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

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A Blanket of Secrecy

The first live interview that a journalist conducted with a pilot in Aviano came a week into the bombing campaign on April 2. The CBC's Neil Macdonald was able to interview a pilot on the condition that his face was not shown. It wasn't the best story Macdonald ever had done.

He said precious little. He had all the insignia taken off his uniform. We weren't allowed to shoot his face so, as he was speaking, we shot him sort of clasping and unclasping his hands. It's a visual gimmick, I mean you've got to shoot something, the guy's talking. We had to agree that we wouldn't identify him. I wasn't too crazy about that really. I don't like doing that.¹

Macdonald explained why:

The CBC really frowns on hidden or silhouetted interviews as they are called. If somebody's talking, the public, the viewer has a right to see who it is. God knows who they're putting out in front of the camera, you know. I'm sure the military's very honest but there are organizations that are less than honest in their public dealings with the media. We like to see faces. We like to see the people we're talking to, but we had no choice. We were there; it was a condition for the interview. It came very late, I mean we had to do it very

quickly—sort of in a field, as I recall—this fellow came out in a jumpsuit without any insignia on it and they presented him and said: “OK, go ahead.” He wasn’t, you know, the best talker in the world, I mean the guy’s a pilot, he’s got a job to do. I don’t expect them to be orators, but it was precious little.²

Macdonald was looking for information about the kinds of missions Canadians were flying, what kind of opposition they were encountering, and whether they were hitting their targets. Instead, the pilot talked about the nervousness of flying into combat, seeing a Dutch warplane shoot down a MiG on the first night’s mission, and his belief that when he took out targets, it was buildings or jets that were neutralized, not people.³

Also, on April 2, journalists attending the daily technical briefing in Ottawa finally talked to a pilot in Aviano on a speaker phone for ten minutes. He was asked in both English and French by CTV and Radio-Canada if he would identify himself, and both times he refused. When asked whether he was sensitive to news reports that the pilots had missed targets and if that was affecting morale, he replied that weather affected some missions. “That does not change the morale at all on the pilots and, no, they don’t follow what’s going on or the way it’s reported in the news media.”⁴ The interviews turned to the pilot’s feelings about being in battle and how it differed from his training. He talked about the first time he entered enemy territory and was targeted by an enemy MiG that was shot down by a Dutch warplane. When asked about his thoughts regarding the people on the receiving end of his ordnance, he replied, “As pilots, we deal with pain. I have to stop an airplane from flying. I have to destroy a building. The human factor is never ever in my mind at that point in time. I think it’s the same thing for a lot of pilots.”⁵

That story, or parts of it, appeared in nearly every major Canadian daily newspaper the next day.⁶ Agnew, the joint operations public affairs officer, was relieved. “Once we organized that one story, they [the Ottawa journalists] were happy. They were quite comfortable with one story and that interview took the pressure off. Once it’s over, it’s over. It’s yesterday’s news.”⁷

The unidentified Canadian pilot who participated in the April 2 Ottawa-Aviano teleconference interview was Lt. Col. Sylvain Faucher,

commanding officer of 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron. Faucher explained that he could have said more but the information was classified, especially that the CF-18s were playing a lead role in the bombing campaign.

I think the journalists were trying to conclude that the role that we would play in such a conflict would be secondary in nature, that we'd be camping somewhere very far from the action and we wouldn't be doing much. Let me tell you on the first night Canada was far from being at the end, in a secondary role. As a matter of fact, the Canadian airplanes were the first to cross the enemy lines on that night. We couldn't talk about it then and I'll be honest with you, I'm not even sure if I can talk about it now. But Canada was right there in the front lines.⁸

Other journalists in Aviano also were allowed to talk to Faucher by telephone. The *Globe and Mail's* Moscow bureau chief, Geoffrey York, was one of them. An elder statesman of Canadian journalism who had covered wars in Somalia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, and the Palestinian territories, York said:

