

# **OPERATION PELICAN**



# OPERATION PELICAN

The Royal Australian Air Force in the Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949

Chris Clark



Air Power Development Centre  
Office of Air Force History



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Chris Clark  
Canberra



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AIRMSHL	Air Marshal
BABS	Beam Approach Beacon System
CALTF	Combined Air Lift Task Force
CO	Commanding Officer
FLGOFF	Flying Officer
FLTLT	Flight Lieutenant
GCA	Ground Controlled Approach
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
SAAF	South African Air Force
SQNLDR	Squadron Leader
US	United States
VIP	Very Important Person
WGCDR	Wing Commander
WOFF	Warrant Officer





## CHAPTER 1

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### BLOCKADE OF BERLIN

*If the Soviet Government were to succeed in their efforts to force us out ... the effect would be extremely grave not only in Berlin but ... in Europe at large. It might prove impossible for the Western powers to maintain their position at all in Western Germany.*

British Foreign Office assessment

During World War II in Europe, the German capital of Berlin suffered terrible damage. Combined with the effects of numerous British night-bombing raids from late 1943, the battle to capture the city, which was undertaken by the Soviet Army in April 1945, saw much of the city centre and inner districts almost totally destroyed.

The Soviets had launched 2.5 million men in a massive offensive towards Berlin on 16 April. Although troops entered the south-eastern suburbs five days later, it was not until 25 April that attacking forces linked up to the west of the city and completed its encirclement. Bloody street fighting saw Soviet troops reach the centre of Berlin on 26 April, and four days later the Red Flag was flying from the Reichstag (parliament) building.



*Bomb damaged central Berlin, 1945 (AWM SUK14270)*

By the time Berlin's 500 000 defenders surrendered on 2 May, about a third of the city lay ruined; 70 per cent of buildings were either destroyed or badly damaged. The rubble reportedly amounted to one-sixth of all the war ruins in Germany. The city's population had dropped substantially from its peak of about 4.3 million in 1941, but still stood at 2.8 million.

### **Divided City**

Even before the end came, the wartime allies had decided how the territory of Germany was to be carved up among them. At the Yalta Conference (4–11 February 1945) the three major powers—the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union—had finalised an agreement on postwar zones of occupation, with the line of demarcation between the three Western allies

(France included) and the Soviet zone set at the river Elbe. This left Berlin as an enclave 80 miles (129 kilometres) inside the Soviet-controlled zone.

At a subsequent conference in July, the future of the German capital was also settled. The conference, held in the last royal residence ever built in Germany—at Potsdam on Berlin's south-western outskirts—agreed to divide Berlin similarly into four separate sectors and place each of these under the control of one of the Allies.



*Allied sectors of Berlin*

Under these arrangements, the administration of Berlin was in the hands of a joint military headquarters known as the *Kommandatura*, coordinated, in theory, by an Allied Control Council to run the whole of Germany. The Western powers expected free access to supply their sectors of the city. The Soviets refused to sign any agreements regarding land routes across their territory, but an air

safety agreement which provided for the use of three air corridors, each 20 miles (32 kilometres) wide, was signed on 30 November 1945.

### **Allies Fall Out**

While the wartime allies had been united in overthrowing the Nazi regime, they were increasingly unable to agree on what to do with defeated Germany. In mid-1946 the Americans and British announced plans to merge their zones, for economic purposes, into a new entity called Bizonia from January 1947. The French agreed to join this arrangement, and plans were developed for an independent federal state in the western half of Germany by 1949.

### AUSTRALIAN VICTORY CONTINGENT

At the end of May 1946, 250 members of Australia's armed forces—60 of them from the RAAF—arrived in England by ship to take part in celebrations marking the Allied victory in World War II. The contingent marched in the military parade by 21 nations through London streets on 8 June, before dispersing on local leave.

Later that month, many members of the Australian Victory Contingent travelled to Germany, arriving in Berlin by train. Over the next week, parties toured places of interest such as Frederick the Great's palace 'Sans Souci' at Potsdam, the Russian War Memorial in Tiergarten, and bomb-damaged sites such as Berlin's cathedral, the stadium used for the 1936 Olympics, and the gutted Reich Chancellery where Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had his office.



*Exploring Reich Chancellery (AWM 030288/04)*

The Soviets strongly opposed such moves, considering that the rebuilding of Germany was proceeding too quickly. In any event, Moscow was determined that any new state that emerged would be politically sympathetic to it. After forming a German Communist Party in June 1945, the Soviets had imposed communist rule on the eastern zone under its control and looked to ensure a similar outcome across all of Berlin.

Things did not go to Moscow's plan when municipal elections were held in the capital in October 1946—the first since 1933. The communists polled less than 20 per cent of the vote, and a non-communist was chosen as Mayor of the City Assembly. When that candidate was hounded from office

by Soviet pressure the next year, another non-communist, Ernst Reuter, was nominated for the post. Claiming that Reuter was 'anti-Soviet' the Soviets vetoed him, forcing the city's affairs to be handled by his deputy.

As part of their plans to revive the German economy, the Western allies recognised the need to curb the black market trade which flourished in the face of the worthless value of the old Nazi money. Currency reform in Germany was also essential for the success of the scheme (the Marshall Plan) proposed by the US early in 1947 to assist European nations in their postwar reconstruction.



*Black market dealings*

Efforts to discuss currency reform with the Soviets got nowhere. At a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in London in December 1947, the Soviets expressed their bitter disagreement. Efforts to raise it in the Allied Control Council in Berlin on 20 March 1948 caused the Soviet Military Governor, Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky, who was then chairing the Council, to adjourn the meeting without setting a date for another so that the body effectively lapsed.

Despite Soviet opposition, the Western allies resolved to press ahead. New notes for use in the western zones of Germany were secretly printed in Washington and shipped to Frankfurt, awaiting a suitable date for release. When relations in the *Kommandatura* finally collapsed on 16 June, after a futile 13-hour session which ended with a Soviet walkout, the decision was taken. On Friday 18 June 1948, shortly after banks had closed for the weekend, it was announced that the new currency would go into circulation on the following Sunday, though not initially in Berlin.

### **The Blockade Begins**

Taken by surprise by the unilateral action adopted by the Western allies, the Soviets reacted angrily and swiftly. According to American claims, a US military freight train was stopped at Marienborn about dawn on 21 June and prevented from proceeding to Berlin (rails even being removed from in front of it) after its commander refused to open carriages for inspection. The next day the Soviets took over the train, attached it to a locomotive and sent it back to Helmstedt—disregarding all protests.

On 23 June a ‘new’ currency was introduced in the Soviet zone too, although until new notes could be printed this was a purely makeshift arrangement involving reissue of old Third Reich marks overprinted with a coupon in one corner. Accusing America, Britain and France of having breached the Yalta and Potsdam Agreements, the Soviets maintained that the Western three should withdraw from Berlin to their own zones since the city had no future as Germany’s capital unless reunification went ahead.



*Berlin besieged again*

At midnight on 23 June the Soviets went even further. Citing 'technical difficulties', they began cutting electricity supplies to the western half of Berlin from power stations in the east, along with telephone communications. At 6 am the next day they halted all civilian road and rail traffic into and out of the city, allegedly because the bridge over the Elbe had become inoperable. A blockade of Berlin had begun aimed at forcing the Western powers to leave the city.



## CHAPTER 2

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### THE ALLIES RESPOND

*The impact on history of that show of Anglo-American air power over Europe in the summer of 1948 was probably as significant as that of the RAF's victory in the English skies in the summer of 1940.*

Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary

The Allies were unprepared for the robust Soviet response to their currency reforms, which was surprising considering that there had been prior indications that the communists could be expected to respond to what they regarded as provocations by restricting access to Berlin.

In March 1948, at the height of ructions within the Allied Control Council, the political adviser to General Lucius Clay, the US Military Governor, had warned Washington that the Soviets appeared to have embarked on a plan to force the Western powers out of Berlin and would probably use the fragile lines of communication as a weapon to achieve that end. The very next day the Soviets began delaying road and rail traffic by imposing rigid checks, as a means of expressing their displeasure.

## Air Bridge Option

On that occasion, General Clay stopped all use of rail transport except for food trains and resorted to a small-scale airlift to keep his garrison in Berlin supplied. The US Air Force had 36 C-47 transports at its base at Rhein-Main outside Frankfurt—only about 25 of which were available due to servicing—plus there was a DC-4 belonging to American Overseas Airlines which provided a scheduled service from Rhein-Main to Berlin. With these slender resources, Clay began Operation *Little Lift* on 2 April, delivering about 300 tons over the next 10 days.

Not that the skies into Berlin were free from interference. On 5 April there was a midair collision between a civilian airliner on a scheduled service for British European Airways and a Soviet fighter over the western outskirts of the British sector of the city, killing all on board both aircraft. It hardly mattered that British and Russian reports into the disaster both found that it had been an accident, not a malign attempt to disrupt western air access.

### GATOW AIR DISASTER

Shortly before 2 pm on 5 April, a Vickers Viking on a scheduled service from London was preparing to land at Gatow when it was struck head-on by a Soviet Yak-3 fighter, which had been previously observed performing aerobatics in the area. All 10 passengers and four crew aboard the airliner were killed, including a 48-year-old businessman from Sydney. Born in Hamburg, Germany, Waldemar Hald had been living in Australia since 1912 and was naturalised in 1921. He was the Sydney manager of a German-owned pharmaceuticals firm, and was on a visit to the company's head office in Berlin to help re-establish its postwar business.

British authorities reacted by instituting fighter protection for all British aircraft flying into or out of Berlin, but relented after receiving assurances that the incident did not reflect a new Soviet policy. Nonetheless, the strength of the British response reportedly so impressed the Russians that later—even during the height of the Berlin blockade—Allied aircraft were not seriously threatened in the air corridors again.



*Waldemar Hald*

At first, the Soviets still let through a limited amount of military traffic (the blockade was not made total until 10 July), so supplies for the 6500 troops garrisoning the western sectors of Berlin were not seriously threatened. The problem was keeping alive the more than two million civilians who lived under Allied protection. To achieve this would require at least 2000 tons of food supplies *per day* and another 1500 tons of fuel and raw materials to keep the city's industries producing. If the blockade continued into winter, it could be anticipated that another 500 tons of fuel would be needed daily for heating. Even these seemingly impossible quantities would provide only the barest necessities to a population already experiencing considerable privation.

Initially, General Clay wanted to adopt a tough line in dealing with the Soviet action. In addition to instituting immediately a counter-blockade of goods from the Soviet zone, the American commander proposed that his forces in Germany should prepare to fight their way through to the city's relief—if need be, by sending a convoy with armoured escort down the autobahn (highway). Clay's British counterpart, General Sir Brian Robertson, warned that this would be tantamount to war with the Russians, and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed. Soviet military forces massively outnumbered the combined military strength in Europe of America, Britain, Canada and France—the Russians had 16 divisions in Germany alone.

Clay next proposed a plan for sustained aerial resupply of Berlin first proposed by Group Captain R.N. Waite of the Royal Air Force, which Robertson had duly passed on to him. US President Harry Truman endorsed this less belligerent alternative, and pledged to provide the aircraft needed to realise the scheme. But the precaution was also taken of dispatching three groups of B-29 heavy bombers—the same type that had dropped atom bombs on Japan just three years earlier—to dispersed bases in England. It was not disclosed whether these 60 aircraft were armed with nuclear weapons (in reality, they had not even been modified to carry them), but the warning conveyed was clear: the Soviets should not escalate tensions over Berlin to a point where events got out of hand.

