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SCATTERING CHAFF: Canadian Air Power and Censorship during the Kosovo War by Bob Bergen

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Planning for War

The year 1998 began with good news for the Canadian Forces. Some 15,000 personnel had been deployed to southern Quebec, eastern Ontario, and rural New Brunswick after massive ice storms wreaked havoc in the two provinces. Power lines were knocked out by ice and falling trees, leaving one million people without heat and power, including residents in Montreal and Ottawa. Soldiers from across Canada assisted power crews in the biggest peacetime deployment of the country's history. They helped to evacuate the most desperate and feed people in shelters and were given emergency policing duties to foil looters. Their efforts encouraged media outlets across Canada to report on local soldiers who were deployed in the Herculean rescue effort.

This was a huge morale boost to the men and women in the Canadian Forces. In the five years since a Canadian Airborne Regiment soldier, Master Cpl. Clayton Matchee, tortured and killed a sixteen-year-old Somali prisoner Shidane Abukar Arone, most of the news about the military had been bad. Media inquiries, court martial proceedings, the disbanding of the Airborne Regiment in disgrace in 1995 and a Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of the Canadian Forces to Somalia and its hearings and witnesses, and news about document destruction and resignations all provided headline fodder for two years that portrayed a military in disarray.¹ When the tired soldiers finally returned home from the icy disasters in New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario, they were able finally to bask in the glow of local media outlets that eagerly portrayed them as hometown heroes.

The early months of 1998 were also a busy time for the Canadian military. In February, the Canadian Forces launched a recruiting drive to attract more women to military jobs. Overseas, a Canadian Hercules aircraft completed its first operational air-to-air refuelling mission involving two US Navy F/A-18 jet fighters in the Persian Gulf. In April, the Canadian Forces deployed forty-five soldiers to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic. The government also announced it would spend \$750 million to acquire and modify four diesel-electric used submarines from Britain that, it said, would ready the navy for the challenges of the twenty-first century, sparking a lengthy debate on the wisdom of the purchase. In May, the Canadian government sent thirty military personnel and ten front-end loaders to Sarno, Italy, to help clean up after heavy rain triggered massive mudslides that killed some 135 and left another 1,500 homeless.

But much also was going on elsewhere in the world as winter moved into spring in 1998 that pushed even the best news stories about the Canadian military to the media's back burner. Sex sells, and there were plenty of opportunities for news outlets to titillate readers and viewers with lurid details about a sex scandal developing in the United States involving President Bill Clinton. In early January, he was required to testify under oath about allegedly exposing himself to former state employee Paula Jones and asking her for oral sex while he was still governor of Arkansas. Things got much worse in the coming months as old problems with Jones were overshadowed by an avalanche of new allegations of presidential sexual activity that threatened his marriage and presidency. In "Zippergate," a play on the Watergate affair that saw President Richard Nixon resign rather than be impeached, Clinton faced impeachment on perjury and obstruction charges related to the Jones case and his affair with a twenty-one-year-old White House intern, Monica Lewinsky.

Meanwhile, moviegoers set box office records flocking to see *Titanic*, directed by Canadian filmmaker James Cameron. In January, it captured Golden Globes for best dramatic film and best original score and song for "My Heart Will Go On" by Canadian songstress Celine Dion. In March, Cameron and Dion won Academy Awards in the same categories and the movie tied an industry record, winning eleven Oscars.

Canadian sporting fans' plates were full with the news the best player ever to play in the Canadian Football League, Toronto Argonaut quarterback Doug Flutie, had signed with the Buffalo Bills in America's National Football League. Flutie won Grey Cups with the Calgary Stampeders in 1992 and the Argos in 1996 and 1997. In February, the Canadian men's hockey team, led by Canadian legend Wayne Gretzky, arrived amid pandemonium in Nagano, Japan, for the 1998 Olympic Winter Games. The star-studded men's team, expected to win a gold medal, was knocked out of contention in a controversial overtime best-of-five shootout with the Czech Republic. The Czechs scored only once, but the Canadians could not score on Dominik Hasek. Astonishingly, Gretzky, the most talented hockey player and prolific scorer ever to lace up a pair of skates, sat on the bench during the shootout. The men's team came home empty-handed, while the women's hockey team settled for silver. Easily one of the most surprising Canadian newsmakers during the Olympics was unknown Ross Rebagliati, of Whistler, BC, who won a gold medal in giant slalom snowboarding. Rebagliati, stripped of his medal after urine samples tested positive for marijuana, claimed he had only been exposed to second-hand smoke. His medal eventually was reinstated after the amounts detected were found to be so minute they could not have affected his performance.

