



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

ISBN 978-1-77385-031-3

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

I Cringed Every Time It Rained

A group of about eight aviation technicians from CFB Cold Lake was in Leeuwarden, Netherlands, when the Kosovo bombing campaign began on March 24. They served as part of 441 Squadron's Capt. Kirk Soroka's planning group for Exercise Brilliant Foil.¹ After the Canadians pulled out of the exercise, that group was left in limbo while the job of transferring the flying missions from Bagotville pilots to Cold Lake pilots was complete. While they awaited orders, defence minister Art Eggleton announced on March 30 that Canada was committing six more CF-18s to the NATO bombing campaign. One of those technicians, "Cookie," said they were finally told late in the first week of April to travel to Aviano because they were running out of ground crew to service the increased number of jets.² The problem was, the military had no plan to get them to Aviano. Each had to find his or her own way. "Cookie" and a master corporal made their way to Amsterdam, where they tried to catch a commercial flight to Aviano. They ran straight into a tangle of red tape at the airport.

They weren't going to let us go because you couldn't go anywhere in Europe unless you had a return ticket. We weren't getting a return ticket. After some discussions with the airport people, one of them realized that we were Canadian service members heading for Aviano so they finally cleared us and let us leave the country and go to Italy.³

In what would become a routine occurrence in the weeks to come, “Cookie” produced a Canadian government credit card issued to squadron members to pay for the two one-way seats. The ticket agent told the pair that they were flying business coach, but it never occurred to the technicians, used to travelling on service flights, what that meant. They soon found out: “We went to war first class.”⁴

Within days of their arrival in Aviano, the Cold Lake pilots began integrating into the NATO bombing packages while the Bagotville pilots gradually returned home, although some of them and their ground crew remained working with the Cold Lake crews. Capt. Mike Barker was a maintenance officer with Cold Lake’s 441 Squadron when he arrived in Aviano on March 21. He later recalled that some of the transitions did not always go smoothly:

When it started, I was not officially part of the team because I was the guy who was coming in to take over and pretty quickly they [the Bagotville commanders] froze the existing chain of command. They said: “OK, the people that are here, they’re the guys in charge. You guys from Cold Lake help out wherever you can but stay out of the way.” So that was frustrating because we were coming in full energy ready to go save the world, ready to do everything right because, of course, the guys from Bagotville had been doing everything wrong. To be put on the sidelines to watch, that was very frustrating and there was tension between some of the different groups on that kind of thing.⁵

Alongside problems of command, the ground crews laboured on twelve-hour shifts night and day seven days a week, keeping the CF-18s ready for war in appalling working conditions. When the bombing campaign began in March, a typical workday for most began at least an hour before their shift with a drive to the Aviano air base from Piancavallo, northwest of Aviano in the southern ranges of the Eastern Alps. The Canadians had moved into a four-star hotel, condos, and two-bedroom ski chalets at the picturesque Piancavallo ski resort in September 1998 to accommodate construction at the Aviano air base.



3.1. A hotel located on the Via Barcis at Piancavallo, Italy, which accommodated Canadian air crew and pilots. Photo courtesy of Travis Brassington.

Piancavallo is renowned for its vistas that stretch from the craggy peaks of the Alps on the Slovenian border to the Adriatic Sea. It is also famous for its après-ski restaurants, discos, cafés, and, to a lesser extent, the hordes of bats that flit through the night air as revellers make their way to the resort's nightclubs. Although their accommodations sounded glamorous, they were little more than a place for the Canadians to sleep. A Cold Lake's sergeant explained:

The plan was to put up everybody in that big hotel we were in. That was the easiest way. You have to remember a four-star hotel in Europe is not up to the standard of a four-star hotel in America or Canada. Like in Europe, a four-star hotel is when you've got your shower and your toilet in your

room. If you've ever lived in Europe, you know that from the end of March they've got the heat off no matter how cold it is. Some people wouldn't have heat in their condo but we tried to take care of that. The hotel owner tried to get the heat back on but some people had it pretty bad. There was another hotel, they had carpet that was mouldy, so that was a problem. But it was not as bad as the guys in Bosnia. Those guys would have been laughing at the accommodation we were in. See, I served on a ship for four years, like when you sleep about fifty-four guys in a room. I can't complain about the hotel, and I was lucky because I was given one of the staff rooms. It was not, let's say, as nicely furnished as the rest of them, but it was a lot bigger so I had a table. My brother he would call and laugh at me that I'm on the wine and cheese tour.⁶