### STALINGRAD AIRLIFT

When the German 6th Army became encircled and besieged at Stalingrad (now Volgograd, in southern Russia) in November 1942, the task of sustaining the trapped force of 250 000 men was passed to the 4th Air Fleet of the *Luftwaffe*. It was calculated that a daily minimum of 300 tons of supplies was essential to keep the Army functioning, but this goal became unattainable from the start after the onset of winter made it impossible for German transports to fly into Stalingrad for days at a time.

A Soviet offensive removed the main supply bases needed for mounting the airlift, and meant operations had to be continued from more distant airfields. Aircraft losses and high unserviceability rates added to the problem. On 2 February 1943, the 6th Army was forced to surrender. The effort to sustain it by air caused the *Luftwaffe* ruinous and irreplaceable losses—488 aircraft (most with crews). The episode has been described as ‘a shattering blow from which the *Luftwaffe* never recovered’.



*Unloading Ju52 in blizzard*

For their part, the Soviets saw little need to apply additional pressure, since any Allied attempt at aerial resupply of a city of Berlin’s size seemed doomed from the start. Had not the Germans tried to sustain by air their 6th Army trapped at Stalingrad during December 1942 and January 1943—a task requiring only 300 tons a day—and failed?

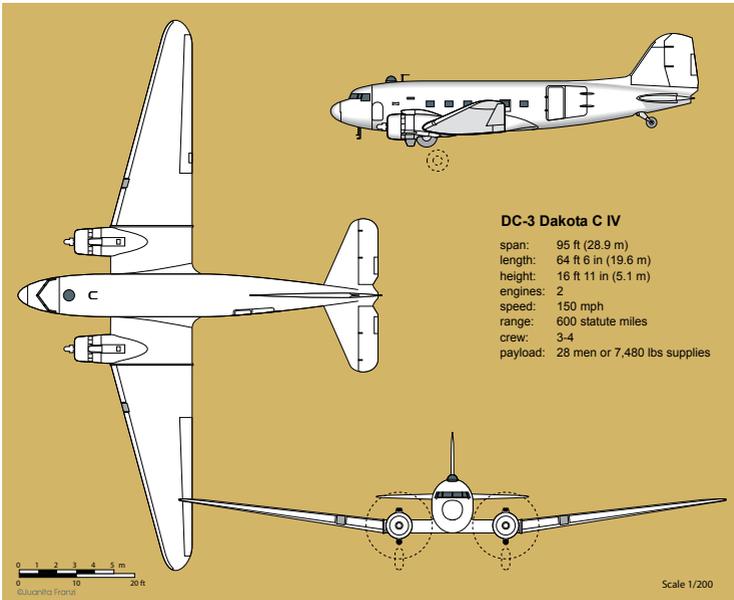
## Getting Started

The Airlift got underway in a fairly haphazard fashion, utilising the limited number of DC-3 Dakota transports (known in the US Air Force as C-47 Skytrains) that the two major Allies already had in Germany. As it happened, the only RAF squadron of Dakotas in the country had just been sent back to England after completing a paratroop exercise, and No 77 Squadron (RAF) was on its way as replacement. Hours after arriving at Wunstorf airfield, near Hanover, three of these aircraft flew the first missions of the Airlift on the night of 25 June. Since Dakotas had a relatively small load capacity anyway, the amount they delivered was trifling—only 6.5 tons. Not until 28 June was it possible for a second Dakota squadron to arrive, giving the British a total of 16 aircraft.

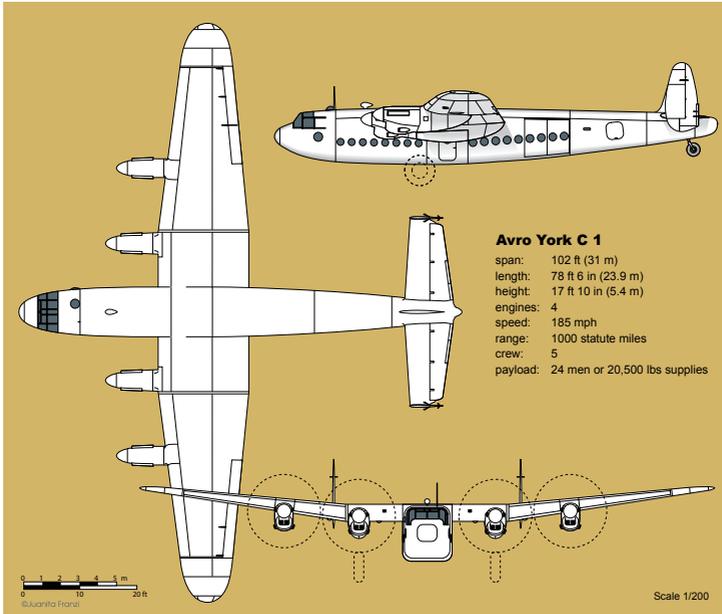


*Dakotas at Gatow, Berlin*

As one historian has observed, in its early stages the Allied effort—though magnificent—was not an airlift but ‘a hasty improvisation ... intended to buy time for diplomats’; it was only when no quick resolution to the impasse was forthcoming that ‘the improvisation was transformed into ... a carefully organized system, operating day and night’. Because it took time to expand and improve the Airlift’s effectiveness, the Allies were extremely fortunate that the Soviets had not contrived to spring their blockade in midwinter, or that when the winter of 1948–49 did arrive it was exceptionally mild, permitting aircraft to operate on many more days than usually would have been possible.



*DC-3 Dakota*



### *Avro York C 1*

So unprepared were the British for the undertaking they had embarked upon, they were initially uncertain of even what to call their part of the operation. The first flights, intended to resupply the Berlin garrison, were codenamed *Knicker*—an unwise choice once humorists among the garrison members began tying underwear to the radio aerials of their vehicles. On 29 June the objective switched to sustaining the civilian population of the city under the codename *Carter-Paterson*, a reference to a well-known British firm of removalists. This was found no more suitable after the Soviets made the propaganda jibe that clearly the British were preparing to vacate Berlin. On 3 July the two operations were combined under the punning name *Plainfare*, and this finally stuck.

By 30 June there were 54 Dakotas at Wunstorf. With these aircraft British planners hoped to lift 450 tons a day, increasing to 840 tons by 7 July. By then it was expected that some 40 Avro Yorks with larger carrying capacity (7.5–8.25 tons) would have arrived also, but in the event the airfield quickly

reached saturation, unable to cope with loading, refuelling or even parking so many aircraft after heavy rain turned grassed surfaces into mud. Although Yorks began flying sorties to Berlin on 3 July, the arrival of the last 20 of this type had to be postponed.



*Yorks at Wunstorf*

Not until 14 July was the daily goal of 840 tons reached. This was achieved partly by stripping the Dakotas of unnecessary safety equipment, and reducing fuel loads. Also helping was the addition of two squadrons of Sunderland flying boats to the mix of aircraft joining the Airlift effort. From 4 July these giant machines landed in Berlin on Lake Havel, close to Gatow, each loaded with 10 000 lb of supplies. Only the appearance of ice in Lake Havel in December put an end to the RAF's use of flying boats. On 27 July the British also resorted to civil aircraft, using a Lancastrian (a converted wartime Lancaster bomber) to fly in bulk loads of petrol.

Similarly, the Americans had only 70 C-47s available to begin missions into Berlin from 26 June. It was 10 July before the first 54 of the larger C-54 Skymaster (the military version of the DC-4) arrived. For their part, the French possessed few transports, and most of their C-47s were already committed in Indochina. The *Armée de l'Air* did operate three Toucan transports out of

Wunstorf early on (until two collided while taxiing and were destroyed), but thereafter did not directly contribute to the Airlift effort.



*Sunderland on Lake Havel, loading Berlin products for return flight*



*C-54 on approach to Tempelhof*

## First Australians

The urgent need for more and larger transports in setting up the Airlift provided an early opportunity for Australian personnel to become participants. As it happened, two five-man RAAF crews had been in England since December 1947 in preparation for posting to the RAF's No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron, a unit specially equipped with Yorks for transporting VIPs. A month before the Berlin blockade began, the Australians had completed crew integration training at an Operational Conversion Unit and been posted to No 242 Squadron, stationed outside Abingdon, near Oxford, where they were to receive further training on Yorks and undertake route familiarisation prior to finally joining the VIP squadron.

### NO 24 (COMMONWEALTH) SQUADRON, RAF

In September 1946, Britain proposed to the Dominions—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa—that they join a scheme to convert a RAF transport unit into a Commonwealth squadron for conducting special flights and carrying VIPs. No 24 Squadron based at Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, was the unit chosen, and Dominion air forces were asked to provide aircrew only. During 1947 the SAAF, RNZAF and RAAF each sent a couple of crews; the RCAF contributed some individual airmen but no contingent.

Crews of the Commonwealth squadron operated their Avro York transports for the first few months of the Berlin Airlift, before being returned to England in November to resume VIP work. In the first half of 1949, the unit relocated to Waterbeach, with a further move to Cambridgeshire, soon after the end of the Airlift. Re-equipped with Hastings aircraft in late 1950, the squadron continued to operate VIP flights, although the involvement of Dominion aircrews ceased. It still exists today as a Hercules unit based at Lyneham.

A week after the Berlin blockade began, the two RAAF crews captained by Flight Lieutenants Roy Carlin and Jack Cornish found themselves committed to the Airlift. According to Cornish, on 1 July everything at Abingdon was normal until about 1000 hours, when crews were told to go home, pack a bag for 'an extended stay', and be ready to fly out early that afternoon. By dark, a large number of Yorks had landed at Wunstorf, and that night crews slept crowded into the large loft of the Officers Mess

building. 'It took some two to three weeks before there was satisfactory administration, such as adequate accommodation.'

#### **FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JOHN GLADSTONE WESTLEY CORNISH, AFC**

Jack Cornish served with the the RAAF's No 33 Squadron at Milne Bay during World War II, and had been awarded the Air Force Cross. After serving with No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron in the Berlin Airlift in 1948, he went on to enjoy a successful career in the Air Force. As CO of No 38 Squadron during the 1954 Royal Tour, he was personal pilot to the Queen. He also experienced a second tour of exchange duty with the RAF in 1959.

After commanding No 2 Air Trials Unit and the RAAF base at East Sale, Victoria, he became Deputy Chief of the Air Staff of the Royal Malaysian Air Force in 1966–68. As an Air Commodore, he was Deputy Director (Military) of the Joint Intelligence Organisation, Canberra, in 1971–72. He was promoted Air Vice-Marshal in 1975 and served as Chief of Air Force Materiel until 1979.



In some cases, it was a matter of hastily assembling crew members together first. Cornish's signaller, Warrant Officer Ted Ferguson, had to be recalled from Iraq (he was actually on his way to Singapore with a RAF crew) and was not available to join in the 'Wunstorf shuttle' until 12 July. For several days in August the Australian York crews were joined by another RAAF pilot, Wing Commander Norm Lampe, who had come from Australia for temporary duty with RAAF Overseas Headquarters in London.

The presence of the eight Australians in No 242 Squadron during the chaotic early days of the Airlift produced experiences which were quite unlike those of later RAAF arrivals. For a start, these were the only RAAF crews who flew Yorks, logging some 300 sorties in the type, whereas the personnel who came

later flew Dakotas. It was in a York that Cornish's crew achieved a much-publicised milestone by delivering the 3000th load of the Airlift into Berlin.

**WING COMMANDER WILFRED NORMAN LAMPE, OBE**

Norm Lampe was the most senior RAAF officer to serve on the Berlin Airlift. Having ended World War II as a Wing Commander, he served as CO of No 36 Transport Squadron for a year before taking command of No 86 Transport Wing at Schofields in July 1946. He was Staff Officer for Transport Operations at RAAF Headquarters when sent to England on temporary duty in July 1948.

