trained with them. Got my wings with the Royal Air Force and got transferred back to the Army Air Corps. They didn't need fighter pilots then, they needed transports. So I got in the transport option. I was in Transport Ops in the South Atlantic Theatre during the war.

Interviewer: So you didn't fly with the RAF, you just got trained with the RAF and --

Gail Halvorsen: That's right, Rick.

Interviewer: Okay. And then when you first went overseas, where did you --

Gail Halvorsen: Went into Natal, Brazil. Really, we were headed to "the hump" -- to fly the hump in India to China, five of us in a group. We got to Natal and the guys that were flying out, based out of Natal during Transport Ops -- five of them were, I think it was three or four, but it doesn't matter -- but they'd crashed in a B-25 just goofing around. So he pulled us off the plane and kept us in Natal. We flew into Africa out of there, and we also flew a few planes from Natal into England for the invasion. Our operation was -- I (inaudible) for quite a long time. That was more night time and weather time than day time flying.

Interviewer: And so, your main base in those days was in Africa?

Gail Halvorsen: No, Natal, Brazil.

Interviewer: Natal.

Gail Halvorsen: And then, uh, we flew out of Europe and down to South America taking supplies in from the States. Where ever they wanted us, we flew those transport airplanes.

Interviewer: So you'd, uh fly transports out of Natal, pick up the stuff.

Gail Halvorsen: Supplies.

Interviewer: And then, uh--

Gail Halvorsen: --deliver them to our bases up and down the coast in South Africa, and Ascension Island half way to Africa was a staging point for all the aircraft going for the invasion. We kept that base supplied -- came up to the States to pick up stuff.

Interviewer: So you were flying in to England, uh, to take supplies for the D-Day invasion?

Gail Halvorsen: Just delivering airplanes for that and then we'd turn around, come back, and get another one. This kind of broke up the monotony of the transport ops. So it was just the delivery of airplanes and then we'd fly back military and get back flying the ol' transport runs till we got another chance to ferry an airplane.

Interviewer: Okay, well, tell us, uh, did you have any interesting experiences flying those transports?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, one, took off -- a two-engine airplane, "Goody Birds" -- flew "Goody Birds" at first, before we got the C-54s later. And, uh, took off with this outer wheel on a very short runway. One engine caught on fire and we burned pretty good for a while. We got turned around, got back on, and didn't kill anybody. So that was, that was good. And that was during that period of time.

Interviewer: They would turn around and land, uh, at your base--

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, well I turned around and landed at Rio de Janeiro right out in the harbor. It's just a really short -- Santos Dumont is the name of the airport there. Yeah.

Interviewer: And during this time, were you ever fired upon, or, did you have any--

Gail Halvorsen: No, not even on our trips up through Africa, taking airplanes to Africa or England. I was never shot at. I trained as a fighter pilot, and I would not mind shooting at somebody else. But, that was my lot and I wasn't -- but I flew a lot of hours.

Interviewer: Yeah. Tell us, towards the end of the war, when you heard that, uh, Germany had surrendered, where were you and what were you doing?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, at the end of the war, I was in South America. Heard the news that it was over and I thought I'd be coming home. I wanted to start a Western Auto Store. I worked at some of that a little bit and continued my education. I only had two quarters at Utah State. Wanted to get out, but I couldn't, uh, because we were froze and I had more time than I needed to get out in the criteria. We were flying back troops from Europe and Africa and all over the place and South America. So we were frozen, but we couldn't get out till we got the job done. And during that period when I came back to Natal and had several days off, my buddy, a roommate, Bob Heath, said they had a Regular Army Board coming by here tomorrow interviewing people who wanted to stay in. And I said, "I wanna get out." And he said, "I wanna stay in." And I said, "Well, what do you gotta do?" And he told me, he said, "Hey, you are not doing anything else. Try it."

So I interviewed for the board, and there was only two of us on the base that got offered a regular commission and, uh, I turned it down and says "I want to get out. I would like to raise a family, and the military, I'm a farm kid from a small town in Utah and I just don't know family-wise." And so I turned it down, flew for two weeks, and came back. One day the head of personnel down at the base in Natal come in and said, "I see you turned down a regular commission." And I said, "I did, I wanna get out." And he said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to keep flying. I had a license before I started this thing. I want to keep flying. And I want to take the GI bill and I want to start a business in Western Auto if I can." And he said, "Well, how would -- you want to go to school and fly?" "Yeah." He says, "Well, how would you like to go to school, have your books bought, your tuition bought, paid your regular wages like you were

still just right in the military, and fly at the same time? Keep flying the big airplanes.” And I said, “Impossible.” “No,” he said, “they just come out with a new policy. If you're a regular officer and you do not have a degree, they'll send you to school. They'll pay your way and pay your wages and you keep flying your airplane, too.” And I said, “I don't believe it.” Coming off of the farm, I didn't have any side but plumbing till I got out of high school. And then they tell me all this stuff? You know? Holy cow, man.

And he went in, got the letter, showed it to me, read it to me. And the big reservation I got was a family, concerned about my family. Not married, got a great girlfriend and I still don't know about that. And they said, “Well if you don't like it, resign your commission.” And I said, “I can resign it after I sign up for a regular commission?” “You bet you can.” “And I can fly and get paid?” “Yup.” “Okay,” so I signed up. And at that time, you can choose one of three schools. I was in pre-aeronautical engineering at Utah State, just the two quarters. I always liked science. And so I took Utah State, BYU, and the University of Utah. And, uh, said “they'll give you one of them.” And I didn't get the first year; I didn't get the second year. At that time, I was ready to resign my commission, and then the Berlin Airlift came along. I was in Mobile, Alabama, flying foreign transport out of there at a time when the airlift started. And I flew the airlift, and after the airlift they put me into school and, uh, they gave me a bachelors and a masters, and I went in the space program after that. That's--

Interviewer: All right, now --

Gail Halvorsen: That's a little fast.

Interviewer: We want to hear, uh -- so this occurred when the war ended. Now, tell us a little detail of this Berlin Airlift. How you got in to that. What it was like, as much detail as you can.

Gail Halvorsen: Okay. You got that much film?

Interviewer: Well, we got a lot, but we'd like to hear--

Gail Halvorsen: Okay, Rick. I'll give it a shot. Well, Berlin Airlift was no surprise to those of us who stayed in the military because every month we'd have pilot briefings of what goes on in the world. And Stalin had just taken Czechoslovakia, and he'd just taken Hungary, and he wanted West Germany. West Berlin was an island in the red sea, and a thorn in ol' Stalin's side, and he wanted to get West Berlin out of the way first because British, French, and Americans were deep inside his -- 110 miles deep inside -- West Germany. He had to get rid of them. So, it wasn't a big surprise to us. At that time, when I was flying in Mobile, I was flying C-74s. They were the biggest transport airplane the Air Force had at that time. And then when it happened, I volunteered -- the girlfriend wasn't writing very good letters, so I volunteered to go the airlift and change back to C-54s because I was current in both. And we had about 24 hours to --

Interviewer: Let me interrupt you, Gail.

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: I want to, uh, go back to, uh, uh, when you were ferrying these troops. Were you taking them back to the United States?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that. This is after the war in 1945.

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: And, you're bringing troops. You're picking them up in various areas throughout Europe.

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: All right, what we want to hear is some details about that. What the guys were like going across, how you picked them up, what it was like taking them, and landing them. That's quite an interesting experience.

