BRITISH BERLIN AIRLIFT ASSOCIATION
THE BERLIN AIRLIFT 1948/49
A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON THE BERLIN AIRLIFT AND THE ASSOCIATION
THE BRITISH BERLIN AIRLIFT ASSOCIATION
Website: www.bbbaa-airlift.org.uk

After three ex Airlift veterans attended the closure ceremony of RAF Gatow in May 1994, the decision to form a British Berlin Airlift Association (An American equivalent has existed for some years) was taken in early September 1994 when ten veterans (four Dakota and six York) of the Berlin Airlift together with ten Americans, had the honour to be invited by the Berlin Senate to attend the ceremonies on 6-8th September, marking the withdrawal of the Western Allies from Berlin.

At present the membership stands at about 450 and the Association issues two newsletters a year. In addition a Weekend Reunion and Annual General Meeting is held in the Spring with a lunch in London in the Autumn.

The requirement for membership is simply to have been engaged either directly or indirectly on the Berlin Airlift. The annual membership is £10.00.

THE COMMITTEE

President - Air Marshal Sir John Curtiss, KCB KBE FRAeS CBIM
Ex Navigator No.59 Squadron (Yorks)

Vice-President - Air Vice Marshal G.C. Lamb, CB CBE AFC FBIM
Ex Pilot No 47 Squadron (Hastings)

Chairman - Squadron Leader Frank Stillwell
Ex Navigator No.30 Squadron (Dakotas)

Deputy Chairman - Printing and Publishing - Geoff W. Smith
Ex Aircraft Electrician, RAF Gatow

Treasurer - Gordon Westwell
Ex Air Frame Mechanic, RAF Wunstorf

Supplies Officer - Squadron Leader Peter Izard RAFVR
Ex AQM No.51 Squadron (Yorks) RAF Wunstorf

NW. Representative - Jack Steele
Ex Engine Fitter, RAF Wunstorf

Events Officer
William Campbell
Loading Supervisor
Black Watch Regiment, RAF Wunstorf
BERLIN AIRLIFT - THE BRITISH CONTRIBUTION
The Berlin Airlift began on 28th June 1948. It was started to defeat the blockade which had been imposed by the Russians on 24th June 1948 upon the three Western sectors of the city, when the road, rail and inland waterway accesses to the Western Zones were closed. However, the right of the Western Allies to reach Berlin by air was by three air corridors each 20 miles wide, extending from ground level to 10,000 feet. There was no way, short of war, of preventing flights along these corridors.
In the initial planning it was considered impossible to supply 2.2 million inhabitants of Berlin, the assumption being that the city had enough supplies to last for 3-4 weeks. Therefore Britain and America made plans for supplying their garrisons and dependants by air, although these plans for short-term. The British operation, code-named 'Knicker' started on the 28th June 1948.
Operation Knicker required the use of two Dakota Squadrons, Nos 53 and 77, based at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. They flew to Wunstorf on 27th June. At 0600 hours on the 28th, the first Dakota took off and flew to Gatow, the British airfield in West Berlin. Thirteen Dakotas carried 44 tons of food to the Berlin Garrison during the following 24 hours.
It soon became obvious that the Airlift was going to last much longer than had previously been anticipated and a re-assessment of the British and American resources showed that it was possible to supply the inhabitants of West Berlin as well as the garrisons. Operation Carter-Paterson was authorised on the 30th June and to put this plan into effect. The operation was re-named Plainfare on the 19th July.
The six remaining Dakota squadrons quickly followed the earlier two squadrons to Wunstorf, but it was realised that the Dakotas would not have the capacity meet the commitment. Accordingly the York aircraft were withdrawn from their world-wide operations and were flown to Wunstorf to take over the major part of the RAF effort. They started operating on the Airlift on the 3rd July. In all, eight York squadrons were involved.
On the 5th July Sunderland flying boats started operating from Finkenwerder on the Elbe, nr Hamburg, flying to the Havel Lake in Berlin. Two squadrons were involved, together with the Operational Conversion Unit. Plus Aquila Airways, who used Hythe flying boats.
When it became clear that sufficient military aircraft could not provide the necessary lifting capacity civilian aircraft were chartered to bridge the gap. With the need to carry liquid fuel, three Lancastrian tankers were initially chartered from Flight Refuelling Ltd and the first of these flew from Bückeburg to Gatow on the 27th July. The first formal day of the Civil Airlift was the 4th August with charter aircraft operating from Wunstorf and Fassberg. In all 26 charter companies were involved using many different types of aircraft. In particular seven of the companies operated tanker aircraft which carried all the liquid fuel required in Berlin, a total of 92,282 short tons.
On the 29th July, the RAF Dakotas and civil twin-engined aircraft transferred from Wunstorf to Fassberg and on the 21st August the RAF Dakotas moved again, this time to Lübeck. These transfers were undertaken over a three-week period whilst maintaining the deliveries to Gatow.
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USAF C54 squadrons, transferred from overseas, moved into Fassberg (British Zone) and started operating on the 21st August. From mid-December USAF squadrons started operating from Celle (British Zone).

