Pathfinder

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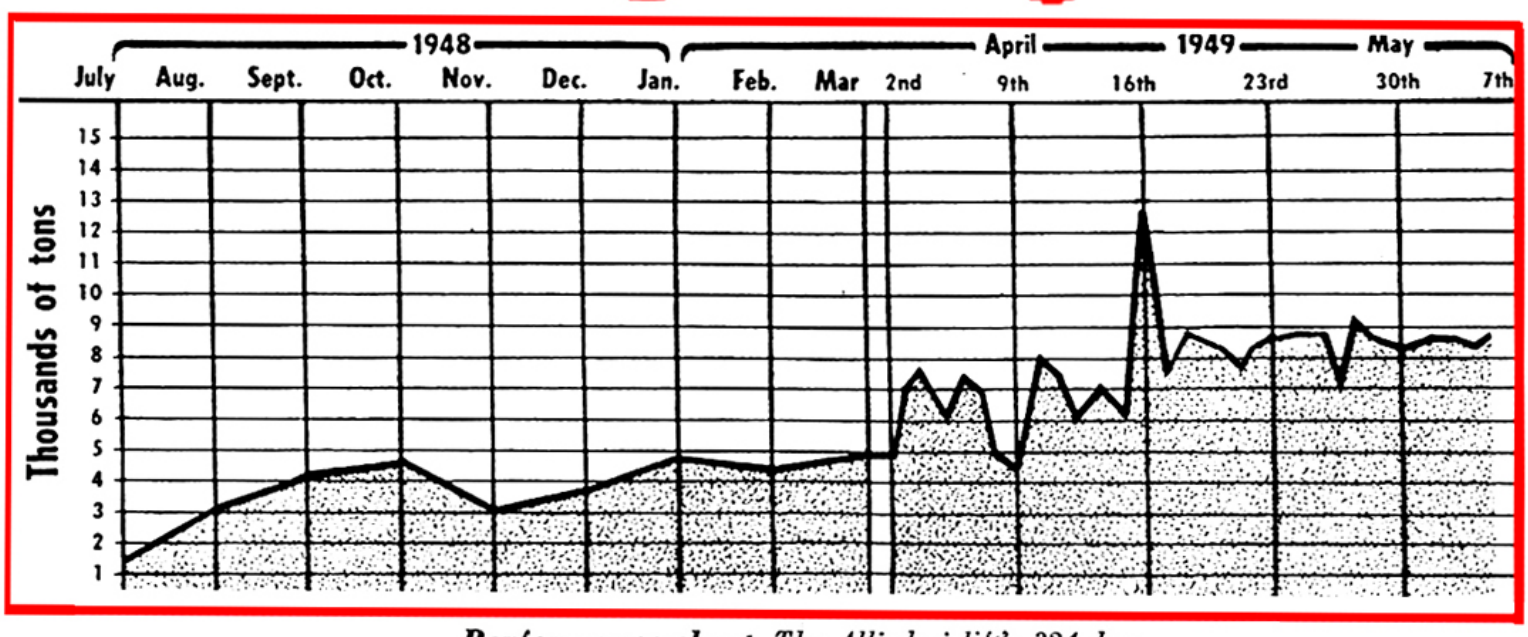
Peace Had Strong Wings



Performance chart. *The Allied airlift's 324 days.*

On a Sunday morning in June, two days after the Russians had clamped their blockade on Berlin, Gen. Lucius D. Clay, U.S. Military Governor of Germany, picked up his phone and asked the operator to get him Gen. Curtis E. Lemay, Air Force commander in Europe. The operator located Lemay at his office in an old stone building that once was Wiesbaden's town hall.

"How are you fixed to fly food into Berlin?" Clay asked.

"Okay, General. About 60 tons?"

"No, a lot of tons. Maybe 500."

Lemay nearly swallowed his cigar, but he agreed to give it a try. He sent out a hurry call for fliers, pulled grounded airmen away from desk jobs, loaded every available C-47, hustled them into the air. By nightfall, the battle-worn C-47's had made 32 flights, delivered 80 tons of milk, flour and medicine to Berlin's Tempelhof airdrome. That was the birth of the airlift.

It wasn't impressive, except as a start-from-scratch. But Lemay had only begun. He demanded and got more planes and more pilots. He put them on a gruelling night-and-day schedule, delivering the goods to western Berlin's 2.5 millions in fair weather and foul. The British pitched in promptly, lent a tremendous hand. The French helped too.

Last week, after the Russians announced they would lift the blockade on May 12, the airlift took a bow and added a modest nod at its 324-day record (see chart): 189,247 flights; 1,528,250 tons delivered; best day's work, Apr. 16 with 12,941 tons hauled in 1,393 flights.

Star Performance. The story of the success of the airlift is a brilliant chapter in aviation history, but most of all it is the epic of the men who kept the planes flying. It took guts and skill and toil and luck and teamwork and plenty of praying. It is the story of tough generals with stars on their shoulders and tougher kids with stars in their eyes.

They came from farms and big cities and from the towns where the local drug store is the most exciting spot in the world. Not so long ago they were the kids who delivered your paper or lugged the groceries from the neighborhood stores.

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Berlin Blockade

Auf wiedersehen. *Clay (left) and successor, Lt. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner.*

Team at Work. Most of the youngsters were old hands at flying over Germany, veterans of the dangerous days when Lemay bossed bomber runs to targets like Cologne and Essen and Schweinfurt and Hamburg—and Berlin. But Lemay worked them harder on the milk run to Berlin than he had ever worked them during the war. At the start a pilot figured he was lucky if he got as much as 7 hours' sleep out of 32.