Gail Halvorsen: Well, we didn't go around Europe picking them up. They gathered them in there, put them in the funnel, got them to the Natal, went back and got some more. So do you want me to tell--

Interviewer: So the troops, did they fly in to Natal?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: Brazil?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, I can pick that up.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gail Halvorsen: Okay, well after the war, uh, when I wanted to get out and couldn't, I was flying troops back, we were picking them up in Natal, Brazil. They were being ferried in from Europe, and Africa, and the, uh, Ascension Island, in the middle of the Atlantic, the South Atlantic, and bringing them to Natal. And then we'd pick them up there and fly them from there back to the United States--

Interviewer: Why were they bringing them to Natal? Why wouldn't they just pick them up in where they were?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, most of them came through the North Atlantic. These were just people that, that were leaving all the bases there -- closing the bases in South America, we handled most of those. Some of them came from Africa and Europe to Natal, but most of them -- we were closing up the bases, all over South America -- phasing down Ascension Island and, we'd go to

Georgetown, uh, in British Guiana, and Boulange, Brazil, and Fortaleza, Brazil, and Uruguay, and Paraguay. We had people all over the place.

Interviewer: You had bases--

Gail Halvorsen: American bases were all -- they had sub bases, and all kind of things. So we were mostly just cleaning out South America where we were. We got some people from Europe.

Interviewer: I see.

Gail Halvorsen: But most of our effort was to clean out all the bases -- we had people all over South America.

Interviewer: How many could you take back at one time?

Gail Halvorsen: About 60 -- 50 to 60 people in these old bench configurations in the C-54. We hauled back a lot of equipment -- we turned over a lot of equipment, you know, small, high-end items back to the people where they were, and gave them back to local military people. But personnel were the main folks that were getting back to the States and getting discharged from the service.

Interviewer: And they sat on kind of benches along the side?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, we didn't have -- we get a lot more than just the canvass, the canvass fold down benches. Just really tight to get most people in you can.

Interviewer: And, did they, your crew was you and a co-pilot and did they have anybody else?

Gail Halvorsen: No, we flew occasionally with a navigator. Not all the time because we could find our way back to the States okay without one. Our main crew consisted of two pilots, a flight engineer, and a load master, somebody who takes care of the passengers. And occasionally, somebody who even served them coffee or whatever else there is. The best guy that helped the dumb pilots was the Crew Chief, the guy that really knew all about the airplane and made sure it was in shape to fly.

Interviewer: And, were these people -- did you have any incidents where they got out of line or any funny experiences or unusual experiences that occurred while you were taking these people home to America?

Gail Halvorsen: No, well, some people still had some bandages here and there, you know, and effects, and if they were mobile, those were the few coming from Europe. We picked up some of the guys that were around the place in South America that had had problems and ran the jeep off the road or something like that. But nothing really unusual except everybody was headed home and in a really great frame of mind. They were really happy to get out of there.

Interviewer: How long was the flight from there to where you landed?

Student: Long time.

Interviewer: Well --

Gail Halvorsen: Gee, it was about 10 hours to get back from Natal -- 10, 12 hours.

Interviewer: And where did would you land?

Gail Halvorsen: Coming back, we'd stop for gas in at Atkinson Field in British Guiana. That's where our main refuel -- we'd pick up a lot of people there, too. And then we'd come in there to Miami, and Miami was the main--

Interviewer: You'd drop them in Miami?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, and then they'd scatter all over the place.

Interviewer: And did they eat on the way?

Gail Halvorsen: Oh, yeah. What we had were what we thought were pretty good box lunches. We had a great kitchen and for the guys going home, why, the bakers out-did themselves. We had cinnamon rolls and good beef sandwiches and all the stuff that guys like to eat. So, they

were well fed. They were well fed on the way back. Everybody was in a good mood, and the world changed colors. It was just wonderful.

Interviewer: Did they let them drink alcoholic beverages on the way back?

Gail Halvorsen: No, not on the aircraft. And if a guy was, uh, being too happy before, they'd hold him over a few days to sober up. When that word got out, why, most everybody was ready to go home when they got on the airplane.

Interviewer: So you landed at Miami and then they'd give you another assignment to go right back?

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah, we'd go right back. We'd take mail back to guys left. We'd take supplies back to those that had to stay in the different units, uh, after their mission was finished. We still had people to support on the bases, bring back a load and whatever we needed, but, always coming back pretty light.

Interviewer: Okay, now take us up to where you finished doing that up until the Berlin Airlift.

Gail Halvorsen: Okay, we came back --

Interviewer: Give us some detail, if you can.

Gail Halvorsen: Thank you. We came back from Natal in 1946, and I was assigned to West Palm Beach, Florida, flying C-54s -- same one I'd been flying down there, flying back to South America, and so I couldn't get out of there. Most of our bases at Panama supplied Central America out of West Palm Beach. And from there, was assigned, went to Air Tactical School at Panama City, Florida -- same as Squadron Officer School now -- for junior officers and tactical training and that sort of thing. And then, after we finished that, they'd transferred the base out of West Palm Beach to Mobile, Alabama to Brookley Air Force Base. And that's the base that was pretty well closed, but is opening back up again. But we flew out of there to South America and Central America. Same thing I flew out of West Palm Beach.

It was there that we got the word that Stalin had in fact blockaded West Berlin, cut off all food supplies to two million people and gave us a notice that, well, we got a call -- I got a call. All the pilots were called in one evening. And they said, "Look, this is it. We've got four airplanes and we've got to get in the air tomorrow headed to Frankfurt, to Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt, and here's the list of guys that are going." And I wasn't on the list. It was natural because I was flying the bigger airplanes and the C-74, which was a really big airplane. Well, on the list, was Pete Soa, and he's a really good friend. There's two LDS guys in that whole outfit -- myself and Donnelly Colic from Pocatello, Idaho. We were the only two regular officers in that whole outfit. And, uh, he and I were invited to Pete Soa and his wife's house. We were bachelors, and Sunday dinners were there, they were just good friends, and they'd give us a great chicken dinner. They just had a set of twins, and, uh, when I went to see what was going on -- the roll call -- and Pete Soa was on the list. Pete was in the air from Panama City to Mobile. And I knew he didn't want to go because he just had the kids and he -- we knew that trouble was

brewing. We already knew they cut off some of the supplies on the 24th of June, 1948, and, this was just after the 1st of July when we got the call. And so, I called his wife up and I said, "Do you mind if I can change squadrons, if I can volunteer for Pete?" Alta Joy wasn't writing me very good letters at the time. She was out west, and I couldn't get out west to improve things, I just won't be over there to see her. And she's, "Oh boy. We'd really be in debt to you if you'd do that." So I got ahold of Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert, who was my commander in the C-74 and said, "Hey, I'd like to transfer back to Colonel Hahn's outfit and replace Pete Soa." And he said, "Okay," and he said, "Sure, I'll pick you up." And so I was able to change that, and the next day, well, I'd--

Interviewer: I bet they thought they'd been given the gift of a lifetime right there when you did that.

Gail Halvorsen: Well, they were such good friends, and it didn't matter to me. I wasn't really getting anywhere, and I thought -- well, and they said this wasn't going to be very long. Three weeks -- you're going on temporary duty three weeks? Holy cow, how bad can it get? Well, a week -- a month before that, I was in the Caribbean. I flew the Caribbean out of Aruba, no Aruba, uh, down by St John's and Puerto Rico, and was able to buy a car. And you couldn't get cars in those days in the States. But this little place in the Caribbean had more cars than they could sell. So I bought a car in the Caribbean, got it delivered in the States. A four door red Chevrolet, and boy, was I (inaudible) then. That was so neat. And that was my principal reason for not wanting to go, but that was secondary. So, I drove the thing up under the palm trees in

Mobile, and put back the key and never saw the car again. But that is one of the reasons I didn't want to -- so I left the next day with -- we had three flight crews and one navigator.

