

Mission Impossible?

How to keep a city of 2.1 million people alive from the air?

Briefing Notes

President Truman of the United States was adamant he wouldn't leave Berlin to the Russians and agreed to put all his country's efforts into forming a viable airlift organisation.

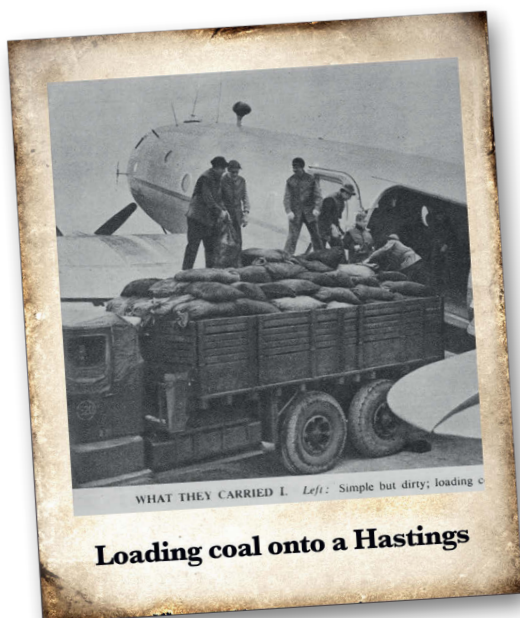
The British Government felt that the Russian blockade was simply a demonstration of its power and the situation would be back to normal in a few days.

The challenge of supplying a city via three narrow air corridors, just 20 miles wide, had begun.

More Questions Than Answers

Ensuring that everyone had enough food to survive was only part of the problem. The Allied forces had to make sure that Berlin's population could keep warm in the winter and that the city's factories had the raw materials to keep manufacturing goods.

The British and Americans had to calculate how many tons of fuel, food and other supplies Berlin needed and how many planes would be required to fly it in. Prioritising this was not an easy task. Officials had to take into account a variety of factors such as the number of calories a person can survive on, how much coal should go to a family versus a factory and what items might impact upon public morale.



Loading coal onto a Hastings

Some goods such as coal and machinery were heavy to transport. Others such as petrol or salt were dangerous to carry. Frozen food was also a challenge because of temperature changes in flight.



DISCUSSION POINT

Why were newspapers flown into Berlin?



Evacuated children climb out of an RAF Dakota

The return leg out of Berlin also posed similar challenges. How long should a plane be kept on the tarmac? The sooner it was airborne, the sooner it could return with useful goods. But manufactured goods and the sick needed to leave the city. Read the eye witness accounts to find out more about the cargos transported on the airlift.

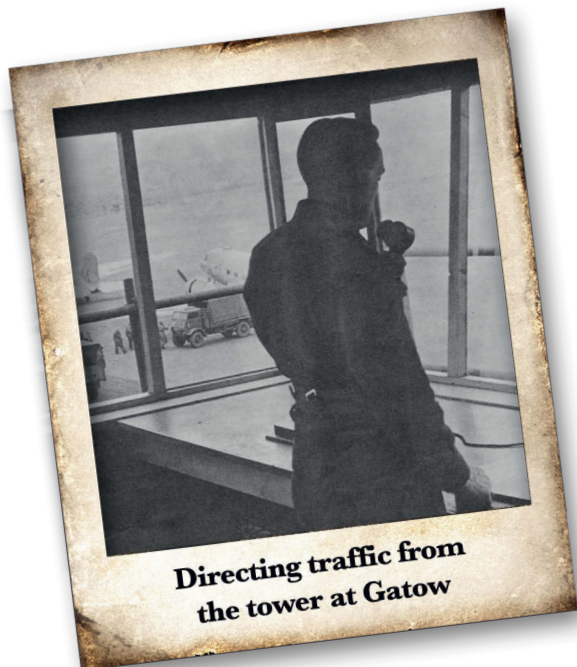


Bottles of milk were soon replaced by powdered milk



DISCUSSION POINT

Why was it important for goods to be carried out of Berlin?



Directing traffic from the tower at Gatow



DISCUSSION POINT

Why was the transportation of bottled milk changed to dried milk?

Cargoes (with apologies to John Masfield)

Heavy-laden aircraft with their dedicated aircrews,
Streaming into Berlin through a dark and stormy night,
With their cargoes of coal sacks, tobacco drums and
flour bags,
Powdered milk, a hundred things to ease the city's
plight.

Medicines for hospitals, candy for the little kids,
Tins of meat and toilet rolls, soap in smelly bars,
Margarine, molasses, paraffin and sea salt,
Steel to build a power station, petrol for their cars.

Not long ago we bombed them, now we try to save them
From former so-called allies we really didn't know,
Why did we fight a ghastly war that cost so many lives?
It seems the gods just spin a coin that comes down
friend or foe.

Poem by Pilot Alexander Mcleish



For your task, consult **Lesson 02**
on your **Operational Log**

Eye Witness Accounts



“And on the thousandth load which I believe was also coal, part of the load was contraceptives, I was one of the very few that ever knew this and in fact it used to surprise people when I told them years later”

Dr. Joyce Hargrave-Wright recalls some of the more unusual loads she charted in her role with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.



“...We were told in no uncertain terms that we either had to do the loading of the plane perfectly or we were in trouble ... you'd have a court marshal and the charge would be manslaughter.. anyway with due reverence to these rules ... you went off to load on your first aeroplane”

Bill Campbell was a Loading Supervisor based at Wunstorf



“We were taking out pianos and electronics and things like that ... but the main thing of course was bringing the elderly and the youngsters and people who had medical difficulties and that was sad”

Pilot Dick Arcscott recalling some of the things he carried out of Berlin.



19 types of different aircraft used on the Airlift

It took 90 days to build the runway at Tegal



Number of days it took to calculate the entire operational plan



Civilian airlines were in sole charge of transporting liquid fuel



weight saved by carrying dried potatoes over whole