

AIR WAR COLLEGE

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THE BERLIN AIRLIFT AND THE USE  
OF AIR MOBILITY AS A FUNCTION OF US POLICY

by

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## **Biography**

LTC Robert D. Fenton, Jr. is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. LTC Fenton entered service in March 1979 and completed Coast Guard Basic Training, Cape May, NJ. LTC Fenton transferred to the New Jersey Army National Guard in 1985 and was assigned to the G1 Shop as a personnel accounting specialist. Thereafter he was commissioned as an officer via NJ OCS Class #32, Sea Girt, NJ. LTC Fenton was branched in the Military Intelligence Corps as a Tactical Intelligence Officer. LTC Fenton completed MIOBC and was assigned to the 50<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. Subsequently, LTC Fenton transferred to the Logistics Corps and held many assignments. These assignments included Commanding Officer of a Heavy Maintenance Company, and Headquarters Company during OIF III (FOB Speicher). LTC Fenton also was assigned as the S1, and Support Operations Officer for the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regional Support Command. LTC Fenton also served in various staff levels (G4) at State Headquarters, FT Dix, NJ. LTC Fenton also commanded the 117<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Command prior to attending AWC. LTC Fenton is a Supervisory Special Agent for the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. He has held this position for over 25 years. LTC Fenton is currently assigned as a student at the AWC, Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Alabama.

## **Abstract**

The conclusion of World War II resulted in the deaths of over 60 million people. In Germany, in general, and Berlin, specifically, the amount of human suffering was substantial. This human suffering placed the inhabitants of Berlin in the center of a conflict with the West (United States, Great Britain, and France) and the Soviet Union. Based on the agreements of the participants, Berlin was divided into four sectors and governed jointly. Berlin itself was located some 100 miles within the Soviet zone of occupation. The eventual crisis resulted in one of the first friction points in the Cold War. The Crisis itself provided a clear and unambiguous choice between the economic and political systems of the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. Central to the success of the Berlin Airlift was the United States Air Force. Their efforts not only help end the Berlin Crisis, but also provided a blueprint for future generations to efficiently and effectively conduct humanitarian relief operations. The Crisis also clearly showed the need for the United States to develop more fully policies and further empower new governmental structures, such as the National Security Council, to deal with emerging issues and threats.

## Thesis

Issued by the Soviet Military Authority: "...on June 23, (1948) ... Transport Division of the Soviet Military Authority is compelled to halt all passenger and freight traffic to and from Berlin tomorrow at 0600 because of technical difficulties."<sup>1</sup> The Berlin Airlift, also known as Operation Vittles, would soon begin. The foundation that led up to the crisis went as far back as the Potsdam Conference (July-August 1945).<sup>2</sup> With the conclusion of WW II, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) were becoming adversaries. This combative relationship would result in the Cold War and last over 44 years. The conflict would be one largely of ideological belief, Democracy vs. Communism. Often this conflict would manifest itself in near-armed or armed conflicts throughout the world.

On 6 and 9 August 1945 the US utilized atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. This action made the US the only atomic power in the world. While Japan actually agreed to surrender after the atomic bombings, the 315<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group attacked Aikita, Japan. This attack would limit the Soviets' capability to launch a landing on Japan proper. Therefore, the attack by the 315<sup>th</sup> was a policy statement to the Soviet Union as it was a military objective.<sup>3</sup> The unconditional surrender of Japan to the U.S. kept the Soviets from having any influence or presence in the post-war administration of Japan. Rather than vie for power in Japan, the Soviets turned to Europe.

Besides the above, a number of incidents led to the confrontation in Berlin. They were, but not limited to: the Annexation of the Carpathian Ruthenia by Ukraine, a Soviet Satellite (1946);<sup>4</sup> the Iran crisis (1946); the Turkish Crisis (1946); and the Greek Civil War (1946-49).<sup>5</sup> With the exception of the Carpathian Ruthenia, each of these issues brought the Soviet Union

into non-armed conflict with the United States. The Iranian crisis resulted when Soviet forces refused to leave Iran. Through the action of United Nations Resolution # 2 and a few others, the Soviet forces eventually withdrew their troops from Iranian territory.<sup>6</sup> The issues were settled in favor of Turkey and Greece. The Greek Crisis was an important event here as armed conflict determined the outcome.

Greece was the first European country to experience a civil war after World War II. In March 1946, hostilities commenced between the Greek Communist forces, supported by the USSR. The Greek army was supported by Great Britain and, later, the United States. The USSR strategy was to nominally, as much as possible, extend their border. They did this through supporting communist countries in Western Europe and the Balkans. "Stalin could not fail to regard the reemergence in Greece of a strongly anticommunist regime attached to Britain as a threat to Soviet interests in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean."<sup>7</sup> Only a year before these events, the USSR and the US were allies in defeating Germany.

Now, for Greece, the stage for this latest proxy conflict, the cost for three years of fighting was 150,000 Greek lives.<sup>8</sup> The decision to assist the Greek government during this crisis was a strategic policy shift by Truman Administration. Any misstep or the perception of a misstep could bring another world war, one with atomic implications. Moreover, there was no stated doctrine or experience in the United States for engaging in satellite war against a communist regime.