During September and October 12 RAAF, 10 SAAF, and 3 RNZAF aircrews arrived at Lübeck to support the Dakota operations.

On the 12th May 1949 the blockade was lifted at 0001 hours, but the Airlift continued unabated.

During the first two weeks of August 1949, the run-down of the flying began with the civil aircraft being withdrawn. Later in the month all night flying ceased. At the end of August the Yorks stopped operating and USAF aircraft from Fassberg also stopped. Overall USAF operations ending on the 30th September. The Dakotas stopped on the 23rd September, with the Hastings ceasing on the 6th October.

Thus ended the greatest Airlift the World had ever known. The inhabitants of West Berlin were kept supplied with a combined American/British total of two million two hundred thousand short tons.

Note! In this brief summary of the Airlift it has not been possible to give details of the large American effort under Operation Vittles. The USAF operated from Frankfurt and Wiesbaden in the America Zone, using initially C47’s which were replaced by over 200 C 54’s (Skymasters) when they arrived from American and overseas bases. They flew mainly into Tempelhof in Berlin, but also used Gatow and Tegel.

**EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE BLOCKADE**

3rd April - Rail routes to Berlin-Hamburg and Berlin-Bavaria are closed leaving only the Berlin-Helmstedt line open. The British military freight-train service between the West and Berlin is barred by Soviet authorities unless each individual item of cargo has Russian clearance.

5th April - A BEA airliner is buzzed on the outskirts of Berlin by a Soviet Yak fighter. Both planes crash, killing the Russian pilot, twelve Britons and two Americans.

25th April - New Soviet rules for the documentation of Rail-freight.

4th to 6th June - Twenty six rail wagons of Berlin mail for the West are seized by Russian officials.

10th June - Five coal trains for West Berlin stopped by Soviet officials because their new-type documents were “not in order.”

12th June - All freight trains from the West suspended until settlement of a dispute concerning the labelling of cars.

15th June - All trains from the West forbidden to use termini in West Berlin. Road bridge over the River Elbe closed for “repairs”. The only substitute is a barge ferry ten miles away, propelled with a pole.

18th June - Russians cancel all internal motor-coach licences and finally suspend passenger trains, road and mail services to and from the West.

23rd June - Further “technical difficulties” brought all rail traffic between Berlin and the West to an end. Traffic on inland waterways experienced similar treatment.