Next month, Lampe flew (possibly unofficially) in the Berlin Airlift. Between 19–21 August, he captained at least five missions on the Wunstorf shuttle with No 242 Squadron, RAF, before he became ill and was hospitalised—first in England and then back in Australia. He retired in January 1971 with honorary rank of Air Commodore, and lived at Buderim, Queensland, until his death on 30 April 2000.



After the volume of air traffic operating into and out of Wunstorf became so great that the Dakota squadrons were moved to another airfield—Fassberg from 19 July, and Lübeck near Hamburg from 20 August 1948—the two RAAF York crews were the only Australians who served there.

Not that Wunstorf was an idyllic location. Soon after joining the Airlift effort, Cornish's crew were returning from Berlin when weather closed in on their home base and left an array of aircraft queued in thick cloud while waiting for clearance to land. In these conditions Cornish missed 'by a whisker' crashing into a civil-registered converted Halifax bomber which crossed his path three or four metres away at exactly his height. As John Balfe dryly observed in his 1985 account of RAAF transport operations, Cornish 'had not appreciated before how big were the registration letters on

civil aircraft'. It was later established that the crew of the civilian plane had not even seen the York.

#### RAAF MILESTONE OF THE AIRLIFT

On 19 July 1948, a York transport crewed by RAAF personnel on exchange duty with the RAF, comprising FLTLT Jack Cornish, FLTLT Don Sheppard, FLGOFF Max Singleton and WOFF Ted Ferguson, touched down at Berlin's Gatow airport with the 3000th load of the Airlift—16 000 pounds (7257 kg) of flour. On hand was a welcoming committee of 'pretty blonde frauleins' from the economics division at Wilmersdorf City Hall.

The captain, Cornish, was embraced by Fraulein Gretel Schoenrock, who presented him with a bouquet of roses, a kiss and a letter addressed 'to the unknown flier' which stated:

*Long live democracy! Long live freedom! May this small talisman accompany you on all your flights and bring you good luck.*

The talisman was a tiny winged wooden horse.



*With Cornish (from left) were FLTLT Don Sheppard, FLGOFF Max Singleton and WOFF Ted Ferguson*

Two months later, on 21 September, Cornish's crew was waiting to make a late evening take-off from Wunstorf when the York immediately ahead of them in the stream had an engine fail. The stricken aircraft had not yet reached a speed where it could stay in the air on its three remaining engines,

and was operating at 1360 kg above normal take-off weight. It quickly went out of control and crashed off the end of the runway before bursting into flames. The tragedy did not prevent operations from continuing as though nothing had happened. Cornish recalled that he was cleared to go on scheduled time, with the laconic remark from the tower that fire services were not available. Although deeply shocked, they immediately took off while the crashed York and its crew burned nearby. As the aircraft's load was anthracite coal, it burned all night.

Cornish recalls that the broad routine entailed reporting for flying duty at 0600 hours for 10 days in a row, during which his crew usually completed three round trips a day. They then had a day off, before being required to report at 1800 hours for a night shift of three trips for the next 10 days. An aircraft would then be flown back to base in England for servicing, which normally gave the crew who flew it a break of three or four days. After some months, with more crews becoming available, the round flights were often reduced to two per shift. In this sort of regime, squadron affiliations counted for little, and the Australians sometimes flew as national crews, other times in mixed crews with Britons, Canadians and South Africans.

During their days off, the married men among the RAAF crews were often able to spend time with their wives and children. Because they were on a two-year period of exchange duty, their families had accompanied them on posting and were living in lodgings near RAF bases back in England. In at least one case, this brought them into regular unsuspecting contact with a notorious Soviet spy.

On other occasions, periods of leave provided opportunities to see legacies of the recent world war which few other Australians would have known about or understood. Cornish recalls that the head of the Australian Military Mission in Berlin, Major General Fred Galleghan, had invited any Australians visiting the city to call on him. 'My navigator and I did so on a day off. He took us for a drive, including into the Russian sector. We commented on the devastation and he said, "Remember boys, there are many people still buried under that rubble even though the war ended three years ago".'

**DR KLAUS FUCHS – SOVIET SPY**

Emil Julius Klaus Fuchs (1911–1988) was a member of the Communist Party before fleeing Nazi Germany in 1933 to resume his studies in physics in Britain. During World War II, he worked on the British atomic bomb research project and in 1943 joined the 'Manhattan Project' in the US, moving to New Mexico to assist in developing a plutonium bomb. From 1941, he also began passing military secrets to the Soviet Union.

On returning to England in 1946, Fuchs filled a senior post at the atomic energy research establishment at Harwell, not far from the RAF base at Abingdon, near Oxford. Several RAAF men posted to No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron were lodgers, with their wives, in a guest house where scientists from Harwell, including Fuchs, also resided. According to one, Fuchs was 'a retiring, quiet man who kept very much to himself':

*He was a model guest. Rationing made the landlady's lot a difficult one, and there was much grumbling about food, but not from him. The landlady said on numerous occasions about this notorious spy, 'I wish you were all like Dr Fuchs. He is a perfect gentleman!'*

Fuchs' espionage activities were discovered in 1949 and the next year he was sentenced to 14 years in prison. Released in 1959, he emigrated to East Germany and became deputy director of a nuclear research facility in Rossendorf, near Dresden.



In November, the Australian crews serving on Yorks were sent back to England, and next month posted to the Commonwealth VIP squadron. In March 1949, Cornish found himself flying Britain's Secretary of State for Air, Sir Douglas Henderson, on a tour of Airlift bases in Germany. As he recalled, 'It was my first trip with a VIP and we struck some foul weather. The old boy was very pleased to get back to the UK. He certainly found out what bad flying conditions meant.'

### AUSTRALIAN MILITARY MISSION

While Britain's Dominions had been partners in the struggle to defeat Nazism, they were excluded from direct participation in arrangements by the major powers to form an Allied Control Council to run Germany after its defeat in 1945. The Dominions were, however, allowed to establish 'Military Missions' to liaise with the Control Council. Canada, Australia and South Africa all took up this opportunity and opened offices in Berlin.

The head of Australia's Military Mission from February 1948 was Brigadier Frederick ('Black Jack') Galleghan, DSO OBE (1897–1971), who was famous for his role as the commander of Australian prisoners of the Japanese at Changi, Singapore. Granted honorary rank of Major General while posted to Berlin, Galleghan focused his efforts on assisting refugees wishing to immigrate to Australia. He returned home in 1949. Appointed Companion of the Imperial Service Order (ISO) on retirement in 1959, he was knighted in 1969 for his work for war veterans.



***Berlin, 1948: MAJGEN Galleghan (right) talks through an interpreter to Soviet MAJGEN A.G. Kotikov (centre). (AWM P0247.006)***



## CHAPTER 3

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### REORGANISATION

*In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth. Then he created the Berlin Airlift to cure keen pilots of their sinful desire to fly aeroplanes.*

Wing Commander Mick Ensor, DSO\*, DFC\*, AFC, RNZAF and RAF  
– after flying 200 York missions in the Airlift with No 206 Squadron

After three weeks of operations, some 150 aircraft were engaged in the Airlift and the amount of supplies delivered daily to the western zones of Berlin had reached 1500 tons. With more aircraft being added all the time, by 20 July the rate of delivery had gone up to 2500 tons but there it began to plateau. By now it was generally realised that the Airlift—what the Germans were referring to as the *Luftbrücke* (air bridge)—would not end soon, and that better long-term organisation was necessary to overcome the makeshift nature of the existing set-up.

Four days after President Truman's authorisation on 22 July for major resources to be committed, the Air Force Chief of Staff in Washington decided to put the US effort under new management. The initial commander, Brigadier General Joseph Smith, had taken on the role only as a temporary assignment. It was he who had given the unofficial name *Vittles* to the US

part of the operation ('since we're hauling grub', as he put it). But the time had come for a transportation expert to run the Airlift. This was Major General William Tunner, who had only recently become deputy commander for operations of the newly-created Military Air Transport Service. During World War II, Tunner had demonstrated outstanding ability in running the supply operation between India and China across the Himalaya Mountains. By 28 July he was in Germany preparing to take charge of Operation *Vittles*.

#### MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM HENRY TUNNER

When he retired from the US Air Force as a Lieutenant General in 1960, Tunner was already recognised as the foremost authority on airlift operations—probably in the world. A 1928 graduate of West Point, he had become involved during World War II with aircraft ferrying operations across the Atlantic, first as a Colonel and from June 1943 as a Brigadier General. In 1944, he reorganised the world's first large strategic airlift across the Himalayas from India to China, increasing tonnages while reducing aircraft accidents.

A year after his success in directing the Berlin Airlift, Tunner was appointed to establish Combat Cargo Command in the Korean War. In July 1953, he returned to Germany as Commander-in-Chief of US Air Forces in Europe, and in 1958 became Commander of the Military Air Transport Service. He died in 1983.



#### General Tunner Takes Over

Tunner and his staff spent several days inspecting arrangements on the ground. This convinced him that the Airlift was a 'real cowboy operation' in serious need of corrective action. Activities were uncoordinated or haphazard, everything was temporary, and confusion reigned. On 31 July, he began issuing orders aimed at tightening procedures, beginning with a halt to crews leaving their aircraft while it was being unloaded (which reduced

turn-around time in Berlin to 30 minutes). As he later wrote, ‘hustle and bustle and excitement’ were not activities necessary for a successful airlift; there should be ‘no frenzy, no flap, just the inexorable process of getting the job done’. The business of running an airlift was, he said, ‘about as glamorous as drops of water on stone’.



*General Tunner (centre) visiting Oberpfaffenhofen*

Two weeks later, an episode occurred that demonstrated the need for fundamental overhaul of the Airlift’s basis. A key problem was that there were only two airfields in the western half of Berlin (Tempelhof in the US sector, and Gatow in the British zone) and arriving aircraft that had to wait to land were required to circle within a 20-mile radius—much of that directly over the two airfields. The recipe for disaster thus presented was realised on 13 August, subsequently known as ‘Black Friday’.

On that day air traffic controllers at Tempelhof quickly lost control of operations after the cloud base sank to be level with the tops of the apartment buildings surrounding the field, and rain obscured the runway from the

tower. Mishaps piled up fast. Two C-54s misjudged their landing, one slewing into a ditch at the end of the runway and catching fire, the other having to brake hard and blowing both tyres. A third aircraft mistakenly landed on an auxiliary runway still under construction and ground-looped. With the situation so confused, incoming aircraft were put into a holding pattern and soon occupied every height between 3000 and 12 000 feet.



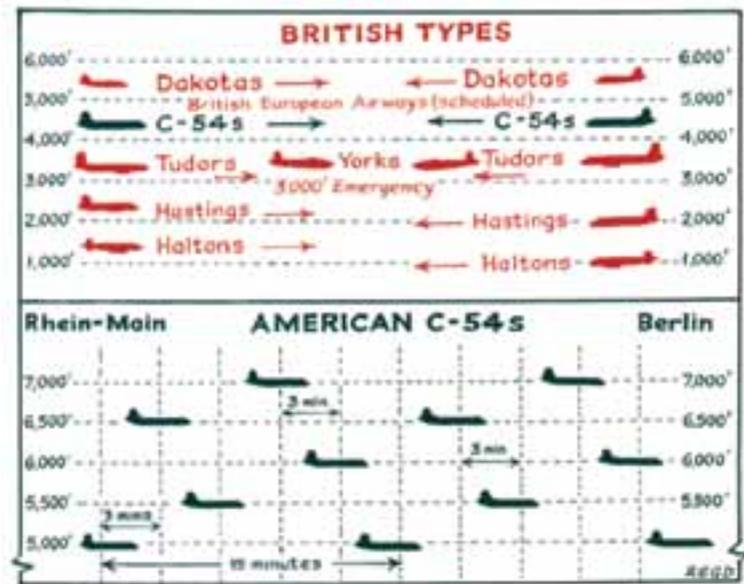
*C-54 on fire, 'Black Friday'*

It so happened that Tunner himself was in the air at the time, his aircraft being bucked around in the murk at 8000 feet, and listening to the near panic filling the radio waves. Seizing the situation, he went on the air and ordered the air traffic controllers to send all aircraft back to their home bases. He then landed his own aircraft at Tempelhof and left two of his staff officers with instructions to sort out the mess. The system they devised and which Tunner subsequently implemented revolutionised the entire Airlift.

