

BEHIND THE TIMES

AUG 1948

Issue
#10

YESTERYEAR TODAY

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Berlin "Airlift" Underway

The skies over Berlin have become a lifeline as Allied aircraft defy the Soviet blockade, delivering food, fuel, and medicine to more than 2 million West Berliners. The Berlin Airlift, launched in June, has grown into a staggering logistical operation that highlights the Allies' determination to resist Soviet aggression and sustain the city without ceding ground.

At the heart of the airlift are the Douglas C-47 Skytrain and C-54 Skymaster, the workhorses of the U.S. fleet. The C-47, with a 3-ton (6,000 lbs) capacity, flies at 160-180 mph and excels in short-haul missions. The larger C-54, capable of carrying 10 tons (20,000 lbs) at 245 mph, handles bulk deliveries across longer distances. Supporting the effort, British Avro Yorks match the C-54's 10-ton capacity, reaching speeds of 298 mph, while the Handley Page Hastings hauls 8 tons (16,000 lbs) at 300 mph. Germany's Junkers Ju 52, though outdated, carries 1.5 tons (3,000 lbs) at 150 mph and proves useful for short hops into Berlin. Meanwhile, the massive Boeing C-97 Stratofreighter, with its 35-ton (70,000 lbs) capacity and 300 mph speed, delivers critical bulk supplies, though its size limits its use to select routes.

With 1,500 flights per day, planes land either Tempelhof, in the U.S. sector, Gatow in the British Sector, or Tegel airfield in the French Sectors every three minutes. In July alone, more than 70,000 tons of supplies were delivered, and the tempo continues to increase as winter approaches.

Engineers work tirelessly to expand runways and repair aircraft, ensuring no delays in the flow of cargo while expanding the capacity of the Airports to continue to receive lifesaving material.

Despite Soviet attempts to paint the airlift as futile, the operation grows stronger. Each landing not only sustains Berliners but also sends a clear message—the West will not bow to intimidation. In the face of mounting tensions, the Berlin Airlift has become more than a logistical feat; it is a symbol of Allied unity and resolve in the shadow of the Iron Curtain.



American of Doolittle's Eighth Air Force flies over the capital of Germany, Berlin.

Jacob Boyce

Rapid Escalation of Tensions with Former Ally, USSR

First confrontation in what is now being called the "Cold War"

Berlin, August 1948 – Tensions between Soviet and Allied forces have reached a boiling point as the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin enters its third month, threatening not only the fragile peace of postwar Europe but also the unity of the Western Allies. The blockade, imposed on June 24, has severed rail, road, and canal access to the sectors of Berlin under Western control, leaving over 2 million residents facing shortages of food, fuel, and medicine.

In a dramatic response, the United States and its British allies have launched what is now being called the Berlin Airlift, a massive operation to supply the city by air and maintain Western resolve in the face of Soviet aggression. The first flights, carrying flour, milk, and medicine, began just days after the blockade was announced, but the operation has since expanded to a scale never before attempted in peacetime. More than 1,500 flights per day are now landing at Tempelhof and Gatow airfields, delivering essential supplies to sustain the embattled population.

The blockade marks the most brazen escalation yet in the growing divide between East and West. The Soviet Union, under Joseph Stalin, claims the action is necessary to protect its zone from what it calls "economic imperialism," citing the introduction of the Deutsche Mark in the Western zones as an attack on its interests. Yet to many observers, the blockade appears as the first true test of willpower in the emerging Cold War—a direct challenge to the Western Allies.

For Berliners, the blockade has brought hardship and resilience. In the Western sectors, residents have adopted rationing measures while volunteers help unload cargo and distribute supplies.

Meanwhile, Soviet propaganda has denounced the airlift as a provocation, with Radio Moscow warning of "grave consequences" should the Allies continue what it calls "military flights into Soviet airspace."

The blockade has made clear that the wartime alliance between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union has unraveled. What began as cooperation to defeat Nazi Germany has given way to suspicion and rivalry. The Yalta and Potsdam agreements that shaped postwar Europe are now overshadowed by competing visions of the continent's future.

Observers warn that if Berlin falls to Soviet pressure, it could embolden further moves against Western Europe, possibly extending the Soviet reach to the North Sea or even beyond. For the moment, however, the skies over Berlin remain crowded with Allied planes—a testament to the West's determination to hold the line.

As the world watches, one thing is clear: the Berlin blockade has become the first true confrontation of the Cold War.



The Soviet Bear Blockades the US, British, and French sectors of West Berlin.