When the Kosovo war broke out, our London correspondent was the first on the scene in Macedonia covering the exodus of refugees from Kosovo. I suggested that I could also help cover the war since Moscow is not far away. I proposed to my foreign editor that I could perhaps go to Aviano to cover the Canadian aircrews involved in the NATO bombing campaign. Since Canada was participating in a war, I thought it made sense to investigate Canada's role in the war and let our readers know what Canada was doing. My editor agreed, and I flew from Moscow to Italy. Then I rented a car to get to a town near the Aviano air base. We were allowed to enter the base, but we were restricted to a big empty building just inside one of the entrances of the

base. The building was a very short distance from the entrance gate, as I recall. At this building, everyone simply waited for a briefing or interviews. There was very little access to anything. We were totally frustrated and we weren't being given any interviews—in fact hardly any information at all. My recollection is that we had one briefing on the first day—late in the afternoon—by Col. Dwight Davies. On the second day, I think, we were put into a bus and taken to the runway to watch some planes landing, but we weren't allowed to talk to anyone. After much complaining by the Canadian journalists, we were finally allowed a telephone interview with one Canadian pilot. And that was the full extent of our entire access in those two or three days.⁹

During the April 4 technical media briefing, primarily about Canada's decision to accept some 5,000 Albanian refugees, the Canadian Forces again put an unidentified CF-18 pilot in Aviano on the speaker phone for journalists to interview. Munson asked the pilot to walk the journalists through one of his missions. The pilot replied: "I'm not sure if I want to do that one more time because . . ." before he was interrupted by Munson, who asked incredulously: "You're the same pilot?"¹⁰ The journalists in Ottawa asked about the refugees, the frustrations of dealing with the weather, the hours they were working, and how political decisions affected the campaign. The pilot replied that the pilots were focused only on their missions, were putting in sixteen-, eighteen- and twenty-hour days, and the weather was frustrating. As for politics, the pilot said he did not follow them either, but carried out the missions to the best of his ability. Ground crew were standing by, but none of the journalists posed questions to them. No major daily newspaper or television network used any of the pilot's material from that interview.

Two days later in Washington, a Pentagon spokesman faced the first of several grillings over collateral damage, the unintended destruction of a building, admittedly by an American warplane. On April 6, reporters asked about an apartment complex that had been hit the night before. They were told candidly that cloud cover may have interfered with a laser-guided bomb and caused it to fall short of its target. That was part

of the risk of combat operations, said Kenneth H. Bacon, the US defense department's assistant secretary of defense (public affairs). "We have said from the very beginning that we will work hard to hold civilian casualties to a minimum, and we are not targeting civilians. . . . There are risks to every combat operation, and those risks cannot be—they can be minimized, but not avoided."¹¹

In Ottawa that day, Eggleton and Henault were also grilled over the accidental killing of civilians. One reporter asked point blank: "And my question to you is: How can you say this war is not against the people of Yugoslavia when our bombs are killing innocent people?"¹² Eggleton's reply took the high moral ground:

It is regrettable that civilians are hurt or killed. We've always known that that was likely to happen, but certainly our targets are military targets. Our effort is to minimize whatever damage to non-military facilities are and that'll continue to be the effort. However, with an intensified air campaign, there are higher risks in terms of civilians. But I must say that while we're doing that to try to stop what has been going on, meanwhile, there are people being lined up and shot against the wall, sometimes in their own home, in Kosovo, and being shot. That is the kind of thing we want to bring to an end.¹³

When asked whether Canadian bombs had killed any soldiers or civilians, Eggleton replied: "No, wouldn't know. There have been, certainly, weapons released by Canadians on many occasions and we continue to fly the sorties with those weapons, but again every effort is made to target military facilities."¹⁴

Totally frustrated with the lack of access to the Canadian Forces in Aviano, two journalists did what some journalists do in such situations: they wrote about it, in articles that were published on April 8. Rosie DiManno of the *Toronto Star* and Geoffrey York of the *Globe and Mail* both documented their inability to learn more about the Canadian war effort. DiManno toured the Aviano air base with a group of journalists tightly controlled by military escorts. From about 100 metres away, DiManno

could see a dozen Canadian airplane mechanics stripped down to their undershirts working on the CF-18s. It took six of them to lift a missile on their shoulder, carrying it like a casket. But that was as close as the escorts would let her get. The agenda for Canadian journalists on the American air base that day was Americans and their warplanes.¹⁵

York devoted an article to the Canadian Forces keeping their aircrews under wraps. A “blanket of secrecy” had dropped over the Canadians in Aviano. Canadians were dropping bombs on the former Yugoslavia, that much he knew, but that was all he knew. When reporters were allowed to talk to one pilot, they couldn’t divulge his name, rank, or hometown. Nor would the pilot discuss his targets. York asked a military public affairs officer why there was such secrecy, but he refused to be quoted. “Apparently even the reason for the secrecy is considered a secret. ‘As far as we’re concerned, it’s a dead issue,’ the officer said. ‘I’m not talking about it anymore.’ He then asked that his name be kept secret and that his comment be kept off the record.”¹⁶ York wrote that secrecy had been the hallmark of the Canadian Forces since the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when Canadians bombed retreating Iraqis but refused to say what they hit or what damaged they caused. He claimed the Canadian Forces had studied the book *Hotel Warriors*, which described how American journalists were shuttled from their hotels and “media pools” during the 1991 war, which was like the system being used in Aviano.¹⁷ York explained that this process was wrong in principle.