### The Block System

Under the new procedures Tunner instituted, all aircraft arriving at Berlin had only one pass at landing. If the pilot was unable to get down the first time, for whatever reason, he was required to return to base with his load. In future there would be no ‘stacking’ in the airspace above the city and the system would operate strictly on a conveyor-belt principle. Tunner also instructed that instrument flying was mandatory for US crews at all times, irrespective of the weather. This overcame the situation where conditions in the air corridors could change with little warning, and standardised the rules that were to apply.

Other changes brought into force were designed to maximise the number of flights that could be made into Berlin every day and also allowed maximum utilisation of facilities on the ground. To ensure that arrivals occurred at regular three-minute intervals, aircraft were required to pass check points at precise times, and at specified altitudes and air speeds according to aircraft type.



To facilitate traffic flow in the air corridors, it was laid down that aircraft flying to Berlin would use the northern and southern routes, with the central corridor to be utilised solely by aircraft leaving the city. Because the southern route from the American zone was longer and entailed flying over the Harz Mountains, a number of US squadrons were moved to bases in the British zone at Fassberg and Celle. These measures all ensured the Airlift attained a rhythm that Tunner likened to ‘jungle drums’.



*Air corridors into Berlin*

Further refinements to the system followed, especially after the British and American operations were brought together as a Combined Air Lift Task Force (CALTF) in mid-October. Based at Wiesbaden, the CALTF was commanded by General Tunner, with Air Commodore John Merer of the RAF as his deputy. Merer commanded the advanced operational headquarters of RAF Transport Command's No 46 Group, which had been dispatched to Germany on 22 September and was based at Bückeburg. This amalgamation meant that a common system was essential, especially with US aircraft operating from the British zone.

Under the 'block system' introduced at this time, each Airlift station in western Germany was allocated a specific time period when its aircraft were to be over the navigation beacon at the entrance to one of the air corridors. Each pilot had to arrive over the beacon within 30 seconds of his allotted time. Aircraft within each block were separated by a gap of only three minutes, and there was also a six-minute safety gap between each block of aircraft. At first, the block system operated on a cycle of four hours, but in January 1949 this was reduced to two hours, and later a one-hour cycle was instituted to ensure better use was made of all available aircraft.



*Air traffic control at Wunstorf*

At the Berlin end, a radar system known as Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) was used to ‘talk down’ pilots and could keep aircraft arriving at four-minute intervals even in adverse weather. The British also had on hand at Gatow equipment called the Beam Approach Beacon System (BABS—also often mistakenly called the Blind Approach Beacon System), which similarly facilitated landings in bad weather.

### **The Long Haul**

Once an efficient system was in place, the Airlift’s success depended on improving carriage capacity in the air as well as the capacity of Berlin’s airports to handle the freight delivered. The second problem was addressed in August 1948, once it became apparent that the Soviet blockade was going to be a protracted affair. Construction began on a third air terminal at Tegel, in the French sector of the city. Three months later the massive new facility was completed, its runway, taxiways and apron areas, access roads and railway having been largely laid down by 17 000 German civilians (mostly women) working in shifts with mainly hand tools.



*Airfield construction work underway, probably at Celle*

Tegel was officially opened on 7 December. During its first fortnight of operations, pilots had to contend with a serious hazard posed by two radio masts used to transmit the Soviet-controlled station *Berliner Radfunk*. After Soviet rejection of requests to relocate the towers, the French commandant resolved the issue on 15 December by sending in engineers with demolition charges.

An estimated 7000 German civilians, displaced persons and refugees were also hired to carry out the work of loading and unloading at the various airfields involved in the operation. This hard labour was performed with sustained vigour that ensured aircraft were constantly turned around in rapid time. Tunner also employed a former *Luftwaffe* major general, Hans-Detlev von Rohden, to recruit and help train hundreds of German mechanics to assist American ground crews with aircraft maintenance.

The problem of increasing carriage capacity in the air was solved by bringing in more and bigger types of military transports, as well as a range of civilian aircraft. The US Air Force moved quickly to employ numbers of the larger C-54 in place of the C-47, so that by August 1948 almost half of all American aircraft involved in the Airlift were of this type. Eventually the Americans had 240 C-54s employed (two squadrons of these from the US Navy), which greatly simplified scheduling and maintenance. In addition, a Douglas C-74 Globemaster I was put onto the US roster in August, followed the next month by a unit of five Fairchild C-82 Packet transports. Very late in the Airlift, even a huge Boeing C-97 Stratofreighter joined the effort carrying 20 tons each flight.

The RAF continued to operate a mixed fleet of aircraft, with the Dakota remaining the main workhorse throughout the Airlift. In November, the British effort was joined by the first squadron of Hastings, a new type which progressively replaced the Yorks. Early in August 1948, a series of contracts were also let with British civilian operators which saw a strange assortment of types taking to German skies. Apart from commercial aircraft like the Avro Tudor (some of these operated by the Airflight company belonging to Australian airman Don Bennett) and Bristol Freighter, many converted wartime types became involved, including ex-Halifax bombers (also Halton variants), Lancasters, Lincolns and Liberators. The Americans, too, chartered some civilian operators as irregular carriers for the Airlift, although the aircraft contributed by these companies were mainly C-47/DC-3s and C-54/DC-4s.



*C-54/DC-4s queued in the Airlift*

Increasing the number of aircraft in the Airlift fleet, and changing the composition to include larger types, produced a dramatic change in the carriage statistics. Whereas 260 aircraft had lifted a daily total of 2250 tons on 20 July 1948, just two months later, on 18 September (coincidentally US Air Force Day), a new one-day record of 7000 tons was achieved with a fleet of more than 300 aircraft. Average cargo delivery for the whole of September and for October was actually 4640 and 4760 tons a day, respectively. But then the level dropped in November, to only 3786 tons, due to deterioration in flying conditions associated with the approach of winter. Unfortunately, this circumstance coincided with an increase in the tonnage considered necessary to keep Berlin supplied. On 20 October, the daily requirement was revised from 4500 to 5620 tons—with coal accounting for 55 per cent of the new amount. There were now real fears held for the Airlift's ability to sustain the city.



*Airflight Tutor receiving fuel*

#### **DON BENNETT AND AIRFLIGHT LTD**

Among the civilian freight airlines employed in the Berlin Airlift was Airflight Ltd owned by Australian airman, Air Vice-Marshal Donald Clifford Tyndale Bennett, CB, CBE, DSO (1910–1986), renowned as the leader of Pathfinder Force in World War II. Airflight's Avro Tudor V transports joined the Airlift effort on 2 September 1948 and completed 977 return flights to Berlin, with Bennett flying a quarter of these himself.

On 10 October, Bennett and his second pilot survived a crisis aboard a Tudor loaded with nine tons of diesel fuel, caused by an elevator lock being left in place on take-off from Wunstorf. The aircraft made a safe landing only through Bennett's extraordinary airmanship. After Airflight's other first pilot, Captain Clem Utting, was mysteriously knocked down and killed by a truck in December, Bennett flew two or three sorties into Gatow every night for the next two months.







## CHAPTER 4

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### MORE AIRCREWS NEEDED

*I have been particularly impressed by the close and effective co-operation which is evident between the American forces and our own countrymen together with those from the Commonwealth.*

British PM Clement Attlee to the British Military Governor  
9 March 1949, after a visit to Berlin

Once it became apparent that the Soviets would not be lifting their blockade in the short term, Airlift organisers began to focus additionally on the requirement to husband the aircrews that were essential to sustaining the relief effort long-term. Predictably, British authorities quickly turned to seeking whatever assistance might be available from Dominion air forces.

#### **London Calls**

First steps in this direction had actually been taken on 28 June, when Britain's Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, briefed Dominion high commissioners on the situation in Germany during a meeting at the Foreign Office in London. After outlining Allied plans to begin delivering essential supplies to Berlin,

mainly concentrated foods, Bevin had used this opportunity to suggest informally 'that if any Commonwealth country had suitable aircraft and crews to assist in this movement [they] would be welcome'.

After news of this feeler subsequently appeared in newspapers next day, the Foreign Office was forced to issue 'press guidance' that no request for the supply of aircraft from Commonwealth countries would be made unless further developments required it. This was essentially because some of the countries concerned made it clear that any request would be unwelcome. Canada in particular made this view known, with External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson expressing his personal 'embarrassment and irritation' over the matter. He said he hoped that 'no such request would be put forward', but if one came then it should be a general call, not confined to Commonwealth countries alone. Singling out the Dominions, he warned, would be seen 'in some quarters' as an attempt to drag them into another Chanak crisis.

#### CHANAK CRISIS

After the defeat of Turkey in World War I, forces of the victorious allies occupied parts of the country under the terms of the peace treaty forced on the imperial government of the Sultan. The Greek occupation of western Anatolia was resisted by nationalists under Mustapha Kemal (1880–1938), later first President of the Turkish Republic. Late in 1922, Kemalists expelled Greek forces from Izmir (Smyrna) and advanced rapidly on the 'neutral' international zone around the town of Chanak (now called Çanakkale), where lightly armed British and French troops maintained the free passage of shipping through the Straits of the Hellespont (Dardanelles).

France ordered its detachment out, but on 16 September, London announced that Britain and its Dominions would declare war on Turkey if Kemal's forces did not withdraw. This threat entailed no consultation with the Dominions in whose name it had been made. Canada declared that its parliament would decide whether to join in any action, and while Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, acceded to the proposal it was clear that Britain's presumption was resented in Australia also. Although conflict was averted, the episode was not quickly forgotten.

Apart from Canada, other parts of Britain's former empire were also unlikely to be responsive. It was recognised in London that India, Pakistan and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were not closely concerned by developments in Europe, and since they had no transport aircraft available in any case it was thought certain that they would refuse. Only South Africa, Australia and New Zealand had indicated that they were willing to consider what help they could give.

After returning from a personal visit to Berlin, Prime Minister Chifley announced on 21 July that he had conferred with his Minister for Air, Arthur Drakeford, about assisting the Allied effort. Drakeford was now said to be examining whether any aircraft were available from the limited number of transports that the RAAF had. Chifley was careful to emphasise that Britain had not requested any such aid, and the assessment being made by Drakeford was purely in case a request did come from London.

#### PRIME MINISTER CHIFLEY VISITS BERLIN

In July 1948, Australia's Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, took time out from a visit to London for economic talks to make a brief tour of Berlin and to inspect the Airlift effort that was then in its early stages. This was an initiative reportedly arranged by Chifley's British hosts, who hoped to align his government with London's anti-Soviet policy.

Arriving at Gatow on 10 July on board a VIP York aircraft of 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron, the PM apparently spent just eight hours in Berlin. This period was, however, long enough to convince him to support the Allied effort to defeat the Soviet blockade. Before he departed, he told journalists that a 'stand' against the Soviets by the Western powers was justified. Within weeks of his return to Australia, Chifley's government offered to supply aircraft and crews to join the Airlift.