24th June - All surface communications with Berlin stopped. Berlin had to be supplied by air or abandoned to the Russians.
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AND COMMONWEALTH INVOLVEMENT

The Squadrons

**Dakotas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>46</th>
<th>53</th>
<th>62</th>
<th>77</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- 238/10 240 OCU 114 (MEDME Det)
- RAAF (10 crews) SAAF (10 crewsr) RNZAF (3 crews)

**Yorks**

| 40 | 49 | 51 | 50 | 99 | 206 | 241 OCU | 242 | 511 |

**Hastings**

| 47 | 295 | 53 (From 1st Aug 49) |

**Sunderlands**

| 201 | 230 | 235 OCU |

The Civil Airlift

- Aquila
- Air Contractors
- Airflight Ltd
- Airwork
- Air Transport CI
- BAAS
- BEA
- BNAS
- BSAA
- BOAC
- Bond Air Services
- Ciro's Aviation
- Eagle Aviation
- Flight Refuelling
- Hornton Airways
- Kearsley Airways
- Lancashire Aircraft Corporation
- Skyflight
- Scottish Airlines
- Silver City
- Sivewright Airways
- Skyways Ltd
- Transworld Ltd
- Trent Valley Aviation
- World Air Freight
- Westminster Airways
- Civil Airlift Division

Royal Air Force Stations and Units

- HQ Combined Airlift Task Force (CALTTF)
- HQ No.46 Group
- Terminal Approach Control Berlin
- Wunstorf
- Lubeck
- Schleswigland
- Fassberg
- Celle
- Gatow
- Buckeburg

Army Units

- Royal Army Service Corps (RASO/FASO)
- Air Formation Signals
DATES and STATISTICS

Significant Dates

24th June 1948 - All surface communication with Berlin stopped.

28th June 1948 - Operation Knicker ordered. This was the plan for the supply of the British troops in Berlin by air. In practice a number of Dakota aircraft carried out sorties in advance of this date.

30th June 1948 - Operation re-named “Carter Paterson” and extended to include the supply of the whole of the Western Sector by air. The corresponding American operation was named “Vittles”.

19th July 1948 - Operation re-named “Plainfare”.

4th August 1948 - First official day of the Civil Airlift.

12th May 1949 - The Berlin Blockade was lifted at 00.01 hours.

16th August 1949 - End of the Civil Airlift.

6th October 1949 - End of the Airlift.

Notable Statistics
Between the 25th of June 1948 and the 1st of August 1949, two million two hundred thousand occupants of West Berlin were supplied 2,223,000 short tons of supplies in 266,600 flights.

Mileposts
18th February 1949 - First million short tons delivered.

2nd July 1949 - Second million short tons delivered.

5th August 1949 - Two and a quarter million tons delivered to Berlin.

Total Tonnage by Commodity:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>British</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>1,421,730</td>
<td>164,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>296,303</td>
<td>241,713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>65,540</td>
<td>25,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet Fuel</td>
<td></td>
<td>92,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,783,573</strong></td>
<td><strong>542,236</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Combined Tonnage = 2,325,809 short tons.**
AIRCRAFT THAT OPERATED ON THE AIRLIFT
Royal Air Force and Commonwealth Air Forces.

Douglas Dakota            Avro York            Handley Page Hastings
Short Sunderland

Civil Aircraft.

Douglas Dakota (19)          Avro Lancastrian (17)              Consolidated Liberator (3)
Handley Page Halifax/Halton (41)       Bristol Freighter/Wayfarer (6)
Avro Lincoln (1)                Short Hythe (3)                   Avro Tudor (9)
Avro York (3)                   Vickers Viking (2)

United States Air Force.

Douglas C47 Skytrain               Douglas C54 Skymaster               Douglas C74 Globemaster
Boeing C97 Stratofreighter         Fairchild C82 Packet

FATAL AIRLIFT CRASHES (British)

19th September 1948    York MW288           Wunstorf 5 Crew killed
17th November 1948      Dakota KP223         Russian Zone 3 killed, 1 died later of injuries
22nd November 1948     Lancastrian G-AHJW Thruuxton 7 killed
24th January 1949      Dakota KN491          Russian Zone 1 Crew killed plus 7 German Passengers
15th March 1949        York G-AHFI           Gatow 3 killed
21st March 1949        Halton G-AJZZ         Schleswigland 3 killed
22nd March 1949        Dakota KJ970          Russian Zone 2 killed 1 died later of injuries
30th April 1949        Halton G-AKAC          Russian Zone 4 Killed Crashed 20 miles from Tegel
16th July 1949         Hastings TG611         Tegel 5 Crew killed
THE ARLIFT MEMORIAL

The memorial is situated in the Platz der Luftbrucke, Tempelhof, Berlin and commemorates the 78 American, British and German persons who were killed on the Airlift.