Canadians, including the readers of my newspaper, have a fundamental right to know the activities of their government and their military, since Canadian taxpayers are financing those military activities and since Canadian voters have a right to elect or defeat a government on the basis of a full understanding of its activities. If Canadians are denied basic information about the activities of their government (including its military), then how can they judge whether their tax dollars have been properly spent and whether their government has been held accountable for its actions? How can they judge whether their government has acted fairly

and deserves re-election? This is just a fundamental rule of democracy.

Secrecy often leads to more secrecy, and then to corruption and abuses. Ordinary Canadians need the media to be a watchdog over the activities of their government and their military. If a government is concealing information, our readers need to be informed of this, so that they can decide whether to vote for that government in the next election. This is what democracy is all about. And when a military is involved in the taking of human lives—in this case the possible killing of Yugoslavian soldiers and civilians—it is all the more important that Canadians be fully informed of the basic facts, so that they can decide whether they want to reelect such a government. As a matter of democracy and morality, Canadians have a right to know the full facts when their government is involved in causing the death of people, regardless of whether it's a war or not. Killing people is not automatically a moral act and a democratic act just because a war is going on. Even when a war is happening, voters have a right to debate whether their government is waging war in a fair and just manner—or whether it is waging war in an excessive and abusive way. This is why the Canadian military should have been releasing more information about the targets that they were attacking. In some ways the basic argument seems pretty obvious: If the Canadian government is authorizing its military to kill people, Canadian taxpayers and voters have a right to know the extent of that killing.¹⁸

These were exactly the kinds of hard questions the defence minister was dodging in Ottawa, saying he didn't know whether Canadians had killed any civilians or military personnel. York, like the other journalists who travelled to Aviano, never obtained any of that information. He left Aviano and travelled to Skopje, Macedonia, where he reported on the unfolding refugee crisis caused by hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians fleeing ethnic cleansing.

At the Ottawa technical press briefing on April 14, reporters asked Henault about requests from Gen. Clark for more aircraft to escalate the bombing campaign. One reporter asked if Canada had sufficient precision-guided munitions (PGM) kits to outfit more CF-18s should they be sent to Italy. In reality, Canada outfitted twelve CF-18s with FLIR pods, some borrowed from allies. No more pods were available for six more CF-18s that were being considered for the operation. Henault evaded the question: "The PGM kits we have right now are sufficient for the operational tempo that we're currently envisaging and, yes, I would say that we're capable doing the mission as we have now defined it."¹⁹ Henault also said that Canada was mixing precision-guided munitions with non-precision bombs, leading one reporter to ask if that was because Canada was running short of smart-bomb kits. Henault replied: "No, not at all. In fact this is all very much part of the air campaign and part of the deliberate campaign that has been progressing over the last three weeks now into its fourth week."²⁰ He added: "No, we are not short of ammunition. In fact, we are in the process at the moment of replenishing our stocks and we have more than enough stocks at the moment to satisfy operational rates as we know them." The truth was that Canada was, indeed, running out of bombs, and those available increasingly were the dregs of American stocks. No stories were published about the Canadians' bomb issues. Such information might not have been helpful to an enemy, but it certainly would have embarrassed the Canadian government.

During the April 14 briefing, Henault also was asked whether Canada had enough qualified pilots to meet a NATO request for more CF-18s. The reporter calculated Canada had some forty pilots and twelve jets in Aviano. Henault replied that the air force thought the operation was sustainable and that they would be in Aviano for a period of six months. The truth was that the dearth of FLIR pods in Canada was causing a crisis in qualifying pilots. Still, Henault said, "I would say that we're certainly capable of another rotation. So, we can go for a period probably six to eight, perhaps twelve months at the current rates, putting people back into theatre as required."²¹ Several days later, during the April 17 technical briefing, Henault repeated his calm assurances, saying that beyond the thirty-five to forty pilots deployed to Aviano eighty more were combat ready in Canada.²² The truth was that had the bombing campaign lasted more than

another two months, the gaps in the CF-18 wings' training would have manifested themselves.