*Prime Minister Chifley (with pipe) with MAJGEN Galleghan (right) in Berlin*

Despite its apparent intention of waiting to be asked, the Chifley Government notified London on 3 August that it had decided that day 'to offer to the British Government the use of 10 Douglas Dakota aircraft to assist in the air lift to Berlin if required'. London showed a distinct lack of alacrity in responding, and not until 13 August was a reply sent. While Canberra was thanked for the 'generous offer' of aircraft, it was advised that the most valuable assistance from Australia would be for the RAAF to provide trained Dakota crews who would fly the Dakotas already engaged in the Airlift. If Australia could assist in this way, the cablegram continued, the crews would be welcome 'as soon as they could get here'. Naturally, any aircrews sent 'would be kept together and their Australian identity retained'.

Both South Africa and New Zealand received similar advice after they made offers of aircraft. When the Union Government in Pretoria hinted that it preferred to receive a formal request, London obliged on 26 August with a message that any assistance 'would be warmly welcomed' but the need at present 'is not for aircraft but for complete Dakota aircrews'. Wellington was also told that aircraft were not required, because it would take too long for these to get to Britain and they would need servicing once they did arrive. An additional reason not stated at this time was a belief in Britain that the Allied Control Council decision in 1945, which established the air corridors into Berlin, had limited their use to 'aircraft of the Nations governing Germany'. This apparently meant that any aircraft from the Dominions would have to be temporarily transferred to Britain and fly under RAF markings—an arrangement unlikely to appeal to sovereign governments.

### **Australia Sends**

Rumours about a probable RAAF involvement in the Airlift had been circulating for several weeks within No 86 (Transport) Wing at Schofields air base, near Blacktown on Sydney's western outskirts. In anticipation, the personnel for an unnumbered unit known as 'RAAF Squadron Berlin Air Lift' had been identified, consisting of 10 aircraft crews and a commanding officer. Equal numbers of crews were drawn from the wing's two flying units, Nos 36 and 38 Squadrons, each crew comprising two pilots, a navigator and a wireless operator—all officers and warrant officers. Their CO would be Squadron Leader Cyril (better known as 'Cy') Greenwood, who had been in

command of No 36 Squadron since April. In the expectation that the RAAF would be contributing aircraft, a maintenance crew of 20 fitters, riggers and crew chiefs had also been selected.

#### SQUADRON LEADER CYRIL ARTHUR GREENWOOD

'Cy' Greenwood (1915–1999) already held a private pilot's licence when he joined the RAAF at the start of World War II. In 1943 he went with No 31 Squadron, a Beaufighter unit, to the Northern Territory, but on 26 April was shot down during a strike on Aroe Island in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). Wounded and captured, he was held as a prisoner on Ambon and in Japan until the end of the war.

After serving on long-distance courier flights to supply Australian forces occupying Japan, he was posted in April 1948 to command No 36 (Transport) Squadron at Schofields. On his return from the Berlin Airlift, he filled staff jobs until sent on exchange duty to the US Air Force in 1954–56. He was CO of No 10 Squadron in 1959–64, before becoming second-in-command of RAAF Base Richmond as a Group Captain. Retiring in December 1965, he had a second career with Trans Australia Airlines, running the company's flight training centre until 1980.



News of Britain's acceptance of an Australian contingent was received with considerable delight at Schofields, though not among the ground maintenance personnel who would not be going now that the decision to send only aircrew had been made. While waiting for word of their departure date, contingent members began preparations: arranging passports and assembling and packing gear, attending lectures on Germany from Flight Lieutenant Eric Gentle (a member whose experiences there straight after the war made him the resident expert), and receiving briefings on their expected airlift work and flying conditions over Europe, as well as vaccinations for a string of diseases.



*SQNLDR Greenwood packs his trunk*

On 21 August, a Saturday, news of the departure schedule reached 86 Wing, while contingent members were on weekend stand-down. Although not on the original list, Warrant Officer Wal Pettersson was one man determined not to be left behind. A pilot who happened to be on duty as Orderly Sergeant when the aircrew bound for Berlin were recalled from leave, he recalled: 'I just put myself on the list and was prepared to fill any vacancy for a pilot. One man withdrew. I was IN!'

Also on 21 August, a cablegram was sent to London advising that Canberra planned to send the 41 members of the RAAF contingent in three groups, beginning with 20 men due to fly out of Sydney on 24 August on board a Qantas Empire Airways Constellation aircraft, with the remainder to travel on Constellations leaving on 28 and 31 August. As scheduled, on Tuesday 24 August, the first group of 29 members (seven complete crews, plus the CO) was bussed in civilian clothes to Mascot Airport, expecting to fly out at 10.30 pm. On hand to see them off was a small crowd of wives and families, as more than half the contingent were married men. Joining the married ranks at the last minute was Warrant Officer Alwyn Smith, who wed his fiancée the previous day. (Flying Officer David Evans, the contingent's youngest member, also married on the Monday, although he was not scheduled to fly out until the 28th.) The planned first departure came to nothing, however, after a leak in the aircraft's fuel supply system forced Qantas to postpone the flight for 24 hours. The delay allowed the RAAF men to spend extra time with friends and family around Sydney, before finally getting away at 10.30 pm on Wednesday night.



*RAAF party transits Karachi*

The trip to London took three days, travelling via Darwin, Singapore, Calcutta (India), Karachi (Pakistan), Cairo (Egypt), Castel Benito (Tripoli, Libya) and on to London. It was a relaxed, informal journey with the RAAF men playing cards most of the way. Little out of the

ordinary occurred until Cairo was reached at 3 pm local time on 28 August, for a 75-minute refuelling stop. Departure was delayed after air-raid alarms sounded and passengers were hustled into bomb shelters. Egypt was observing a truce after fighting with the Jewish state of Israel proclaimed on 14 May, but the situation was still tense. When no hostile aircraft appeared, the flight was able to leave at 5 pm and reached Castel Benito at 9 pm. Owing to fog in London, it was not until 4 am on the 29th that the Constellation left Tripoli on the final leg of the journey.

### **Arrival and Training**

Arriving at London's Heathrow airport at 10 am on 29 August, the Australians found an official party on hand to greet them, led by Air Vice-Marshal P.H. Mackworth, the Air Officer in charge of Administration for RAF Transport Command. With him was Group Captain R.J. Cohen, a seconded New Zealand Air Force officer who was serving as Senior Air Staff Officer of No 46 Transport Group, and Air Commodore Ernest Knox-Knight, the head of the RAAF's Overseas Headquarters in London. After a welcome breakfast at the airport, Greenwood's men boarded transport aircraft of No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron and were flown with their luggage to the RAF station at Bassingbourn, near Cambridge.

The Australians were given a day to settle into their accommodation, which was in wartime Nissen huts offering sparsely-furnished single rooms and even more basic ablution facilities in need of refurbishment. On 31 August the seven crews—all except the copilots—were flown to Bircham Newton, Norfolk, to undergo familiarisation on the BABS navigation and landing system. Meanwhile, the copilots had been kept active back at Bassingbourn with general and instrument flying training. When the second batch of two RAAF crews reached England on 1 September, having departed Australia on 28 August, they were also sent to Bircham Newton (less the copilots) to join in this training.

On 3 September the first seven crews were sent back to Bassingbourn, followed by the second batch three days later. Next afternoon, on the 7th, the remaining crew from Australia arrived (having left on schedule on 31 August) and brought the squadron to its full strength. This last group was not sent to Bircham Newton but received equivalent training locally. While the pilots began in-flight training, the wireless operators were flown to Royston near King's Lynn and converted onto the Marconi radio equipment fitted in RAF Dakotas, instead of the US sets which the RAAF used at home, before again heading back to Bassingbourn.



*Waiting for the bus at Bassingbourn, 10 September 1948  
(from left) Murdoch, Hudson, Shadforth, Greenwood, Carrick,  
Cannon and Burke*

Training for the pilots mainly entailed being checked out on instrument flying, involving precision let-downs and homing using the relatively new Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) system. This phase was not without

incident, as later recounted by navigator Flight Lieutenant Ken Staib. On 7 September, he and Flight Lieutenant Rex Berriman were in the crew of Dakota C IV KN520 with a RAF captain undergoing let-down training when the aircraft made a single-engined wheels-up landing. 'It was a good landing and we and the aircraft escaped serious injury.'

This effort continued until 10 September, when tests began for the issue of 'Green Cards' qualifying the pilots to fly in all conditions. There was a slight disruption to this process while Greenwood—with his flight commander, Flight Lieutenant Rod Murdoch, and four others—made an overnight visit to Germany to complete arrangements for the RAAF unit's impending move. By 13 September, however, the Green Card tests had been completed at RAF Base Brize Norton, near Oxford. All 10 aircraft captains had passed and were now rated as ready to participate in airlift operations. At 8 am the next day, the squadron moved to Oakington, just north of Cambridge, the point from which the men were to be dispatched to Germany. Because of problems with the availability of transports, the Australians had to proceed in two groups and were not complete in their new location until the mid-afternoon of 15 September. Earlier that same day a crew led by Greenwood had made the contingent's first contribution to the Airlift effort, flying a 7300 lb (3300 kg) load of flour into Berlin.



## CHAPTER 5

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### RAAF OPERATIONS

*A wonderful bird is the pelican,  
Its beak can hold more than its belly can.*

Ogden Nash (1902–1971), American poet

The base which was the Australian squadron's new home was Blankensee, outside the historic north German city of Lübeck. The airfield was a former *Luftwaffe* station, used during the war initially by He-111 bombers and later Ju-88 night fighters, and for jet experimental work. It had since undergone considerable development to accommodate all the Dakota aircraft of the RAF's No 46 Group involved in the Airlift.

As promised to the Australian Government, the squadron was kept together as an entity, although, given the nature of the flying entailed, this actually meant very little. There is even evidence that the British authorities referred to the detachment as 'No 1 Dominion Squadron', although it seems that neither unit members nor the RAAF authorities had any knowledge of this. When the 10 aircrews offered by South Africa arrived at Lübeck on 18 October, having duly completed their preparation training at Bassingbourn, these were similarly given the designation of 'No 2 Dominion Squadron'. In fact, the SAAF had sent 12 crews, but two were intended to support the



## LÜBECK

For much of its 800-year history, Lübeck has been one of the main commercial centres of northern Germany. Although located 14 kilometres inland from the Baltic Sea, river access enabled it to become a major seaport. In 1358, the city became the administrative headquarters of the Hanseatic League, an association of 200 towns for the protection of trading interests which lasted until 1630. The status it enjoyed since the Middle Ages as a separate, self-governing city ended in 1937, when the Nazi regime made it part of the Prussian province of Schleswig-Holstein.

During World War II, Lübeck suffered severely from a single mass air raid which became famous as the first major success by RAF Bomber Command against a German target. The attack, on the night of 28 March 1942, destroyed 30 per cent of the built-up area and caused damage of varying degree to over 60 per cent of all buildings in the city. At the end of the war Lübeck remained just outside the zone occupied by Soviet forces, its population swelled by 100 000 German refugees.



South African Military Mission maintained in Berlin under Major General Evered Poole. For this purpose, Pretoria had sent two SAAF Dakotas, which were used to bring the Airlift crews to Britain, and reportedly both aircraft and crews were then used to fly airlift missions when not required by General Poole (without—so far as is known—any objections being raised by the Soviets). These airmen remained, however, quite separate from the Airlift contingent commanded by Major Dirk van der Kaay.