And our instructions -- we had four airplanes -- and our instructions were, "You don't stay overnight anywhere. You go up the East Coast, to Newfoundland -- St John's, Newfoundland -- and you go up Azores, and you go up to Brest, France, and into Frankfurt. And you just keep it going." In the C-54s there are two bunks. And you get some rest there. So we'd trade off, and we could find a way to St John's without a navigator, we just kept him in the sack. We just stopped for something to eat at Westover Air Force Base in St John's and, uh, gassing up, then from St John's, the long haul in to the Azores, and that's where the navigator came in. And we just stopped there long enough to get something to eat and some gas and change, switch seats. All the time going over with different pilots and then over a Brest, France and in to Frankfurt. That's how, how we got there.

Interviewer: How many hours was that?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, you left Mobile, Alabama, and it was about, it must have been about 15 hours. It had to be more like 20 hours -- 20 hours till we got to Frankfurt.

(Cell phone ringing)

Gail Halvorsen: Oh my gosh. Sorry about that. I forgot to turn that off.

The reason we had it on, I forgot, my wife is coming down from Montana and I'm supposed to pick her up after lunch. And she's trying to tell me she's on the airplane. Sorry about that.

That's dead now.

Interviewer: There it goes. Okay, it was about a 20-hour deal with, uh, one gas stop, or how many gas stops?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, uh, we had two gas stops: St John's, in Newfoundland, and then in the Azores, and then into Frankfurt.

Interviewer: Okay, and you flew from the Azores right into Frankfurt. Okay.

Gail Halvorsen: Right, we came right over from Brest, France, and that's where we hit the coast and right into Frankfurt.

Interviewer: And in those days, they didn't know whether the Russians were going to shoot at you, or what. So, you went from Frankfurt down over into -- across East Germany into Berlin.

Gail Halvorsen: Exactly. The bases that we had in West Germany -- of course, we were based in West Germany, naturally -- Rhein-Main at Frankfurt was the main base. Wiesbaden -- which is about 35 miles away from Rhein-Main, an old Luftwaffe fighter base -- was the second base we had. The third base we had was in Celle, in Northern Germany. And also, we had Fassberg in

Northern Germany -- that was in the British Zone, the British loaned us those bases. They had a lot of bases up there.

So, those were the bases that we flew out of. And as you mentioned, from there, we would fly through three air corridors: the Northern Air Corridor, which came in from Hanover over in Northern Germany in Berlin across East Germany; and the Southern Corridor, coming up from Frankfurt into Berlin; and the Center Corridor coming out. Airplanes in the north would be in the north one way, south would go up corridor one way, and all would come out one way. Center would then split and go the other way. The corridors were 20 statute miles wide. If we stayed within a corridor, they weren't supposed to bother us or force us down or whatever because the agreement we signed -- that's why the airlift started -- we signed an agreement with them that we could fly to Berlin about 188 miles from Frankfurt across East Germany, day or night, no matter what. They signed off on that. But the Treaty of Yalta -- when they set up this thing in splitting Germany, the ground troops didn't require that we have access to Berlin from West Germany over the ground. So Stalin says, "I don't have to let your supplies go to two million people." He cut off the rail. He said the Bridge of (inaudible) was unsafe, you cannot use that with trucks, and he froze the locks in the canals that put that bunker fuel and heavy coal and stuff into Berlin across East Germany. And so, we had a decision to make: are you going to fight your way in? And General Clay, the head guy for the Americans and Governor of West Germany, said, "They're bluffing. Let's fight our way in. Let's open up the rail. Let's open up the autobahn and fix the canal. Fight our way in." Well, the politicians said, that's not a very good idea, and some military, too. Stalin had 100 divisions, and his control had 300,000 troops in East Germany. He had more tanks and airplanes in East Germany than he had anywhere else

in the Soviet Union -- the buffer to the west, or ready to go to the west. And so, coming down, to make a long story short, everybody decided -- not everybody -- but Truman says, "We're in Berlin. We're going to stay. And we're going to fly supplies." And most of the advisers said, "We're going to look stupid. You can't supply two million people by air. It's never been done before. It's not our responsibility." We hear that every day from people trying to do a job that's different. But Truman got tired of that. He says, "Look. End of discussion." And the British, like Bevan and Attlee, and the French, they said, "We agree." We're going to do that rather than start World War III and start a fight. So, that's how we were flying -- that's why we were flying stuff in to Berlin, because we had a right to. We didn't want to go proactive and start a fight going in because, according to what we agreed, we didn't have a right. We didn't have any written agreement to access Berlin on the ground.

Interviewer: That was, really, the first altercation in the Cold War, wasn't it?

Gail Halvorsen: It was the first battle -- the first battle of the Cold War. It was a showdown. And we didn't know if they were going to shoot at us coming into the corridors. We flew day and night. Whatever the weather was, we went. Sometimes the fog was so bad, we couldn't get anybody out, and on the other end, we wouldn't fly. We'd come down the corridor, and a Yak-3 -- we'd fly over their fighter fields, they had fighter fields everywhere, I've got movies of them that I'm leaving them with you that show the fighter airplanes (inaudible). I didn't get one buzzing us because I was too busy dodging them. But they'd come up head on. They'd come up right head on with you, the last minute would pull off. And some of them would come up behind you, come up behind your wing, and go over your wing. And I was just waiting for them to

shoot. This was really -- I was right at, almost at the beginning, on the 11th of July, and starting the 26th of June, 1948. And then we find out why they didn't shoot. President Truman put 60 B-29 bombers on the runway in England, and he sent a note to Stalin. He said, "Hey buddy, if you shoot at those transports, you are going to have a fire in Moscow." And we voted for Truman every time we came back because then we thought it was kind of fun -- broke the monotony. Here, these guys -- we were a little worried whether the Soviet fighter pilots had had a recent physical to check their depth perception because in April of 1948, a British transport coming in the North Corridor to Berlin was buzzed by a soviet plane and he ran into him and killed everybody, including the pilot. So we just hoped that the guy had a physical and could tell when to pull up. All we had is flour and coal sacks to throw at them, so that wasn't very effective.

Interviewer: You had no guns on board or anything like that?

Gail Halvorsen: No, no.

Interviewer: That's interesting. So they, these Soviet fighters would harass you right from the get go?

Gail Halvorsen: No, no. That wasn't a steady stream of fighters. These were off-and-on.

Interviewer: I see.