On April 15, the *Maple Leaf*, a weekly tabloid-style paper published by the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, provided a detailed story about the first Canadian mission on March 24 (when Canadian pilots led the coalition strike package into Serbia). Although the author was unidentified, the article titled "My First Combat Mission" provided every bit of dramatic detail that Canadian journalists in Aviano had longed to obtain from one of the CF-18 pilots. It discussed details on the takeoff of four CF-18s; how they were tracked by fire-control radar as they entered Serbian airspace; that an enemy surface-to-air missile (SAM) was launched; that the Dutch destroyed a MiG fighter closing in on the Canadians; that their target was a military base; that the pilot struck his target; and that he returned to Italy at 900 kilometres per hour while his wingman was tracked by SAM radar.²³

More than a month after the fact, the "best-before" date of that story had long passed. Just four Canadian newspapers bothered to pick up a wire story by the Canadian Press based on the *Maple Leaf* article.²⁴ Its unidentified author was Lt. Col. Faucher, who had no grand designs such as helping the Canadian public understand the experiences of CF-18 pilots. Indeed, he had no intention of publishing his account. Faucher explained: "Initially, I wrote it for me. Then somehow through discussion, public affairs got a hold of that and decided to share it with a bigger audience."²⁵

It wasn't just Canadian journalists who were frustrated over a no names policy for military personnel in Aviano; American journalists complained as well. During a press briefing at the Pentagon on April 16, they protested being unable to identify individual crewmen by name and hometown. Said one journalist: "If we want to talk to someone who's from Long Island and identify them as such as we've done through every military engagement I can remember, why are we arbitrarily saying you can't do that now?"²⁶

US Maj. Gen. Charles F. Wald, vice director for strategic plans and policy for the joint staff, admitted some Americans were identified on television in the first nights, but since then could be identified only by their first names. "I was there and know these folks. . . . When I was there, we did not want our names on TV at that particular time in the middle of

an operation.”²⁷ Seconds later, the assistant secretary of defence for public affairs, Kenneth Bacon, explained that SACEUR Gen. Clark had the policy put in place for security reasons.

Certainly, we have pilots who are flying at risk every single night. And to the extent that those pilots run the risk for being shot down and might be shot down, as one was, I think the commander, I think the wing commander and I think the pilots would all prefer that they not have information out about their names and their hometowns and where their families might live. It is a choice that has been made by the military commanders, and it’s a choice that obviously could be open to question, but so far is a choice that’s prevailed for the life of this operation.²⁸

That line of questioning was dropped. An explanation for why that argument might have been accepted may be found in the transcripts of an earlier briefing on April 2 about the capture of three US soldiers by Serbs in Macedonia on March 31. When journalists asked to be briefed on the soldiers, Bacon said that the Serbs were letting the captives call their families. But their phone lines were choked by journalists trying to interview them, making it hard for the soldiers to get through. Wald asked the press not to interfere with those attempts. “So, I ask you to maybe back off a little in your calls so that important calls can get through if they’re allowed by the Serbs, and we hope they are. It would be every encouraging if they did allow them to communicate with their families.”²⁹ In other words, it was the American news media itself that constituted a potential threat, badgering soldiers’ families while simultaneously denying soldiers the opportunity to talk to their loved ones.

During the April 17 technical briefing in Ottawa, defence minister Eggleton told journalists that Canada was adding six more CF-18 aircraft to the campaign, bringing to eighteen the number of Canadian jet fighters in Aviano. When asked if those aircraft had any assignment or would be carrying the same kind of weapons as the other twelve, Eggleton replied that the CF-18s already had a role, but the new ones could provide other functions, such as flying escort missions, making them “multi-purpose

combat capable.”³⁰ He avoided any response to the question about the weapons they would carry. At the next day’s technical briefing, a journalist followed up that line of questioning, asking if the six CF-18s going to Aviano would have precision-guided munitions kits. Jurkowski replied: “They won’t be carrying any weapons, if that’s what you are asking.”³¹