*British Prime Minister Attlee chats to RAAF men on a visit to the Airlift, March 1949*

In November, the personnel from the Royal New Zealand Air Force reached Lübeck also. There were just three crews, led by Flight Lieutenant Colin Fraser. This was too small an element to be given separate status under the unofficial scheme adopted by the British, so it appears that the New Zealanders were put in with No 1 Dominion Squadron in what might have been an attempt to create some sort of Anzac identity.

## Following Routine

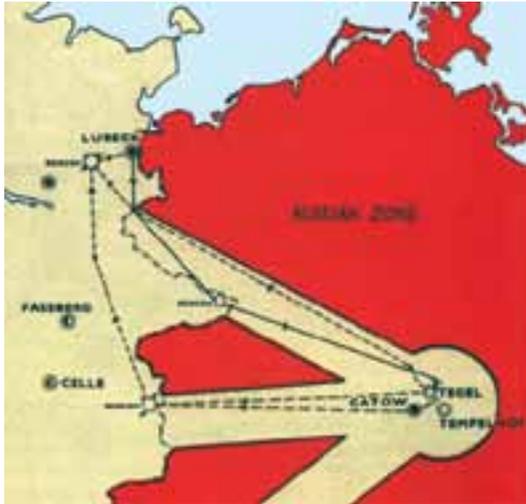
By the time the Australian detachment arrived, the Airlift had largely settled down into its pattern of operations. Some elements of the block system were not implemented until the middle of the next month, and the new airhead at Tegel had still to open, but the main problems in the system had been resolved and the delivery rate was then steadily climbing during the lead-up to winter. The RAAF men took their place in the aircraft block flying from Lübeck down the 'Hamburg corridor' at an altitude of 5500 feet to Berlin, then departing via the 'Hanover corridor' at 5000 feet back to Lübeck. At Berlin they usually flew into Gatow, but while runway repairs were being carried out there, Tegel was used from 22 November to 9 December 1948.



*Briefing of RAAF crew: (from left) Hahn, Evans, RAF officer, Benson-Inglis, Clark*

The routine was for each RAAF crew to complete a 20-hour roster which entailed two return trips (each of three hours duration). Under this arrangement, each crew—after flight planning and turn-around time on the ground at both Gatow and Lübeck—was left with about 10 hours in which to consume one full meal and sleep before resuming the schedule.

After completing three of these 20-hour stints, crews received a 36-hour break. After finishing four such cycles, crews were given a 3–6 day break (often enjoyed back in Britain), before starting all over again.



### Hazards Faced

Considering the volume of traffic moving into and out of the airfields at Berlin, great demands were constantly placed on all aircrews. By January 1949, there were 356 aircraft based on Airlift airfields (before the Airlift was over more than 690 aircraft would have been employed at one time or another), and although maintenance difficulties such as a shortage of essential spare parts reduced aircraft availability, the air corridors into Berlin were never other than extremely busy. The other factor affecting the average daily level of deliveries achieved in January (5500 tons actual, against 8000 tons notionally possible) was the winter weather.



*Winter at Lübeck*

Officially, the weather experienced during the 1948–49 winter was described as ‘better than expected’, but this did not mean that flying conditions were other than extremely demanding and occasionally hazardous because of heavy fog, turbulence or icing. Despite the navigation aids used, it was not unknown for visibility to be so poor that pilots had to rely on Very flares fired from near the runway threshold to find the Gatow airstrip. But crews soon took operating under such conditions in their stride. As David Evans sardonically recorded: ‘I recall walking out to my aircraft one dark, wet, cold and sleety night, [with] snow underfoot, and I said to a crew just landed, “What’s the weather like in Berlin?” The response was, “Oh good, cloud base is 400 feet”. I was relieved at that good news.’

To ensure that the aircraft was not only on course, but also precisely on time to preserve the three-minute interval which separated individual aircraft within each corridor, navigators were often forced to fix position every three minutes. Despite the strict procedures meant to apply, the unexpected could still occur. Evans recalled one night sortie in which his Dakota entered cloud at 400 feet on leaving Lübeck and did not break out of this murk until passing through the same altitude on descent into Gatow. Considerable icing of the airframe was experienced during the flight, but the effects of this on his aircraft’s speed was not realised until he saw the RAAF Dakota

which had departed three minutes after him already on the ground and unloading, meaning that somewhere in the cloud cover in the air corridor—while travelling at the same altitude—his squadron colleagues had somehow managed to pass him! It is said that ‘lively discussion ensued’.

Evans recalls that the most frightening moment of his time in the Airlift occurred soon after he took off from Gatow on 7 April 1949 to return to Lübeck with 22 passengers, mostly children, on board. One of his engines began malfunctioning at 100 feet and failed completely at 400 feet. He barely managed to turn and join the circuit, landing safely in a strong crosswind. The cause of his problem was suspected sabotage, after a large piece of rag was discovered in the aircraft’s fuel tank. Sabotage was a relatively rare occurrence, with only 27 suspected cases reported over the course of the Airlift; only four were proven.



*Unloading passengers at Lübeck, October 1948  
RAAF crew (from left) Fuller, Page, Kuschert, Blackman*

The incessant schedule of the Airlift placed enormous demands on everyone involved in it—not just aircrew, but maintenance personnel and loading staff. Adding to the flying hazards were technical problems caused by such things as dust from coal (a common cargo) working its way into control cables. Surprisingly, Soviet interference with Allied transports using the air corridors was not the issue that might have been expected, or which Allied

press propaganda occasionally portrayed. It was not that harassment did not occur, but incidents were neither anywhere as numerous nor as serious as would have been the case had it been the intention of the Soviets to disrupt or prevent the Airlift.



### SOVIET INTERFERENCE

Despite the Americans recording more than 730 incidents of Soviet interference with Airlift operations between August 1948 and August 1949, when viewed against the nearly 190 000 sorties flown by US aircraft alone it is clear that Soviets were not bent on destroying or disrupting the Allied effort. Less than 40 per cent of the recorded incidents were activities likely to imperil aircraft engaged in the Airlift, and most were purely nuisance value involving radio jamming, searchlights and flares.

Most crews saw Soviet fighters in the air corridors, but none that showed hostile intent. Occasionally, Russian aircraft would formate on Allied transports and stay for several minutes before breaking away, but RAAF airmen attest that there was nothing 'challenging' in this behaviour. More worrisome were military exercises that the Soviets periodically conducted close to the air corridors, involving ground-to-air firing or parachuting, usually at short notice or with no notice at all. The purpose seemed to be to remind the Allies that the Soviets had equal right to use the air corridors.

### FLYING OFFICER EVANS AND HIS 'ITCHY FINGER'

*On one occasion I was asked to fly a journalist to Berlin from Lübeck. I invited him to travel in the crew compartment. The weather was fine, and in the corridor we sighted some aircraft in the distance. He asked what they were and I replied that they were too far away to be really sure but I thought it was a Soviet formation, probably Yak fighters.*

*A few weeks later I received a cutting from an Australian newspaper that my wife sent me with the headline saying that a RAAF aircraft had been buzzed by the Russians. It described a very close encounter with Yaks and quoted me as saying 'my trigger finger was itching!' Here it was, front page news! The whole story was rubbish and caused me great embarrassment. It was quite a joke in the squadron, however.*



**FLGOff Evans at the controls**

AIRMSHL Evans, quoted in Steve Eather,  
*Odd Jobs* (1996)

Inevitably, before the Airlift was over there had been a large number of aircraft accidents, both in the air and on the ground. The US Air Force alone suffered 126 accidents, more than 70 of these classed as 'major'; 32 occurred during taxiing, and 37 while on approach and landing. Twelve accidents resulted in more than 30 fatalities. The RAF experienced nearly 100 accidents, five of these claiming 18 lives. Included in this number was the sole RAAF casualty of the Airlift. British civil contractors also had five fatal accidents, with another 18 lives lost. Figures for the total number of deaths vary, depending on the number of German civilians regarded as fatalities of the Airlift. The Airlift Memorial in Berlin bears 78 names, which means that only eight Germans are officially acknowledged as being victims, whereas other sources put the number as high as 13.

### SOLE RAAF CASUALTY

On the night of 22 March 1949, a RAF Dakota Mk IV (number KJ 970) was attempting to land at Lübeck in bad weather. The captain was instructed by air traffic control to carry out a radar-guided approach or else overshoot and divert to Wunstorf, but when the crew experienced problems on approach and aborted the landing, the pilot made a turn with the intention of going around at low level and making a second attempt. While on the downwind leg of the circuit, the aircraft flew into the ground in Soviet-controlled territory two miles south-east of the airfield.

The pilot, FLTLT Mel Quinn of the RAAF (on attachment to No 27 Squadron, RAF), and the navigator, FLGOFF K.A. Reeves (a South African serving in the RAF), were killed outright. The third crewman, Master Signaller A. Penny, died of injuries later. Quinn was the sole Australian fatality of the Airlift. A court of inquiry concluded that pilot error was most likely a significant factor in the crash, but the AOC of 46 Group, RAF, pointed out that the crash was the third fatal accident at Lübeck which might have been avoided by the installation of upgraded lighting and ground control facilities.



*Mel Quinn, on enlistment 1941*

### Conditions

Considering the winter cold and wretched hours kept when flying, aircrews at Lübeck were fortunate to have comfortable living quarters. The three-storey brick blocks which they occupied were formerly part of the permanent *Luftwaffe* station from prewar days, so at least constituted a quite acceptable standard of accommodation. Members of the RAAF detachment shared their block with the New Zealanders, while a nearby block housed the South Africans. Under these arrangements, a quite fraternal relationship operated between the Dominion contingents. This was especially the case with the South Africans, among whom there was at least one member with a strong Australian connection in Lieutenant Trevor Hill. Whenever actually on duty, all crews had access to a special flight mess—separate from the

normal one—where better food was available, including scarce, rationed items such as eggs.



*WOFFs relax at Lübeck*

When not rostered to fly, detachment members were free to relax by joining in activities on the base, such as snooker in the Mess, nightly movie shows, local tennis and cricket competitions, and even horse riding in the surrounding countryside. Longer leave periods allowed for excursions into Lübeck or to nearby Travemünde or one of the other resort towns on the Baltic coast. Two RAAF men used to go sailing on Lübeck Bay as far as Denmark and Sweden, until one day a sudden squall nearly pushed them onto shore in the Russian zone—an occurrence which briefly led to rumours that they had been detained by the Soviets.

### LIEUTENANT TREVOR WINSTON HILL

Although born in Johannesburg, South Africa, Trevor Hill (1921–1994) spent 10 years growing up in Sydney before returning home with his parents in 1935. He served in artillery units of the Union Defence Force during the East African campaign of 1941, before transferring to the South African Air Force as a Second Lieutenant in January 1943. Promoted temporarily to Captain in December 1945, he was discharged in April 1946.

Successfully applying to join the postwar SAAF, Hill was in the first contingent of aircrews sent from South Africa in September 1948 to take part in the Berlin Airlift. He was among the personnel relieved by replacement personnel in April 1949 and flew home. In September 1951, he resigned to fly with various African airlines for the next 25 years. He formed Uganda Airways in 1978 and worked there as Director of Operations until 1981. Retiring to Nairobi, he moved back to South Africa in 1986 to live in Umhlangeni, a coastal town south of Durban.