A 416 Squadron's sergeant said that, four-star hotel or not, he was not impressed. "I can remember the European standard hotel rooms are nothing like the North American standard hotel rooms we were staying in. I've been in military barracks better than some of those hotels."⁷

The air force crews travelled back and forth from the hotels in rented cars and nine-passenger buses. To a man and woman, they remember the drives as excruciating thirty-five-minute ordeals at the beginning of their workday and hour-long ordeals at the end. The base of the Piancavallo ski resort is on a plateau on the edge of the Italian Alps, some 1,300 metres above sea level. That elevation required drivers to follow a twisting turning series of switchbacks that snaked up the steep hills leading to the resort. Capt. Barker, one of the first to make the trip, recalled:

When we first got there, it snowed and rained and there was thunder and lightning and, of course, there were sheep on the road, rally cars and bicycles. They had rally races on the weekend. I'm surprised we survived. It actually wore us out more than anything because you had to go up the mountain every day and down the mountain every day on switchback roads. I actually had people sit beside me and get sick, pull

off their T-shirt and get sick because of doing this, swinging back and forth on these hills.⁸

On top of that, the aircrews had to find time to eat and sleep. Barker recalled the daily routine:

It was a crazy, crazy drive. I remember the first time we drove up thinking: “Are they kidding? Are we lost?” And we’re still going up this crazy hill. It was dark at the time so we had no idea how far we’d gone, anything like that. So your twelve-hour workday rapidly expanded to a fourteen-hour day minimum, you know, generally kind of fifteen hours, at least. If you wanted to fit in eight hours of sleep, that’s your day.⁹

A 416 Squadron weapons loader said that they worked twelve-hour shifts in name only. “Twelve hours, that’s what your shift is called. But by the time you do hand over or debriefs, there’s lots of times when you’re there and you’re in the middle of a job and you’re not going to drop it to another crew. It’s a lot easier to finish it yourself, so you can be there for fourteen or fifteen hours just for the sake of getting something done.”¹⁰

Yet it wasn’t so much the pace of the work that wore on them: it was that the work never, ever, ended.

Actually, it’s the pace of work that armourers enjoy. We were always loading. We like that. It’s just, it starts to wear on you. Your shift at work is twelve hours, but when you’re talking the driving and all the rest of it, you’re actually up for more like eighteen hours. There wasn’t a whole lot of downtime for sleep and recuperating after the harrowing drive up and down the mountain.¹¹

The hardships caused by travelling back and forth from Piancavallo to Aviano were resolved about four weeks before the war ended. The Canadians were moved back to the American base after 2.5-metre-wide modular buildings were set up for them near a runway.



3.2 Modular trailer accommodations at Camp Canada or “Tin City” air crew moved to in the last days of the bombing campaign. Photo courtesy of Travis Brassington.

Even though the spring weather got progressively hotter and the runway location was insufferably noisy, making sleep difficult, most saw it as the lesser of two evils. The logistics non-commissioned officer “Cookie” recalled that when the portable trailers arrived, air crewmen and women were desperate to get into them, and it wasn’t for security reasons. “People were begging to go into those eight-foot trailers because they were so sick and tired of going up and down that mountain.”¹²

During the trip from Piancavallo to Aviano, the Canadians routinely had to drive past thousands of chanting placard-waving Serb supporters gathered at the gates to vent their rage at the NATO bombing campaign. One protestor working from a tent erected a white cross every single day of the campaign. Death threats were painted on garbage cans and stop signs.

