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Folder Title:
Italy - Aviano [June 22, 1999]

Staff Office-Individual:
Speechwriting-Widmer, Edward

Original OA/ID Number:
2190

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I cannot think of a better way to end my trip to Europe than to thank the men and women who protect our freedom from this base every single day. I am here on behalf of a grateful nation to say to those who fought for human dignity in Kosovo: thank you. I want to tell you face to face: you have done your country very proud.

Since the beginning of Operation Allied Force, I have been to quite a few bases [Norfolk, Barksdale, Spangdahlem, Ramstein, Ingleheim, Whiteman]. I didn’t want to let this chance go by without a visit to the 16th Air Force and the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing. Aviano has been a stronghold for peace for a long time, first in Bosnia, and now in Kosovo. You took to the skies to say: enough is enough. You put your lives on the line to save the lives of others.

And after 79 days, you did two things that had never been done. First, you proved a military point. A sustained air campaign can defeat an army on the ground. The Serb forces have withdrawn from Kosovo. Allied forces are moving in. Second, you proved a moral point. We are not powerless when dictators brutalize people. You not only stopped ethnic cleansing, you helped to reverse it. The refugees are going home, protected by a peacekeeping force that includes NATO, Russia, and many other nations. They are arriving in a shattered land. But thousands upon thousands are already saying, "we are home, and we are free. Thanks to you."
Let's be clear. There is only one reason Milosevic saw the light: you made him. Thank you for giving new meaning to the motto of the 31st Fighter Wing: "return with honor." Imagine where we would be today if we had not acted. There would be hundreds of thousands of Kosovars hiding in the hills, starving and freezing. Neighboring countries would be overrun. People would say that the most powerful military alliance in history is powerless to stop crimes against humanity on its own doorstep. Milosevic's theory that democracies are weak would have been vindicated. Instead we see the opposite on every count. A strong alliance. A vision taking shape of a Southeastern Europe where freedom is in the ascendant. A people returning home, tired, but not beaten, to rebuild their land. All these blessings we owe to you.

No one thinks this peace will take hold without difficulty. We learned again yesterday how dangerous the situation still is, and we mourn the loss of our British allies. It will take time. We have to win the peace as we did the war – with patience and precision. As more and more light is shed on those burned villages and mass graves, we become more and more appalled by the darkness of human nature when distorted by those who seek to divide us. It will take a long time to recover normality in Kosovo. But thanks to you, the worst is over. And because of what you have done, tomorrow's dictators will take a hard look before attacking vulnerable people to advance their power.

General Leaf called you a "championship team." Both words are well chosen – and they are linked, because your teamwork has been the key to victory. Over thirty thousand sorties flown – over eight thousand from Aviano – and zero combat fatalities, though I'd like you to remember the two Army airmen who died in a training exercise in Albania (Chief Warrant Offices David
Gibbs and Kevin Reichert). Two planes were downed, both from Aviano – but in each case, the pilot was recovered, the first time in six hours, the second time in an hour and a half.

So many of you here deserve acknowledgment. I wish I could name you all: the Buzzards of the 510th Fighter Squadron … the Bushmasters of the 78th … the Black Panthers of the 494th … the Triple Nickle (555th) … the Star Warriors and Hornets from the Navy … the Panthers, Playboys and Seahawks from the Marines … the men and women who deployed to Aviano from over 70 bases around America and Europe; the crews here from Italy, Spain, Canada, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

You all know how many people contribute to each mission. Not just the crews in the air, but the people on the ground … the maintenance personnel, the weaponeers, the air traffic controllers, the Italian citizens who work on the base. One of the more remarkable achievements of Allied Force is that the 31st's civil engineers were able to build a Tent City here at Aviano in four days. I’d like to show this city to some of our urban planners back home – you’ve got no crime, decent sanitation, and extremely low unemployment.