For many in the RAAF detachment, remaining in the vicinity of Lübeck on their days off was not the preferred option. The warrant officers found that they were resented by many in British uniform, including the Army and RAF police who patrolled the town and regarded Australians as ‘wild colonials’. Running foul of these petty authorities frequently resulted in being paraded before Squadron Leader Greenwood as CO, although he understood the problem and rarely took stern action apart from giving a ‘dressing down’. Part of the resentment from RAF types stemmed from the fact that the British Service had adopted a new rank structure which effectively demoted many NCO aircrew. The RAAF had also adopted the same scheme back home, but Greenwood had shrewdly decided not to implement orders for the change to avoid creating dissension within his detachment; instead, he kept it in ‘the bottom drawer’ as an additional disciplinary sanction that he could apply if required.



*CO Greenwood (right) and his Flight Commander, FLTLT Rod Murdoch*

Some members went sightseeing in Berlin, although that also carried the risk of inadvertently straying into the Soviet zone. This happened to two Australians travelling on a train, but they were helped by a group of German civilians who masked them until they got back into the right area. Understandably, many chose to take their leave outside Germany—usually heading for England on aircraft returning there for maintenance. Free rail travel made Paris and Copenhagen other popular destinations, and a few headed for the ski resorts of Switzerland and similar playgrounds.

Of the hundreds of aircrew who took part in the operation, only the RAAF and RNZAF men kept up the Airlift routine for the duration of the Airlift without relief. RAF crews were entitled to return to England after three months, although they were encouraged to extend for at least another three months. In April 1949, the South Africans sent a replacement contingent of 10 crews (with another two to meet their Military Mission's needs) under

command of Major Dirk Blaauw. Among this group was Lieutenant Duncan Ralston, later to rise to senior rank in the SAAF.

### RAAF TOURISTS

During longer leave breaks in the Airlift roster, members of the RAAF squadron often took the opportunity to escape from Lübeck and its environs and travel further afield. Some visited British recreation centres such as Garmisch in Austria to try their hand at skiing, but more usually the Australians went with aircraft returning to England for routine maintenance. Often hospitality in London was organised by the Victoria League, in the form of tickets to theatres, concerts and dances. On other occasions, invitations were received from across Britain for individuals or small groups to spend their leave in Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

One special visit was that paid by SQNLDR Cy Greenwood and FLTLT Trevor Fairbairn to Windsor Castle, where they were the guests of the Deputy Constable, Lord Gowrie, the former Governor-General of Australia 1936–45. Another excursion arranged by the Services Club in London saw four warrant officers visit the Irish Republic, where they stayed with an English family who owned the local flour mill in one of the minor cities.



The New Zealanders also sent three replacement crews led by Flight Lieutenant Larry Siegert, though these did not arrive until July 1949—after the blockade had been ended and the Airlift was being continued to create a reserve stockpile. Even then, two of the RNZAF crews were earmarked to replace the time-expired men still serving on exchange with

No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron, RAF, as soon as they flew their last airlift mission on 11 August.

In effect, it was only the Australians—at least 25 of them—who remained in situ for practically the entire Airlift, not leaving until 11 months after their arrival in Germany and most logging about 240 round trips to Berlin.

An important factor in the decision not to relieve the RAAF crews was an acute shortage of suitable aircrew being experienced across the Australian Service. In mid-1948, when the Airlift began, the strength of the RAAF was down to 8025 personnel—less than five per cent of its peak during World War II, four years earlier. On 21 September 1948, Prime Minister Chifley had responded to a question in Parliament by saying that the Government would consider increasing the strength of RAAF aircrews then in Britain, but not surprisingly nothing further was ever heard of such a suggestion. The fact was that providing just the 10 crews originally sent had imposed a severe strain on Air Force manning, to an extent where the two squadrons of 86 Wing were left so depleted they were subsequently pooled together as one.



*RAAF group at Lübeck, 1948: (from left) Page, Kushert, Hudson, Pegler, Cannon, Lang, Staib*

The grievance felt by the men of the RAAF detachment to the Airlift was that they had originally been sent to Europe for a period expected to be a

matter of weeks, or at most a few months, but found themselves remaining far longer than other contingents without any indication of whether they would be 'replaced, withdrawn, or left there for good'. As one member observed, 'It was the way of the times, but I believe this reflected badly on RAAF personnel administration'.

An opportunity to implement at least a partial changeover of personnel arose from the situation which developed after it was found that the carriage of copilots had been deleted in RAF Dakotas, to enable a greater payload on each aircraft. As aircraft were loaded without regard to the crews who would be actually allocated to fly them, this meant that all flights operated by four-man RAAF crews were always overweight. The problem was finally overcome in April 1949 when three crews were needed to take delivery of new Bristol Freighter transports, which the RAAF had acquired to support the Anglo-Australian Joint Project at Woomera, and to ferry these aircraft to Australia. Three aircraft captains, with equal numbers of navigators and signallers, went back to England to form the Freighter crews, and with them went seven of the copilots as passengers on the flight home. The remaining three copilots had been made up to captain standard to replace the three then leaving the Airlift.

To bring the Airlift detachment up to full strength, RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne sent only six replacements for the missing navigators and signallers among the crews. These duly arrived in England in late April, and were helped to settle in at Bassingbourn by members of the Australian contingent on exchange with the RAF. After the usual training to prepare them for European flying conditions, the group reached Lübeck on 13 May 1949. This was the only change made to the manning of RAAF Squadron Berlin Airlift throughout the period it was in Germany, and brought the total number of members who served with the Australian detachment to 47.

### FREIGHTER FERRY

In early April 1949, the three RAAF crews selected for return to Australia—each comprising captain, copilot, radio operator and navigator—reported to Australia House in London. They were sent to the Bristol Aircraft Company's factory at Filton to begin familiarisation on the Bristol 170 Freighter Mk 21, three of which had been acquired to support activity at the Woomera rocket range in South Australia. Joining the crews at Filton were three flight engineers loaned from the RAF.

On 20 April, the Freighters took off from RAF Station Lyneham headed for Australia. On board were the seven copilots also being returned from the Berlin Airlift. Although time in the air totalled less than 80 hours, the trip took 13 days. The prolonged nature of the journey was mainly caused by the limited navigational aids carried in the aircraft, which meant that the crew was restricted to flights made under VFR (visual flight rules) the entire way. Some delays were also experienced in obtaining overflight clearances through the Middle East and Pakistan.







## CHAPTER 6

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### THE AIRLIFT ENDS

*The Berlin crisis, on reflection, resulted in a division of Europe. The government in West Germany was created, and ... on our side the German Democratic Republic was born. That division went right across Germany.*

Vladmir Yerofeyev, Soviet Foreign Ministry

Throughout the winter months, the pace of the Airlift continued unabated. In part, this was possible because weather conditions were better than usually encountered. Early in July 1948, the weather patterns of the three previous winters were examined by Airlift planners in order to gauge the likely rate of flow that might be possible. In the event, the predicted levels were exceeded in December by nearly 15 per cent. As later reported, there were very few occasions when the flying stopped 'except on days of thick fog in Berlin'.

During February 1949 the quantity of supplies delivered was maintained at an average of 5437 tons per day, and with the worst of winter over the trend was inexorably upwards from then on. The week of 12 March was a record breaker, with 45 683 tons flown into Berlin over seven days—a daily rate of over 6500 tons. By April, the figure had risen to 7845 tons. In the middle of that month, General Tunner organised a special effort to be mounted over

the Easter weekend to boost the morale of Berliners—and to make a point to the Soviets. Over 24 hours ending at noon on Sunday 17 April, just short of 1400 flights were made into the city carrying almost 13 000 tons. To sustain this performance, aircraft were landing or taking off from Berlin's three airfields every 30 seconds around the clock.

#### VISIT BY CAS JONES

Air Marshal George Jones recorded in his autobiography *From Private to Air Marshal* (1988) that he made a visit to the RAAF detachment engaged in the Berlin Airlift 'shortly after it began operating'. In fact, it appears that his visit must have taken place in April–May 1949—shortly before the Soviet blockade was lifted. After flying into Berlin, he was hosted by General Gallegan, head of the Australian Military Mission, who he mistakenly identified as 'General Callaghan' and 'commandant of the British Sector' of Berlin.

According to Jones, the General insisted on taking him for a drive through the city in the big black Daimler which he had 'taken over' from Air Chief Marshal Sholto-Douglas of the RAF:

*I agreed to go, so, with the Australian flag flying on the radiator, we drove down the Unter-den-Linden, then through the Brandenburg gate to tour East Berlin. The wall which now divides the city had not yet been built, and although the Russians gazed at us with some astonishment they did not attempt to stop us.*



### The Soviets Back Down

The message was unmistakable, and the Soviets finally conceded that their attempted tactic of starving the Western powers out of Berlin was a failure. Not only had they been made to look silly before the rest of the world, the counter-blockade imposed by the West had severely hampered the development of the East German economy. On 12 May, there was a partial lifting of restrictions on movement. The first Allied trucks that ventured

down the autobahn to Berlin were greeted by huge welcoming crowds, and the first trains that arrived were garlanded with flowers.



Although the Soviets had effectively abandoned their blockade, pinpricking delays still occurred. On top of this, a month-long strike by Berlin's railway workers from 20 May delayed a return to normalcy. As a result, the Airlift was continued without interruption. Not until a conference of Foreign Ministers in Paris in June, did the Soviets agree to lift the siege entirely. Even then, the Allies announced in July that they would maintain their effort, at a reduced pace, for another four months, until the end of October, with the aim of building up a 200 000-ton stockpile of supplies—in case the blockade was suddenly re-imposed and the Airlift had to be reinstated.

The last RAAF sortie was flown from Lübeck on 26 August 1949, this again being carried out by a crew captained by Squadron Leader Greenwood. Three days later, 25 of the 31 members of the Australian squadron posed for a group photograph behind a tally board recording their contribution to the Airlift in 6041 hours spent in the air over the previous 11 months.



*RAAF squadron tallies the score, 29 August 1949*

### **Homeward Bound**

Paradoxically, it was only on 16 June—as the Airlift was winding down—that the Australian Government raised the question of providing relief for its airmen. Noting that seven of the RAAF crews would complete 12 months of service in August, London was asked whether replacements should be sent. In July, British authorities recommended leaving the present crews in Germany, since they were likely to be required only a short time longer. Canberra agreed to this arrangement, which was just as well, since a call for volunteers put around RAAF units in early June had drawn few takers.

Accordingly, the RAAF Squadron remained at Lübeck until mid-September, when it was withdrawn to England to the RAF base at Manston, in Kent. There, members waited for arrangements for their return to Australia to be finalised. Inquiries made at shipping offices by the acting adjutant, Vic

### AIRLIFT HONOURS

Three members of the RAAF contingent sent from No 86 Transport Wing were decorated for service during the Berlin Airlift. On 9 June 1949, FLTLT Rodney Sinclair Murdoch and FLTLT Terence Leslie Bourke were each awarded the Air Force Cross (AFC). Murdoch was the second-in-command of the contingent and, despite an injury which kept him off flying for several weeks, set an inspiring example to the rest of the aircrews in the RAAF squadron. Similarly, Bourke had consistently displayed great flying skill, leadership, determination and courage during the worst winter months.

For his decisive part in the success of the RAAF squadron, SQNLDR Cyril Arthur Greenwood was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). This recognised not only the 103 sorties which he personally undertook, but also his 'methodical planning and leadership, his personal example in the air and on the ground, and ... his close supervision of the discipline and welfare of his crews'.

Cannon, established that there were few sea passages available, and on vessels not leaving until mid-November. Names were drawn from a cap to allocate these places, and the lucky recipients enjoyed a leisurely cruise before reaching Melbourne the week before Christmas.

More than half the Australian detachment, 24 men, flew out for home in a RAF York transport in the last week of October. The flight entailed mostly eight-hour legs, with stopovers in Malta, Habbaniya (Iraq), India, Ceylon, Singapore, and a refuelling stop at Jakarta before heading on to Darwin. With Air Force cut lunches for in-flight meals, it was, in the words of David Evans, 'a lousy trip'.