In late February, political leaders headed off a series of pre-emptive strikes by Israel or America against Iraq's developing missile program by brokering a deal to give United Nations inspectors unfettered access to its weapons sites. But the major international concern in the spring of 1998 was the news that India had set off three underground nuclear tests, engaging its neighbour Pakistan and defying the world community with a celebratory announcement that it was capable of making nuclear weapons. Speaking at a G8 summit in England, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien publicly feared an arms race in south Asia and thought it was just a matter of weeks before Pakistan—which had previously fought wars with India in 1948 and 1965 over the disputed region of Kashmir—set off its own series of nuclear tests.

Given the staggering magnitude of events globally, it would take a lot for the Canadian military to crack newspaper front pages and television network news lineups, but it did. An avalanche of news reports of rape and sexual harassment of female Canadian Forces members dominated

the headlines and news reports across Canada for months. These reports were sparked by two in-depth reports in *Maclean's* newsmagazine's May 25 and June 1 editions. The first reported on thirteen women who claimed they had been sexually assaulted while in the military. The second edition carried reports of eleven more women who came forward after the first, who told tales of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. The June 1 edition led with a front-page picture of former CF-18 pilot Dee Brasseur, with an insert picture poised in front of her jet fighter, who claimed she had been forced into sex by her Canadian Forces flight instructor.

The cartoons in the May 12 *Globe and Mail* and the June 1 edition of the *Vancouver Sun* about the Canadian Forces said it all. The *Globe* cartoon showed a helmeted soldier with a pony tail with a pair of groping hands from soldiers to her left reaching toward her. The *Sun* cartoon showed darkened images of a tank, a jet fighter, a submarine, a missile, an attack helicopter, and a curvy outline of a woman it identified underneath as "BABE." For a proud but notoriously thin-skinned institution like the Canadian Forces that doesn't take criticism—let alone ridicule—well, the reports of some military members' sordid sexual behaviour drove the relationship with the Canadian news media to a new low.

It was on a hot, muggy day with a light breeze in Ottawa, 11 June 1998, when Canadian air force Col. Benoît Marcotte had been summoned to DND's grey headquarters at 101 Colonel By Drive. As with so many recent days, the news reaching Canadians about their military was all bad. Headlines in newspapers across Canada screamed out allegations of the rape of a female army recruit, Ann Margaret Dickey of Oromocto, New Brunswick, at a military base in St. Jean, Quebec. But the subject Marcotte would talk about at National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) had nothing to do with the sex scandal and everything to do with Kosovo, the tortured Serbian province half a world away.

The average Canadian could be forgiven for knowing little about Kosovo, home to about 1.75 million Muslim Albanians and 200,000 Orthodox Serbs. The ethnic (Muslim) Albanians, by 1998, had been struggling for years for independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in 1991, but nationalist Serbs considered Kosovo their historic homeland. Impatient with the political progress toward independence, militants formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)

to fight for it. Serbian police and military units under the command of Slobodan Milosevic responded with brutal ethnic cleansing, which by August 1998 saw up to 230,000 displaced and other 50,000 homeless. Ethnic cleansing had been widespread from 1992 to 1995 in Bosnia. Unprecedented North Atlantic Treaty Organization bombing attacks on Bosnian Serb positions around Sarajevo in August 1995 led to the establishment of NATO Stabilization and Implementation Forces and a NATO-enforced no-fly zone that eventually brought stability to Bosnia.

The emerging humanitarian crisis in Kosovo in 1998 was but the latest chapter of misery inflicted on the long-suffering people of the former Yugoslavia. But, given the world events elsewhere, it is not surprising that a news report of the deaths of sixteen Albanians and four Serbian policemen in a six-paragraph Reuters News Agency report on March 2 was the first to crack the pages of Canadian newspapers, however tepidly. It was buried on page A11 in the *Globe and Mail* beneath a story on India's new coalition government. That ranking would change, however, as the rampage of ethnic cleansing of Albanians reached crisis proportions and world leaders woke up to a new humanitarian disaster looming in the Balkans.

By June, Canadian newspapers regularly carried prominent, often front-page reports of the escalating violence. The seriousness of the situation prompted NATO defence ministers to meet in Brussels. By June 3, they considered deploying 20,000 troops to Macedonia and Albania, given mounting fears that the clashing KLA and Serb soldiers and police, coupled with ethnic cleansing, could cause a military crisis. By June 8, one of the world's biggest news stories was that Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, and US president Clinton expected to seek a United Nations Security Council resolution to set the stage for NATO military action to halt the bloodshed in Kosovo. One day later, the fifteen-member European Union imposed economic sanctions on Belgrade, while Blair raised the possibility of NATO air strikes to push Serb leader Milosevic to the negotiating table in order to secure an end to the ethnic cleansing and autonomy for Kosovo.

