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# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Air Ministry: Berlin Airlift



Key Stages 4-5 | Postwar 1945 - present  
Video resource

# Air Ministry: Report on 'Operation Plainfare', 1950

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Records Specialist Dr William Butler looking at records from the Air Ministry, the Royal Airforce, and related bodies. This video focuses on a report on 'Operation Plainfare', the Berlin Airlift (1948 June to September.)

## Suitable for:

KS 4-5

## Time period:

Postwar 1945 - present

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# Tasks

## Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What is the role of the AIR Ministry?
- When was it set up?
- What types of sources can we find in these collections?
- What makes AIR Ministry documents valuable for historians?
- What document is examined in this video?
- What is the purpose of this report?
- How could the AIR Ministry use the findings of this report?
- How useful is this report to historians researching the Berlin Airlift?

### Source 1: Front cover of the report

Catalogue ref: AIR 10/5067

- Why do you think the AIR Ministry published a report on 'Operation Plainfare' (the Berlin Airlift)?
- Why do you think the report was 'Restricted'?
- Can you explain why the Berlin Airlift was given an operational name?
- Can you explain the likely perspective of this report on the operation?
- Can you find out and explain the code-name used by USA military for the operation?
- Why was this document 'closed' to public access until 1981?

### Source 2: Photograph of the report

Catalogue ref: AIR 10/5067

The caption of the photograph says: 'Huge storage hangars like these provided emergency stocks at all Airlift bases in case the normal flow of supplies to the railhead should break down'.

- What can you see in the photograph?

# Tasks

- What do the photograph and caption reveal about the organisation of the Berlin Airlift?
- What type of goods were airlifted to west Berlin?

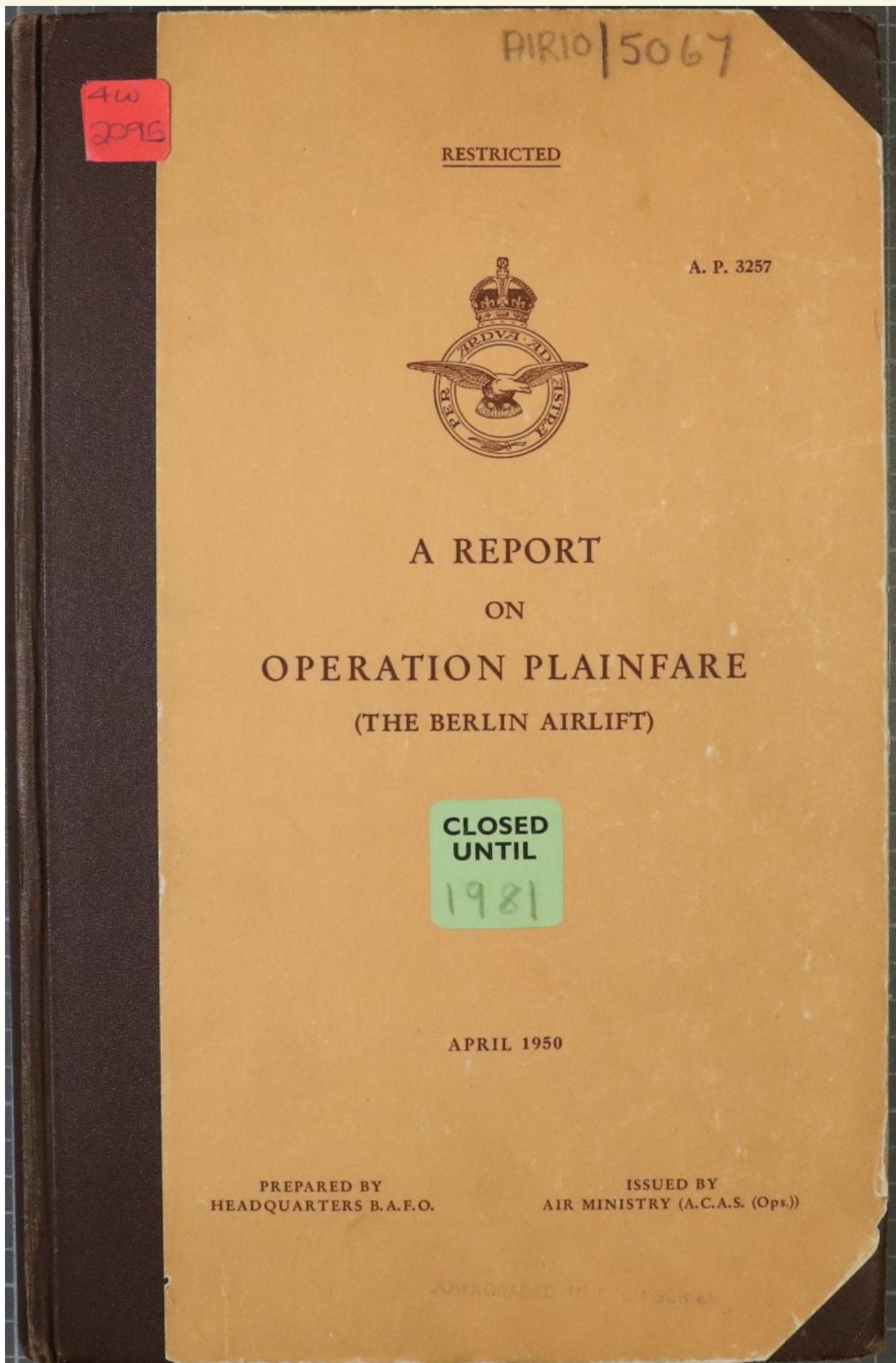
## **Source 3: Extract from the report**

Catalogue ref: AIR 10/5067

- What is an air 'corridor'?
- Why were the flight paths of the British and American aircraft changed as the airlift progressed?
- What do these extracts of the report reveal about the organisation of the Berlin Airlift?
- Why would this report be useful for the Air Ministry?