Both the Turkish Crisis and the Greek Civil War resulted in both countries becoming aligned with the West. Turkey and Greece would become members of NATO in 1952,<sup>9</sup> with Turkey allowing basing of U.S. forces. The stage was set for future conflicts in Europe. There would be no going back to the alliance with the Soviets. On 12 March 1947, President Truman,

in a joint speech to Congress, provided the framework to combat Communism. Known as the Truman Doctrine, it enumerated the policies of the United States government, and the Truman Administration in particular. Specifically, Truman stated: “it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”<sup>10</sup> While Greece and Turkey were the intended beneficiaries of this policy; the strategic message was aimed at the Soviets and their satellite allies.

Based on the Greek crisis, as well as mounting issues in Iran, Secretary of State Marshall gave a speech in June 1947 enumerating the policy of the Administration and the United States. Known as the “Marshall Plan,” he stated “The role of this country should consist of friendly aid in drafting of a European program ... this program should be a joint one, agreed to by a number, if not all, European nations.”<sup>11</sup> The strategic message was clear, the United States would remain in Europe, and fully support the Continent economically against the Soviets. This speech also confirmed that the United States would take on the role of a guarantor of European security. Although Marshall had only presented a vision, he soon provided a blueprint for action.

This policy soon became the foundation for the actions that formed the basis for the Berlin Airlift. The German surrender had led to the partition of Berlin and Germany. The city of more than 2 million inhabitants was divided into four zones of occupation, Soviet, American, British, and French. The city proper was actually in the Russian zone, a distance of one hundred miles from the Western zones, and completely surrounded by the Soviet zone. Since it was the former capital of Germany, all four allies participated in the administration of the city; each in their own zone. Berlin was the center of Nazism; many of the inhabitants were Nazis themselves, or greatly benefited from association with the Nazi regime.

Immediately after the war, Berliners paid a heavy toll for this support. The Soviets were harsh in their treatment of Berliners including killings of many civilians and mass rape of the female population.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. was not immune to actions that led to murder or rape, but this activity was treated as a crime by American authorities. Unlike the Soviets, during the war some 140 US service members were executed for murder/rape in the European Theater of Operations. There were two events that brought about the crisis in Berlin: 1) the establishment of an allied currency,<sup>13</sup> 2) the 1946 election of anti-communist candidates, especially in the Soviet zone of occupation.<sup>14</sup> Whichever currency dominated the economy, would determine the relative strength of the issuing country. It was clear that the Soviets had been devastated from the fighting against the Germans. They would not have the ability to compete with the US in providing a robust underlying economy. Couple that with the loss of elections, and the Soviets believed they were losing influence over Berlin and eventually Europe.

In late June 1948, the Western Powers announced that the Deutschemark (DM) would be introduced and utilized as legal tender in Germany.<sup>15</sup> The currency would be backstopped by the full faith and credit of the Marshall Plan, hence the United States. Both France and Britain agreed to this policy change, but the Soviets did not. Their policy was to keep Germany a weak state. The Soviets then stated they would issue their own currency to be utilized in all of the zones of occupation.<sup>16</sup> Upon issuing and distributing the DM, it quickly became the currency in the three allied sectors. Not surprisingly, this was a pretext to remove the Western powers from the capital.<sup>17</sup> At this time, there was a near riot and a crowd stormed Berlin's City Hall. Once order was restored, there was a vote on the acceptance of currency. The council determined that the Soviet currency would be utilized in the Soviet zone; the DM would be utilized in the



Western zones.<sup>18</sup> This was the culminating point of the crisis, and set the conditions for the Soviets to blockade Berlin.

Concurrently, in 1949, Berliners turned away from the Soviets and overwhelmingly elected the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>19</sup> The election was viewed as a repudiation of the Soviet occupation. Soon thereafter, the three allied zones would join together to begin the rebuilding of Berlin. Since Berlin was well within their overall zone of occupation, the Soviets were furious about the actions of the allies. The fate of Western Europe would be determined within the next year, 1949. Berlin, and its inhabitants, would be ground zero for this clash of ideology. Both sides were heading towards another crisis. The Soviets possessed sufficient men and material that a military conflict would leave little doubt as to the outcome. Much of western Berlin was in the American territory-in the struggle there the US and the USSR would faceoff directly for the first and only time. It would be the testing place that would determine whether the Soviets could conquer the rest of Europe or whether democracy would hold its ground; whether there would be a hot war or a cold peace.<sup>20</sup> The courage of Truman to continue cannot be overstated. Only two years earlier, the Germans had been our bitter enemy. A loss of Berlin would mean the loss of Germany. Truman's strategic message of support was critical. The message implied that if things "go hot," there is the potential for the use of atomic weapons against the cities of the Soviet Union. Most importantly, the defiance of the Soviets showed the world that the United States, even with our faults, stood for decency. Today the US is considered the world's only superpower. The true genesis of this title can be traced to the Berlin Airlift, not the bombings in Japan.