Gail Halvorsen: And I, I think I only got buzzed three or four times. The other guys got buzzed, too. But after, further on in the airlift, I don't think -- they just gave up. They just -- Stalin was

getting such a black eye in the world press, you know. That was a crucial time not only as the first battle in the confrontation of the Cold War, but Stalin and the Soviet system and the Communists planted other governments -- France and Italy, particularly -- long range plans looking for the long term, changing everybody over one way or another. And the neutral countries were -- it sounded like a pretty good idea, this Communism, everybody helping each other out and all this stuff. But, boy, when they saw the black and white difference between starving two million people, and everybody flying day and night to feed them, overcoming whatever was necessary, it changed -- it changed the attitude. You know, I wasn't, of course, there in the occupation force. I wasn't in Berlin before the airlift, but a lot of them were in Berlin -- the military. We took over the base in about July, 1945, at Tempelhof in Berlin, and the Soviets, and we had a lot of military guys there. The Army had a Brigade there. And, some of those guys we talked to, as we flew the airlift said, "Boy, it was like night and day." We'd go in to a bar, and, uh, the Berliners -- the Germans would move out. The enemies coming in the bar and we had our right to be there. When I'd go in the bar -- I never got to a bar in Berlin anyway - - I drink lemonade. I'd take my buddies, if ever had problems, I'd take them home. But these guys, said, they come in to the bar, and the Germans would leave. This was before the airlift started. And after the airlift started, they'd go into a bar and they'd buy them a drink. And that's just one small sliver of illustrating the difference, and from then on. You know, I think, the point you're getting at here is, a key point that is missed a lot time, is the feelings -- the feeling, the psyche of the people. We had just been back a couple years from the guys that were started the whole thing, getting their lives in order. Some of the guys had come back and see their kids for the first time since conceived, or whatever, and they were asked to leave right, you know, that fast to support the former enemy. In my case, after staying in, we knew who the new enemy

was. That helped a bit. We knew that, we knew that we got to do something here. The second feature that changed the attitude was the starving women and children. Most of the people in Berlin were women and children. But the thing that really solidified it for me was my first flight into Berlin, and came over and it's like a moonscape. And you'll see it in my film. Just like, how could two million people live in this rubble? And then land with 20 thousand pounds of flour at Tempelhof, and wonder what these super guys were going to look like. I just came out of the States; I hadn't had any interaction with the community or what they were like. I got out of cockpit, walked back there, opened up the back doors of the airplane, and the big truck backed up to pick up 20 thousand pounds of flour. And about six of these guys came forward to unload the flour. And instead of starting, they came right up, put out their hands -- you couldn't understand what they were saying, but, boy, from their eyes, looking at that flour like we were angels from heaven. We were on the same page -- we had flour and we had freedom, and they wanted both. From then on, I only knew one person during the airlift that was complaining about feeding the former enemy from then on. Why? Because of their gratitude, and doing the right thing. The people were so grateful. They let people come out on the field and talk to the pilots while they were unloading. And, boy, they'd bring us gifts. I mean, all kind of little gifts. I still got a bunch of things they brought to me, and not to me because I was the "Candy Bar Man" -- that didn't come till later -- but, they bring things out and express their gratitude. One woman and a little daughter came out to my airplane one day and she had a teddy bear. And she's holding it tight, and came right up to me, and handed it to me. And I said, "Holy cow." It was probably the only thing she had left. And I said -- I tried to refuse it. "No, no, that's okay. I don't need your teddy bear." And I said, "Why do you want to give it to me?" And her English, she learned in school, and her mother was prompting her here and there when she couldn't get

the word, but she wanted to tell me herself. She said, "During the bombing of Berlin, we were either in our own cellar, or if we didn't have time, in the air raid shelter, and this teddy bear was with me all the time -- it was my good luck symbol. And it saved my life. And I want to give it to you." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "So it will save the lives of people that are flying in to Berlin. I want to do all I can to help you." And her mother said, "You need to take it." And I took it. I still have pictures bringing it to Hill Field when I came back of that teddy bear and a gal friend, Alta Joy, "would you marry me," and went through three kids with that teddy bear. But that was the indication of the change in the shift of the feeling. And it fully brought the West Germans into the Western camp. One of the East Germans to come -- in 1953, they revolted and were slaughtered trying to join their Western brothers and sisters because they wanted to be free. So, the transition of the Berlin Airlift was a healing balm on the wounds of war. It spawned NATO. And the Marshal Plan was hand in glove with it. It was such a powerful force of America and England and Great Britain doing what they could to help, and reenergizing, giving of life. The reason that Stalin blockaded Berlin was because there was a showcase of capitalism deep inside of East Germany. He had a five-year plan on how you guys are going to be benefited by the communist system. But inside that, he had an open market of capitalism -- 300,000 troops would walk across the border, no problem. 1961 is when the wall went up, back and forth, back and forth. And they said, "We want to see what these dirty capitalists were like." What did they find? They found oranges, bananas. They found food in the shop they didn't have any where else. They found clothing that was not the standard old stuff. They found shorter lines. The people owned their apartment houses. And the rubble was picked up in front of it. If there was just a wall for part of the building, it had a window box with flowers in it. And some of the places started to show some signs of paint. And these soldiers

would go back to the barracks at night and say, "holy cow. If that's capitalism, we like some of that stuff." And of course, Stalin had all these spies in every battalion and they sent -- no e-mails -- but they were sending mail back real fast, "Hey, you've got trouble. You are not going to be able to convince the East Germans how great our system is if you've got a showcase in your backyard." And that -- he felt he had to do it. And he blockaded, he thought there would be food riots, and he knew when the riots would start, they'd, you know, come across the border. We had a token force, and just put down. We can't have this going on inside our territory and these outer influences. That's how important -- stop communism going west. It was the biggest humanitarian effort since. The number of people involved, the number of people that were being supplied solely by air.

Interviewer: That's a great chapter in world history and American history.

Gail Halvorsen: It is -- it's a great day in American history.

Interviewer: And, uh, any other experiences when you would land in Germany and they would unload? Would you just take off? Would you stay overnight there? Would you take right back off?

Gail Halvorsen: That's a good point, Rick. No, when we land -- when I first got there Joseph Smith, a one star General, was in charge right at first. And then, toward the end of July 1948, they brought in General Tunner. He was the wizard that directed the airlift over the hump and supplied the Chinese. And he was an airlift genius. He deserves all the credit -- he's just an airlift

genius. And he's the guy that changed the policies right away. When we first started in July, landing in Tempelhof, we'd go into the terminal building where they had a great snack bar, and you get hot dogs, hamburgers, and I had hot chocolate, and, uh, go out in the airplane, and we would not stay there, we'd only stay long enough to unload. And we wouldn't take any fuel on. Gosh, we bring fuel in to fly out. And we'd have enough to fly in and back out and just a little bit more.

When Tunner came, he went into Berlin and he found some airplanes sitting there empty, and the guys in line at a snack bar waiting to be served. And he said, "No more of that stuff, guys. You don't leave your airplane. You stand right by that airplane and the second that last sack of flour or coal or dried potatoes or dried eggs," -- everything was dried that we could dry to cut down the weight -- he said, "get that number 3 engine started to get that bird out of here and get another load." And we thought "Oh, that's going to be kind of miserable, and raining." "I don't care if it's raining or snowing. Get in the airplane and sit in the cockpit and wait for them to unload it." But he made up for it. He sent the weather man around to the airplane. He sent the clearance guy around to the airplane to say, "You are clear to go or whatever." And he made mobile snack bars -- a bunch of mobile snack bars on wheels -- and he put some beautiful German frauleins in there, and they'd come by with hamburgers, hot dogs, hot chocolate -- everything that the guys wanted. They were very friendly and waved, and, boy, that was better than inside. No line, we were the only guys in line. They were friendly because they knew -- I never had a date on the whole airlift and anyway, but that didn't matter to a lot of the guys -- but the guys flying, we, that's all we're doing. At first we had to fly three round trips a day, day or night, or whatever it was -- that took about 16 hours. The requirement for starvation diet in Berlin was 4,500 tons a

day, just to keep them alive. And, all we had was two-engine airplanes in Europe when we started, and, on the first day, they flew 80 tons. And boy, that sent out the panic signal immediately bringing all four-engine airplanes from all over the world. And so they came out from Japan, Hawaii, South America, Brazil -- everywhere. And that was Tempelhof. And at first, we had to fly three round trips a day. Now, up north, they were an hour closer to Berlin than we were. That's why we put half of our airplanes up north. So, with that -- that was high density flying, and later on, after we got more airplanes, we could back off, back off to about two flights in 24 hours.