Source 1: Front cover of the report, April 1950

Catalogue Ref: AIR 10/5067



# Source 1: Transcript

RESTRICTED

A.P.3257

A REPORT

ON OPERATION PLAINFARE

(THE BERLIN AIRLIFT)

CLOSED UNTIL 1981

APRIL 1950

PREPARED BY HEADQUARTERS B.A.F.O.

ISSUED BY AIR MINISTRY (A.C.A.S (Ops.))

## Source 2: Photograph from the report, April 1950

Catalogue Ref: AIR 10/5067



*Huge storage hangars like these provided emergency stocks at all Airlift bases in case the normal flow of supplies to the railhead should break down.*

10. When Plainfare started it was possible for aircraft to fly to and from Berlin in the same corridor, thus making use of the shortest possible routes. As the operation grew in intensity it was decided, in the interest of safety, to have all aircraft in any one corridor flying in the same direction. Consequently all aircraft from the British Zone flew into Berlin by the Northern Corridor, aircraft from the U.S. Zone flew in by the Southern Corridor and all aircraft from both Zones returned through the Central Corridor. This procedure was subsequently used throughout the operation with one minor exception in the Northern Corridor.

#### ROUTING OF AIRCRAFT

11. As greater numbers of airfields came into use it was necessary to devise clear and distinctive routes and altitudes for aircraft from each airfield to fly. This resulted in a very complicated traffic pattern that can only be illustrated properly with a three-dimensional model. However, the diagram opposite gives some idea of the lay-out of the traffic pattern, while Appendix 'H' gives the details of routes between individual bases and Berlin.

## Source 3: Transcript

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### ROUTEING OF AIRCRAFT

11. As greater numbers of airfields came into use it was necessary to devise clear and distinctive routes and altitudes for aircraft from each airfield to fly. This resulted in a very complicated traffic pattern that can only be illustrated properly with a three-dimensional model. However, the diagram opposite gives some idea of the lay-out of the traffic pattern, while Appendix 'H' gives details of routes between individual bases and Berlin.

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# Connections to Curriculum

## Key stage 4

- AQA History GCSE: Conflict and tension between East and West, 1945–1972: Origins of the Cold war.
- Edexcel History GCSE: Superpower relations and the Cold War, 1941–91: The origins of the Cold War, 1941–58.
- OCR History GCSE: The Cold War in Europe 1945–1961: Rising Tensions.

## Key stage 5

- AQA History GCE: The Origins of the Cold War, c1945–1949
- OCR History GCE: The Cold War in Europe 1941–1995

## Related resources



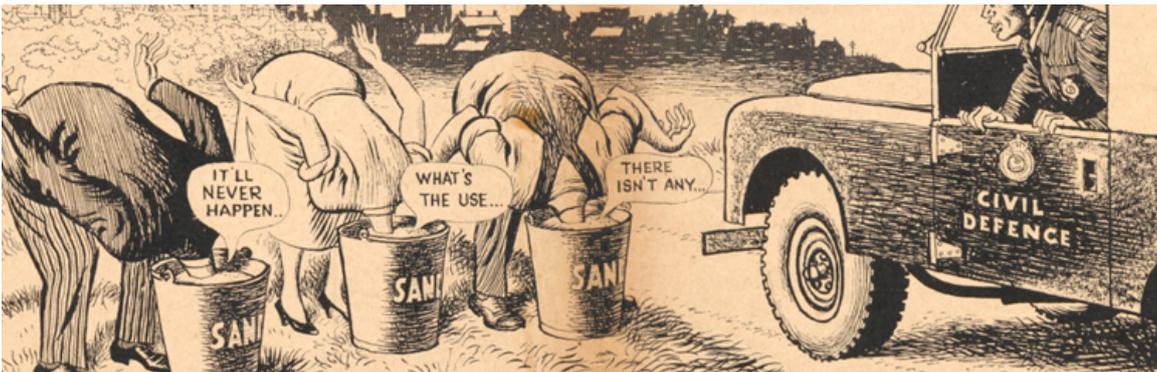
### Cold War on File<sup>1</sup>

Why did the Cold War emerge?



### Attlee's Britain 1945-1951<sup>2</sup>

Planning for the future?



### Fifties Britain<sup>3</sup>

Never so good? Or too good to be true?

1 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/cold-war-on-file>

2 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/attlees-britain/>

3 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/fifties-britain/>

## Related resources



### **Cabinet Papers 1915-1988**<sup>1</sup>

History through the eyes of 73 years of the British Cabinet.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/cabinet-papers-1915-1984/>



## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

## Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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