Col. Marcotte was the former commander of Operation Mirador, Canada's contribution of six CF-18s from CFB Cold Lake to the NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina, which ended on 15 November 1997. The notes in his personal Day-timer show that he was called to NDHQ on the afternoon of June 11 and told of NATO's request

that Canada join the planning for Operation Echo, an aerial bombing campaign for Kosovo that was already being considered in June by NATO defence ministers.²

“I was informed at that time”, Marcotte said, “that Bagotville was selected as the operational wing which would deploy—if Canada accepted the invitation—and, strong of the experience the previous year as the Commander of Op Mirador, a similar deployment of CF-18s into Aviano, I was being asked to lead the initial phase of this new operational deployment.”³ At that time, 3 Wing Bagotville started planning and polished off its training requirements in anticipation of the deployment of six CF-18s. Although Canada had been invited to join the coalition, an air base had not yet been designated for Canadian warplanes. But discussions were already taking place among Canadian, NATO, and Italian officials for the return of the CF-18s to Aviano, Italy.

Marcotte recalled:

That base was already very busy with early operations linked to the growing Kosovo crisis and places to park coalition aircraft were at a premium. Also, within Canada, while the planning was going on, our government had to determine if we were going to accept the invitation. This planning was progressing well, and late on Thursday June 18, the advance party was put on twenty-four-hour readiness to deploy.⁴

The government’s quiet approval for Operation Echo on Saturday, June 20, came two days after the House of Commons had adjourned for the summer. Marcotte and his advance party were told to deploy to Aviano soon after. That night they boarded a Canadian Forces Airbus to Europe.⁵ The first six CF-18s were scheduled to deploy to Italy on June 24.

The sprawling air base at Aviano was at that time headquarters for the US 16th Air Force and two F-16 squadrons with the 31st Fighter Wing, which had the Mediterranean Region as its area of responsibility. It is in the scenic Po Valley where the Dolomiti Alps loom in the distance. Lush vineyards and wineries dot the rich agricultural and industrial plain surrounding it. Also a popular tourist destination, Aviano is about twenty

kilometres from the internationally renowned ski resort of Piancavallo and fifteen minutes away from the historic city of Pordenone.

Within hours of Marcotte's arrival in Aviano on June 21, he met the 31st Fighter Wing Operations Group Commander and left most of the advance party in Aviano in the hands of a major from his wing. The advance party was to work out the Canadian contingent's operational and logistics details, including arrangements for CF-18 parking, hardened aircraft shelters, maintenance areas for the aircraft, and the contingent's living quarters. After lunch, Marcotte and two others were on the road for the two-hour drive to Vicenza, an inland city about 100 kilometres west of Aviano near the northern tip of the Adriatic Sea. Vicenza was home to the US Army's Southern European Task Force and NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC). Marcotte was responsible for setting up the Canadian contingent in the CAOC.⁶

Starting on June 22, he had meetings to secure facilities for Canadian headquarters in trailers in Vicenza, access to all operational areas, and the insertion of the Canadian contingent aircraft into NATO air operations out of Aviano. He had to familiarize himself with operational plans and the rules of engagement and work on national activities such as the Canadian terms of reference for the operation and the less strategic local contracts for required services such as rental cars for the deployed contingent. He worked with NDHQ in Ottawa to set up the terms for the Canadian military personnel's deployment, including allowances, sports facilities, recreation, amenities, laundry, and dry cleaning. In Ottawa, the role that Canadian CF-18s would have within the coalition was discussed among NATO officials while discussions took place with Italian officials to secure approval for the Canadian CF-18s' flights from Italian airfields and in Italian airspace.

In Canada, Aviano, and Vicenza, the air force activities continued at a pace set on edge by the potential for participation in the first protracted combat campaign involving Canadian pilots since 1945.⁷ On June 24, three days after MPs adjourned to their constituencies across Canada for the barbecue circuits during the dog days of summer, six Canadian Forces CF-18s assigned to Aviano took off from CFB Bagotville. They were already three days late. Just four days after the government's approval for

Operation Echo, the cracks in the readiness posture the Canadian Forces maintained were beginning to show.

In 1998, the auditor general of Canada reported that the Canadian navy was seriously deficient in its projected need for four support ships on the east and west coasts to provide strategic sea lift capability. The navy was operating with only three support ships.⁸ Canadian Forces Hercules C-130 strategic and tactical transport aircraft could provide airlift for passengers and cargo and some air-to-air refuelling.⁹ The aging CF-18 fighter aircraft procured by the Canadian Forces in the 1980s, the auditor general noted without being specific, lagged in advanced technology available in other aircraft that represented a potential threat. However, it noted that CF-18 squadrons had acquired precision-guided munitions and associated delivery systems.¹⁰ In fact, for all its criticisms of the Canadian Forces, the auditor general's report was overly optimistic in assessing its strategic capabilities.