In hindsight, there should never have been a question on the outcome, but in 1948 success of the plan was in doubt. At that time, General Lucius Clay was the officer in charge of

troops in Europe. Clay was almost an accidental choice for the position of military governor. During WWII he was responsible for provisioning the entire Army war effort. His expertise was in logistics. However, his only professional desire was to command troops in combat. It is ironic, unable to provide any operational value during the war, he would be at the center of any potential operation with the Soviets: "Lucius Clay, a general who spent World War II on the home front in charge of defense procurement; frustrated, overlooked, haggling over spare parts instead of commanding troops in battle became the military commander of America's first battle of the Cold War"<sup>21</sup>

Clay's background was also an important factor. A career officer, he was a graduate of West Point,<sup>22</sup> part of the pre-war officer corps. Equally important, he was from Georgia.<sup>23</sup> His background included growing up in the post-Civil War South,<sup>24</sup> so he was perhaps a little more sympathetic to the hardships faced by the residents of Berlin. Unknown at the time, but as the crisis was developing; Clay was actually being readied for retirement. His successor, General Walter Bedell Smith had already prepared to assume command. The commander most associated with the Air Force effort was General William Tunner, an expert on air transportation and logistics. During WW II, Tunner was responsible for providing logistics by air for troops in the India – China Theater.<sup>25</sup>

Tunner became a key figure in the development of the Air Transport Command. By the time of the crisis, Tunner was a well-respected administrator. He was called upon to organize what was previously a less than efficient logistics operation. By the end of the crisis, Tunner brought such efficiency to the operation that Tempelhof Airfield would "handle fifty percent more traffic than New York's La Guardia Airport... which had been the busiest one in the world."<sup>26</sup> Both men, Tunner the air logistician and Clay the bureaucrat, faced the daunting task

of not only providing life, but rebuilding a devastated city. The near total devastation the population of Berlin suffered at the end of the war cannot be understated. For example, Berlin's children existed on "a thick porridge that provided 300 calories. The average child between ten and fifteen years of age had been permanently stunted from lack of food."<sup>27</sup> The inhabitants of the city, near starvation, could only hope to exist.

Against this backdrop, Clay was charged with bringing food and the American form of democracy to the German people. The governing of each sector required that each country would provide sufficient food to feed their inhabitants. Since Berlin was located inside the Soviet zone of occupation, food, coal, and water had to be trucked, brought by train, or barged into the city. The administration of the American zone of the city was headed by Colonel Frank Howley.<sup>28</sup>

The Soviets zone was headed by General Kotikov.<sup>29</sup> The joint governing body was known as the Kommandatura.<sup>30</sup> Over time it became clear that neither administrator would effectively work with each other. In fact, Howley stated "The Russians are the world's most colossal liars, swindlers, and cut-throats."<sup>31</sup> For his part Kotikov was equally bombastic about the Americans and the rest of the allies: The Kommandatura's leadership rotated among all four of the allied nations. But it is important to remember that the administration of the city was conducted by military governors. In order to bring events to a crisis, the Soviets waited until they were in charge.

During one of the meetings they actually placed many nonsensical and negligible items on the agenda. On 16 June 1948, Howley walked out of the meeting leaving his deputy. At this time, the Soviets stated that they could no longer work with such a hooligan, and walked out. As a result, the Soviets dissolved the Kommandatura.<sup>32</sup> This indicated that the two sides would

no longer effectively communicate with each other. Not quite as dramatic as recalling an ambassador, but another step closer to conflict.

Caloric intake was necessary as a gauge of how long it would take to rebuild the city. As rations were cut, it would take a longer period to rebuild. "By 1947 the average caloric ration was 1,040 per day."<sup>33</sup> The rations were increased for those engaged in a greater amount of work. Based on the low caloric intake, there was an increase in the rate of sickness, and eventually death. As a result, with lower productivity, it would take Germany years longer to rebuild their country. The German people were at a crossroads, constant hunger and the absence of food was foremost in their minds. Perhaps most unsettling, the ideological battle between the US and the Soviets could be decided by which country could provide basic life sustaining requirements. As stated by Clay, "there is no choice between becoming a Communist on 1,500 calories (per/day) and a believer in democracy on 1,000 calories."<sup>34</sup> Logistically it would be easier for the Soviets to provide food for the city. Their supply chain was shorter and closer than that of the US. Equally important, while it would be possible for adults to exist on reduced rations, the old and very young were at risk. It was only natural that parents would go over to the Soviet side as their children's lives hung in the balance.

In and around 1948, the Czechoslovakian government was overthrown in a coup d'état by Soviet functionaries.<sup>35</sup> This along with other civil unrest in Europe began to negatively erode the working spirit of cooperation between the US and Soviets in the administration of Berlin. Clay suspected that there was an increased probability of hostilities. He provided his opinion in a communique to the Pentagon. In sum, he stated, "I have felt a sudden change in Soviet attitude... which gives me the feeling that it (war) may come with dramatic suddenness."<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the Soviets were aware that President Truman was undergoing political difficulties. But in Clay's

view, the Soviets were making cooperation within Berlin particularly difficult. Clay's cable provided the early warning needed to prepare the Department of Defense to plan the transfer of atomic weapons from the Atomic Energy Commission (to the Air Force and eventually) to Europe.<sup>37</sup> The events now set in motion a greater probability of war in Europe. The pressing question was: What event would trigger this action?

