

The berlin airlift: the responsibility of saving millions

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Imagine a city filled with two million men, women, and children. Now, in that city, the roads are strewn the rubble, once great buildings lay helpless on their sides, and the basic necessities such as electricity are hard to come by. This may sound like a harsh life, but for the many inhabitants of Berlin, this was everyday life to them. But, to make matters worse, what if all ground and water passages in and out of Berlin were blocked by military convoys? What if you had no place to receive food, beverages, or coal? What would you do then? How could you keep your family alive in these desperate times? Who would take on this great responsibility? Now, one must first start at the beginning of a story in order to uncover it in its entirety. So, we go to the beginning of the end of another clash between several world powers. This is the event known as World War II, in which the Axis Powers engaged the Allied Powers in global warfare. However, after World War II ended, and the victors emerged, the country of Germany and its capital city Berlin was split among the Allied powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain.

By 1948, each country had its own plan to rebuild Germany's infrastructure and so naturally, the sides clashed. The US, France, and Great Britain all disagreed with the Soviet Union's view on how to reconstruct the ruins of Germany. As tensions rose, the Soviets became increasingly hostile and tried to bar the Americans, British, and French from entering Berlin. Soon, on June 24, 1948, Stalin ordered the military to halt all foreign supply transports and to turn around any vehicles entering Berlin. In a few days, the Soviet Union had essentially kicked out the other countries and did not allow any supplies or resources to enter without permission. In spite of this, there were still <https://assignbuster.com/the-berlin-airlift-the-responsibility-of-saving-millions/>

around two thousand Occupation Forces and over two million innocent citizens that needed the supply transports in order to make it to the next day.

It was a very grave situation. An Impossible Task As one can imagine, this did not sit well the Allies (US, Britain, and France). Every attempt at a peaceful negotiation failed, and ground invasions were starting to be drawn. It seemed that the Allies were ready to move on to another colossal war, and that World War III was on the brink of existence. Preparations were made, the troops were mobilized, and the governments readied themselves to declare war on the Soviet Union. Then, out of the blue, British Commander Sir Brian Robertson offered an alternative: supply the city by air.

While this could leave out the possibility of war, it was a daunting task. Back then, at that particular time, all the Allies had were some five year old Douglas C-47 Skytrains, which could hold at maximum 3.5 tons each. Additionally, the US also had a few C-54 Skymasters, which could three times as much as a C-47, around 10 tons each. So, the old plans were discarded and the Allies quickly patched together a new plan which would fully utilize the three 20-mile wide air corridors that could provide direct access to the city.

After a few calculations, it was determined that Berlin's daily food ration would be 646 tons of flour and wheat; 125 tons of cereal; 64 tons of fat; 109 tons of meat and fish; 180 tons of dehydrated potatoes; 180 tons of sugar; 11 tons of coffee; 19 tons of powdered milk; 5 tons of whole milk for children; 3 tons of fresh yeast for baking; 144 tons of dehydrated vegetables; 38 tons

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of salt; and 10 tons of cheese. In essence, 1, 534 tons were needed daily just to keep the over 2 million inhabitants alive. Yet that amount did not even include other necessities, like coal and fuel. In fact, the largest quantity of anything required was coal. It wasn't needed to heat homes as much as it was necessary for industry. In addition, there was limited electricity, because the city's power plant was located in the Soviet sector, so that was cut off, too.

It was determined that in total supplies, 3, 475 tons would be needed daily. It was previously established that a C-47 can haul 3. 5 tons. In order to supply the people of Berlin, the C-47's and their crew would have to make 1000 flights in a 24 hour span. This seemed beyond the impossible.

However, the Allies knew that abandoning Berlin was out of the question. Berlin was far too important to leave in the hands of the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the US could only supply 300 tons a day while the British could only provide 750 tons. This meant that there would be a 2, 425 ton deficit at any given moment of the day. So, on June 27th, 1948, an additional 52 C-54 Skymasters were requested since they had a much larger carrying capacity.

As soon as word reached President Truman, he knew that he had to show the Soviets that the Western Powers would not take this rash act lightly. So, US B-29 Superfortresses were sent to British Airfields and the C-54 Skymasters were promptly delivered to Major General William H. Tunner, who would be overseeing the entire operation. As a former veteran of World War II, he was already a professional in transportation. As a matter of fact, he was known as

“ The transportation expert to end all transportation experts.” It seemed that the Berliners would stand a fighting chance after all.

However, there was still a long way to go in order for this mission to be a success. Trials and Tribulations Now, there were plenty of pitfalls along the path to success. First, in order to keep the people of Berlin healthy enough to function, the plans indicated that 4500 tons of resources would be need each day. However, General Tunner and General Clay were up to the task. Widely known for their operational efficiency, the generals promoted friendly competition among the crew to see how many tons of supplies they could get in the shortest amount of time.

As a matter of fact, on Easter Sunday (April 16 and April 17) in 1949, General Tunner planned to deliver a 24 hour blitz that aimed at delivering 10 tons a minute. As he recalled later, “ It would be an Easter present for the people of Berlin (PBS).” So, when the time came, the Allied fleet of around 400 aircraft did not disappoint. There were nearly 4000 take-offs and landings and they all occurred in 36 second intervals, culminating in almost 13, 000 tons delivered. Next, there was the problem of manpower.