For example, despite the auditor general's observation that the Hercules C-130 could provide "some" air-to-air refuelling capabilities, both before and during the Kosovo air campaign the lack of an indigenous air-to-air refuelling capability created critical deficiencies. Canada had a core capability of air-to-air refuelling only until 1997, when its fleet of Boeing 707s was retired.¹¹ That retirement limited air-to-air refuelling capability, which restricted the deployments of the original six CF-18s and the force package increase from six to eighteen aircraft. Given the limited air-to-air refuelling capability, the Task Force Aviano commander was compelled to approach NATO allies to develop "tenuous operational planning and scheduling to achieve the mission."¹² Details beyond this limited observation were exempt from *Access to Information Act* release, citing international affairs and defence considerations.¹³

Canada's limited air-to-air refuelling and sea lift capabilities manifested themselves from day one with the first deployment of six CF-18s from Bagotville on 21 June 1998. The problem was this: Canada's thirty-two C-130 Hercules transport planes were and are the workhorses of the Canadian Forces. They are used for troop transport, cargo and equipment transport, and on search-and-rescue missions. They can also be reconfigured to carry up to 100 planeloads of fuel that enables air-to-air refuelling of fighters. However, they have a maximum ceiling of 10,770 metres and

a propeller-driven maximum speed of 556 kilometres per hour,¹⁴ whereas the CF-18 jets have a ceiling of 15,000 metres and a top speed of Mach 1.8, or nearly twice the speed of sound.¹⁵ The lumbering Hercules C-130s reconfigured to an air-to-air refuelling role were woefully inadequate for refuelling CF-18s on transatlantic flights. A CF-18 fighter pilot who flew in the Kosovo air campaign explained:

The Hercs are not strategic tankers, they're tactical tankers, so they cannot fly very high. They don't fly fast. We can't just stay on their wing forever. They fly at about, I don't know, 230 to 250 knots, and they stay at lower altitude. Lower altitudes, most times, means worse weather and you can't climb above the weather [with the Hercules]. It's not a place we [the CF-18s] want to be. There's altitudes we cannot fly at because of the equipment, so just being on the wing of a Strat tanker is just so easy for us.¹⁶

The other option for pilots on transatlantic flights was to island hop: to fly from Bagotville to Goose Bay, Labrador, where they would refuel; then to Keflavik, Iceland, where they would refuel; and then to Germany, where they would refuel again before flying to Aviano. That is only a marginally worse option than flying with a Canadian Hercules tanker. They do it, but they don't like it.

Every time you stop a jet and you shut down the engine there's a chance there might be something breaking with it. Those are pretty high-tech systems so if you keep a jet running, it just keeps running, but when you shut down and stop, now you might have a hydraulic leak. You might have a snag between the time you shut down and start again, so something might go wrong and so, for us, not having to stop is a big plus. If you're stuck in Keflavik, then you have to have a mobile repair party and so on. It makes things more complicated, for sure.¹⁷

As a result, Brig.-Gen. David Jurkowski, the Canadian military's Chief of Staff, Joint Operations, was on the telephone in Ottawa to his American counterpart in the Pentagon for help. His counterpart in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff office, was able to assist thanks to long-standing co-operative arrangements established by the Permanent Joint Board on Defence during the Second World War¹⁸ For the For the Kosovo air war, Jurkowski was number two in the Canadian military's operational chain of command. The Chief of Defence Staff was Gen. Maurice Baril, but the day-to-day operations of Canadians overseas—including eighteen different missions—was the responsibility of Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Lt.-Gen. Raymond Henault. Jurkowski reported directly to Henault.

Jurkowski recalled his interchange with the Americans:

It was brilliant, you know. The kinds of conversation would be: "Hey, so-and-so, how are you doing? Me again. Listen, we want to send half a dozen F-18s over to Aviano. We need a tanker because we no longer have strategic tankers and there's nothing on the horizon. Can you help us out?" "When do you want to move?" "Tuesday." "Okay, stand by. We'll call you back." Call back about an hour or two later. "Listen we're really sorry we can't do it on Tuesday, but how about Wednesday?" They were brilliant, they were really supportive, really helpful. We would rendezvous with them and they'd take care of us.¹⁹

Jurkowski's negotiations resulted in arrangements for American KC-10 air tankers to rendezvous with the Bagotville CF-18s over the St. Lawrence and mid-Atlantic. However, it took three days to conduct those negotiations. The CF-18s eventually took off from Bagotville on June 24, three days after their original planned departure, reaching Aviano, at 8:45 p.m.²⁰ Baril signed the Canadian terms of reference for the military contribution to Operation Echo in Ottawa on 25 June 1998.²¹