The names are inscribed on the circular base of the memorial.
The BBAA Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum
(Dedicated 12th May 2001)

THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

The National Memorial Arboretum came from a concern by the late Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC OM DSO DFC who felt that something positive should be done if we were to remember forever our debt to those who gave so much to defend our freedom.

The Arboretum is at Croxall Road, Alrewas, Staffordshire DE13 7AR.
It is open daily 10am to 5pm
(Closed Mondays from November to 1st April: 22nd December to 2nd January)
It is now managed by the Royal British Legion
(There is no charge for admission)
THE AILIFT AIRFIELDS

IN THE BRITISH ZONE, GERMANY.

WUNSTORF - A bomber base to 1940 - Then used by single or twin engined fighters. The runway was built after the war and the station was used by RAF fighters.

Airlift - Dakotas from 25th June 1948 to 29th July 1948.
Yorks from 3rd July 1948 to 29th August 1949.
Civil Four engined aircraft from 4th August 1948 to 15th August 1949.

LUBECK - Built 1935 - Initially used by Heinkel HE111’s - then became a fighter training station, later Junkers JU88 night fighters.

Airlift - Dakotas from 20th August 1948 to 23rd September 1949.
Civil twin engined aircraft from 28th August 1948 to 5th October 1948.

FASSBERG - During the war was a technical training station - then used by retiring squadrons towards the end of the war - used 1946/7 as an RAF fighter base.

Airlift - Dakotas from 29th July 1948 to 29th August 1948
Civil twin engined aircraft from 4th to 28th August 1948.
USAF C54’s from 21st August 1948 to 1st September 1949.

CELLE - 1935 became a Luftwaffe training school - concrete runway laid in early 1948.

Airlift - USAF C54’s from 16th December 1948 to 1st September 1949.

SCHLESWIGLAND - 1936 a glider club - Night fighters during the war - concrete runway was laid in early 1948.

Airlift - Hastings from 11th November 1948 to 5th October 1949.
Civil four engined aircraft from 25th November 1948 to 16th August 1949 - mainly tankers.

FINKENWERDER - Used as an Airlift flying boat base on the river Elbe at Hamburg.

Airlift - Sunderlands from 5th July 1948 to 16th December 1948.

FUHLSBUTTEL - Civil airport for Hamburg.

Airlift - Used by civil airlines from 5th October 1948 to 15th August 1949.
IN THE AMERICAN ZONE, GERMANY.

RHEIN-MAIN - Near Frankfurt. The European terminal for USAF Military Air Transport Service. Had a 2,000 yd runway. Also used for Commercial Flights.

Airlift - Used by the USAF, initially by C47’s and then by C54’s.

WIESBADEN - The other principal USAF transport base in Germany. Had been a Luftwaffe fighter base during the war.

Airlift - Again used by USAF C47’s and then by C54’s.

IN THE ALLIED SECTORS, BERLIN.

GATOW - In the British sector, Berlin. Initially a grass airfield - Luftwaffe training station in Berlin, the equivalent of Cranwell. A PSP runway was laid by the RAF and in 1947 a concrete runway was laid and extended to 2,000 yds in 1948. The original PSP runway laid in 1946 was relaid as a concrete runway after damage by a USAF Stratofreighter and extended in 1948.

Airlift - Used by the RAF, USAF and Civilian aircraft.

TEGEL - A new airfield built by the Americans in the French sector of Berlin during the Airlift and opened for traffic in November 1948. Is now the principal commercial airport for Berlin.

Airlift - Used by USAF, Royal Air Force and Civilian aircraft.

TEMPELHOF - The pre-war civil airport for Berlin and in the American sector.