Darwin was eventually reached on the night of Sunday 30 October 1949. All on board were handed a copy of a message from the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal George Jones, congratulating them on their 'very fine performances' and his appreciation of the example they had set which 'contributed greatly to the prestige of your service and your country'. Flying out again next morning, the York went to the Amberley base outside Brisbane (where a few members disembarked), then next day headed for Schofields. On hand to meet them was Air Vice-Marshal John McCauley, the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Eastern Area. An hour later the York took off again,



*RAAF main party at Schofields*

headed south for Laverton air base with less than half the party's original number. It was Tuesday 1 November 1949, and the Melbourne Cup was being run that afternoon; members who wished to attend were given a free invitation from the Victorian Racing Committee.

The departure of most of the Australian contingent robbed them of the opportunity to participate in several events organised back in England to recognise the service of all those involved in the Airlift effort. On 7 December 1949, there was a ceremonial march by 250 officers and men to Buckingham Palace. The King and Queen reviewed the parade and spoke to Squadron Leader Greenwood and Warrant Officer Ferguson, who were the only two Australians to take part. Afterwards the parade marched through the city to the Guildhall, where the men were guests at a luncheon hosted by the Lord Mayor of London. In the event, it was two signallers of the replacement contingent—Flying Officer Mitchell and Warrant Officer Ewin, both of whom accepted further deployment with No 24 Squadron, RAF, when the Airlift ended—who became the last RAAF members home.



*Reminiscing at Young and Jackson's hotel, Melbourne*



*Airlift parade at Buckingham Palace*

## Outcomes

The Soviet attempt to force the Western powers out of Berlin had failed, defeated by air power. Not only was the Airlift the longest and most sustained undertaking of this type for more than four decades—until this honour was claimed by Operation *Provide Promise* in the 1990s—but the volumes transported into Berlin still make it the largest in history. Moreover, the ultimate success of the Berlin operation represented the first occasion in which air power had relieved a siege—something previously achieved only by armies and navies.

### OPERATION PROVIDE PROMISE

During the disintegration of the former republic of Yugoslavia, the United Nations organised a humanitarian airlift to relieve the suffering of the civilian population caught up in the fighting. From July 1992 until March 1996 aircraft from 21 nations flew 12 886 sorties to deliver 159 622 tons of food, medicines and other supplies to places such as Sarajevo, Bosnia. Another 18 000 tons were air-dropped to areas which were cut off, or too dangerous to reach by overland means.

Although Operation *Provide Promise* was more protracted in duration than the Berlin Airlift, the total tonnage lifted was only about seven per cent of the amount moved in 1948–49—indeed, the entire tonnage flown into war-ravaged Yugoslavia over 45 months did not equal the quantities flown into Berlin on each of five of the last six months of the Airlift.

For 328 days, a city of two million people had not only been kept alive, with the basic necessities of its population being met, but its economy had also been sustained and prevented from collapsing. A little appreciated part of the operational story was that, while most of the freight moved during the Airlift went into Berlin, the holds of returning aircraft were filled not just with passengers (nearly 228 000 of them) but also with goods produced by Berlin's factories for export—thereby keeping the city's commerce viable.

The cost of the Airlift had been heavy. When told that the official estimate for the US effort was \$300 million (an amount equal to many billions at today's values), Tunner protested that 'a more reasonable figure should be placed on the operation' and strongly questioned whether it had cost

anything like \$150 per ton as claimed. The figure most commonly cited now is just over \$137 million—still a huge amount when adjusted to reflect contemporary values. Outlays on the British side were equally hefty. In October 1948, costs were calculated at £25 000 a day—and this did not include expenditure on improving and expanding the airfields.

### AIRLIFT MEMORIAL

In July 1951, a memorial to the Airlift was unveiled at the Platz der Luftbrücke in front of Berlin's Tempelhof Airport. The 63-foot-tall monument faces westward, its three sweeping prongs representing the Allied powers which maintained the city's lifeline during the Soviet blockade. The Airlift Memorial bears the names of 78 persons killed during the operation, although accounts indicate that this may not be a complete list.

The 39 British airmen who became fatalities (civilian as well as military) are also commemorated on the British Airlift Memorial dedicated at Alrewas near Lichfield, Staffordshire, in May 2001. This memorial, located within the National Arboretum, takes the form of a miniature replica of the Tempelhof monument, surmounted by a carved wooden eagle to symbolise the British and Commonwealth contribution. Nearby stands a grove of 39 fruit trees which blossom in May, the month the Soviet blockade was lifted, and whose fruit represents the food supplies carried into Berlin during the Airlift.



*Tempel hof monument*

The Soviet action also did nothing to avert or prevent some of the other measures it had so staunchly opposed. After the Soviets established a government in East Berlin in November 1948, Ernst Reuter was finally free to take up his mayoral post following new elections in West Berlin the next month. On 23 May 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany was created out of the western zones, with its seat of government at Bonn, near Cologne. Not to be outdone, the Soviets formally turned their zone into the German Democratic Republic on 5 October that same year.

### DISPLAY DAKOTA

In 1980, as the RAAF prepared to retire its aging DC-3s from service, a decision was made to present A65-69 to the people of Berlin in memory of the efforts made by Australian Dakota crews during the airlift. On 5 June, the aircraft left for West Germany with a crew of five, and two airlift veterans as passengers: AVM David Evans and WGCDR C.S. ('Dinny') Ryan, both still serving officers.

Arriving at the RAF base at Gutersloh, West Germany, 11 days later, the Dakota had to be repainted in RAF colours and given a British serial number to satisfy the rules for using the air corridors into Berlin. The final flight to Gatow was completed on 18 June, with the then AVM Evans in the pilot's seat. Once at its destination A65-69 reverted to RAAF colours and was turned over to Berlin's Senator for Cultural Affairs on 20 June. It was still at Gatow when veterans returned to the city in 1998.



*RAF base commander (left) with Evans and Ryan*



*A65-69 as found by Airlift veterans in 1998*

The Airlift had also marked the beginning of a Western alliance which endured throughout the ensuing ‘Cold War’ ultimately to defeat Soviet communism. On 24 August 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed, in which the US, Britain and most non-communist European countries pledged themselves to mutual assistance in case of foreign aggression. The threat envisaged was clearly the Soviet Union, which successfully exploded its first atomic bomb in September and so achieved nuclear parity with the US.



*Berlin Wall goes up*

After erecting a permanent barrier in 1961 to enforce a division of Berlin and halt refugees escaping to the west, the communist regime in East Germany was compelled to relent in 1989 and end all restrictions on travel between the zones. In November that year, the Berlin Wall was opened, and progressively torn down. By October 1990, Germany had been reunified, with Berlin again as its official capital.





## APPENDIX 1

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### RAAF AIRCREW IN THE AIRLIFT

#### No 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron, RAF

##### *Pilots*

Carlin, FLTLT R.

Cornish, FLTLT J.G.

##### *Copilots*

Donnelly, FLTLT C.A.

Quinn, FLTLT M.J.

##### *Navigators*

Sheppard, FLTLT D.R.

Wheeler, FLTLT R.J.

##### *Signallers*

Callinan, WOFF J.T.

Ferguson, WOFF E.G.

##### *Flight Engineers*

Murphy, FLGOFF J.C.

Singleton, FLGOFF R.B.

#### Temporary Duty with RAAF Overseas Headquarters, London

##### *Pilot*

Lampe, WGCDCR W.N.

## First Contingent from No 86 Transport Wing

### *Pilots*

Berriman, FLTLT W.R.

Cannon, FLTLT V.B.

Greenwood, SQNLDR C.A.

Muller, FLTLT F.K. \*

Page, FLTLT G.

Bourke, FLTLT T.L.

Evans, FLGOFF S.D.

Hudson, FLTLT N.H. \*

Murdoch, FLTLT R.S.

Shadforth, FLTLT R.J. \*

### *Copilots*

Blackman, WOFF H. \*

Hahn, FLGOFF D.V.

Hanel, WOFF N.E. \*

Kahler, WOFF S.J. \*

Pettersson, WOFF W.E. \*

Swinbourn, WOFF A.A. \*

Fairbairn, FLTLT T.S.

Halewood, FLTLT R.S.

Heyns, WOFF J.F. \*

Peel, WOFF N.H.

Rosevear, WOFF R. \*

### *Navigators*

Barber, FLGOFF H.R.

Benson-Inglis, WOFF D.S.

Gentle, FLTLT E.G.

McGilvray, WOFF A.M. \*

Straney, FLGOFF J.

Bell, FLTLT F.P. \*

Carrick, FLTLT F.K.

Kuschert, FLTLT D.L.W.

Staib, FLGOFF K.M.

Whorlow, WOFF R.E. \*

### *Signallers*

Barnett, WOFF K.F.

Fuller, WOFF H.G.J. \*

Johnston, WOFF H.R.D.

Pegler, WOFF M.G. \*

Smith, WOFF V.A.

Clark, WOFF D.M.

George, WOFF A.S.M.

Lang, WOFF N.R. \*

Ryan, WOFF C.S.

Williams, WOFF R.G.

(\* – returned to Australia, April 1949)

## **Replacement Contingent**

### *Navigators*

Bray, WOFF R.D.

Clements, WOFF R.L.

Prain, WOFF K.G.

### *Signallers*

Ewin, WOFF R.J.

Grant, WOFF S.N.

Mitchell, FLGOFF G.J.





## APPENDIX 2

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## STATISTICS

*For they intended evil against thee; they imagined a  
mischievous device, which they were not able to perform.*

Psalm 21, Verse 11, a reference to which  
was painted on the nose of the last Dakota  
flying from Lübeck in the Airlift

### Airlift Totals

	US	BRITISH	(RAF)	TOTAL
Sorties <sup>1</sup>	189 963	87 841	(65 857)	<b>277 804</b>
Tonnage <sup>2</sup> to/from Berlin:				
Inbound	1 783 573	542 236	(394 509)	<b>2 325 809</b>
Outbound	45 888	33 843	(Not known)	<b>79 731</b>
Hours flown	589 524	193 249	(Not known)	<b>782 773</b>
Mileage	92 061 862	32 358 951	(24 692 603)	<b>124 420 813</b>
Passengers	62 749	167 654	(Not known)	<b>230 403</b>

1 Each mission to Berlin entailed two flights

2 Tonnage quoted in American short tons (2000 lb = 1 short ton)

## Load Details

	US	BRITISH	TOTAL
Tonnage <sup>1</sup> to Berlin, by type:			
Food	296 319	241 713	<b>538 032</b>
Coal	1 421 118	164 800	<b>1 585 918</b>
Military		18 239	} → <b>201 858</b>
Liquid fuel	66 135	92 282	
Miscellaneous		25 202	
Passengers to/from Berlin:			
Inbound	25 263	36 218	<b>61 481</b>
Outbound	37 486	131 436	<b>168 922</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>62 749</b>	<b>167 654</b>	<b>230 403</b>

1 Tonnage quoted in American short tons (2000 lb = 1 short ton)

## Commonwealth Air Forces

	SAAF <sup>1</sup>	RAAF <sup>2</sup>	RNZAF <sup>3</sup>
Sorties	2 500	2 062	473
% of RAF Total	3.80%	3.13%	0.72%
Tonnage to/from Berlin	8.333	7.812	1.577
% of British Total	1.45%	13.6%	0.27%

1 South African Air Force (12 crews)

2 Royal Australian Air Force (10 crews)

3 Royal New Zealand Air Force (3 crews)



## APPENDIX 3

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