The Czechoslovakian coup forced the allies to make two decisions: 1) The allies would join together and govern as a Tripartite council; and 2) The nations of France, the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg agreed to provide for a common defense, (Treaty of Brussels).<sup>38</sup> The Soviets responded and informed the Berlin inhabitants on 14 March that "unpreventable withdrawal of the Western Powers may someday occur very suddenly."<sup>39</sup> In their estimation, the US would be leaving Berlin under Russian control. As the Soviets withdrew from the Kommandatura, the city was on edge. In each instance, there was a gradual elevation of tension by the Soviets. While the actions were directed at the US, the message was overt and meant to inhibit the local population. The coup in Czechoslovakia was another key turning event in the crisis. The Soviets were consolidating their authority in the satellite countries. It was only logical that Berlin would be next.

On 1 April 1948, supply trains destined for the inhabitants were subject to permit and inspection. Guidance from the Pentagon limited Clay's actions.<sup>40</sup> Clay requested authorization to fire on Russian troops if the Soviets entered any US troop trains.<sup>41</sup> Soon, the situation would be elevated to a point of no return. The US possessed insufficient troops to deter any Soviet action. These incidents put Truman in the center of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and uncertain (VUCA) environment. The environment had shifted completely. Overnight, the situation went from post-war rebuilding to prewar preparations. There was volatility based on all the

circumstances surrounding the crisis. Any miscalculation on either side would cause all-out war. Uncertainty as to the outcome and shaping the problem are evident. The problem was complex; the Soviets were readying themselves for conflict with the West. The US and all their allies did not have the men, material, or ability to fight the threat with resorting to atomic weapons. Finally, as the circumstances changed throughout Eastern Europe, the landscape became more ambiguous. The only certainty was that the US was in a position of limited options.

The decisive event soon occurred, on 1 April 1948, one of the allied trains was stopped by the Soviets in their zone.<sup>42</sup> In sum, the Russian commander stated that they would inspect the travel documents of all 300 US soldiers.<sup>43</sup> The train was surrounded by armed Soviet forces, the reply from the 350 US personnel was, if you enter the train, you will be fired upon.<sup>44</sup> Eventually the train and soldiers returned back to the American zone of occupation.<sup>45</sup> The probability of errors was bound to increase, Clay had previously requested authorization to have US troops fire on Soviet forces if engaged. He had also been given the option to evacuate all dependents from the city, including his wife. Indeed, General Bradley transferred his own son-in-law, his daughter, and grandchildren out of Berlin back to the United States.<sup>46</sup> However, Clay correctly assumed that any movement of dependents would signal panic to the Berliners and only strengthen the Soviets. Clay, the garrison (10,000 US Personnel), and dependents would remain.

The Air Force had been operating a daily flight from Rhein-Main Air Base to Tempelhof Airport. At the conclusion of the confrontation with the Soviets, "Clay asked the commander of Tempelhof (Airfield) how many cargo planes are available in Europe?"<sup>47</sup> The reply was about 25 were operable.<sup>48</sup> Clay ordered that the planes would be utilized to feed 10,000 troops, employees, and family members stuck in Berlin.<sup>49</sup> This action by Clay is masterful. He has modified the risk from that of unarmed troops confronting the Soviets to that of unarmed cargo

planes confronting Soviet fighters. In one alteration of the plan, he sidestepped the Soviets' ability to initiate conflict and altered the dynamic. Moreover, their ability to bring about conflict was greatly diminished. In order for the Soviets to achieve their goal, they would be compelled to shoot down an unarmed transport/cargo plane. I suspect, although this is not clearly apparent, this action changes the entire crisis from confrontational to an indirect strategy. Clay accidentally provided the framework of a solution for this crisis. This course of action would pit the strength of the Air Force/Army logistics against the military manpower of the Soviets. Soon, the United States Armed Forces in general, and the Air Force in particular, would provide history a tangible example of hope and strength to the world. This action would show the absolute decency of America. Our ability to provide in essence "life" to our former enemy displayed the real strength of the United States. Moreover, this action showed the entire world the clear difference between Democracy and Communism. In many ways, when it comes to disasters, America has set the standard and continues to do so today. Twenty five planes could provide the bare essentials for the Garrison of Berlin and their dependents. The actual situation for the inhabitants was more dire: The Russians clamped a blockade on all rail, highway, and water traffic in and out of Berlin; "This time, it's final, a blockade has begun...32 million pounds of supplies [for the residents] were cut off."<sup>50</sup>

The situation was extremely dangerous. Clearly Stalin was attempting to force the Western allies to withdraw from the city. Except by air, the allied sectors were entirely cut off. Nothing could come in or out. Two and a half million people faced starvation. As it was, stocks of food and coal were already limited. Upon learning the situation, it was best summed up by Howley, "We're going to stay, I don't know the answer to the present problem—not yet—but

this much I do know: the American people will not stand by and allow the German people to starve.”<sup>51</sup>

The Communists offered increased rations for any Berliner willing to turn in their ration cards to them. Ten percent of the city did--but the rest stood firm. Perhaps after living under Nazism, they truly understood Soviet intentions and actions.

