

# UNFORGETTABLE

## How flour saved Berlin

by Volkmar Wywiol

After the Second World War, Germany and the U.S. became close allies, and today the former enemies are close friends. Good business relations go hand-in-hand with scientific exchange programs and many educational and cultural projects. All of this started with America's incomparable and speedy assistance of the needy western part of Germany after the war. One major part of this was the Marshall Plan, officially called the ERP or European Recovery Program. It was designed to help West Europe rebuild from the war, and was passed by the U.S. congress on April 3, 1948 and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on the same day.

Another was the U.S. reaction to the ominous escalation of the Cold War

initiated by the Soviets. What happened? On June 20, 1948 the western allies (the U.S., Great Britain and France) implemented a currency form for West Germany and West Berlin, which was a "city island" in the Soviet Occupation Zone. Without consulting its erstwhile allies, the Soviet Union



General Lucius D. Clay, Military Governor of the U.S. occupation zone in Germany.

reacted by cutting off all land and river access to West Berlin on June 23, 1948. At the time Berlin was still a gigantic ruin, and the 2.2 million people in West Berlin were still entirely dependent on supplies from the outside. But the western allies under the leadership of President Truman and the legendary



From this point until autumn of 1949, Berlin was supplied only by air.

Military Governor Lucius D. Clay reacted immediately.

Using three 32-kilometer-wide air corridors from West Germany to Berlin, they started what would become known as the Berlin Airlift. It was an ingenious stroke of humanitarian aid.

The first plane took off on the evening of June 23, followed by an endless series of other U.S. Air Force and British Royal Air Force transports carrying freight of every kind to Berlin's Tempelhof airport. The main commodities were foods like flour, grain, dried milk and potatoes, coal for fuel and electricity, gasoline, and medications – along with everything else a major city needs.

About 33% of the total cargo was flown in by the British, but the



The official Marshall Plan logo.

Americans shouldered most of the burden. On return flights they often took children to West Germany for hospital treatment or care. In the north part of the city a new airport, Tegel, was built in just 90 days.

Mayor Ernst Reuter became a symbol of Berlin's determination to resist. In his most famous speech in front of the ruins of the Reichstag, where today the Germany Bundestag meets, he said: "Peoples of the world, in America, in England, France and Italy! Look at this city and see that you cannot, you must



Berliners watch an airlift transport land at Berlin Tempelhof.



not, give up this city and its people!" The speech resonated around the world.

It was a dramatic time. Faced with the allies' obvious determination to protect West Berlin from Soviet annexation, amply demonstrated by the airlift, the Soviet Union eventually bowed to the inevitable and permitted supply of the city by road and water again. The Berlin Airlift ended on May 12, 1949.

During the one-year blockade, some 278,000 flights brought 2.3 million



This flour sack from the Berlin Airlift is now on display at the MehlWelten Museum in Wittenburg.

tonnes of cargo to West Berlin. Among the cargo was a sack of flour. That sack is now in the MehlWelten Museum in Wittenburg, where it commemorates the lifesaving effort of 66 years ago. Seventy-five kilometers from Hamburg, Germany's largest port, the museum was created by Mühlenchemie as a unique flour museum for the millers of the world. In it almost 3,000 flour sacks

from five continents are on display, with their cultural and historical context. The often beautifully designed sack art tells many an exciting story, taking visitors into the world of myth, meaning and expression of flour and its significance in different regions. The museum is being expanded into a "Flour & Bread" information center. This particular flour sack (left) from Houston, Texas has a place of honor there, commemorating the Berlin Airlift.

Wittenburg is home to both the Flour-World Museum and Mühlenchemie's production facility, where the company produces its well-known Alphamalt flour improver, baking enzymes and vitamin and mineral premixes. It exports its products to over 100 countries.

It is hunger that has brought people together for thousands of years, and that triggers humanitarian aid. And it is flour that so often plays the definitive role.

With this in mind, for Mühlenchemie it is a daily effort as well as a moral responsibility to honor flour, the basis of human nutrition, with a place of commemoration and knowledge transfer in the form of the museum. **WG**

Volkmar Wywiol is managing partner of Mühlenchemie.

We want to hear from you — Send comments and inquiries to [worldgrain@sosland.com](mailto:worldgrain@sosland.com). For reprints of WG articles, e-mail [reprints@sosland.com](mailto:reprints@sosland.com).



Germany from 1947 to 1989.



Germany since 1990