Airlift - Used by the USAF on flights from Rhein-Main near Frankfurt and Wiesbaden.

HAVEL LAKE - The widest stretch of the Havel river and adjacent to RAF Gatow.

Airlift - The lake was used by Royal Air Force Sunderland flying boats and Civilian Hythe flying boats on flights from Finkenwerder, Hamburg. Ceased to be used in December 1948 when ice on the water became a hazard.

NOTE - The dates quoted have been taken from the HQ BAFO Report. In some cases they may not correspond to the actual dates experienced by individuals, where the transfer from one station to another took place over a number of days whilst the Airlift operations were continuing.
Airlift Snippets

The Sunderland flying boat was used to carry into Berlin loads of salt, as it was protected against salt corrosion. Later, Halton aircraft with a removable pannier were used.

The first loads of coal flown into RAF Gatow were carried in brand new white RAF kit bags due to the shortage of suitable coal sacks.

A Bristol Freighter/Wayfarer flew in a Bulldozer and a Fire Engine.

Two Skyways Yorks carried the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and their instruments to play in London.

An RAF Dakota was incorrectly loaded with a York consignment, nearly twice it's normal load. The aircraft took off and managed to complete the trip, although the pilot commented, 'I thought she was bit sluggish'.

Experiments were carried out to try and drop sacks of coal from an Avro Lincoln Bomber and also there was a similar test at RAF Gatow to drop loaves of bread. Neither tests were considered successful.

The Russians continually buzzed aircraft in the thee air corridors and harassed pilots flying into Gatow at night by aiming searchlights at the aircraft.

Fuel flown into Gatow was transferred from the unloading apron by pipeline, to barges on the Havel Lake.

In the first six months of the Airlift there was only one day (Due to bad weather) when no British aircraft flew into Berlin.

The Kaiser Wilhelm I memorial in Berlin was on the Flight Path into Gatow and became known as the 'Christmas Tree' due to the bright red warning lights on it.

An RAF York landed at Gatow minus its central tail fin. The pilot who was unaware of the loss thought that the reception committee had come to congratulate him on carrying the millionth ton or some other notable event.

There was also plenty of airlift humour - Especially between RAF Gatow Control and the American crews. However a Canadian RAF pilot was mistaken for an American voice and was asked by a controller if he was flying a C54 Skymaster when the next plane should have been a Dakota. He replied 'I don’t think so, I’m sure it was a Dakota when I took off, but I’ll go and take a look'.

The loads carried sometimes caused amusement and also anxiety. When one pilot reported that he was carrying a load of gin, he was advised to ‘land her very gently’.
IN MEMORIAM
British and Commonwealth Casualties

John Anderson - 30 April 1949
Alan John Burton - 22 November 1948
Edward Ernest Carroll - 30 April 1949
Michael Edwin Casey - 22 November 1948
William Cusack - 22 November 1948
Ian Ronald Donaldson - 16 July 1949
Frank Dowling - 17 November 1948
Alexander Dunsire - 16 July 1949
Peter James Edwards - 15 March 1949
Robert John Freight - 21 March 1949
Roy Reginald Gibbs - 16 July 1949
Lawrence Edward Hope Gilbert - 19 September 1948
Cecil Golding - 15 March 1949
Patrick James Griffin - 15 January 1949
John Ernest Grout - 24 January 1949
Reginald Merrick Watson Heath - 23 November 1948
Geoffrey Kell - 19 September 1948
William Richard Donald Lewis - 30 April 1949
Philip Arthur Louch - 17 November 1948
Henry Thomas Newman - 15 March 1949
Edward O’Neil - 15 January 1949
William George Page - 16 July 1949
Henry Patterson - 21 March 1949
Alan Penny AFC - 22 March 1949
Mel Joseph Quinn - 22 March 1949
Kenneth Arthur Reeves - 22 March 1949
Dornford Winstan Robertson - 22 November 1948
Kenneth Arthur Seaborne - 22 November 1948
James Patrick Lewin Sharp DFC - 21 March 1949
Theodor Supernatt - 15 January 1949
Cyril Taylor - 22 November 1948
Hugh Wallace Thompson MC DFC - 19 September 1948
Joseph Toal - 16 July 1949
Sydney Mark Lewis Towersey - 19 September 1948
Francis Ivor Trezona - 17 November 1948
Clement Wilbur Utting - 8 December 1948
Ernest William Watson - 19 September 1948
John Graham Wilkins - 25 November 1948
Kenneth George Wood - 30 April 1949
SOME BRITISH AIRLIFT AIRCRAFT