Attempting to provision almost 2.5 million inhabitants is not only ambitious, but monumental. Fortunately, it was summer. Equally important, General LeMay, was commanding all USAF personnel in Europe. When asked, he stated; “The Air Force can deliver anything.”<sup>52</sup> No one could imagine the eventual totality of effort required to complete this task. The capability to supply Berlin by air was 225 tons/daily prior to the blockade; ultimately 31 million pounds of supplies/day were delivered.<sup>53</sup>

All that remained was for the Truman Administration to authorize these actions. The answer was as overwhelming today as it was in 1948. Simply put, Truman provided the very essence of what we as Americans hold most dear. Mostly forgotten today, this action set off the events that would, in time, provide the blueprint for American resolve in confronting Communism. More importantly it showed the world, and perhaps ourselves, the determination, decency, and greatness of America. The military, Clay, and the world received clear guidance from President Truman: “We stay in Berlin – Period.”<sup>54</sup>

Although President Truman was resolute in his conviction, the state of the Air Force in Europe was ill prepared for the challenge. The requirements to feed the city greatly exceeded the capacity to deliver. The daily requirements were 1,428 total tons daily; 3 tons of yeast, 5 tons of dried whole milk, 10 tons of cheese, 19 tons of salt, 38 tons of skimmed milk, 64 tons of fats (oils), 85 tons of sugar, 109 tons of fish and meat, 125 tons of cereals, 144 tons of vegetables,



180 tons of potatoes, and 646 tons of flour and wheat.<sup>55</sup> Distribution of coal was equally important, but since the operation began in April, the initial requirement (12 million pounds/day)<sup>56</sup> was not as acute. General LeMay, Commander of US Air Forces in Europe, estimated that they could provide transport of half a million pounds of supplies, less than one percent of the pre-blockade requirement.<sup>57</sup>

The initial issue for the Air Force was simple; they did not have the required planes, pilots, logistics personnel, or a workable plan to begin the mission. By June, there were 70 operational C-47 cargo planes. Each C-47 had a capacity of 6,000 pounds.<sup>58</sup> In actual numbers, the C-47s could provide 420,000 pounds daily. What was required was the larger C-54 cargo plane with a capacity of 20,000 pounds per trip. The issue for the Department of Defense was more complicated; while Clay and the Air Force were beginning to accept supplies at Tempelhof, the Department of Defense was making plans to evacuate the city and fall back to the western border of Germany.

Concurrent with the relief effort in place, Truman made another monumental decision: “He approved the plan to station B-29 bombers in Germany and England. These planes—commonly known as “atomic bombers”—were the kind that had flown over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”<sup>59</sup> The implication would be clear to the Soviets; there was now a greater probability of an atomic threat. The numerical advantage of troops enjoyed by the Soviets would be deterred by atomic weapons. As of this time, the US was the only country that possessed working atomic weapons.

Interestingly, none of the US participants believed that the airlift would only be a temporary measure, weeks at most. LeMay placed General Joseph Smith in charge of the operation. The first problem was the airport itself: in the middle of the city and not large enough

to accommodate the increased air traffic. After initial operations, it was quickly determined that more assets were required to make a dent in the delivery requirements. “The alert flashed to Air Force bases around the world: Prepare to release all available C-54 Skymasters to the United States Air Force’s command in Europe”<sup>60</sup> This order was strategic as well as operational. President Truman would be accepting great risk; these aircraft were dedicated to support daily Air Force operations throughout the world. More importantly, these assets were required to support the war contingency plans to move troops, material, and weaponry in the event of major conflict. While Tempelhof would be suitable for increased traffic, it was still not suitable for all of the traffic estimated. German workers literally had to repair breaks in the runway after each flight landed.<sup>61</sup> Not surprisingly, the operation was problematic and inefficient.<sup>62</sup> There would have to be radical changes to make the system work. Worse yet, the system would fail as autumn turned to winter. The daily struggle for life would be even more difficult. Stalin and communism offered a chance for Berliners to at least survive.

Based on his record in previously successful resupply efforts in WW II, General William Tunner was selected to organize and increase the efficiencies of the operation. Once in theater, Tunner conducted an accurate assessment of the operation. Based on his findings, Tunner immediately began to make the changes required for increased efficiency. The first change was in operations, pilots would no longer leave their plane upon landing. Various ground crews, maintenance, operations, weather, and others would meet the plane and provide the necessary information to offload and prepare the plane for return.<sup>63</sup> Tunner was bringing a detached, focused mathematical logic to the airlift. Initial changes reduced the loitering time a plane spent on the ground from an hour and 15 minutes to 30.<sup>64</sup> The success of the airlift brought about additional problems. Most apparent, there were only two airports at which to land, off load

supplies, and take off again. The success of the operation required that an airplane take off or land every 90 seconds.<sup>65</sup> With this constraint, Tunner developed procedures for the safe navigational operation of flight. In some ways, this operation was the beginning of the modern air traffic control system. The flight plan and procedure for each sortie was the same, transport was from Rhein-Main into the Berlin corridor. Pilots were required to fly by instrument in both good and bad weather. There was a three minute interval between planes. The operation was supported by the fields of Operations, Logistics, Air Installations, Cargo, Maintenance, and Communications. Put all together, they provided the support necessary for success. In many ways, this operation was the first successful sustained relief effort in modern times. Still, with winter approaching, the lack of runways would hamper movement of goods. Another airport would be needed. Here again, Clay and Tunner were masterful problem solvers, they built another airfield in the French sector.<sup>66</sup> Original estimates indicated that the Tegel Field would not be ready until February 1949.<sup>67</sup>