The reporter responded that this was not what had been asked and put the question directly: “Will they have the FLIR pods?” Jurkowski replied: “They will have the full capability when they arrive. They will be put into the same pot as the other aircraft, so that they will be fully capable of receiving any PGM-related [precision guided munitions] equipment.” The thrust and parry continued. The journalist said: “I guess what I’m asking is, we’re going to have eighteen aircraft over there. Will we be able to field eighteen capable aircraft at once or are we moving kit around between aircraft? Jurkowski replied: “We will be able to field eighteen aircraft to do whatever is required, multi-role.” The journalist thanked Jurkowski for his responses.³²

The truth is the first casualty in war, but war journalists habitually are identified as the propagandists and myth makers.³³ That often is the case.³⁴ But like Eggleton and Henault, Jurkowski avoided telling the journalists the truth about Canada’s participation in the Kosovo air war by telling only partial truths. For example, the new CF-18s could receive PGM-related equipment, but the truth was that no more FLIR pods were to be had. The truth was that the additional CF-18s were not used like PGM-capable jets; they were put in a separate area and were cannibalized for parts, because a lack of strategic lift stretched the supply lines to Aviano to their limit. Moreover, Canadian military brass were more than comfortable in not telling the whole truth. Baril told the CBC quite candidly about Kosovo: “There is a great difference between not releasing information and telling the truth. We’re telling the truth, we are just not releasing some information.”³⁵

Years later, Baril, by then retired, explained his thinking about what the news media should be told about the Canadians’ participation in the Kosovo air war. The military had a democratic duty to inform to the news media about the war, but the question was how much, given security constraints.

Security is based on some very well-known principles in the sharing of information. If information is coming to us from another country, there are restrictions attached to it. Anything coming from the US, for example, is extremely sensitive because of their rules and regulations that they shared with us. If we don't respect it, that's the last time we're going to hear from them on the issue. Anything coming from Europe will have strings attached to it as far as security is concerned.³⁶

Regarding the information given to Canadians via the news media, Baril said:

The information has to be general purpose information, in as much as you can give to the press; I mean to the people of Canada. You know much of the very detailed information, but you certainly don't want to tell the capability of your airplane publicly. You just don't show your hand to the enemy that way. We were very careful never to tell what packages our airplanes were part of or anything like this. This is not only our Canadian view but that was the NATO view. Everybody was rather careful when telling what was going on.³⁷

Captain Dave Mural, the Canadian Forces public affairs officer in Aviano, sent Faucher's article to the *Maple Leaf*. He also bore the brunt of many journalists' outrage over the lack of access to the pilots and ground crew.

Toronto Sun reporter Joe Warmington, arrived in Aviano in mid-April from Macedonia, where he had travelled to write on the Kosovar refugee crisis. Mural was able to get Warmington on the base to talk to the Canadians. Warmington talked to one pilot for an article published April 17 about the pressure to avoid collateral damage and how he thought of his targets as buildings, not people. Though the pilot wouldn't have objected to being identified, he had to abide by the anonymity conditions. That anonymity, Warmington said, robbed the article of its life and his readers of any opportunity to identify with the piece in the way that using names and hometowns does.

The whole reason to go to the scene is to localize it, you know. Here's our guys; here's our gals; here's what they're doing well; here's what they're doing wrong; and here's the equipment they're working with. But the Canadians had a theory that somehow identifying them would leave their families vulnerable back here. I thought it was appalling but I didn't really know how to go around it.³⁸

Malbon, meanwhile, said the trip to Belgium was a second exercise in frustration because, while NATO spokesman Jamie Shea provided detailed briefings about the bombing campaign, no details were emerging about the Canadians' role. A review of the transcripts of the Brussels press briefings for the entire war revealed that the word Canada was used just three times in seventy-eight days.³⁹ The most information that Shea revealed about the Canadians' involvement was one sentence one week into the campaign when he discussed NATO's resolve, noting: "Canada has just announced that, for instance, six CF-18s are on their way to augment the Canadian contribution already there."⁴⁰ As a result, Malbon said that her network determined it would be best if she returned to London.

They kind of said: "You know what? You're not getting much out of there, so there's no sense CTV spending all this money to keep you there [in Belgium]. We can get just as good stuff from the feeds. Because you're not getting information on the Canadians, we're going to send you home." The next morning they changed their mind. Our vice-president of news told us he wanted us to stay and keep pushing and pushing to try and get more access to the Canadians, so we stayed.⁴¹

The costs of her trip on her fourth week on the road were high, very high. "Think about it: Flying us there, hotels, cars, food, and the satellite feeds. We were feeding from ABC sometimes, CNN sometimes, sometimes some of the freelance people in Europe. I don't know what they were charging but these mobile trucks were pretty costly."⁴² The timing of her return to Aviano was fortunate because a Canadian Forces reserve public affairs

officer Naval Lieutenant John Larsen from Calgary, had arrived to replace Muralt. Larsen had transferred from naval operations, as a diver, to public affairs early in his career. He had completed seven years in the regular force public affairs branch, including a stint in Bosnia, before transferring to the reserves and being asked if he'd go to Aviano. Larsen arrived in Aviano with strong thoughts about his role. Larsen was one of the "two fellows" in the car with Malbon who Muralt said was trying to get her on the base.