Behind the pilots were thousands of other men. They were technicians who operated the radar controls, the alert youngsters who directed traffic from the control towers and kept the planes coming into Berlin, one every three minutes, on a pattern so delicately timed that if a pilot, on rare occasion, fell as much as two minutes behind schedule he was ordered back to takeoff point to try all over again.

And on the ground were the crews that kept nearly 500 American and British planes in tiptop shape, the mechanical geniuses who with their eyes shut could take apart and reassemble an engine. And there were the D.P.'s who helped load the planes and the Germans who unloaded them; and the tanker crews who brought gasoline across the Atlantic so that the airlift's pumps never ran dry, and hundreds of others who helped write this success story.

Next Job? Last week the pressure came off, but the airlift will roar on, at least, until it builds up Berlin's stockpiles to meet whatever emergency the Russians may contrive next. But it won't be the same old airlift, for it will have to go on without General Clay. He yields his German command May 15. On June 1, after 35 years in the Army, he retires.

The Western world and Germans, in particular, will never be able to measure the debt they owe to Clay and to the airlift. Calm and cool as a julep, Clay stood

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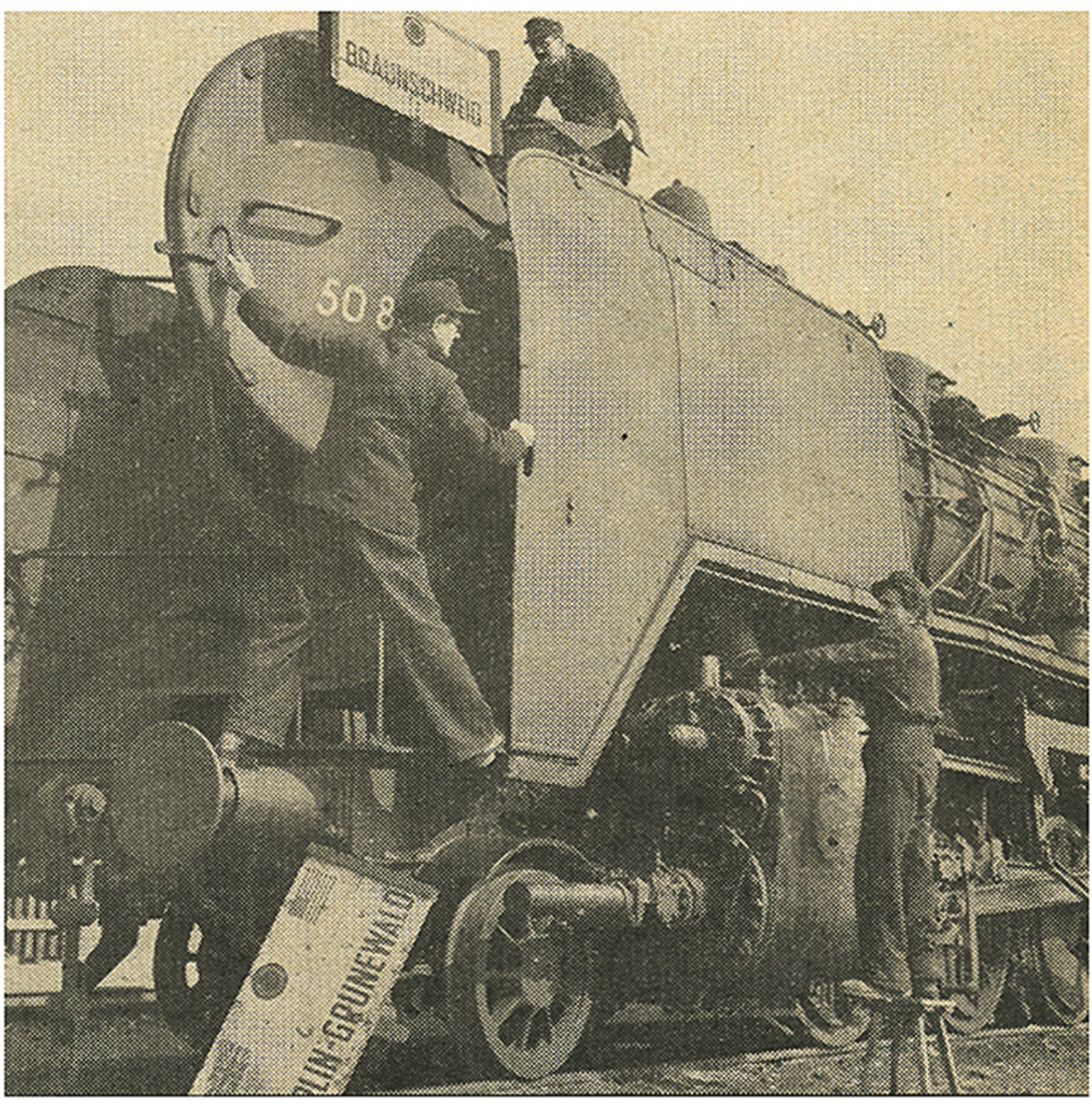
Berlin Blockade

Heave-Ho. *German workers repair rails,*



overhaul locomotive for lifting of the blockade of Berlin.

firm and kept his head for four years in the face of Soviet ranting and threatening and double-dealing. And for the past ten months, the airlift was his best weapon. If either had failed—Clay or the airlift—the Western powers would have been forced out of Berlin. And if that had happened there might never have been an Atlantic Pact or a Western German state. The Communists might have gone amok in France and Italy. Russia might have won the cold war in the first heat.

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