Where were the Allies going to get enough people who could transport the supplies? As it turned out, the German people were only too eager to step forward. Soon, there was no shortage of German volunteers as they became determined to help the cause that was keeping them alive. Additionally, there was a huge shortage of skilled mechanics, people that could perform maintenance checks, repair engines, and clean airplanes. As a result, General Tunner went to Berlin once again to ask for help. Not surprisingly,

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thousands of citizens volunteered, most of them former Luftwaffe mechanics. In a matter of days, the Berlin Airlift had officially gone underway.

There was enough manpower to transport twice the supplies provided. Soon, any aircraft that wasn't being fixed, inspected, or overhauled was flying the corridors. It looked like Operation Vittles was here to stay. Life in Berlin
Meanwhile, in the city of Berlin, the people were struggling. In the beginning, there were plenty of supplies that were distributed throughout the city.

However, as the days grew longer and longer, the stockpiles slowly dwindled down. Starvation was a real threat for these citizens, and life was bleak at best. Additionally, when the winter of 1948-49 hit, there was little fuel to run the remaining industry, let alone heat the homes. Berliners soon found themselves chopping down all of the trees in the city for fuel, and learning what grasses could be eaten for food. In addition, people rummaged through garbage cans for food, but soon found that there was very little of that to go around. It was a dire circumstance, but still they knew that their suffering in this manner would be better than succumbing to Soviet control.

They had seen the horrible treatment the Soviet soldiers had given them when they arrived. Not only did the soldiers steal everyone's valuables, but they systematically stripped every Berlin industry of all its necessary and vital equipment and promptly shipped the precious resources back to Moscow. On top of that, German wives and daughters were being raped and abused all of the time by the soldiers who had no fear of punishment.

German scientists and engineers were being forcibly sent to Moscow in order to reveal all of the German technological secrets acquired during the war. To

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the people, starvation was far better than that treatment. When the Allies finally decided that an airlift would be attempted, Berlin's Lord Mayor Ernst Reuter held a public rally in support of the effort.

Germans would suffer and sacrifice to make it work. The German resolve was strong, even in such a desperate situation. They would never give in to the harsh rule of the Soviets. The people believed it was their right to stand up for their freedoms. Defenders of Our Freedom The two masterminds behind the whole operation were General Lucius Clay and General William Tunner. General Clay was always known as an opinionated and decisive leader, who was often called " the great uncompromiser" by his subordinates.

Additionally, he was already in charge of the American of sector of Germany and was no stranger to his Soviet counterparts. Therefore, he seemed to be the perfect man for the job. However, there was a slight blip. General Clay had no prior experience whatsoever with air transportation and if needed, aerial warfare. So, General Tunner soon arrived. Also a proud graduate of West Point, Tunner was previously overseeing the entire Allied air transport operation.

Additionally, he was the architect of World War II's only successful large-scale airlift, which managed to transfer tens of thousands of tons of provisions over the Himalayan " Hump" from India to China. Once these two admirable men joined forces, they set out on an intimidating quest to turn this makeshift effort into a regimented machine. But, as an old maxim states, with great power comes great responsibility. And in this event, these two men would be responsible for keeping over two million other beings alive

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and healthy in a war-stricken city. Rights and Responsibilities In order to closely analyze the origin of the Allied involvement in Berlin, one must first conclude why these nations would do such a thing. First of all, there were two million people who felt that they deserved the right to receive the staples of life: adequate food and shelter.

They felt that their rights were being violated when the Soviets expressed a harsh authoritarian rule upon them. And in that context, they had every right to stand up for the denial of their rights. After all, their lives hung in the balance. However, while that act was completely justified, was the Allies and more importantly the American's act that culminated in the Berlin Airlift a right? America has always portrayed itself as a global force for good, a country that will promote democracy in all corners of the globe, whenever a dispute arises. History will tell you that fact alone.

In spite of this, many critics have argued that America does not always embody these values. They argue that America supports Israel, which in turn oppresses Palestine. Additionally, the United States sends American missiles and aircraft to Israel, which one could say does not promote peace and democracy, but violence and possibly war. Also, America openly trades and has a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, which not only has vast oil reserves but also an absolute monarchy, which does not promote open elections, another essential for Americans. So, this ultimately asks the questions, was enacting the Berlin Airlift a right? This issue has hardly been raised in a historical context, mainly because of the lives that it saved. And in this case, history proves it right.

In the long run, America was fully justified to step in and try to help Berlin. It was a right that was presented to the Allies as soon as Stalin closed Berlin's borders. So, with rights come responsibilities. In this case, the Allies were responsible to launch an attempt to keep the city of Berlin out of Soviet and communist hands. Now, you might be wondering what all this has to do with its impact on society. But in actuality, the answer is sitting right in front of you, looking at you straight in the face.

Because the Berlin Airlift has been established as a right and responsibility by the Allies, this proves that deep down, no one can resist a call for help, no matter how extreme the situation. This proves that at the end of the day, everyone has the right and responsibility to assist those in distress. This proves that we all have been presented with this right and responsibility and that even in desperate times, we all have the resolve to offer a hand to anybody, friend or foe. This is why the Berlin Airlift has such an important impact on human society and the way we are shaped now. This is why this event was such a momentous right and responsibility that managed to go down in the annals of the past. After all, history has a way of repeating itself.