In September, it appeared that the blockade would be lifted. The decision on currency would be finalized in the Soviets' favor. But the obstacles became clear, "The Soviets would not allow the allied powers to have any real say over the economic life of Berlin, and they would not commit themselves to completely lifting the blockade."<sup>68</sup> No agreement. The blockade would continue and the allies would continue to supply the city by air. In order to increase the tension, the Russians announced they would conduct extensive maneuvers in the air corridors.<sup>69</sup> "Only weeks earlier, the Pentagon had given the approval for Operation Halfmoon, the first war plan that envisioned all out atomic war with Russia"<sup>70</sup> Many of the planners envisioned war with the USSR beginning in Germany.

The circumstances in Berlin were grim. The inhabitants were caught between the desire to turn towards the West and the compelling of the Soviets to be ruled by them. At various times during the crisis, riots broke out at City Hall. Protesters had been shot by Soviet forces resulting in death. The Soviets also would fire their anti-aircraft guns in the air corridor.<sup>71</sup> This was an absolute battle of wills. With winter approaching, the airlift was barely keeping pace with the requirements. It would have been expedient for Truman to retreat to the Western border. In fact, he was facing a formidable opponent for the Presidency in his reelection bid.

The need to build Tegel Airfield was acute. Berliners answered the call by the thousands. "A call for workers went out ... 17,000 Berliners showed up. Most were ordinary women ... maimed veterans...worked three shifts around the clock. They received low wages and a warm meal of potato soup and black bread."<sup>72</sup> Here again the competency of Tunner is displayed. "In order to build an airfield capable of handling C-54s, the foundation for the runway was two feet of concrete. This amount was not available. The solution to the problem was found in the rubble of the city. The bricks, approximately ten million, were repurposed and used to make the runways."<sup>73</sup> The need to make the most efficient use of the C-54 was also critical. The C-54 could haul 19,500 lbs. of cargo.<sup>74</sup> Hence, each commodity transported needed to provide the most value based on weight. So, rather than transport finished bread products, flour and yeast would be flown in.<sup>75</sup> Tunner also faced critical shortages in spare engines, parts, and mechanics. Tunner accepted great risk and employed former Luftwaffe mechanics to service the C-54's.<sup>76</sup> This decision, while expedient, was expressly against US Government policy.<sup>77</sup> But the need to utilize trained aircraft mechanics trumped the policy.

One of the reasons for success was in the training of incoming pilots. Prior to deployment to Berlin, pilots were trained at Great Falls, Montana.<sup>78</sup> This afforded the crews the ability to

replicate the weather and operational conditions they would soon encounter. Additionally, pilots and crews from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Great Britain participated in the operation. Fluency in English alleviated any potential miscommunication. But fluency would not overcome the harshness of the German winter. November was the traditional beginning of winter, predictably the Airlift operations were reduced based on limited visibility. There were three other incidents that changed the course of events in Berlin. Truman, against most predictions won re-election, authorized the US Government to begin talks to form NATO and, critically, Tegel Airfield opened for business earlier than scheduled. There would be no going back, only negotiation with the Soviets or armed conflict.

The cost in men and material were high. Maintenance and USAF supply lines were put to the test of their abilities. Fortunately, airfields in Great Britain were available for maintenance. But the absolute costs were extensive. By the end of the operation, some 73 American and allied servicemen had been killed.<sup>79</sup> The USAFE Summary stated that the allies delivered 2,325,509 tons of supplies.<sup>80</sup> The estimated cost was \$200 million dollars (1.6 Billion in 2015 dollars).<sup>81</sup> Perhaps fittingly, on Easter weekend, the Airlift delivered a record 20 million pounds of freight. In a 24 hour period, there were 1,398 flights into Berlin. A plane was landing every 63 seconds.<sup>82</sup> Clay said it best, “You know, I think we licked them.”<sup>83</sup>

Operation Vittles served to show the world the competence and professionalism of the Air Force. They could, and did, as LeMay said, deliver anything, anywhere. Moreover, the USAF could deliver supplies on relatively short notice. Truman showed that he would accept risk and utilized the majority of lift assets to support this endeavor.

By the end of the Blockade, the world picture was clear. This incident was the first of many confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Blockade served to

bring the inhabitants of Berlin and the US closer together. It also served to strengthen the commitment of the US to Europe.