Interviewer: So how many planes, there would be a plane landing every how many minutes?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, that varied totally as we built up the force. We started, say, five minutes. We finally got up to five minutes of airplane landing.

Interviewer: And that's 24 hours a day.

Gail Halvorsen: 24 hours a day. And at first, we didn't have radar to help us land in West Germany, I mean, West Berlin. And one day, in August, it was August the 11th, I came into a terrible storm in West Berlin. And we couldn't land an airplane -- because we were in the clouds -- except by using an old-fashioned radio range that we had, low frequency range and nobody knows about anymore, but it takes you about 15 minutes to make a procedure, and the airplane making a stack every five. So they were stacking us in Berlin. I was up -- they stacked me up to ten thousand feet, still in the soup, and holding on wedding beacon in Berlin, coming in bound,

and I come head-on in a cloud with another C-54. Head on. Our props just about tipped, but, thank goodness, we were both level at the time. You see the pilot's lights and, boom. They were gone -- and holy cow. They lost total control of the airplanes, so many coming in. You raised a good point -- they lost total control. I found a hole came out in a hole somewhere, I circled in there till the clouds cleared, and they finally worked us down. The next day, General Tunner heard about it. He came in, the problem was still there -- the cloud was still there. They still got a problem with him. Finally, he called up the control and he said, "Control, send everybody home. And when they're gone, I'm coming down." And he came down; he shut down things for awhile. He got Red Foreman, his Chief Pilot, and Rhett Bettinger -- two of the great guys that were in his staff, the head staff guys -- to change the procedures. And they changed the procedures. And that was one of the procedures that came out of this -- the snack bar. But that was good. For bad weather procedures, he got radar. He got expedited ground control approach radar, the radar that can breathe through the cloud and get you down fast. You just come in and keep going instead of holding, not holding, but approach on a low frequency range. So he got the radar coming. And then he said, "When the weather's bad," and November '48 was terrible fog, "When you come in and it was radar, and even with radar you can't see land, a certain minimum, you pull up and you take the load right back to Germany. You don't even, you don't circle. You got to take it back to West Germany." The guy's right behind you. They aren't going to stack you anymore -- you're going to come right through the system. So, he got long range radar that looked into East Germany toward West Germany, from West Berlin, and over the Elbe River about 70 miles out, they pick us up on the long range radar and just say, "Slow down five miles." And boy, your blood pressure went way down. It was so much better. And those -- that funnel -- the long range radar, it gets you focused and then you turn you over to

guys on the ground with the ground, close radar and they just keep you coming. And you come down too low, you couldn't see to land, turn it back. That was a big change. And then they changed the clearance procedures, besides. When you took off from West Germany to Berlin, if the weather was good in West Germany, sometimes they'd clear a visual flight and then pick up your instrument later. But he changed it every flight. You fly every flight as if you cannot see the ground from the time you take off. And I think that's why I'm here. He saved my life.

Interviewer: Now, there's a lot of lives lost during that--

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: That. Tell us about that.

Gail Halvorsen: Well, that ties to the feeling, too. Even though we had losses, the guys still were totally dedicated. Jesus Christ said, "Greater love hath no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." Thirty-one of my Air Force buddies, and 39 of my British comrades, gave their lives for an enemy to become a friend. That's how much the feeling changed. Why? Because of gratitude. When people are so grateful, and their lives are on the line, we accept it. So there were losses, but, again, every time we'd lose a crew or something, I never felt like, "Hey, I shouldn't be in this business." I was glad to be there. One of my buddies bombed Berlin. He was a fighter pilot and bombed Berlin during the war. And when things were getting rough, I said, "How do you feel about this flying through ice and snow and everything else to support

these guys?" And he stopped a minute and he said, "It's a whole lot better to feed them than it is to kill them. I'm glad I'm here. It makes me feel better."

The heart of this thing is the change in feelings -- the transition because of the cause we were in. It underlines the things that we're taught all the time in the Utah community, my family, and my church -- that service before self is the only way to fulfillment in life, genuine fulfillment. The only real fulfillment is service before self. I slept in a barn. I nailed hammers in the rafters in the barn because our barracks were used to shelter displaced persons held in camps by Hitler. So, you know, we found a barn, and it worked. And the food wasn't good, but we had plenty, and I would look around at the other guys and say, "Man, how grateful I am for what we have. It reinforced how grateful I was for our freedom.

But that idea of service -- looking back on it -- there are three times in my life that I felt worthwhile, doing something worthwhile. Occasionally, some other times too, raising a family. One was the Berlin Airlift because you were serving somebody else. One was a mission when I served for the church in England. And then I served a mission for the enemies again in the Soviet Union -- served a mission in Russia from '95 to '97, and the people were great. The system, the system. People are great whenever you get down person-to-person. They're great. But on a mission, all you're doing is serving somebody else. You're not watching TV, you are not doing anything for yourself except feeding yourself and then, how can I help somebody else. And, that, in spades, gratitude, service before self. And little decisions in life. And the integrity of Truman and the British and French working together.

And the Berlin Airlift -- I want to make clear; it was a three-nation airlift. The French didn't have any airplanes to speak of, just a few. China was in with them -- all the resources were committed. The French sector (inaudible) in Berlin -- they supported everything together. The Brits were flying like mad. We were. But not just air crews, the ground -- the Army was deeply involved. That's how the stuff got done. The Army, way out, they don't get enough credit. The Navy don't get enough credit. They had to sail to bring the stuff across the ocean. And they had two squadrons, two R5Ds flying the same as the C-54s that were flying on the airlift, and boy, they were in the top squadrons. So it wasn't just the airlift, and it wasn't just the pilots that were outstanding in the trenches. They weren't the heroes -- the heroes were the 31 guys and 39 guys that gave their lives. They're the only heroes of the airlift. But General Tunner, if it wasn't for him -- he made it work. And he saved a lot of lives by the procedures he set up. In the military, it's not the Air Force, not the pilots. There would be no airplanes over Berlin if it weren't for the aircraft mechanics on the ground. There were so many airplanes (inaudible) you couldn't get them in the hangars. They were out changing engines out in the open field in the winter with snow storms coming. A wooden frame with canvas flapping in the breeze in the middle of the night. There's no vacation, no time off. Those guys, changing engines, their hands freezing to the head bolts -- I tell you, in my view, they were the heroes. The other guys on the ground were the ground control approach guys that were bringing us through the fog. If it hadn't been for them, wouldn't been much food that got to Berlin in November '48. And we wouldn't be able to go if it hadn't been for the cooks and the bakers and the security police. General Tunner said, "The airlift ought to be as dull as water dripping a stone. The airplanes ought to be either being loaded or unloaded or in maintenance. Used all the time. The crew ought to be resting or preparing for the next flight." And he said that it has to be a symphony. He said, "I don't know

anything about drum sticks, I think they come on chickens. But I know the air lift has to be a symphony.” And that's why he said -- he recognized the security, the police, the cooks, the bakers, the guys, the engineers on the field that rebuilt Tempelhof.

