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# The Round Tablette

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**Welcome to the February session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight we are celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Berlin Airlift with Roger G. Miller, historian and author of *To Save a City*, and veterans of that extraordinary endeavor

American entered the war in Europe when Hitler declared war on us on 11 December 1941. This created a very strained three-way ‘alliance’ between the US, the UK, and the USSR. For many Americans, this demanded a turn-around in American attitudes toward the communists.

Being partners with Stalin’s USSR required at least a tolerant, if not friendly, attitude towards the Communist regime. A series of propaganda campaigns were launched inside the United States, encouraging a positive view of the Soviets, such as the 1943 films “*The North Star*” which showed Ukrainian villagers resisting the Nazis, and the pro-Stalinist “*Mission to Moscow*.” Despite the propaganda, the relationship between the leading capitalist state and the Communist state could hardly be anything but difficult. However, the US and USSR shared a common goal: the end of the Third Reich. When the war was critical they cooperated: as the war drew to an end differences between the US and the Soviets became more acute and visible.

At the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences in 1945, Germany and its capital Berlin would be divided into zones of occupation between the Big Three Allies and France. It was hoped that the war time cooperation between the Allies would continue after the surrender. Even so, the western zones in Berlin were precarious: 100 miles in the Soviet zone. The western occupation forces in Berlin could easily be cut off if the Soviets wished.

Although the plan was for unobstructed free elections to be held in all of the territories liberated from Nazi rule, in areas where the Red Army had control, the Soviets immediately began acting in bad faith. In the Soviet Zone, they gathered the remains of the German Communist party and Stalin planned to slowly undermine the western zones and he believed the US would

withdraw from Europe much like after World War I. Then Germany would become a united communist country.

Even in the early days of the occupation the Soviets disrupted western rail, road, and canal traffic into Berlin. Western forces could do little since there was never a formal agreement regarding land and water traffic, thus, western leaders had to rely on Soviet goodwill. The Soviets would only allow one rail line and limited that to ten trains a day. The West did have three air corridors to and from Berlin which would prove decisive later.

German communists aside, the average Berliner hated the Soviets. Few had forgotten the treatment they had received after the battle of Berlin. Indeed, the vast scale of rapine and plunder by the Red Army would permanently handicap the legitimacy of Communist rule in the east.

In light of the hostility of the conquered Germans, the Soviets began to put ever increasing pressure on the western allies to leave and the Allies responded to these threats. In 1946, the Soviets stopped delivering agricultural goods to the western zones to try to drive out the western Allies. In response, American General Lucius Clay stopped shipments of dismantled industries from the western zones into Soviet territory. The Soviets then responded by obstructing the administration of all four zones. Realizing that the Soviets could arbitrarily disrupt supplies, the western military commanders in Berlin slowly began to build up a supply of food, fuel, and ammunition in case of a Soviet provocation.

The immediate cause of the Berlin blockade was the introduction of a new currency in the western zone, the *Deutsche Mark*. The Soviets protested, wanting to keep the old currency as a way to keep the Germans under their control. On 21 June 1948, in response to the new currency, the Soviets stopped all rail, road, and canal traffic into Berlin. This was a very serious threat to the existence of the Western Zone in Berlin, one just short of war. The western allies countered by stopping all transports to the eastern zone. Free Berlin was cut off: how could it be sustained surrounded in Soviet territory?

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**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

The Americans, British, and French began to use all their transport aircraft to deliver everything to the western zones in Berlin. At its essence Berlin airlift was an exercise in logistics. How many tons of food were needed to feed a city of over 2 million? The best estimate was over 1500 tons of food and 3500 tons of coal and gas daily. The USAF used C-47, and C-54 transport planes and British RAF used DC-3s. The Allies also sought the cooperation of Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter to rally the civilian population to support the effort.

As the days, weeks, and months went by the airlift became more efficient and more airplanes joined the endeavor. By the end of August the airlift provided over 6000 tons of food and cargo, and by April 1949 almost 13,000 tons were delivered in one day. In May of 1949, the USSR lifted the blockade, and the first major conflict of the Cold War had ended in a stalemate.

The airlift thus frustrated all the Soviet plans. Instead of driving the westerners out, the Berlin airlift cemented the role of the United States as the defender of Western Europe. The airlift made it unequivocal that there was a Cold War going on between the United States and the Soviet Union and Berlin would be the front line of this war. It also hastened the transformation of Western Germany from its status as a defeated enemy to being a partner in the defense of freedom from the Communists. This was the first major confrontation of the Cold War: and the Korean War was just over a year away

**FURTHER READINGS:**

- Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000)
- Barry Turner, *The Berlin Airlift: A New History of the Cold War's Decisive Relief Operation* (London: Icon Books, 2017)
- Andrei Cherny, *The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour* (New York: Dutton Caliber, 2009)
- Daniel F. Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2012)
- Helena P. Schrader, *The Blockade Breakers: The Berlin Airlift* (Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2011)
- D.M. Giangreco & Robert E. Griffin, *Airbridge to Berlin: The Berlin Crisis of 1948, Its Origins and Aftermath* (New York: Presidio Press, 1988)

**Announcements:**

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 20 Feb. 2018 – *Lincoln's Childhood*- [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com)

[www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - info@tccwrt.com  
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 26 Feb. 2018 – *Lincoln's 1861 SO and the 1862 Executions* - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
 Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 7 Apr. 2018 - info@tccwrt.com  
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523  
 Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)  
 World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>  
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 16 June 2018. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>  
 Airshow - Eden Prairie - 14-15 July 2018 [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org) 952-746-6100  
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Crane, *Airpower Strategy in WWII* - 28 Feb. 2018 - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)  
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717  
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

**Round Table Schedule 2018**

- 8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
- 22 Mar. OSS Woman v. Imperial Japan
- 12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
- 10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory



Zones of Occupation, air corridors to West Berlin



See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>