Let me also take a moment to express how much we appreciate the seamless cooperation of this remarkable alliance of 19 democratic nations. NATO never stood taller. When I visited Spangdahlem in May, I spoke with pilots who told me how good it felt to look out from the cockpit and see aircraft from the other NATO nations flying beside them.
Finally, I'd like to express America's gratitude to Prime Minister D'Alema and the Italian people for their hospitality to all who call Aviano home, and their solidarity throughout Allied Force. All of us here know that Kosovo was anything but a distant crisis for the people of Italy. It was an immediate threat to our ally's security. Now that threat is receding before a new vision of Southeastern Europe, integrated into the rest of the continent. A vision where people overcome old animosities because the pull of a united, democratic Europe is stronger than the forces of hatred and destruction tearing people apart.

Anyone seeking to understand our strength need only look around this room. Even more important than the example of our power is the power of our example. We are not weakened by our many heritages. Each is a source of strength. Our differences do not divide us - in fact, they unite us. America's men and women in uniform come from all races and religions. You look out for each other. You respect each other. You uplift each other. It is appropriate that ethnic cleansing was arrested by a multi-ethnic military, part of an international air armada that celebrates the fact its member nations are not identical.

From Aviano, I will fly home to Washington. At the end of my trip, I see much cause for hope in Europe. In Cologne, Germany, I saw the leaders of Europe coming together to face hard challenges, from bringing poorer nations into the global economy to rebuilding our essential partnership with Russia. We had a lot of good news this week, from our final agreement with Russia over KFOR to the Serb withdrawal to the KLA's commitment to demilitarize. Yesterday, in Ljubljana, I saw a new generation of Slovenians proving that there is no stopping the people of Southeastern Europe when they free themselves of the fetters of the past. And today in
Macedonia, I saw Kosovar refugees struggling to survive through the catastrophe inflicted on them, but grateful for NATO’s intervention, and determined to get on with their lives. The Balkan peoples have seen a lot of violence of this century; but there is nothing in their character or destiny that condemns them to more violence. Their tortured past is an incentive, not a disincentive, to roll up our sleeves and get to work. That is what we intend to do.

This progress didn’t just happen because people hoped it would. It happened because hard-working men and women like you made it happen. Every time peace has been threatened in Europe, American and allied forces have been there to say “no.” In all of our languages, we are saying “yes” to freedom, to human dignity, and to the biggest possible future we can build together.

I know it’s not easy to be far from home. To sleep ten to a tent and work twelve hour shifts six days a week. To spend Father’s Day alone, waiting to hear a child’s small voice coming out of the telephone. I just want you to know with absolute certainty that you are building a better world for your children. Your kids may be too young to understand right now. They may not even be born yet. But someday they will thank you for taking a brave stand in the twilight of the twentieth century.

The millennium is a mere six months away – but I believe a sea change has already taken place. The year 2000 would have arrived whether we acted in Kosovo or not. But because of you, we emphatically do not face the new calendar with irresolution. We do not lament the suffering of others with helpless indignation. Instead, we go forward with confidence in ourselves, trust in
our allies, and broad faith in a future that stretches far beyond the next six months and into a millennium that just might live up to its billing. Thank you for making that faith possible. God bless you, and God bless America.

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Two good contact points are:
Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Evans: 011-39-0434-66-4444 (overall POC for the visit)
Staff Sergeant Kelley Stewart: 011-39-0434-66-7555 (the Public Affairs office)

They have both been very helpful. In fact, I have the draft remarks for Brig. Gen Leaf if you think they would help. I only have in fax form though so let me know if you'd like them sent.

Betsy

-----Original Message-----
From: Widmer, Edward L. (Ted)
Sent: Friday, June 18, 1999 4:28AM
To: Pimentel, Betsy J.
Subject: RE: Background information on Aviano [UNCLASSIFIED]

thanks Betsy, this is great. Are there any especially helpful people you've been speaking to? Could use a few phone numbers. Thanks, Ted

-----Original Message-----
From: Pimentel, Betsy J.
Sent: Wednesday, June 16, 1999 3:21 PM
To: @JACOBSON (Tracey & Allison); @EXECSEC - Executive Secretary; @DEFENSE - Defense Policy; @SPEECH - NSC
Speechwriters; @PRESS - Public Affairs
Subject: Background information on Aviano [UNCLASSIFIED]
Importance: High

The following was provided to me by the Public Affairs office at Aviano. Good background as well as more details on their support to Operation Allied Force for use in the speech.