In the beginning, we landed on piers of steel in a field, and you see that in the video. Piers of steel are just panels hooked together because they didn't have a paved runway. Hitler didn't pave the run way for us at Tempelhof in Berlin. And we landed in the same place because the runway is too, really short, and we had to get downright quick, pound and pound. And the women -- that's about all we had -- we had women working for us on both sides of the runway. And as soon as that airplane passed and landed, they'd come on with old fashioned wheel barrows and sand and sit on crow bars, raise it up, pour sand under this mat, and a guy would -- only one man in the whole crew -- he'd pour tar over it. And then they'd blow a horn as an airplane was about to land, and they'd get off the run way. You'll see it. Actually, it's not even Air Force footage, I took it myself. And then we madly built hard two hard-service runways before it was too late, just barely before this thing was not usable. So the guys there, you know, it was a symphony -- the guys out there pouring foundation for the run way and making it possible for us to have something to land on. It's a symphony, just like Tunner said.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Tell us about the “Candy Bomber” at the (inaudible) and how you got started in that--

Gail Halvorsen: Yeah.

Interviewer: --and what led you into that.

Gail Halvorsen: The way I got started -- interacting with kids and got me wanting to do something for the kids -- was quite natural. Anybody would have done the same thing I did. People in the service have been giving their rations since the Continental Army when they go through places with kids -- so that's nothing new. But for me, and how this thing particularly started, I came back from Berlin one day the 17th of July, came back from Berlin, landed at Rhein-Main, supposed to go to bed, and it was eight hours before we start to fly again that night. And I thought this airlift would be over right away -- a kid off a sugar beet farm in Utah, wanting to see what it was like on the ground in Berlin. I thought, it's going to be over in two weeks. They are going to send us home. We are never going to be able to see, get around the town on the ground. And so, I had a movie camera, I kept a camera with me at all times. And right next to me, on the next (inaudible), getting ready to start the engines, was Bill Christian, a buddy of mine from Mobile, and he was just about ready to take off. And I said, "Holy cow! I can just get on that airplane with Bill and go back to Berlin. I've got a buddy there that says he's got a Jeep, and if I ever get to Berlin, he'll let me -- I'll have him drive me all over and get movies on the ground." And I said, "Here's a chance." So I told my co-pilot, John Pickering and Sergeant Elkins, the Engineer, "Go to bed, I'm going to Berlin." And they said, "You're crazy." And I said, "I know, but I'm going to Berlin. I've got a chance; I am going to get on with my buddy." And so, I got on with Bill Christian. And he is in this uniform, my ticket. And there's an airplane coming back every five minutes, I won't have any trouble getting home. And, so, I went back to Berlin and it was a beautiful, clear day. And before I got the Jeep, I called my buddy, Larry Kaskey, and I said, "Hold the Jeep. I want to get some pictures of the approach. If I ever

get married, I want to show my kids the approach coming over the bombed-out buildings and getting down right quick. And I'm going to go around two miles around an air field and shoot pictures. And I'll be back and just hold the driver."

So I ran -- good shape -- I ran around the opposite side of the field from the terminal building. And inside a barbed wire fence all around, shooting the movies, and suddenly right in front of me, was 30 kids plastered up right against the barbed wire. And, uh, about 30 kids -- they're standing between the bombed out buildings and the barbed wire fence. They were friendly. I wondered, looking at the uniform killing them a few years before. But their aunts and uncles were coming across to West Berlin to the library to see what is happening in the world. So I would tell 'em what's happening in the world. And they told them -- their aunts, uncles, cousins, whoever -- "Boy, you don't want anything to do with this outfit." American-style freedom was the dream of these kids. And Hitler's past and Stalin's future was a nightmare. These kids had their heads screwed on straight. And they spoke English, I didn't know any German. And I was there and I got so interested in them and they were encouraging me. They said, "Hey, you know, it's July. You just wait till fall and winter comes. You are not going to be able to get in here. Not very often, you're going to have trouble. But when that happens, don't give up on us. We can live without everything we want to eat if someday we have our freedom." Eight to 14 years old, these kids were telling me, an American, what freedom meant. I couldn't believe it. And all of a sudden, I was like, "Holy cow." So I got to run, kids. "Don't worry. We won't quit. We'll never quit." So I started to run. A little voice said, "Boy, these kids are unusual. How come? Boy, they, they know what the value is. Freedom is more important than flour, enough flour. The pleasure of flour is secondary -- I'll put that pleasure off for something downstream." And

that told me something about decision making in my own life as I reflected back on that. And I tell the kids I talk to, "If you put your principle before pleasure, you're going to have pleasure. If you put it the other way around, it's going to reverse on you."

And those kids, that hit me. I started walking again, and they still bothered me. I knew immediately why the change was so distinct, and it was the trigger that caused the thing to happen. During the war and after and flying to foreign countries and South America and other places were, the kids had some chocolate and gum and had maybe not all they wanted to eat, but enough. And you see walking down the street, in those towns in an American uniform, they'd chase you in groups like that. Grab you, "Hey, chocolate? (inaudible) You got American chocolate?" And we'd carry stuff with us, give them stuff, and they'd take off. But these kids had no gum, no chocolate, for months. Not enough to eat. And I suddenly realized that not one of 30 kids had put out their hand. Whereby voice inflection triggered me to say, "Hey, these kids would like some chocolate, dummy." That restraint, I couldn't believe that. Not one would break ranks. When that happened -- boy. If one kid had put out his hand and say, "Gimme," that trigger would never occurred. They're all the same, "Don't worry, guys." We'll, I knew we didn't have any chocolate anyway. It never would have happened if one child had said, "Gimme." And because he didn't and when I realized that, it blew my mind.

And I reached in to my pocket and I had two sticks of gum -- double mint gum. I thought, try and give that, you are going to have bloody noses. You are going to have a fight, get out of here. I will never see them again. I will be flying 24 hours obsolete, but I had a good co-pilot and I had an automatic pilot and I'd be napping coming and going, probably, but I couldn't come back

to fence. I don't know how I would ever see them again. It was a freak that I was there. So I said, "Well, give 'em what you've got. They're incredible." So I put my hand in the pocket and looked back at the fence, and boy, when I put my hand back in the pocket, those kids just really came to attention. Pulled it out -- two sticks -- broke it in half and gave it to the kids that were talking to me the most. Here come the rest of them. And I thought, "Boy, I'll see mixed boys and girls." But they didn't. They were asking for something. And it was obvious. They wanted a piece of the wrapper. And the guys and gals that got half a stick of gum tore off the outer wrapper on the tin foil and passed to the kids. And the kids that didn't get any gum took that piece of paper and held it up to their nose and smelled it and smelled. Just the smell on the piece of paper. I just stood there dumbfounded. I just couldn't believe it. And I thought, "Boy, I've got to do something for these guys." And about that time, the airplane came over my head and landed right behind me, taking pictures, and I got an idea. I said, "Boy, I can deliver tomorrow to these same kids without losing anything if I can drop it out of the airplane." Then the red light came on: you don't do that. You've got to have permission for something like that. And then I rationalized -- that's how you get in trouble -- I rationalized, and I said, "This airlift is not according to (inaudible), starving two million people. What's a few sticks of gum, you know?" And so I just almost started feeling bad. I said, "Look kids," -- and boy, I shouldn't be saying this, but I'm going to be saying it anyway to them -- I said, "Kids, just come back here tomorrow and I'm going to drop enough out of my airplane. If you'll share it -- enough gum if all of you share it, if you do that." Oh boy, they just blew up. "Jawohl!" "Jawohl!"

"Jawohl!" "We'll do it!"

And I started running, "Wait a minute!" "What's the matter?" "We've got to know what airplane you're in. Every few minutes, an airplane comes in. We can't watch them all, or a tiny package coming out of the airplane." And I said, "Well, I fly a different airplane every time. It might have red markings on it, coming from Alaska, or coconut trees on the nose if it's from Hawaii. I just don't know. Might be a two-engine plane, or four-engine plane." But they said, "Well, we just really need to know." Then I remembered when I learned to fly in Garland, Utah, in the summer of 1945 -- '44 -- '45. No, what am I saying -- 1941.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gail Halvorsen: Can you scrub that?