However, the military's air transportation problems were not over. The Operation Echo after-action report notes heavy-air lift deficiencies rendered the Canadian Forces totally dependent on commercial sources. That dependency caused significant expenses and formidable limitations

on the ability to commence rapid operations. For example, the air force had to abandon the Hercules for transport of its supplies and equipment. Instead, it contracted two An-124 Antonov civilian aircraft from a Russian firm to move its equipment from Bagotville into Aviano. Unfortunately, the Italian government was reluctant to let commercial aircraft on a military air base even though it was operated by the American military and the two cargo planes were loaded with military equipment.²² Hence the two Antonovs and their Canadian non-commissioned officer escorts were stuck in Greenland for a week after leaving Canadian airspace.²³

Cpl. Patrick Savoie, an aviation technician with 3 Wing Bagotville's Air Maintenance Squadron at the time, was sent to Aviano on a Canadian Forces Airbus CC-150 Polaris in the Canadians' bomb dump/missile lab group. Upon arrival, there was nothing for those in second-line support for weapons and munitions to do for upward of two weeks due to the Antonovs problem.

We went over there with minimum stuff, our own personal baggage. Everything else—trucks, tools, equipment, munitions, boots, screwdrivers, extra towels, aircraft jacks—those two Antonovs had everything on them. I had a laptop computer from the shop with me to do the weapons inventory because I carried it with me on the Airbus to go over. If I had not brought it along and said, "Oh, I'll put it with the tools, I don't want to carry it," I wouldn't have had a computer to work with to do the weapons inventory.²⁴

A Canadian government diplomatic intervention was required to authorize the deployment of the OP ECHO main party and the logistical equipment into Aviano via heavy lift Antonov cargo planes chartered by the Canadian government. Otherwise, the Canadian Forces operational readiness in Aviano could have been severely delayed.²⁵ Col Marcotte recalled some of the negotiations involved in finally getting permission for Antonov aircraft to land in Aviano to complete this deployment. "These negotiations were being done by NDHQ and likely other Canadian government departments and agencies. I was involved from Vicenza and served as a conduit with the operations' group in Aviano to find a compromise

on the Antonov landing times which would meet the requirements of all parties.”²⁶ His personal records showed the following:

NATO and Italy finally accepted on June 24 that AN-124s would be allowed to land into and take-off from Aviano during nighttime but that they could support only one Antonov per night. The resolution of this deployment hurdle was welcomed to finally get the full contingent on the ground and minimize the charter costs which were adding up while landing clearances were being negotiated.²⁷

Once Marcotte set up the basic logistics for the establishment of Canada’s Task Force Aviano, it needed a full-time commander. The problem was where to find one. In the end, Lt. Col. Jim Donihee gave up command of 410 Tactical Fighter (Operational Training) Squadron, a CF-18 fighter training squadron at CFB Cold Lake, to take the job. Donihee, promoted to colonel, assumed command of the newly formed Task Force Aviano in Aviano on 5 August 1998. He held that position for four months. Donihee recalled commanding Task Force Aviano as being a particularly frustrating experience.

The first part of my duties really was to get the unit stood up, to get them bedded down, to get the local operating procedures established, to get the rules and regulations and administrative procedures all in place. One of my disappointments, which was one of the greatest indicators of where Ottawa was at with a lot of these things, was that it took me longer to get permission for the alcohol policy than it did to get permission for the rules of engagement surrounding the employment of deadly force. I think that was really just all the aftermath of the Somalia affair and so much sensitivity and so much concern about having an occurrence of that nature. It actually consumed more of my time and effort than getting the unit established on an operational footing.²⁸

Cpl. Savoie understood why Donihee was so frustrated over the alcohol policy. Savoie was sent with the first wave of about 100 Canadians and arrived with the main contingent on June 25. The senior officer on the plane, most likely a major, told everyone that Aviano would be “dry” for the Canadians. There would be no drinking. However, the advance party members sent to Aviano to prepare the ground for the main body were already familiar with Aviano’s hot muggy weather. In the interest of boosting their comrades’ morale upon arrival, they had water and a table full of free beer ready for the troops when they landed. Savoie recalled:

When we first went in there, we were just sitting around waiting and there was free beer sitting there, so what did we do? We drank. Most people just took a beer or two—a few of us took a little more. One guy did a three-point landing in the dirt. We picked him up, carried him out and took care of him. Unfortunately, he did it in front of everybody, including the senior leadership, so right away it was obvious this could become a problem.²⁹

Complicating the senior leadership’s development of an alcohol policy was the fact that upon their arrival, the Canadians were housed in modular “shacks” like the portable trailers used by civilians as construction offices. They were part of a huge tent city set up by the American military. It comprised about 200 shelters, each of which housed between eight and ten people. Although they were cramped, most felt the trailers were better than sleeping in a tent or, worse, a trench. The American base also housed some fifty tents, a Burger King, and a Base Exchange tent where soldiers could rent videos, shoot pool, play bingo, and, most importantly, buy beer. The American base also was not far from a little town, replete with Italian restaurants and world-renowned wine.

