materials for the city. As on the conveyor belt, all carriers (the
aircraft) moved at equal speeds, executed whatever actions were
preplanned at specific locations, and never deviated from the
predetermined method of operation. The conveyor could be
slowed or sped up as necessary, but it was absolutely inerrant
in its regimentation. This approach, Turner discovered, brought
the most efficient type of operation. Such an approach, it
should be added, earned him the nickname of “Willie the
Whip,” for he demanded unerring precision. (33)

Turner also emphasized the intangibles that he believed would
increase airlift efficiency. For instance, he encouraged competi-
tion between organizations involved in Operation Vittles. He
maintained a huge board in the Airlift Task Force Headquarters
that tracked the tonnage of every unit, sponsored a newsletter
that listed efficiency of units and sent kudos to those with the
greatest records of achievement. He was also quick to prod offi-
cials who seemed pleased with their units’ accomplishments by
pointing out greater efficiencies elsewhere. For example, during
a push to deliver a record amount of tonnage on Easter Sunday
1949, known as the Easter Parade, the airlift made a record
1,398 flights and hauled an unprecedented 12,941 tons of cargo
to Berlin in one twenty-four hour period. During this drive Tur-
ner visited a unit at Fassberg where the commander told him he
was running ten percent ahead of his quota. Turner was unflap-
able and always prodding for greater effort. “That’s fine,” he
replied, “but of course it’s not up to what they’re doing over at
Celle [another airlift base]. They’re really on the ball over
there.” Those were just the right words to foster more effort.
Turner remarked that the commander immediately returned to his
“flight line and cracked his whip.” (34)

The Headquarters Element

The Berlin Airlift’s ability to function with anything approach-
ing full capacity required a well-developed and efficient airlift
headquarters. Turner established his headquarters at Wiesbaden,
Germany—after meeting with General LeMay and receiving his
directive, “we expect you to produce”—which coordinated the
many specialized military and civilian services that kept the
airlift operating smoothly. His headquarters was officially es-
lished through General Order 61, Headquarters USAFE, on 29
July 1948, as the 7499th Air Division. This task force was a
special unit reporting directly to Headquarters USAFE. (35)
The Airlift Task Force broke down functionally into eight ma-
jor divisions: personnel, communications, airfields, plans,
supply, maintenance, cargo handling, and operations. Under
the operations function were two critical specialties, weather
and navigation. (36)

Each of the functional parts of the headquarters was handled
by one of Turner’s hand-picked officers whose duty required
both execution of his function and liaison with the unit of the
Air Force that provided the service to the airlift. In so doing
the airlift headquarters functional head worked closely on both
plans and expansion projects. For example, the Air Field offi-
cer was required to keep abreast of conditions at all airlift in-
stallations and ensure that the proper authorities at the Penta-
gon were aware of the requirements for runway repair or any
other work that needed to be done. In the same way, the main-
tenance functional manager thoroughly monitored field level
maintenance, depot maintenance in theater and in the United

States, and worked closely with officials at the Air Materiel Command, the predecessor
of Air Force Logistics Command, to ensure proper support in terms of both spare parts
availability.

Maj.Gen,William H. Turner (left)
"Willie the Whip" who applied and
refined his techniques to turn the
Berlin Airlift into a smooth ma-
chine.

and services provided. (37) In addition to the functional man-
gers for the American airlift effort, there was a close working
relationship from the start with the British. Early on, three
Royal Air Force (RAF) representatives were permanently at-
tached to the task force headquarters to act as a liaison with the
RAF and they coordinated carefully the efforts of the two na-
tions. Later, on 14 October 1948, the RAF was brought more
directly into the airlift headquarters when the United States and
the United Kingdom created the Combined Airlift Task Force
(CATF). This merged the efforts of the two nations and placed
the CATF under a single commander, Turner, with RAF Air
Commodore J.W.F. Mereer acting as the Deputy Commander.
(38)

The provisional and the Combined Airlift Task Force Head-
quarters documented carefully, with statistics, the performance
of the airlift. Turner used the statistics extensively to determine
required goals and whether the objectives were being met for
virtually every aspect of the operation. An entire room in the
airlift headquarters was set aside for the purpose of displaying
charts and statistical information, so that performance for every
function could be displayed, analyzed, and compared. Not satis-
fied only with tonnage figures, airlifters used a complex array
of statistical measurements to show at a glance assigned air-
craft; daily missions flown; utilization rates of aircraft; flying
hours by type of aircraft, by unit, and by several other break-
downs; trips per assigned aircraft; aircrew status; flying times;
imloading times in Berlin; ground time in Berlin; block time in
Berlin; percent of aircraft in 200-hour inspection; locations of
aircraft at all times; and daily tons airlifted. (39)

One of the most important aspects of operating a successful
airlift, the airlift managers believed, was establishing a series of
effective maintenance and supply facilities. He made this a
matter of highest priority when he took over command of the
Airlift Task Force. The airlift fleet required constant mainte-
nance on an “as needed” basis. There were also periodic checks
every 25 hours of flight up to 200 hours, after which aircraft
were sent to a depot for a major inspection. At 1,000 hours, an
airplane was returned to the United States for a comprehensive
overhaul. (40) All of these maintenance activities were pains-
takingly planned, executed, recorded, and controlled at the air-
lift Task Force Headquarters. Whether a transport was in the air
or on the ground, there was constant information flowing be-
tween the headquarters and the field on its maintenance status.

The majority of maintenance for the airlift occurred at squa-
dron level. Turner directed the equal distribution of maintenance
technicians to the various bases used for the Berlin Flights.
There were 148 maintenance personnel attached to each squa-
dron. They worked in three shifts, 12 hours on and 24 hours off
duty. As much as possible the airlift concentrated expertise for
similar types of aircraft at the same base. This was so success-
ful, for instance, that the 50 and 150 hour checks were reduced