

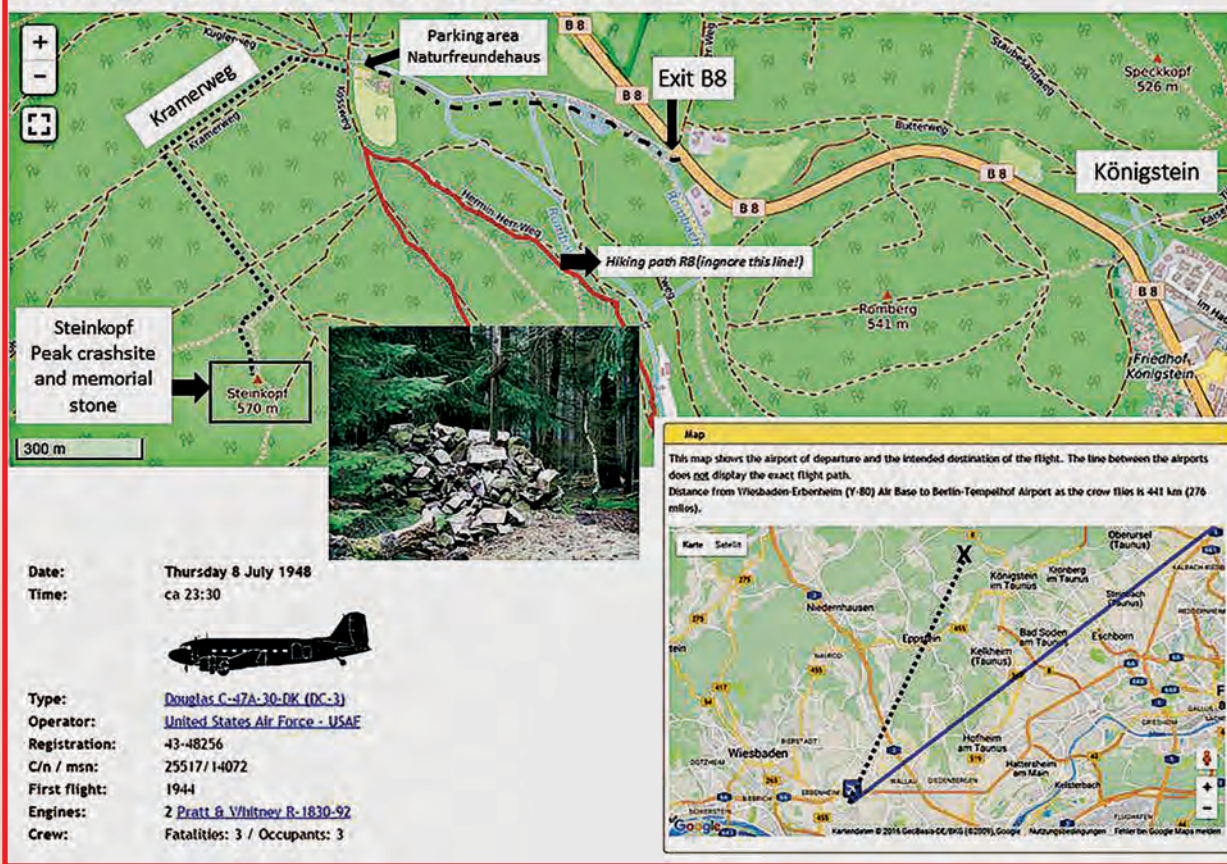


The Berlin Airlift Association

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The Berlin Airlift Association last November dedicated a memorial at the crash site of the first aircrew lost during the Berlin Airlift Operation (1948/49). American Air Force veteran Col Gail Halvorsen (Rtd.) was the guest of honor at the site in the Taunus Mountains. The US Military Vehicle Club (USMVC) Germany provided a number of MVs for the occasion. It was a touching moment for a smiling veteran and the other outstanding guests of honor in attendance.*

Map - Berlin Airlift Association memorial stone inauguration and commemoration, 26.11.2016



This mission started with a simple phone call by my friend Dr. John Provan, a local historian, collector and Vice President of the Berlin Airlift Association. He asked for our help: "Hey buddy, we are planning a memorial in the Taunus Mountains and an inauguration with Gail Halvorsen attending..." I replied that it sounded interesting and asked what the plan was. John went on to explain his idea: a memorial stone that was to be erected by the Berlin Airlift Association and located at the crash site of the first aircraft lost during the Berlin Airlift Operation. That plane was a C-47 with two pilots and a civilian employee of the US Army.

Coming to Germany would be a former Berlin Airlift pilot, Col Gail, 'Hall' Halvorsen, the legendary *Candy-Bomber*, aka, *Uncle Wiggly Wings*, and also nicknamed the *Chocolate Flier*! We wanted to take him to the crash site in a WWII vehicle.