Interviewer: Yeah, they're going to edit this.

Gail Halvorsen: In summer 1941, when I first learned to fly from Brigham City, that first flight class, went up over Garland and then over to Logan and I crossed country. And I when I got over Garland -- our farm -- my Dad was down there with the two horses cultivating, and Mom was in the garden. And in those days, before, you had to learn how to recover from spins -- you don't have to do that anymore -- and so I know how to spin really well. I thought I would show them how to fly. Pulled up the nose and did two-turn spin over the farm, came back that night, and Dad met me at the door step and says, "You're through flying." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Mom thought you were going to crash and she still isn't feeling very good and you almost gave her a heart attack." And I said, "I won't do that anymore. I promise I won't do that

anymore." When I came over the farm after that, flying in the summer of 1945, I wiggled the wings of the airplane. And I got that idea -- I told the kids, "When I come over the airport first, I have to come over a beacon over the airport. When I come over that at first, if you see me -- I'm not in the clouds -- I'll wiggle the wings of that big airplane. When you see the four engine airplane with wings wiggling, that's got the stuff. Just watch that one airplane." "Oh boy," they said, "Get out of here and get started!"

Well, I shot a lot of movies in town, got out late that night, that evening, two hours before I had to start flying. I went to the Base Exchange and bought all the candy, chocolate, and gum I could. You had ration cards -- you couldn't buy very much, and so I went to my co-pilot and said, "Can I have your ration? Give it to me." I had candy bars and gum, big double handful. And boy, that's heavy. And smell that, I couldn't wait to get back. But hitting that at 110 miles per hour could make the wrong impression. You will be going fast over their heads, at about 100 feet in the air, and I got the idea, "Hey, I can put parachutes on it." I had a lot of handkerchiefs, tied a pair on each, rolled them up. Went back that night, of course, didn't see anyone -- not even a thought of doing it. The next day, noon, still a good day -- there's the 30 kids, they didn't tell another soul. I wiggled the wings and they just blew up. Came over their heads, there is a stove pipe behind the flight deck for emergency flares. My engineer just pushed 'em out. The airplanes lined up to take off had seen them come out and reported it. But, I was more worried that I pulled it over the barbed wire fence on the runway where they couldn't get it. Take off along the barbed wire and there were three handkerchiefs waving through the barbed wire. Their mouths were going up and down and they shared it. And they were waving like crazy and I said, "I wish you wouldn't do that." And Pickering says, "They know who you are?" And I

says, "No, they don't know who I am. I didn't have my name tag on; they didn't know who I am." I didn't have my hat on, I was almost bald-headed. So, we waved back at them. Every day, they were out there. Every day, we come out -- more kids, waving, every day. And we got a ration, a weekly ration. Let's do it again, we did it. We did it again. Three times we did it. And then the weather was bad in West Germany -- we couldn't, uh, tell where to land in West Germany. So I said, "We're half unloaded, I will run into the base ops and ask why the weather man didn't come by. I've got to know where it is, I don't have much fuel to find a place to land." Ran into base ops, there's a huge planning table for maps. On top of it was a stack of mail. I wondered what the mail was doing there for. My girlfriend hadn't written me for awhile. Didn't expect mail in Berlin, but I wondered why the mail wasn't delivered. I went up and looked at it and it says, "To Uncle Wiggly Wings, Tempelhof Base Operations," and "Onkel Wackelflügel, Tempelhof Base Operations."

Holy cow, we're in trouble! I forgot about the weather, ran back out, "Hey guys, we're in trouble, you've got to stop. There's a post office full of mail in there." We stopped. For two weeks, we stopped. And the mail was still coming, and we looked at each other and said, "We're in," uh -- we didn't want to quit right quick. And we said, "Once more, and that's all," and whenever you say that, you're already too far. So once more, we took six parachutes, came back the next day, wiggled the wings, "May Day" celebration, dropped it, and said, "That's it, we're through." Too late. Next day, came back from Berlin, at Rhein-Main, an officer came on the airplane, "Halvorsen? Colonel Hahn wants to see you right now." I said, "What for?" He says, "He'll tell you." Colonel says, "Halvorsen, what are you doing?" "Flying like mad." "I'm not stupid," he said, "What else you been doing?" And then I knew he knew. For 15 minutes or

so, I thought I was going to be court-martialed for not following regulations. So he pulled out a newspaper, and there was a cad of the operation. They almost did a German newspaper guy who had a candy bar on the last drop. He had the story all over the world. And General Tunner called him up and said, "Hahn, what are you doing dropping parachutes over Berlin?" And Hahn said, "General, we're not dropping parachutes over Berlin." And he said, "Colonel, you better find out what's happening in your outfit." Clunk. Well, they had the tail number where the parachutes had been coming out, so that -- and then General said, "That's a good idea. Keep doing it." He was a good guy -- don't sand bag your boss. You want to your boss informed, just not your boss's boss. And I learned a management procedure from that. But Hahn was a great guy, and I don't blame him for being a bit angry with me. And I come back from Berlin, and my bed would be filled with candy bars and gum and women's clubs would be tying up to parachutes. We went to Berlin, took mail bags, picked up the mail, and brought it back and we had two German secretaries the Base Commander gave us to answer all the letters. And we got a lot of, a lot of really good letters. Ran out of parachutes and the kids sent back old ones for refills, and it just went crazy from there on.

Interviewer: How many drops do you estimate that you made?

Gail Halvorsen: Well, I have a document -- first of all, in September 1948, General Tunner said, "They want somebody to go back to New York and tell the press all about what the airlift is like from a personal standpoint, and I want you to go. And pick up an airplane and bring it back." I went to New York on "We the People," television, radios -- all over the place for a week. And the American Confectioners' Association President, Mr. King and Mr. Sorzee, from the candy

companies, said, "we'll give you all you can drop. Whatever you can do, we'll send it to you. Just tell us how much to send." Well, they sent over 6,600 pounds of candy bars by boat and by rail to Rhein-Main for Christmas, and my guys ferried that over and we had a ground party on the ground in Berlin with that 6,600 pounds of candy bars. Christmas Day, not Eve, because no lights all over the city. But the volume was -- we couldn't tie up the parachutes. So Elm's College -- a Junior College in Chicopee, Massachusetts -- got ahold of me and said, "We'll tie up the parachutes." They organized 22 schools around Chicopee, Massachusetts, near Westover Air Force Base, the major Air Force base that supplied Rhein-Main, and they got a fire station. And they turned out 800 pounds every other day in cardboard boxes -- big cardboard boxes -- of parachutes ready to drop. And I've got documentation from Chicopee that they had had processed 18 tons through the seven months -- the first seven months. We figured we dropped over 20 tons. The estimate is 250,000 parachutes over West Berlin. Quit dropping around the Air Field -- afraid of kids getting hurt -- So, we'd drop it at 1,500 and 2,000 feet as we come around the city, all over the city, plastered the city. The kids in East Berlin wrote and they said, "Hey, we can't help where they put the border. You know, we are over here with these Russians. I hope you're not mad at us, but we're catching some of these things that you meant for these West Berlin kids. We don't have any chocolate, either!" And the last paragraph was pay off: "When you come into West Berlin to land, drop it over here. There's not many people, and we'll have a lot better chance at it." And I said, "Why not?" So we were getting stuff like crazy. So I save it and go over East Berlin, see soccer match, and drop it. And the soccer ball would take off into the Jones' and the kids would chase the parachutes. And, uh, they'd have, well, two weeks of this. Came back from Berlin, at Rhein-Main, an officer met the airplane. "Okay, what's up?" He says, "What are you doing over East Berlin?" "I'm dropping to those nasty

Communist kids.” “You can't do that.” And I knew this was Colonel Gilbert, the guy that transferred me to the 74th Squadron -- they brought him over. And I said, “Gravity is the same on both sides of the border.” And he said, “That's not the problem.” He says, “The Soviets complained to the State Department that it's a dirty capitalist trick. You're trying to influence the minds of the people against them. You've got to stop because we don't have jurisdiction over that air space you're using.” So I had to stop.

