

Name _____



The Berlin Airlift

By Sharon Fabian

Germany had been divided into four zones after World War II. The United States and its allies controlled the three western zones. The communist Soviet Union controlled the eastern zone. The capital city of Berlin, which was located within the eastern zone over 100 miles from the dividing line, was also divided into quarters.



The Soviet Union wanted to take control of all of Berlin and drive the western countries out. To do this, it began a blockade of the western part of the city in June of 1948. Since it controlled the land on all sides of the city, this was not difficult to do. First it cut off all automobile and truck traffic into West Berlin. Then it cut off all barge traffic into West Berlin. Finally it also stopped all railroad traffic. No supplies could enter the city. If the blockade continued, the 2.2 million people of West Berlin would starve. Would the United States and its allies abandon their claims to Berlin to save the people from starving?

Berlin was not abandoned to the Communists, but its people didn't starve either. The United States, Great Britain, and France planned a huge mission to send in supplies by air. They would fly supplies from bases in the British part of West Germany into West Berlin.

At first they flew in from three air bases in West Germany. In Berlin, they landed at either a U.S. base named Tempelhof or a British base called Gatow. At the beginning of the airlift, Tempelhof and Gatow each had only one runway. Nevertheless, airlift pilots began flying in 500 tons of supplies per day.

The American mission was known as Operation Vittles; the British mission was known as Plane Fare. American, British, and French

pilots worked together to fly in all of the necessities. They brought food and medicine. They brought coal for fuel. They brought raw materials and machine parts to keep the factories operating.

Soon the operation was too large for the airfields they were using. Another large airfield, named Tegel, was built in the French section of West Berlin. Outside of Berlin, six more airfields in the British section of West Germany were put to use.

For nearly a year, airlift pilots provided for the people of Berlin. Twenty-four hours each day, planes made their deliveries. At the height of the airlift, planes were taking off and landing with only minutes, or even seconds, between planes. Sometimes the weather was bad and the visibility was poor. Often, the flying conditions were dangerous, but the pilots kept flying. They were delivering an unbelievable 13,000 tons per day!

Finally in May 1949, the Soviet Union gave up and ended the blockade. Cars, trucks, trains, and barges could again make deliveries into West Berlin. Still, it would take some time for life to return to normal, and so the airlift continued for about four more months.

The Berlin Airlift took place during peacetime after World War II, but when the Soviet Union had to give up its blockade, it was as if it had lost a battle. It had not been able to starve out West Berlin, and it had not been able to take control of the city.

The democratic countries of the west had been successful in feeding the people of West Berlin. They had also been successful in holding back the advance of Communism.

The Berlin Airlift would become the first of many challenges between the communist countries and the democratic countries. It was the "greatest humanitarian mission in the world," according to a website maintained by Berlin Airlift veterans, but it was also "the first battle of the Cold War"!



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Questions

- _____ 1. This article is about _____.
 - A. the life of someone famous
 - B. a scientific theory
 - C. a fictional event
 - D. a real historical event

- _____ 2. The event described in this article took place on the continent of _____.
 - A. Europe
 - B. Africa
 - C. North America
 - D. Asia

- _____ 3. The Cold War occurred _____.
 - A. after World War II
 - B. before World War II
 - C. at the same time as World War II
 - D. at the beginning of World War II

- _____ 4. The Berlin Airlift provided _____.
 - A. fuel and weapons
 - B. weapons and machine parts
 - C. food and fuel
 - D. machine parts and computers

- _____ 5. _____ brought supplies into Berlin during the Berlin Airlift.
 - A. Germany, the United States, Great Britain, and France
 - B. the United States, Great Britain, and France
 - C. Germany and the Soviet Union
 - D. the Soviet Union

- _____ 6. The airfield at _____ was built to handle the additional air traffic needed for the Berlin Airlift.
 - A. London
 - B. Tegel
 - C. Tempelhof
 - D. Gatow

- _____ 7. Which happened first?
 - A. Pilots delivered tons of supplies into Berlin.
 - B. The Soviet Union planned a blockade.
 - C. The U.S. and its allies planned an airlift.
 - D. The blockade was lifted.

- _____ 8. The Berlin Airlift accomplished all of the following, except _____.
 - A. supplying food to West Berlin
 - B. supplying other necessities to West Berlin
 - C. gaining control of all of Berlin for the U.S. and its allies
 - D. preventing the Soviet Union from taking over West Berlin

Pretend you are living in the Western sector of Berlin in 1948. Write a letter to a friend in the United States describing what life is like during the airlift. What is your opinion of the Soviets that cut off your city? What are your feelings about the United States, your enemy in World War II?

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