I obviously knew there would be some additional work waiting for me and as it turned out they wanted

some of our clubs WWII jeeps. The crash site is located on a hilltop 2.5 km in the forest – or to be more exact – in the middle of nowhere!

Okay that was the Mission, I thought, and it would be simple: some phone calls, and with the support of some of our USMVC members and supporters, we would find a solution. November would not be the perfect month to organize a taxi job for this outstanding American veteran. John, however, had another point in mind.

"The memorial stone will soon be finished and I need some help to set it up on Steinkopf Peak, and I know you have a 4x4 SUV." I'm sure I don't have to explain the rest of the phone call. Even worse, John is a nice fellow, but he's a paper pusher, not an expert on rebuilding historic MVs or memorial stone construction projects.

Some days later, after a heavy snowfall, he and I went on our first scouting trip, on gravel roads, to the crash site in the Taunus hills' thick German forest.



Halvorsen with friends and the media in place. He often visits Germany and was honored by the German President in 1974, with the *Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), Germany's highest award.



Col Gail Halvorsen (Rtd.) at the age of 96, in a WWII jeep provided by the USMVC on the way to the memorial inauguration.

Halvorsen being driven by our oldest member Peter Jaberg. They were heading for Steinkopf Peak in the middle of nowhere northwest of the Wiesbaden Erbenheim Air Force Base.



After looking at a map we started up the hills on a muddy trail, full of broken trees from a previous snowfall. It took us about an hour with the SUV and a rope to clear the route and access Steinkopf Peak, some 570 meters (1870') high.

At the peak was a small pile of stones but the wooden cross that I had seen in older photographs was missing. About 50 meters from the top of the peak we could see an area with younger trees towards the direction of Wiesbaden Erbenheim AFB. This was the crash site of the C-47.

The registration number was 43-48256. It was built in 1944, and was lost on 08 July 1948. It was fully loaded with goods for Berlin and appeared to have problems climbing high enough to clear the Taunus hills. It hit the first peak of the Steinkopf on its outbound climb about 2 km north of the City of Koenigstein.

The reason for the crash is not known. Some sources stated that there was too much freight on board, but technical problems might also have been involved. The lack of flight recorders at that time made it an unsolved mystery.

A local forest ranger heard the noise of the crash and saw the fire from his house. He was the first to reach the crash site but found the crew dead. Later the fire brigade arrived from Koenigstein, and a recovery team from the Air Force

Base came, in order to remove the wreck from the crash site.

Gail Halvorsen with his daughters at the Steinkopf Peak cross and memorial. Below: The Steinkopf Peak, with a new wooden cross and memorial stone, donated by the Berlin Airlift Association.



The pilots were identified as 1st Lt. George Bates Smith from Los Angeles, California and 1st Lt. Leland V. Williams, from Tuscola, Texas. Both were later buried in the USA. The third victim was a German emigrant – Karl-Victor Hagen, employed by the Department of the Army, who was later buried in the family grave in East Berlin,

Our additional tasks were clearing up the peak for the inauguration, setting up the memorial stone, organizing the invitations, the routes and roadblocks, and planning transport for Col. Halvorsen and the other guests to the site.

One week later John and I loaded 60 kg of concrete, tools and the memorial stone in the back of my SUV and started up on our second trip. Once there we added more stones to the pile marking the site. John had constructed a new wooden cross that we placed in position. Finally the memorial was finished and everything prepared for the inauguration on November 26, 2016.

The following Saturday John picked up Col. Halvorsen at the railway station and drove him to our meeting point North of Koenigstein. There in the

parking lot we had a small lineup of our WWII MVs waiting for the Candy Bomber. Among our guests of honor was Helen Patton, granddaughter of General George S. Patton Jr., LTG Hodges, Commanding General of the US Army in Europe, Col. Fish, Commander of the Wiesbaden Garrison and Major Perry, a military Chaplain from Wiesbaden.

Our oldest Club member, Peter Jaberg was the designated driver for Halvorsen and provided the first taxi jeep in the line. Col. Halvorsen stood in the jeep while driving up the steep hill, bouncing over tree stumps all the while with a wide grin in his face.

After a brief introduction of the guests, a deep sound could be heard – the unmistakable sound of four reciprocating piston-driven aircraft engines. It was our small surprise for an old pilot: a fly-by of four aircraft and a pilot on the ground with a radio, so that Hal Halvorsen could talk to the pilots. His smile was getting wider and the engine noise was music in his ears.

After the inauguration he was very enthusiastic about his day in the German Forest and he stated, “With the jeep in the forest, like mine back in Utah



A smiling veteran at the end of the perfect day Gail Halvorsen (center) with MVPA correspondent Joakim Steinweden (left) at the new memorial stone, donated by the Berlin Airlift Association.