Background on 31st Air Expeditionary Wing:
The 31st AEW was activated at Aviano Air Base, Italy, May 1, 1997, bringing various U.S. aircraft and personnel deployed in support of NATO operations and other contingency operations under a single chain of command.

The 31st Fighter Wing Commander, Brig. Gen. Dan Leaf, and the 31st Operations Group Commander, Col. Jeffrey Eberhart, are dual-hatted as wing and operations group commanders of the 31st AEW, which puts them in charge of a flexible, tailored, quick-response force designed to fill theater needs across a spectrum of conflicts. The air expeditionary wing provides theater and regional commanders with a forward presence deployable within 72 hours.

How long have you been running 24-hour operations?
Since 1800 on 20 Mar 99

Number of Sorties Flown? (as of 10 June)
Combatt Strike 7,962
Combat Support 565
Total 8,527

Number of Deployed Personnel?
Operation Allied Force
-- Air Force 1,883
-- Other U.S. military 854
-- NATO 922
Operation Joint Force
-- Air Force 434

Permanently assigned personnel
-- About 3500 active duty; 4400 family members; and 200 U.S. civilians

U.S. units that have deployed to Aviano Air Base:
-- 23rd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, Spangdahlem AB, Germany (F-16CJ)
-- 22nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, Spangdahlem AB, Germany (F-16CJ)
-- 78th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, Shaw AFB, S.C. (F-16CJ)
-- 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, U.K. (F-15E)
-- 492nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, U.K. (F-15E)
-- 8th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, Holloman AFB, Ariz. (F-117)
Avians
31 Return with Honor

Casema Barlett = Test City

SpanishCan
Portugal
Support
Hospital

Armored, guns, planes, tank, staff together
US Navy supports of maintenance
Marines came back Navy came of Allied force

That help of Barry Secundy
deployed out then came back
-- 43rd Airborne Command and Control Squadron, Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz. (C-130E)
-- 43rd Compass Call, Davis-Monthan, Ariz. (C-130H)
-- KC-135 Tankers (Rotates)
-- VAQ-138,-140, -209 U.S. Navy Whidbey Island Naval Air Station, Wash. (EA-6B)
-- VMAQ-2 and -4 Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, N.C. (EA-6B)

**All the bolded units are currently at Aviano**

Allied units deployed to Aviano Air Base:

- 12 Group
- UKÄEW-1
- CTFA Det
- 201st Fighter Squadron

Units assigned to Aviano Air Base:

- 510th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron
- 555th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron
- 603rd Air Control Squadron

Results:

- Built Tent City with approximately 100 tents in four days, which grew to about 200 tents by mid-March
- Sustained 79 days of combat with no pilot losses. However, it was still a high threat environment. For example, a 78th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron pilot was locked on to by three surface-to-air missiles during an engagement. He wasn't sure if he was going to make it back when one of the SAMs exploded behind him.
- Quick rescue of downed pilots flying out of Aviano and returned to Aviano. The first pilot was rescued in six hours; the second in 1 1/2 hours.
- 250+ intelligence people providing unprecedented intelligence information to aircrews.
- Integrated mission planning cell for all coalition tactical planning for allied missions.
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- UKAEW-1 British (E-3D AWACS)
- CTF A Det Canadian (CF-18)
- 201st Fighter Squadron Portuguese (F-16A)

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MEETING WITH
SERVICE MEMBERS AT AVIANO AIR BASE
DATE: June 22, 1999
LOCATION: Aviano Air Base, Italy
TIME: 8:35 p.m. - 10:10 p.m.

FROM: SAMUEL BERGER

I. PURPOSE

Meet with U.S. military personnel assigned and deployed to Aviano Air Base.