Savoie says the technicians in Aviano were no different than many soldiers past or present. “The 425 technicians were party animals. They got the work done, but they enjoyed a good party. So, our idea was to work hard, party hard. Everything’s fine as long as the work gets done.”³⁰ Sometimes, Savoie said, the soldiers had a few beers after their shifts, but more often than not, a group would get together in one vehicle and “go to

a good Italian restaurant and order good Italian wine. You know, it was quite normal. We acted and treated it the same way as we do when we go down to the southern United States to use one of their training facilities. We weren't at war."³¹

Savoie said: "The [drinking] policy pretty much came up to no drinking eight hours before you use a military or rented vehicle. Also, don't get into trouble because if it becomes a problem, everybody will be dry. The military always has this problem of you're allowed to do something until somebody screws up, then nobody's allowed to do it."³² The Canadians in Aviano officially went dry as a matter of policy three months later at the end of August. Unofficially, the troops still found time to indulge after hours. "The same happened during the [1991] Gulf War. I mean, we're in Italy. There's vineyards surrounding the base. Have you ever heard of a military unit anywhere succeeding in keeping dry? Never, ever."³³

Back in Ottawa, the Chief of Defence Staff's alcohol policy considerations all were driven by a scandal four years earlier, a result of the torture and killing of a Somalia teenager in March 1994 at a Canadian Airborne Regiment camp near Belet Huen, Somalia. Jurkowski recalled:

To my recollection, possibly driven above his level, the CDS invoked the policy. There was a lack of appetite for the obvious deleterious effects that alcohol could have on operations and, frankly, in the minds of the Canadian public. We had a good statistical sense of the number of incidents that occurred that were almost always traceable to too much alcohol. I mean guys accidentally getting killed in other theatres, you know, falling off buildings and doing stupid things in an operational theater. That was not acceptable, so there was a limit on that and there was a challenge for the task force commanders.³⁴

In Aviano, Donihee didn't view the alcohol policy problem so much a challenge as an exercise in frustration.

That's the kind of to-ing and fro-ing that went on between ourselves and Canada, because they wanted it to be like

Bosnia, dry. I said: “Look, first of all it doesn’t work. In Bosnia you have a captive audience. The only time the guys are not in garrison is when they’re out on patrol, and they’re certainly not going to be drinking while they’re out on patrol.” The situation for us was obviously totally different. I mean you’ve got people living right next to the American mess and it’s simply not going to work. On top of that when they’re off duty they’re heading out into the Italian villages and every place else and we had no intention of restricting that freedom of movement to them, because I mean it’s simply not warranted. I finally won the argument because I said: “Look, unless you want to send me a company of military police in order to try and police this, it just ain’t going to work.”³⁵

The alcohol policy finally put in place allowed the Canadians at Task Force Aviano to drink if they abstained twelve hours before working. “You know, twelve hours prior and a responsible approach to drinking. If you are ever caught at the point of being inebriated to the extent that you bring embarrassment to the Canadian Forces, you will be charged and there is no tolerance. You will be sent home.”³⁶

By comparison, Donihee said, the rules of engagement for the CF-18 pilots were straightforward. In August and in the later fall months, the pilots were flying in a fairly benign environment.

Ultimately, it was self-defence that was the primary consideration. If your own defence is ever threatened, you had the right to employ force up to and including deadly force, but, in any of those situations, your first act should be to withdraw from the encounter, as opposed to going looking for a fight in the name of self-defence.³⁷

Back in Ottawa, our Rules of Engagement (ROE) process was so well refined and efficient that it routinely took less than an hour for the Chief of Defence Staff to approve requests from the Task Force Commander in the field to modify his originally issued ROE. Jurkowski said:

Only the CDS is authorized to issue or change ROE. They are classified, carefully crafted numbered lists for the use of force up to and including lethal force based on operational needs, Canadian and international laws. It got so we could receive, analyze, send a courier to the CDS's residence at say, three o'clock in the morning, get his sign off and transmit the approvals back out the TFC within 25 minutes. It was that slick.³⁸