A great surprise for an American veteran. For the first time Gail Halvorsen met Helen Patton, General George S. Patton Jr.'s granddaughter. For many years Helen has been supporting veterans with her 'Patton Foundation Sustainable Trust.'

Col Gail Halvorsen, at the former Rhein Main Air Base. The Berlin Airlift Memorial dedication ceremony took place last November. Behind the memorial is a C-54 Skymaster, one of the aircraft types used during the Berlin Airlift Operation that saved the city from starvation during the Soviet blockade.



at my Ranch, and then the fly-by! Joakim, that was the best thing ever!"

What a great compliment from such an outstanding person after more than 72 years of German-American history. We savored the long lasting friendship between our two nations that at one time had been enemies. It was also a great honor and pleasure for all our USMVC members to support the Berlin Airlift Association's memorial project. After the inauguration we all enjoyed a dinner together and shared some local German beer at a nearby pub.

* Colonel Gail Seymour *Hal* Halvorsen is a retired officer and command pilot in the United States Air Force. He is best known as the Berlin *Candy Bomber* who dropped candy to children during the Berlin airlift.

Halvorsen grew up in rural Utah but always had a desire to fly. He earned his private pilot's license in 1941 and then joined the Civil Air Patrol. Later he joined the United States Army Air Force in 1942 and was assigned to Germany on 10 July 1948 as a pilot on the Berlin Airlift. He piloted C-47s and C-54s during that operation where he initiated *Operation Little Vittles*, an effort to raise morale in Berlin by dropping candy via miniature parachutes to the city's residents. He began that operation with no authorization from his superiors but over the next year became a national hero with support from all over the United States. His operation dropped over 23 tons of candy to the Berlin residents. He became known as the Berlin *Candy Bomber*, *Uncle Wiggly Wings*, and *The Chocolate Flier*.

Halvorsen received numerous awards for his role in the Airlift, including the Congressional Gold Medal. However that was not the end of his military and humanitarian career. Over the next 25 years he advocated for and performed candy drops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Japan, Guam, and Iraq. Halvorsen's professional career



The Candy Bomber, as all know him best, handing out Hershey's bars to the kids at the Berlin Airlift memorial five days before the Steinkopf ceremony took place.

TAUNUS HILLS BERLIN AIRLIFT COMMEMORATION

26.11.2016

WITH "CANDY BOMBER" COL. GAIL HALVORSEN (RET.)



ON THE 8 JULY 1948 THE BERLIN AIRLIFT CAUSED THE FIRST 3 VICTIMS IN THE JOINT ALLIED EFFORT TO SAVE A CITY:

1ST LT. GEORGE B. SMITH, 1ST LT. LELAND V. WILLIAMS, AND KARL V. HAGEN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CRASHED WITH THEIR C-47A AT 23:30 H. AT THE STEINKOPF PEAK, NEARBY THE CITY OF KÖNIGSTEIN.

68 YEARS LATER THE ASSOCIATION "LUFTBRÜCKE FRANKFURT-BERLIN 1948-1949 E.V." AND THE USMVC E.V. ASSOCIATION ARE ORGANIZING A JOINT COMMEMORATION WITH THE "CANDY BOMBER" COL. GAIL HALVORSEN IN PLACE.

MEETING POINT IS THE NATURFREUDEHAUS BILLTALHÖHE (LOCATED AT THE BB BETWEEN KÖNIGSTEIN AND GLASHÜTTEN, ACCESS AT THE BUS STOP BILLTALHÖHE) AT 14.30 H. THE HIKE STARTS AT 15.00 H.

GOOD HIKING BOOTS RECOMMENDED. WALKING DISTANCE: 2.5 KM.

ADDRESS: BORGNISSWEG 1 (BILLTALHÖHE), 61462 KÖNIGSTEIN IM TAUNUS

CONTACT / INFO:

DR. JOHN PROVAN, VICE PRESIDENT LUFTBRÜCKE FRANKFURT-BERLIN 1948-1949 E.V.
EMAIL: JOHNPROVAN@GCMX.NET

included various notable positions. He retired in August 1974 after logging over 8,000 flying hours.

THE BERLIN AIRLIFT ASSOCIATION

The Berlin Airlift Association, Luftbrücke Frankfurt-Berlin 1948-1949, since 2009 attends to the care of the Berlin Airlift Operation memorial at Frankfurt Rhein-Main Airport (former Rhine-Main Air Base). Website: < www.luftbrueckechapter.de >

THE US MILITARY VEHICLE CLUB (USMVC)

The USMVC is one of the oldest US Military Vehicle Collectors Clubs in Germany, caring for the heritage of US Army MVs in Germany for over 30 years.

Website: < www.usmvc.eu >

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