Handley-Page Hastings

Douglas Dakota

Avro York

Avro Tudor

Avro Lancastrian

Short Sunderland

Berlin - The Four Sectors
AIRLIFT MUSEUMS

Fassberg: The Fassberg Museum is dedicated to the Berlin Airlift. It is situated adjacent to the former RAF Airfield, which is now occupied by the Luftwaffe Technical School No.3 and German Army helicopter units. The Museum Chairman is Herr Rainer Kruppik. The address is Förderverein für die Erinnerungstätte Luftbrücke Berlin e.V., 29324 Fassberg, Heideweg 30, Germany. Tel: 0049 5055 1300 - Fax: 0049 5055 590130

Wunstorf: The Wunstorf Museum is at the entrance to the former RAF Airlift base at Wunstorf. It is in the JU52 Halle and has a large exhibition hall with many items of aircraft memorabilia, including a section on the Berlin Airlift. The museum curator is a serving Luftwaffe Officer. He is Hauptman Manfred Pickel. JU52 Halle, Lufttransportgeschwader 62, 31515 Wunstorf, Germany.

Berlin: The Alliierten Museum in Berlin is in Clayallee. It is located in the former American Sector, in a cinema and library used by the U.S. forces. It has two large exhibition halls, an outdoor area which includes the 'Checkpoint Charlie' border control cabin, a section of a French train which carried personnel between western Germany through the Soviet Zone to Berlin and the centre-piece, an RAF Hastings aircraft which now incorporates in the passenger cabin, a video cinema. The museum Director is Dr Helmut Trotnow. Address: Clayallee 135 - Outpost, 14195 Berlin - Zehlendorf, Germany. Tel: ++49 (0) 30 81 81 99-0 Website: www.alliiertenmuseum.de

The Deutsches Technikmuseum has numerous items related to the Berlin Airlift and is at Trebbiner Strasse 9, 10963 Berlin-Kreuzberg, Germany.

The Luftwaffenn Museum is at the former RAF Gatow, the Airlift airfield in the British sector of Berlin. It has many aircraft on display and a section devoted solely to the Berlin Airlift and the Royal Air Force in Berlin from 1945 - 1994.

AIR MUSEUMS IN THE U.K.

Imperial War Museum, Duxford: The Imperial War Museum is at Duxford Airfield, Cambridge, CB2 4QR. It is a working airfield and has a number of aircraft of the type used during the Berlin Airlift, including Avro York, Douglas Dakota, Handley-Page Hastings and Short Sunderland

Royal Air Force Museums: The RAF Museums are at Hendon, London and Cosford, near Telford, Shropshire. They both have aircraft on display representing the types used on the Berlin Airlift.

Note! Check for opening times and non-opening days before visiting.
SOME USEFUL NAMES AND ADDRESSES

Website: bbaa-airlift.org.uk

Association Chairman
Squadron Leader Frank Stillwell,
9 Barnards Hill,
Marlow,
SL7 2NX
Telephone: 01628 472625

Deputy Chairman,
Printing and Publicity
Geoff Smith,
74 Weatherthorn,
Orton Malborne,
Peterborough, PE2 5ND
Telephone: 07931 526617
Email: geoffsmith@supanet.com

Supplies Officer
Squadron Leader Peter Izard,
31 Pickhurst Rise,
West Wickham, BR4 0AB
Telephone: 0208 2897583