It wasn't until John Larsen came that he tried, he really did try, to kind of free up, try to get Dwight Davies and the other officials to allow us more access, because they wanted the publicity, too. They wanted Canadians to know: "Look what we're doing over here. This is important stuff. Look what we're doing."⁴³

He had spent a lot of his time in Ottawa working to convince his senior public affairs bosses to work as facilitators, while still ensuring operational security. Larsen considered himself an enabler who helped the media obtain the information they needed from the most authoritative source. "One of my central tenets is, if I was truly successful in my job, I would never be quoted once but I'd have all the operators quoted to facilitate that."⁴⁴ He went to Aviano fully aware that the military's media policy was restrictive. "That's the exact message I went over with, that the only two people who have authority to speak directly to the news media are the commanding officer and the public affairs officer."⁴⁵

When I arrived in Aviano—and this is not a state secret by any means—by and large, the Canadian media were outside the gate. Many of them had already left. They had been out there since the beginning of operations with essentially zero exposure to the operation, the pilots, or anybody else. That was a bit of a source of personal frustration to myself because, as a junior officer, I have no choice but to abide by policies that have been sent down. But I believe that media relations transcend just going out and doing interviews. I

think one of the things that was incumbent upon me as a public affairs officer in the field was to say: “If you’ve got journalists standing out there in the mud for days on end, you’ve got to communicate with them.” Maybe it doesn’t mean they can get an interview. Maybe it doesn’t mean they can get an interview the way they want one, but you’ve got to have a discourse with them. You’ve got to get them to understand why you’re doing what you’re doing. I don’t mean to imply that they have to agree with that, in fact many of them never did agree, but a relationship needs to be built.⁴⁶

Larsen continued:

So, when we first got there, several of these people had already pulled their pegs, Joy Malbon being one of them. We immediately hit the phones and said: “Could you come back? There is an important story to be told here.” They said—with no fault to them because it’s certainly legitimate—they said: “Well, we were there and we saw nobody and we heard nothing.” So, one of the things that we began talking about very early on was: Can we not start to tell our story in a way that still accords to the letter of the law as dictated, which is pilot safety will not be jeopardized and identification will not be made? The rationale was that they didn’t want to jeopardize the safety of the pilots and they didn’t want them identified. So, we felt that we could begin a process of getting these guys some exposure without doing that and we did that. We did interviews without the names and we did interviews with the back of their heads, right? So, it was initially crafted no interviews with aircrews. It was quickly changed to, “You can interview aircrew, you just can’t identify them.”⁴⁷

Malbon did two brief stories for her national network with Larsen’s help. The first aired on April 18, quoting an unidentified pilot saying that dropping bombs did not rest easily on his mind. At that point there were twelve

CF-18s in Aviano with six more on the way.⁴⁸ Malbon did a second piece that aired April 24 for which she could interview a Canadian pilot, a padre, and a ground crew member, on the condition they not be identified. She said that before the camera was rolling, the pilot told her a very moving, emotional story about what it was like being in combat. But that's not what he said when the camera started rolling. Malbon explained:

You had to abide by the rules or you wouldn't get any Canadians, but from what I remember, this pilot, he was a young pilot from Alberta. His family was absolutely terrified for him. Again, when it's not on tape—for television—it doesn't exist. But he told me that, yeah, he felt lousy about dropping bombs, but he's Canadian, he's a soldier, his country told him this is what he has to do, so he's doing it. He talked about missing his family. He talked about his mom and her fears about him over there. Before we interviewed this particular pilot, a plane had been shot down and there were all these rumors circulating because there was no information coming out. There were rumors, at one point, that it was a Canadian pilot that was shot down. So, can you imagine his mother sitting at home in Alberta getting information on the television saying a pilot's been shot down? CNN's reporting that they think it may be Canadian because of the markings. Can you imagine what she was going through?⁴⁹