But we flew that airplane, and we fly back to Berlin in 1998, hundreds of people came through that airplane, and some of them were East Berlin kids that came and got the parachutes in 1948. They gave me a hug, hard to let go. What a great experience. So, the letters, other letters came. A little boy named Peter Zimmerman wrote me a letter. These two secretaries answered the letters, we couldn't answer them. But they gave me the special letters and said, “What will you do about this guy?” And Peter Zimmerman says, "I'm nine years old. My legs aren't very long and I am not getting this stuff. Almost got it today, but a bigger kid beat me to it. And I saw the parachute, perfect parachute. And he made me a map. When you take off out of temple off the second canal base, turn right one block. I live in the bombed out house in the corner. I'll be in the backyard every day at 2:00. Drop it there.” And, so I tried to find Peter. They didn't let me do that. In good weather, I'd unload the load, the tower would let me fly around and make special deliveries to hospitals and other stuff. And I couldn't hit Peter Zimmerman. Finally, he wrote me, “He said, look -- you're a pilot? I gave you a map. How'd you guys win the war anyway?” Well I gave up on Peter. I took a big package of gum and candy to Berlin. I mailed it to him in the Berlin mail. You couldn't mail it to Berlin; you had to drop it in the mail there. He was -- his Dad and Mom were killed during the bombing of Berlin, and he lived with an Uncle.

And he wanted to be an American citizen. And I had barracks bags of kids wanting to write kids for pen pals, and the State Department -- I put this in the State Department bag and he was adopted by a family in Palm, Pennsylvania. He needed shoes, so we took some shoes to Berlin and imprinted the size and gave some to him. I never met him though.

And a little girl wrote. She said, "I am Mercedes. And you cost me a terrible problem." And that got my attention right away. "We live on the approach just before you land right at the apartment house, and when you come to the apartment you scare the chickens. We've got a bunch of white chickens down here not laying eggs anymore." And being raised on a farm in Garland, I knew all about white chickens. Had to clean up the coop on Saturdays while my buddies went fishing. But, she said, "They run in the coop, they're losing their feathers. No eggs." But she said, "When you see the white chickens, drop it there. I don't care if it scares them." Well, I couldn't find the white chickens. By that time, we are getting supplies out the ears. I told my buddies, bomb the approach, and we still missed Mercedes. So I took a big package of gum and candy to Berlin and mailed to Mercedes. In 1972, because of two sticks of gum in 1948, I went back to Berlin as a commander of Tempelhof Air Base for four years with my family. And everybody who caught a parachute wanted me to come to their house to dinner so they could tell their kids and show their kids I was real and how it happened for them. But I couldn't. Almost every night, we were out officially. It was Vietnam time -- riots and things going on. And I was out every night, my wife and I. It was family home evening, which we kept sacrosanct -- we couldn't take private invitations, but one kept coming for two years. And, in 1972, we said, "This is the only one that keeps asking, let's go." So, we cancelled something on a Wednesday night, went to the apartment house, rang the clanger, out came a young couple -

- two kids, two boys. Age of my boys we had with us. Went up stairs, we didn't have to introduce ourselves. She went to the china cabinet, opened up the cabinet, handed me a letter and said, "Read this." This was 1972, and it was dated November 1948, and I knew what this was about. And I opened it up and I said, "Holy cow!" "Dear Mercedes. I can't find your white chickens. I hope this is okay." And Mercedes said, "Step over here five steps. I will tell you where the chickens were." Well, I stayed with Mercedes two months ago in Berlin, with her and her family, stayed with them about 33 times since 1972. Her husband is a science teacher at a high school in Berlin. We established an airlift from West Berlin, before the wall came down, to Utah County. We had students going back and forth to understand the cultures better. Some of them became LDS, some of them became Mormons, and some people eventually came here to the States. And I am supposed to be, on the 15th of this month, in East Berlin, Germany, with Mercedes in the big, yearly, fest they're having there, and the honored guest is Mercedes. And I'm supposed to be there, but I will be in Washington, D.C. with the old C-54 airplane. And, it's -- it's incredible. They came out here and they stayed with us for a month and went all over the state of Utah where we lived.

We went back in 1998 with that airplane, and we could tell, immediately, everyone who had been there during the blockade of Berlin by the look in their eyes, they were moist -- hardly could speak, there was so much emotion. Shake our hands and say, thank you for our freedom. Thank you for our freedom. One man, I could see him stand off to the side, getting his composure, and when people stopped coming through, came up and said, "I'm 60 years old. He said, 50 years ago, I was a boy of 10 going to school. The clouds were very low, and the rain was coming down. I could hear the airplanes landing, but I couldn't see any. And suddenly, out

of the cloud, came a parachute with a fresh Hershey candy bar. He said, it took me a week to eat that candy bar. I ate it day and night.” But he said, “It wasn't the candy that was important. What was important was that somebody in America knew I was in trouble, and somebody cared. That's what it meant to me.” And he said, “You know, I can live on thin rations, but not without hope. Without hope, the soul dies,” he said. And how true that is. We see people in our communities that, uh, have lost hope. And no connections to an outside force, whether it's a teacher, a parent, or a buddy. If they haven't got an outside connection like this to give them hope in life, whatever it might be -- spiritual or material or whatever -- then they lose hope. I lost my great wife, Alta Joy -- at almost 50 years, five kids, 24 grand kids, 14 great grand kids -- suddenly of a heart attack years ago. And I needed outside help. And for me, it was the Savior Jesus Christ who gave me assurance that we would see each other again. That's what it was for me. It wasn't the dried eggs and it wasn't the dried potatoes. It wasn't the coal, it wasn't the flour. They were just symbols, symbols that somebody -- British, French, and Americans -- weren't going to give up. They were going to stay with them. The Russians offered them food rations. You know, we will give you all you want. Just sign up with us. But only a few percent capitulated. They said, “We'll never give in.” They put principle before pleasure. The principle of freedom was more important than pleasure of enough to eat. And they could put that off. And that's what we need to learn today. We need hope in the world today so much as we did during the Berlin Airlift.

There is an example used today in the military. You know today, right now in the world, the Air Mobility Command that runs all the transport for the Air Force -- we launch an airplane somewhere on this earth every 90 seconds, there's an airplane on a mission of mercy or to

support troops that are in harm's way. And the Air Mobility Command at Scott Air Force Base, I work with them in Europe, today, in this terrible thing in Burma -- with a new name that I have forgotten -- has wiped out 100,000 people. We finally got -- today -- we got some of the first airplanes with American flag on the tail. Every 90 seconds -- an earthquake, a tsunami, in disasters -- we're first before any other nation with supplies from the air. Airlift is so crucial to the livelihood of people surviving today as it is. That flag on the tail of an American airplane is the same as that chocolate bar to that man in Berlin.

Interviewer: Well, Gail, I think you touched us all. It's amazing what a little farm boy from Garland can do to influence Germany.

(End of recording).