In Aviano, meanwhile, NATO aircrews had been flying missions from the base over former Yugoslavia since the beginning of Operation Deliberate Force on 30 August 1995, when they attacked Serbian military targets in response to a Bosnian Serb mortar attack on civilians in Sarajevo. US military planners viewed Operation Deliberate Force as proof that air power could play a decisive role in achieving clear policy objectives.³⁹ A succession of NATO non-combat air operations took place after Deliberate Force in support of NATO's stabilization force in Bosnia (SFOR), including: Operation Deny Flight, Operation Decisive Endeavor and Operation Deliberate Guard. Deliberate Guard, which ended 20 June 1998, was replaced by Operation Deliberate Forge in the wake of SFOR's extended mandate in the Balkans.⁴⁰ Over the summer, behind the scenes in Aviano and in Canada, the Chief of Defence Staff considered force generation for limited air operations as early as August 27. The air force, meanwhile, readied in mid-September for a proposed aerial bombing campaign in Kosovo, assessing Canadian munitions inventories and storage.⁴¹

During the summer months, the armed conflict in Kosovo had resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties and nearly 300,000 ethnic Albanian refugees. On September 23, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1199 demanding that all parties end hostilities, backed by the threat of NATO air strikes.⁴² From day one of their deployment, the 433 Squadron pilots dispatched to Aviano on June 24 knew the reason for their mission. Despite the vague references to Kosovo by the defence and foreign affairs ministers, the CF-18 pilots knew as early as June that they were not there to participate in Operation Deliberate Forge's demonstration exercises. Instead, they were in Aviano and flying over the Balkans to familiarize themselves with the lay of the land and to prepare for an aerial bombing

campaign against Serb military forces in Serbia and Kosovo. One pilot recalled:

Oh yeah. The Canadian detachment, the reason Canada deployed there was for Kosovo. Even that early in June, we knew the main reason was for Kosovo. We didn't go there to support Deliberate Forge, but we were on site, so we might as well practice and do something and learn about the air-space and all that, keep our skills up, so we did participate in Deliberate Forge.⁴³

Although the theatre was benign, the missions flown over Bosnia were no longer practice runs or Maple Flag exercises. The Serb military had sophisticated aerial defence systems that included sixty surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites and 1,000 Soviet-made SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 surface-to-air missiles.⁴⁴ Those three missiles are radar-guided weapon systems that lock their radars on targeted aircraft. While older systems, they had high ceilings. The SA-6 medium level missile system could be guided by radar from the ground onto aircraft engaged in evasive manoeuvres and had brought down a US Air Force F-16 in Bosnia in 1995.⁴⁵

Yugoslavia also had 1,850 anti-aircraft artillery pieces and 240 war-planes, including fifteen Soviet MiG-29 and sixty MiG-21 fighter interceptors.⁴⁶ Those threats changed everything for the pilots, including their relationships with the ground crew. Bravado and jocular humor in the hangars and on the flight lines went by the wayside. Cpl. Savoie recalled:

I mean for them [the pilots], all of a sudden this is real, eh? It wasn't just strutting around wearing the G-suits anymore. It was actually going for real. I mean they would get into their planes and the technicians would have to be careful how they spoke to the pilots. I mean, normally, you know the pilots a little bit. The pilots are so good. We're only technicians, right? In Aviano, we had to be careful with them. They were over flying Bosnia, right? Doing air patrols. The pilots came back pretty white, scary, not the same thing

doing training and actually, “Oh, wow. I’ve got a SAM site pointing at me.”⁴⁷

Back in Ottawa, the House of Commons began sitting on Monday September 21, carrying through with sessions on September 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, and October 1, 2, 5, and 6. During those sessions, nothing was said about the air force operations in Aviano, where the CF-18 pilots and ground crews were getting ready for all-out war. On September 27, National Defence Headquarters gave Task Force Aviano clearance to use a 2,000-pound smart bomb in an air campaign in Kosovo.⁴⁸ The training and certification of load crews would begin with the bombs’ arrival in Aviano.⁴⁹ Maj. Stéphane Hébert was deputy weapons and tactics officer for Bagotville’s 433 Squadron in Aviano as the situation in Kosovo deteriorated in October. During the three months Hébert was there, the situation was “fluid,” in the words of SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) US Gen. Wesley Clark, with some NATO countries repatriating their planes and pilots.⁵⁰ Hébert described what “fluid” meant for him personally:

I spent about four months there pre-war. I was there in October for the first time until just before Christmas. Then I was home for three weeks and then I was there until just before the war started on Easter weekend. I got home probably around March 15 or so. I had gone to Montreal where my family is. On Easter Sunday, I got a phone call at about 7 o’clock saying to jump on the next plane. I took a Dash-8 to Bagotville and the next morning I was flying out of Bagotville on a Challenger with six pilots aboard.⁵¹