In Malbon's story, the pilot said much less than what he did off the record. What he said was:

You can't sit back on the sidelines and say: "Somebody else take care of that." You know, it's a terrible injustice but, you know, we don't want to get our hands dirty. We had a couple of times where we'd come back and sat down and sat across the table from each other and, "Hey, do you realize what we just did? We just dropped bombs on a target." And then you think about it after. But during the mission, you're not thinking about that, you're concentrating on what it is

you're doing. And you have to do that, otherwise the guys who are shooting back at you have the advantage.⁵⁰

When Malbon interviewed the pilot, the camera shot him in the foreground, with his back to the camera. She found it less than ideal, because her story lacked basic information, such as a name and a face, that makes television stories credible.

For television, it's everything. Television is visual; you want someone's face. You want someone's name. You want to find out who they are. When you have blacked-out faces on TV, especially on TV—not so much for print or radio—it just looks suspicious. It looks like the person's lying or it's not true. It adds doubt to the story. But we did the best we could. I know the desk was happy with the story because we were so desperate to hear from the Canadians. You've got to imagine back in Canada the desk wants to know what are our boys doing over there, what are they up to, what are they thinking, what are they feeling?⁵¹

Larsen saw time and again that the stories the journalists generated in person and over the telephone were not the ones they really wanted. The journalists had to lean toward softer, human interest stories, due to the lack of operational information. As Larsen explains:

Let me put it this way: The questions that they asked did not necessarily mean those were the stories they wrote. The questions they asked we often couldn't comment on and so they couldn't generate stories out of them. What they wanted to know was: "How many planes are you putting in the air? What is your ammunition? What targets are you going in after?" They were the standard high-tempo military operations questions that for logical security reasons you really can't address. Those were the questions that we were asked most often. The stories that they picked up on most often were: "What are the pilots thinking? What are the pi-



8.1. CTV's Joy Malbon interviews an unnamed CF-18 pilot who has his back to the camera to protect his identity for unspecified security reasons. Photo courtesy of CTV News.

lots doing? What is the life of a fighter pilot? We haven't gone to combat in fighter aircraft for ten years and we haven't launched an operation of this magnitude since Korea, so how does that affect the people there? What's the mentality?" It often sort of swerved between the hard news stories right into that human angle.⁵²

In between Malbon's two stories, Joe Warmington wrote a second story for the *Toronto Sun*. For the first time, Warmington discussed one shortcoming of the aging CF-18s, which were computer-challenged compared to those flown by the US Air Force. One unnamed pilot compared the CF-18s' on-board computers to an early 1980s Commodore 64 computer, as opposed to a Pentium-powered model.⁵³ Warmington's story, published

April 18, revealed just the tip of the iceberg of the technological challenges the aircrews had to overcome, but was also the first like it to appear.⁵⁴

Years later, Warmington explained that he didn't go to Italy looking to portray the Canadian Forces in a negative way. In fact, he hadn't planned on going to Italy at all; the trip was an afterthought. Warmington's rationale for convincing his editors to send him and a photographer to Europe was to cover the Kosovar refugee crisis.

You know I work for the *Toronto Sun*. It's not a network, or, it's not even a paper of record, really. It's a strong local tabloid, so we're not out there covering a war every time it happens. I'm not a Joy Malbon. I know Joy. I worked with her in the Soo.⁵⁵ She's big time. But sometimes these big-time faces, you know, they almost become the story because of who they are and what they represent. I'm kind of a small-time reporter who usually focuses mainly on people. I don't generally get into the major politics.⁵⁶

Warmington's first stop was Skopje, Macedonia, where he wrote his refugee stories. Then, he and his photographer flew to Venice and drove to Aviano on the strength of assurances from an Ottawa contact that he would be able to get on to the base. "When we got there, a guy from the Canadian group came out and said: 'No, you can't do that,' and left. He kind of blew us off at first and steered us toward Wesley Clark and the press conferences, which we certainly weren't really interested in."⁵⁷ Warmington's Ottawa connection eventually paid off and he was allowed on to the base to talk to the Canadians.

I made a call back to Ottawa and got some people on the phone. I guess they phoned around and we did get around those guys. We got in what they call the loop and we went right up to the CF-18s and we touched them. We took pictures, talked to the crew and this kind of thing, but the part that we were not happy with, and we had to live with, was the fact we couldn't name the pilot. We had to agree that we

wouldn't use any names to get in there. We had to take pictures of a silhouette and stuff like that, so it wasn't perfect.⁵⁸

As for Warmington's second story on the CF-18s' computers, he stumbled upon it while sightseeing in the historic town of Pordenone, a fifteen-minute drive from Aviano.