II. BACKGROUND

Aviano Air Base is home to the Headquarters, 16th Air Force, the 31st Fighter Wing, and the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing. In addition to these units, servicemen and women at Aviano today include personnel deployed from United States Air Force units at over 70 bases, Marine Corps and Navy units, a permanently stationed Army unit, and planners and operators from all of the participating NATO nations. This team was instrumental to the success of Operation Allied Force in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

After being greeted by senior military officials, you will proceed to a hangar and deliver a prepared speech to an assembled audience of U.S. and NATO military personnel, family members and DOD civilians. Following your remarks, you will work a ropeline and depart.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The President

Lieutenant General Michael C. Short, Commander, 16th Air Force
Brigadier General Daniel P. Leaf, Commander 16th Fighter Wing and 16th Air Expeditionary Wing
IV. PRESS PLAN
Open Press (Remarks)

V. SEQUENCE

Upon arrival at Aviano Air Base you will be greeted by Lieutenant General Short, Commander, 16th Air Force, Brigadier General Leaf, Commander 16th Fighter Wing and 16th Air Expeditionary Wing, and....

You will proceed to a hangar via motorcade (?) escorted by General Leaf. Following remarks by Brigadier General Leaf,..., you will deliver a prepared speech to an assembled audience of approximately XXXX U.S. and NATO military personnel, family members and DOD civilians. Upon completion of your remarks, you will work a ropeline and depart.
Yugoslavia | The road toward peace

Yugoslavia legislators have accepted terms of a plan to end the conflict over Kosovo. That does not mean the estimated 850,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees will go home soon, NATO officials said, but a "verifiable withdrawal from Kosovo of military, police, and paramilitary forces according to a quick timetable." Until then, NATO airstrikes will continue.

Serbs withdraw, NATO strikes end

NATO strikes in Yugoslavia will cease when there is an "imminent and verifiable end to violence and repression in Kosovo," and a "verifiable withdrawal from Kosovo of military, police, and paramilitary forces according to a quick timetable." Until then, NATO airstrikes will continue.

NATO strikes through yesterday

31,529 sorties flown over 72 days of NATO airstrikes.

5,000 Yugoslav security forces killed.

10,000 Yugoslav security forces wounded.

30% of Yugoslav heavy weapons in Kosovo destroyed.

40% of Yugoslav's missile production and repair facilities destroyed.

29% of Yugoslav ammunition storage destroyed.

334 pieces of artillery and tanks destroyed.

471 personnel carriers and other military vehicles destroyed.

100 aircraft destroyed.

57% of Yugoslavia's petroleum reserves destroyed.

38% of targeted communications sites destroyed.

* Casualty figures are supplied by NATO and may change substantially after better assessments are made.

Peacekeepers move in

The Yugoslav government must accept an "international security presence, with an essential NATO participation ... to secure a safe environment for all the residents in Kosovo and enable the safe return of displaced persons." The peace force

The current NATO plan calls for 50,000 peacekeepers to be deployed in Kosovo once Yugoslav forces begin withdrawing.

7,000 peacekeepers will be supplied by the United States.

The role of Russia

The makeup of the peacekeeping force has not been entirely worked out, but Russian forces will be involved. Russian officials said their troops will be present in Kosovo, but will remain under Russian command. This contradicts assurances by NATO, which insists on a unified command under its control.

Refugees return

The Yugoslav government must allow for the "safe and free return of all refugees and the displaced under the supervision of UNHCR and undisturbed access for humanitarian organizations to Kosovo."

Other parts of plan

- An interim administration will be established for Kosovo which gives the people of Kosovo substantial autonomy within Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Liberation Army will be demobilized.
- Some Serb personnel will return to Kosovo to assist with marking minefields, maintaining a presence at places of Serb heritage, and other functions.
- All refugees will be allowed to return under the supervision of UNHCR and access for humanitarian organizations to Kosovo will not be hampered.
- A general approach to the economic development of the region will be defined.
- A phased, detailed timetable will be outlined and a buffer zone 25 kilometers inside Serbia, behind which the troops will withdraw will be established.
- Serbs will be given seven days to end the withdrawal and 48 hours to pull air defense weapons from the zone of mutual security.

GEOGRAPHIC GRAPHIC:
DAVID L. SCHNITZER, ROBERT B. JOHNSON