During that period Hébert was prepared to fly his CF-18 into battle several times before Christmas 1998. Meanwhile, the problems in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo had been roiling following violent clashes between Serbian soldiers and the guerilla Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which had emerged in 1997. The KLA had assassinated Serbian officials, police officers, and Albanian collaborators with the Yugoslav regime in Belgrade, which wanted to crush it. In September of that year, the Contact Group of

six nations—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia, that had first come together years earlier over Bosnia—issued an appeal for negotiations to end the escalating conflict. Their proposals and a proposed observer mission by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were rejected, because Belgrade deemed Kosovo an “internal affair.”⁵²

After an arms embargo and a round of UN sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council against the Yugoslav regime in March 1998, NATO increased its presence in Macedonia and Albania in June 1998 and threatened air strikes. Amid a humanitarian crisis, with 200,000 displaced ethnic Albanians by September, NATO enacted Resolution 1199, an activation warning of an air campaign on September 23. That was followed by an October 12 ultimatum for a withdrawal of some Serb forces and the establishment of an OSCE 2,000-personnel verification mission. Despite mild success, sporadic fighting between Yugoslav forces, paramilitary forces, and police against the KLA led to a complete ceasefire breakdown by Christmas.⁵³

During that time, Bagotville pilot Maj. Alain Pelletier said the pilots were on a readiness roller coaster.

We experienced two ramp-ups during the times that we were there. The first ramp up was in October, end of October. When I was there for my first tour in theatre, activities started increasing and then the diplomatic activities had a positive ending. We didn't have to use force to actually get to the means and we were able to get the diplomatic staff in with the Serbs and to actually calm things down.⁵⁴

But it was between January and March 1999, when the Canadians moved from preparing for a potential war to a war footing, that they began to feel real pressure. From the day the first Canadian aircrews arrived in June 1998, security at the American base was tight. Cpl. Savoie remembers how daunting the American military was.

It was kind of funny leaving base, going downtown, going to a restaurant and coming back in wee hours of the morn-

ing. Here is this Hummer with a big 50-calibre machine gun pointing at you as you come in. You showed your ID card and they would say: “Yes. OK. Y’all come on in.” This 50-calibre machine gun would follow you in. Then it would point back at the next vehicle. And behind that gun is this tiny little girl, you know, this very same girl we had a drink with the night before. If the guy says “no” and you floored it, she’d shoot you down.⁵⁵

The ground crews that arrived in Aviano in early January 1999 to perform routine maintenance on the CF-18s’ complex electronics, avionics, and weapons systems had a typical day’s work. The CF-18s flew from four to six missions a day, which required their shift to begin around 6:30 a.m., with a shift change around 4:00 p.m. A maintenance supervisor with the rank of sergeant typically supervised a team of eighteen first-line technicians. Eight of those would be armament specialists responsible for loading the aircraft with missiles and bombs as required and preparing them for their missions. The remaining ten were responsible for fuelling the aircraft, start procedures, and conducting basic inspection and maintenance of the aircrafts’ electronic and mechanical systems, including radios, radars, and hydraulics systems. Second-line maintenance saw two technicians conducting X-ray testing of the aircraft to ensure they were structurally sound.⁵⁶ That daily routine lasted until the Rambouillet negotiations on the legal status of Kosovo began on 6 February 1999. Pilots moved from flying four to six missions a day to eight to ten missions. Major Pelletier explained:

When we started seeing more activities again at the diplomatic level, we, as a coalition, once again started exercising a little bit more. We were doing packages, a series of air-planes that took off and went flying as a group, as a wave. We exercised pretty much the routine in the event of hostilities, except we were doing it over Bosnia as a rehearsal. So, this is the kind of activities that we ended up doing in preparation for the hostilities.⁵⁷

The more the jets flew, the greater the workload became for the ground crews. They began working twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week, with no increase in personnel to accommodate the increased workloads. As February 1999 worked its way into March, talks with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) broke down completely. That could not have come at a worse time for the Canadians in Aviano. There were plans afoot to move all of NATO's air operations out of Aviano for a period for runway maintenance. The Canadians also were just conducting a wholesale change of personnel from 3 Wing Bagotville to 4 Wing personnel from Cold Lake.⁵⁸ As with just about everything in the military, a mountain of paperwork was also building. As a rotation such as 3 Wing's ends, the Forces normally conduct a board of inquiry that measures and investigates all aspects of its operations, including documentation of the force's status, bookkeeping, supplies, and money accounts. The annual reporting season for personnel evaluations was also just ending. But that was only part of the complicated events that were developing. The rotation of 120 personnel from 4 Wing to replace those from 3 Wing was to take place in what would become the first week of the bombing campaign.