We ran into a couple of Canadian pilots and a driver that were on a very short leave I guess, maybe a twenty-four-hour leave or a twelve-hour leave or something like that. They just wanted to go for a walk away from the base. That's where I got that story from. I thought well that's a good story, you know. What happened, when I wrote that story, that whole Ottawa gang just pooh-poohed it the next day. That was the end of it, but you know what? It turned out to be true. There was lots and lots of stuff after that that came forward. That story was ahead of its time.⁵⁹

Warmington was right about top military officials in Ottawa denying there was anything to his story. Jurkowski told Warmington's Ottawa colleague there "are no structural problems of any sort, and the systems are very, very capable of sustained operations of the kind we are involved in at the moment."⁶⁰ At the daily technical briefing, Jurkowski also continued his gavotte with journalists attempting to obtain accurate information about the CF-18s' precision-guided munitions. He was asked directly: "OK, but has Canada enough equipment that all eighteen could go up in the air on the same day at the same time with precision-guided missiles?"⁶¹ Jurkowski replied: "Typically, that may or may not happen. You may end up with some doing combat . . . combat air patrol. I'm not going to get into numbers of how many pods or weapons we have. I'd rather not address that."⁶² Of course, he could not. To tell the truth, at that point, would have exposed the house of cards on which the air force's combat capabilities were built. Further, it was simply not possible to put all eighteen CF-18s in the bombing campaign at one time. There were not enough FLIR pods, and six of the planes were being used as parts bins. The only more dishonest answer would have been "Yes."

Back in Aviano, Larsen had Forces' videographers shoot film discreetly showing the Canadian operation. He tried to supply that film to television networks in Canada via satellite, so they could use it to build their own stories. Larsen says:

I don't for a minute blame the media for not doing more. I mean, if you come down with a television camera and all you can get are the backs of somebody's heads, you're only going to be down there once or twice to do the key stories. After that you're going to take stock footage. When the media visitation really dropped off markedly, what we did was we relied on creating our own B roll and sending that over by satellite and then having media and, this of course was TV media, electronic media, build their own stories from what we were sending them.⁶³ It wasn't what journalists would like. We didn't show them anything in the air. We showed pilots going through the briefings but we had to be careful the maps were removed. We had visuals and pilots taking off and what not. It was quasi-professional, certainly good enough to work on the national networks.⁶⁴

Larsen continued to have difficulty with the American military's security guarding the Aviano air base's main entrance. The security personnel, as opposed to public affairs officers, cared not one iota about Larsen's need to give the Canadian news media film his military photographer shot. One day, he had film shot for CTV and tried to get it to an Anik satellite uplink. "There was a truck waiting and the media were waiting in Canada but there was a security dude there who would not let us through. We ended up throwing the tape over the fence."⁶⁵

Malbon remembers that incident precisely because she was on the receiving end of that toss. "I remember there was some footage of a Canadian pilot that the combat video people took. The truck was waiting, we were phoning, and they actually threw the tape over the fence to me so I could feed it back to Toronto."⁶⁶ The good news was that her network had some film to work with. The bad news was that it wasn't really what they wanted.

We always have problems with that because it's not our footage. It's someone else's footage. We prefer to shoot our own. But we were pretty desperate, so we took it and sent it to Toronto and they were happy with it. Again, you have to explain to people that it's not CTV footage, it's military footage. Military footage isn't necessarily going to show you what you want to see.⁶⁷

In Washington, meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Bacon had taken up the Pentagon press corps' issue over improved access to American pilots in Aviano with Clark. As a result, on April 19 Bacon said that the journalists should be able to talk to the pilots at their discretion. He added: "There's nothing in the Constitution that says a pilot has to talk to the press, but should they want to talk to the press, they'll be free to do that. We are going to, however, adhere to the rule that they talk by first name only and not identify where they're from. This is to protect both them and their family's privacy."⁶⁸ There were no questions from the news media, and the subject was not revisited during the Pentagon press briefings for the duration of the war. Judging from the transcripts of the briefings at NATO headquarters in Belgium while Clark attended on March 25, April 1, and April 13, the issue of access to pilots was brought up only in the Washington and Ottawa press briefings, but not for the record by the international news media in Brussels.⁶⁹