

Memories of the “Big Lift for Freedom”

Celebration at the Frankfurt Airport Airlift Memorial – Speeches by Koch, Jung and Timken

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FRA/th-rap> On the occasion of the Berlin Airlift 60th anniversary, Fraport AG and the Hesse state government will be holding a ceremony on Thursday to commemorate the famous airlift in which the Western Allies supplied the Soviet-besieged city of West Berlin with vital goods from June 26, 1948, to May 12, 1949. The Americans flew the "Big Lift" missions to Berlin Tempelhof Airport primarily from their main bases in the West: Frankfurt Rhein-Main and Wiesbaden-Erbenheim. The Airlift Memorial monument on the south side of Frankfurt Airport honors the 41 British, 31 Americans, and 6 Germans who lost their lives in this humanitarian relief mission. The monument is a replica of the structure standing at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin – in local parlance *Hungerharke* (hunger rake). The three struts of the monument symbolize the three air corridors that linked West Berlin with the states of what later became the Federal Republic of Germany.

A Fraport spokesman said that during Thursday's celebration representatives of the U.S., Great Britain, France and Germany will lay wreathes at the Airlift Monument in memory of this "historically significant contribution to the regaining of freedom and unity". Hesse prime minister Roland Koch, German defense minister Dr. Franz Josef Jung, the U.S. ambassador in Germany Jilliam Robert Timken Jr., the commander of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) General Roger A. Brady, chairman of the Airlift Veterans in the U.S. Earl Moore, Frankfurt's lord mayor Petra Roth, and Fraport's executive board chairman Dr. Wilhelm Bender will be addressing the more than 700 expected guests, including the consular corps.

On June 26, the prominent speakers will fly from Wiesbaden to Frankfurt Airport on a Douglas DC3. This aircraft type was used in the Berlin Airlift as the "Candy Bomber". At the end of the ceremony, prizes will be awarded to winners of a school contest on the 60th Berlin Airlift anniversary. Afterwards, the DC3 will carry the veterans to Berlin where they will take part in events at the Allied Museum.

Upon invitation of Fraport's chairman, the veterans will already meet on Wednesday evening – when former U.S. Air Force colonel Gail Halvorsen will take center stage. Halvorsen, who is now 87, became world famous as "Uncle Wiggly Wings" during the Airlift's "Operation Little Vittles". He attached candy to tiny handkerchief parachutes and dropped them from his aircraft to the children of Berlin. He told the kids he would wiggle the wings of his plane so that they would recognize him.

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For Further information, Please Contact:

Robert A. Payne, B.A.A. – Manager International Press
Press Office (Dept. UKM-PS), Corporate Communications (UKM)
60547 Frankfurt am Main, Federal Republic of Germany
Tel.: +49 69.690.78547; Fax: +49.69.690.60548;
E-mail: r.payne@fraport.de;
Internet: <http://www.fraport.com>;
www.airportcity-frankfurt.com