The period immediately after the blockade found Europe divided into two spheres of influence: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact countries formed a block of countries that were aligned with the USSR. Thus, Stalin and his successors would not allow any of these countries democracy or human rights. The intellectual fight was always over Germany and NATO would be the backdrop. During the time of the Cold War, Europe would bend but not break. Great Britain would later suffer a major spy scandal and France would elect Socialist governments, but the Center of Gravity would be Germany in general, and, specifically, Berlin. In March 1953, Stalin died; he was followed in power by Nikita Khrushchev. Again the next altercation would revolve around East Berlin. In June, 1953 the East German workers began to protest. Not surprisingly, protests began to take on political demands; "Rising in East Berlin and more than 250 other towns of the GDR, it began as a labor dispute in a country with free unions ... it escalated until some 300,000 – 400,000 were involved and the communist government could no longer count on its own police to prevent it from being toppled."<sup>84</sup> It is ironic, the workers of a communist state were fomenting the seeds of a revolution. This action would not go unnoticed by the USSR. The Soviets would be forced to take action and, "On June 17, however, Soviet troops had already occupied railway stations and post offices in larger towns, harbors, and uranium mines. A state of emergency was declared and huge crowds gathered. That was until Soviet tanks and infantry appeared (and fired weapons in the air). This resulted in twenty one dead."<sup>85</sup> Here, it was the willingness of the East German workers to keep alive the idea of freedom. The battle of ideology again would take hold. The result of the uprising included "the imprisonment of over 1,000 East Germans and the sentencing of seven to death."<sup>86</sup>

While the government would continue to maintain authority, it was clear, without Soviet support, they would not remain in power. Here again we can see the clear contrast between the West and the Soviet system. Again, much of the unrest centered on Berlin proper. The Cold War would take place in countries all over the globe, but Berlin was the intellectual battleground for the idea of liberty. Predictably, the United States could not afford another conflict. Hence, all actions would have to be either through Information Operations (Radio Free Europe), or covert. While these methods may be time consuming, the seeds of freedom would take hold.

By 1953 the adversaries were well established. The Soviets proposed that both East and West Germany would be neutral in their disposition. The West naturally disagreed. Soviet personnel stationed in Berlin reacted to the protests, strikes, and rioting. Pravda Correspondent P. Naumov provided the following account of the situation. In sum, “he observed construction workers on strike, as well as some 2,000 people in front of the GDR ministries.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, “An elderly man in construction worker attire raised himself up onto a table. He said that he had been sent to a concentration camp by Hitler as a fighter for the rights of workers, and he saw it as his duty to defend these rights once again.”<sup>88</sup> These observations indicate that the German people would reject communism. Less than 10 years earlier, the residents of Berlin were shown the stark differences between the West and the Soviet system. Berlin was again the battleground for ideas.

Almost concurrently with the protests was the establishment of the Paris protocols of 1954. Here there was an easing of tensions between the USSR and the West. This resulted in the inclusion of West Germany under the NATO umbrella: “The protocols allowed the Federal Republic (West Germany) to rearm with conventional weapons within the framework of the Western European Union and NATO.”<sup>89</sup> On the surface it appeared that West Germany may be a threat, it was the proclamation by Bonn that they “renounced the use of force to achieve any

eastern objectives and, as a practical matter depend on NATO to defend West German territory.”<sup>90</sup> While the Soviets policy was to keep two separate countries, the United States pushed for reunification as soon as possible. At that time, Secretary of State Dulles stated at the 1955 [Geneva] conference “that the great powers had a responsibility for the reunification of Germany.”<sup>91</sup>

The German question did not occur in a vacuum. By this time the revolution in China had taken place, there was a coup d'état in Iraq, and soon Great Britain and France would seize the Suez Canal. All of these factors would continue to increase the level of tension between the US and the USSR. This tension would continue to be played out in Berlin.

The actual crisis of 1958 would begin on November 27.<sup>92</sup> Here the Soviets gave a deadline requiring the negotiations of Berlin. In a speech Khrushchev stated that “West Germany aided by the allies had chosen the path of militarism, fascist generals and admirals were reconstructing the Wehrmacht-and West German industry is redeveloping on a massive scale in the service of German militarism.”<sup>93</sup> The Soviets assumed, and correctly, that the West would impede their efforts in Berlin. The Soviets forcefully requested that the Western powers leave the city: “That the Western presence in West Berlin was an anachronism, sustained by incredible feelings of hatred for communism.”<sup>94</sup> This sentiment only further brought the West and Soviets into conflict, if not in Berlin, then in other parts of the globe.

The underling enmity between the powers would be crystalized when a US U-2 spy plane was shot down over Soviet airspace. This led to the capture of Captain Francis Gary Powers. Eventually, Powers was tried, convicted, and incarcerated in the USSR. Increasing tensions provided Khrushchev the ability to order the East Germans to “impose a selective blockade of West German traffic on the access routes beginning August 30.”<sup>95</sup>



The actual order was issued by the German Democratic Republic on 15 August 1961.<sup>96</sup> The order was issued in conjunction with the Warsaw Pact's declaration, "In the face of the aggressive aspirations of the German Federal Republic... with the proposal to establish an order and the borders of West Berlin which will securely block the way... so that reliable safeguards and effective control can be established around the whole territory of West Berlin, including its border with democratic Berlin"<sup>97</sup> effectively closing all transit within the city.

