

Remarks on the 750th Anniversary of the Founding of Berlin June 12, 1987

The President. Well, Chancellor Kohl and Mayor Diepgen, Ambassador Burt, ladies and gentlemen: It's an honor for me to be able to join you today at this 750th birthday party for the city of Berlin. I'm especially pleased to be here today because -- well, it's not often that I get to go to a birthday party for something that's older than I am. [Laughter]

But to subject you to a second speech here -- [laughter] -- you know, I keep thinking of a story of ancient Rome, where, on a Saturday afternoon, the hungry lions were turned loose on the little group of people there on the floor of the Coliseum, and they came charging toward them. And one individual stepped out of the group, said something very quietly, and the lions all laid down. Well, the crowd was enraged and horrified that they're going to be denied the show. And Caesar sent for the man who had spoken to the lions. And they brought him, and he said, ``What did you say to them that made them act like that?" And he said, ``I just told them that after they ate, there'd be speeches." [Laughter]

Well, let me begin by conveying the warmest greetings of the American people to all of you here today. While only a small fraction of the Berlin community can be here in this hall, our good wishes go to all the residents of this marvelous city, wherever they may live. And I am happy to see so many young people here this afternoon. There are two groups of local teenagers I would like to greet in a special way -- the graduating classes of the Berlin-American High School and of the city's John F. Kennedy School.

Congratulations on a job well done!

Well, this is a celebration for all of Berlin. To those of you in the East who are watching on television but unable to attend in person, you're here with us in spirit. The traditional banners of Berlin's 20 districts, East and West, around this hall, remind me of the kinship that exists among all people of this city. By its very existence and character, Berlin remains the most compelling argument for an open world. We're reminded of the many traditions of openness and democracy that have marked the history of this city.

America -- missed me! [referring to a loud noise] [Laughter] America has a special relationship with Berlin that extends beyond formal political or economic ties. Like America, Berlin is a place of great energy. We see our own hopes and ideals mirrored in the energy and courage of Berliners and draw strength from our joint efforts here.

This sense is symbolized by the nearly 14,000 American soldiers, airmen, and their families who live and work in close cooperation with Berliners to ensure the defense of our common goals. And let me make one point clear: Our troops will remain here as long as they are wanted and needed by Berliners to demonstrate to the other side that force and coercion cannot succeed. Several thousand other Americans from all walks of life make an important contribution to the business and cultural life of this city. We've joined the centuries-old tradition of Berlin and, in a real sense, we have become Berliners.

A few moments ago here at Tempelhof, I shook hands with three men who testify to the way you Berliners and we Americans play such a proud role in each others' lives: Three former U.S. Air Force pilots, veterans of one of the most remarkable operations in modern history, the Berlin airlift. On his flights, Colonel Gale Halvorsen tossed small, candy-filled parachutes to the children of Berlin as his plane approached the Tempelhof runway. Yes, Colonel Halvorsen was one of the famous Rosinenbombers or bomber pilots who every Berliner of that generation still remembers with warmth and affection. Another airlift veteran, Captain Jack Bennett, has many friends here today; he lives in Berlin.

As for Colonel Allen Chealander, when the Soviets blockaded Berlin, Colonel Chealander had been back in civilian life for just 8 months. He and his wife had an infant son and another child on the way. Those precious 8 months were the first Colonel Chealander had been able to devote to his family since the long years of the war. Yet, when called up for the airlift, he never hesitated. Looking back on those days of constant hardship, of danger scorned, Colonel Chealander says simply this: ``We had a job to do, and we did it." In those few words, hear the understatement of a hero. I am especially pleased that Colonel Chealander and his son, who saw him only briefly before he returned to service to help fight the blockade and who is now my own military aide, are both with us here today.

I have met other heroes as well -- German heroes of Berlin:

-- Truemmerfrauen -- women who, 40 years ago, collected and cleaned bricks from the rubble to rebuild their homes, their churches, their schools, their very way of life.

-- A scholar, expelled by the Soviets from the city's old Humboldt University in the East, who then joined in founding what has become one of the world's major institutions of higher learning, the Free University of Berlin.

-- A group of RIAS employees of the first hour who helped us get the voice of freedom on the city's airwaves in those early postwar years, and ever since. For 40 years, radio in the American sector has been a voice of freedom and an essential part of our continuing commitment to Berlin. And now we are taking another important step in German-American relations by moving forward to make RIAS television a reality. I can't help but wonder if they will rerun ``Bedtime for Bonzo." [Laughter]

-- An East Berlin border guard who decided to live in freedom rather than building a wall that removes even the most basic rights of freedom and self-government.

Well, then, too, I have met Berliners whose actions speak with confidence of the city's present and future: A professor who has helped make Berlin one of the world's leading centers of research in the field of laser medicine, and the winners of the 1987 computer contest sponsored by the Berlin-U.S.A. initiative. In each face, I've seen abiding pride in this city and its accomplishments. Indeed, there's been something deeply moving, something humbling about meeting these heroes of Berlin. I feel your pride in what you've done for your city, your zest for life, your confidence and hope from having overcome so many obstacles, and the strength of your commitment to overcome those that remain. You've demonstrated to the world the value of human liberty, and perhaps the courage of your example is the greatest gift you can give to us every day of our lives.



Today when most Americans think of Berlin, they recall our postwar relationship with this city. And as we celebrate this 750th birthday, it's worth remembering that America's ties with Berlin go back many years. More than 20 American communities bear the name Berlin. Three of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams negotiated a treaty of friendship and commerce with Frederick the Great in 1785, establishing a basis for the special relationship that we enjoy today.

Americans were affected in other ways by this city when some of the best and brightest people active in Berlin came to the United States. Albert Einstein, George Grosz, Arnold Schoenberg, Kurt Weill, Mies van der Rohe -- the list of former residents of this city who changed the face of modern America is practically limitless.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. All right, he has just told me, and now they want to create heaven on Earth. We celebrate with you today -- [Inaudible] -- thank you. Thank you. Well, I thank you very much, and I wish you well.

So, we do celebrate with you today, remembering the heroic deeds of these -- all of them here on this platform and all Berliners, and the longstanding relationship between our two countries. But let's not forget the painful lessons of the not-so-recent past and draw on those experiences. Together, we can build a better future for this city, for Europe, and for the world. And as we look toward the 21st century, the ideals the world associates with the free part of Berlin are gaining in recognition. History did not come to an end in 1945, and it will not do so now. Berlin is a city of the future; it stands as a beacon for freedom and shines brightly for all Berliners to see.

In the name of the American people, I want to congratulate all three million Berliners on the occasion of your anniversary.

And I'm proud to issue a Presidential proclamation today honoring Berlin. Perhaps more than the people of any other city, you, the free people of Berlin, have demonstrated to the world the value of human liberty. So it is that we have so much to celebrate today. And so it is that, on behalf of my nation, I thank you. Having witnessed your courage and determination for all these years, I am confident in extending the heartfelt best wishes of all Americans for your city's future. And for those of you here today who are with our Armed Forces and who are here; I want to tell you that nothing in the job I have has made me more proud than you, the men and women wearing our military uniforms.

Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 3:57 p.m. at Tempelhof Central Airport. In his opening remarks, he referred to West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Governing Mayor of West Berlin Eberhard Diepgen, and U.S. Ambassador Richard R. Burt. Prior to his remarks, the President met with members of the allied armed forces serving in West Berlin. Following his remarks, the President traveled to Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany.