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**The Berlin Airlift**

After World War II, all of the former Allies (France, England, the USSR, and the United States) controlled parts of Germany in a delicate balance of power. Berlin, which was within Soviet territory, was also split between the four powers. In the summer of 1948, Joseph Stalin, feeling threatened by the U.S. presence in Berlin, decided to blockade the city by closing off all land routes to West Berlin. When Stalin began the blockade of Berlin in early June of 1948, he was hoping the Americans, French, and British would not want to spend time and energy preserving their presence. However, Truman as well as his colleagues realized the importance of Berlin as a symbol of Western resistance to Communism.

In what would become the first major confrontation of the Cold War, U.S. President Harry Truman made the historic decision to supply Berlin by air. In a heroic joint effort, the Americans and British delivered more than two million tons of supplies to the beleaguered city. In order to supply the two million citizens of Berlin, American and British pilots flew day and night to land over 1,500 tons of food, coal, and other necessities every day.

The planes flew so frequently that they often became stacked above the city in a dangerous waiting line. On August 13, known as Black Friday, there were several accidents. As a result, a new policy was instituted. If a plane could not land on its first try, the pilot would immediately head back for his home base. If a plane returned to Berlin it would be given a new crew and sent back in rotation. One of the most popular memories of the Berlin Airlift was “Operation Little Vittles,” which was started by Lieutenant Gail Halvorsen. After visiting with children in Berlin, he began dropping candy with mini-parachutes from them as he flew over Berlin. Soon many pilots were following suit and providing the children of Berlin with treats.

The Berlin Airlift lasted almost eleven months. Finally, realizing that the western allies had won the standoff, Stalin gave up his blockade, allowing the normal flow of supplies to continue in Western Berlin.

1. The city of Berlin was split between which four powers?
2. Why did Joseph Stalin blockade the western section of Berlin?
3. How did the Western Allies supply West Berlin?
4. What was “Operation Little Vittles”?
5. How long did the Berlin Airlift last?
6. Why did the Soviet Union give up on the blockade?