The people of East Berlin voted by leaving their sector by the thousands. In the end, they chose the liberty and freedom of the West. Soon the "Berlin Wall" would be erected and East and West Germany would be severed. It would take almost 30 more years for the Soviet system to implode. This resulted in the Berlin Wall being dismantled.

In the end, it was Truman that provided the midwestern common sense and exhibited the decency of America. He was correct. He set in motion the policies and strength of the allies for Berliners to hold on against all odds. And it all began as an ad hoc operation to feed a starving city. Clay, in particular, stood alone and displayed fortitude in the face of the Soviet Army. Tunner's technical ability and leadership provide us lessons of defeating an adversary through soft power. A lesson that is as applicable today as it was then. The names of Truman, Tunner, and Clay are not well known today. But these men are as much the founding fathers of Berlin and modern day Germany as the founding fathers of America were. Their moral, emotional, and physical courage provided the clear delineation between the systems. Their efforts, more than anything, prove the thesis that the Berlin Airlift did more to thwart the communist system than any number of military battles, campaigns, or wars. The lessons of this enterprise are applicable today. The ability of the US military to solve humanitarian crisis' are peerless. It is the logistical

support and mission control that provide any administration the ability to always show the decency and (soft) power of the United States.

## **Recommendations**

There are three recommendations that should be considered based on this PSP.

1. The core competencies of all services should be adjusted to include global disaster relief operations.
2. A Senior Service College should be established that focuses on both domestic and international logistics operations in support of disaster relief operations.
3. Overall United States foreign policy should include pre-planning for humanitarian relief operations.

## **Conclusion**

Recent events in Europe and the Middle East provide a backdrop for humanitarian crises suffered due to war. Soon Europe will have over one million refugees on their continent. The logistical ability of the United States military can provide the National Command Authority flexibility to provide solutions nearest the crisis. The DOD should be the primary agent tasked with this function. It was clear in 1949 that the Air Force provided this capability. The willingness to assist a defeated enemy's population eventually brought them firmly in the West's sphere of influence. The efficient distribution of aid can only be achieved if the services are willing to enhance this competency and fund its discipline.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour* (New York: Putnam, 2008), 241.
- <sup>2</sup> David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992), 406, 451.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Thornton, WW II *President Truman and the Pacific War*, CSPAN. 8/16/2015
- <sup>4</sup> Dr. Howard Hensel., IP 6416, Jones Auditorium, Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, AL. 9/21/15.
- <sup>5</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, 580.
- <sup>6</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution #2, "The Iranian Question," 30 January 1946.
- <sup>7</sup> John O. Latrides and Linda Wrigley, *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 26-27.
- <sup>8</sup> Andre Gerolymatos, *Red Acropolis, Black Terror: The Greek Civil War and the Origins of Soviet-American Rivalry, 1943-1949* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 229.
- <sup>9</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Greece and Turkey Join NATO, 18 February 1952.
- <sup>10</sup> President Truman's Message to Congress, March 12, 1947; Document 171; 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Records of the United States House of Representatives; Record Group 233, National Archives.
- <sup>11</sup> Secretary George C. Marshall, "The Marshall Plan" (address, Receiving Honorary Degree, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, June 4, 1947).
- <sup>12</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 97-98.
- <sup>13</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 239.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.
- <sup>15</sup> Dr. Rodney C. Loehr, *Currency Reform after Four Years*, (High Commission for the Occupation of Germany (HICOG) October, 1952) 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 238.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-240.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>22</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Lucius D. Clay*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1990), 25.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>25</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 329.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-163.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-213.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 213-214.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 213-214.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 213-214.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 220.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 214.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 214.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 214.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 241.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 242.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 252.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 252.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 259.
- <sup>55</sup> Harvey Conover, *Special Study of Operation "Vittles"* (Aviation Operations, April, 1949, Vol. 11, No. 5, NY, NY) 16.
- <sup>56</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 252.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 252.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 253.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 259.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 264.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 278.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 281.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 340.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 342.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 347.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., 359.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 359.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 363.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 365.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 376.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 391.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 392.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., 393.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 421.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 421.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., 421.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., 421.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 424.
- <sup>79</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent 1945 to the Present* (2004; repr., New York: Anchor Publishing, 2004), 96.
- <sup>80</sup> Roger D. Miller, PhD, *Global Supply and Maintenance for the Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949 , Old Lessons, New Thoughts, Readiness in Logistics, History, and Technology*, 2006, (Montgomery, AL: Air Force Logistics Management Agency, January 2006) 263.
- <sup>81</sup> Representative Bilirakis (FL). "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Berlin Airlift." V144, Pt 10. June 25, 1998 – July 14, 1998 P14009. Available from CONGRESS.GOV; Accessed: 1/7/2016.
- <sup>82</sup> Andre Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*, 524.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 524.
- <sup>84</sup> Peter Merkl, *German Unification in the European Context*. (University Park, Penn: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 55.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 55.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 55.
- <sup>87</sup> Christian Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany: 1953* (New York: Central European University Press, 2001) 202.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 202.
- <sup>89</sup> Jack M. Schick, *The Berlin Crisis: 1958-1962* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, PA, 1971) 3.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 163.



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