On one weekend, 20,000 people gathered outside the gates to protest the war. The Canadians’ security precautions were heightened. No protesters were going to get past the heavily armed American guards, but



3.3. Protests against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization bombing campaign Operation Allied Force took place daily outside the entrance to the American 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano Air Base, Italy. Photo courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

it was outside the gates where the Canadians were most vulnerable. A master corporal recalled a potential terrorist threat, not at Aviano but in Piancavallo, where they were staying:

Our only real threat that we had was a terrorist threat and we knew that it was there. A lot of people say that living up in Piancavallo, which was where we originally stayed in the ski hills, was a good thing. In my eyes it was a very bad thing. We were only lucky, in my mind, that we didn't lose somebody to a terrorist act. We drove up the mountain at night time. We saw cars. Every day in the same spot there was a guy on a cell phone sitting in his car. Every day we saw the same guy, same car. The threat was there.¹³

A sergeant was aware of potential threats, but he didn't give them much thought. "I knew I was going to be pretty safe. We were in Aviano. There was a little bit of terrorist threat every now and again—watch for this, watch for that—but I wasn't that worried being in Italy."¹⁴ If there was a terrorist or Serb threat to the Canadians, it was minor at best, explained retired Brig. Gen. James Cox, who was posted to the intelligence staff of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, during the war.

In my job in SHAPE, I had never heard a threat against Canadians per se, but we had intelligence and we often acted on it in terms of the force protection of guerrilla or terrorist—call them what you will—threats against installations of the coalition and even at SHAPE. In Mons, there were a few times that we closed up the base and closed all the stores and the shopping centre for a day or two because there was a perceived threat for a period of time against the base. It was always particularly against Americans, because Americans were the ones who were running the show. The threat against everybody else would have been incidental. I can't recall anything ever that said there was a threat against Canadians, but a threat against an installation and the Aviano air base was an obvious thing. I mean if you're at war you can anticipate that the enemy's going to try and get at your base and anybody on the base will be at risk.¹⁵

Still, as an added precaution, the Canadian aircrew were ordered to wear civilian clothing when travelling to and from Piancavallo to decrease their visibility and potential exposure to harm. Some thought that security precaution was silly. Explained one ground crew member: "The same five people would be in the same cars every day. They told us to change the route because there was two ways to get to the base from where we were. Anybody who went up there on a daily basis saw the same vehicles, saw the same people taking basically the same routes."¹⁶

A weapons loading supervisor with CFB Cold Lake's 416 Tactical Fighter Squadron seconded to 441 for Operation Echo. He was given

orders to report for duty in Italy on March 27 the day the US Stealth fighter was shot down. In Aviano, he worked in the squadron operations centre and saw the transition from Bagotville to Cold Lake personnel as the bombing campaign kicked into high gear. His job on the midnight to noon shift was to make sure the weapons technicians knew what weapons to assemble and where to deliver them. He also had to ensure that those on the flight line knew what weapons were to be put on which aircraft and what the weapons configuration of each CF-18 was. He remembered that the transition to the bombing campaign workload shocked the Bagotville crews, but by the time most of the Cold Lake crews began arriving they had a better idea of what they were getting into. Still, the workload astonished them. He explained:

There is no need to train to that level, twenty-four-hour operations. On the weapons side, we train for timings where we have to do each job in a certain amount of time and we train to meet that time. The weapons build-up people are a little bit different. When we load the plane, we're under time constraints. We trained for that kind of stuff, but we hadn't actually seen it before. Some guys trained for twenty years before they went. It was just the intensity of what we were doing there. It was a little bit higher than we thought it would be.¹⁷

Master Cpl. Edelman, with 441 Tactical Fighter Squadron, was a thirty-three-year-old load crew chief supervising a team of bomb loaders in Aviano. Edelman thinks the most physically demanding part of the crew's job was reconfiguring the CF-18s to drop unguided munitions, or dumb bombs, when cloud cover prohibited the use of smart bombs. In order to reconfigure the jets that way, the crews had to install vertical ejection racks on the CF-18s' wing pylons. The racks allowed the crews to load two dumb bombs on the pylon instead of one smart bomb. What made the job so demanding was the physical exertion and frequency. Edelman explained:

It's all manhandling. You're not doing this with an MJ1, your bomb loader, you're doing it by hand.¹⁸ We would download



3.4. A Canadian Air Force bomb loader inspects two Mark 82 500-pound General Purpose Bombs, so-called “Dumb Bombs” which are not laser-guided. Photo courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

one type of weapon, put up the vertical ejection racks, man-handling them, lock them into place and then reload the aircraft. There was one day that I remember we reconfigured four times. Considering we were working twelve-hours-on and twelve-hours-off, you really had a lot of configurations that happened over that twelve-hour period.¹⁹

The Canadians’ work routine carried on seven days a week, often without a day off, for more than forty days. “Cookie” thought the ground crews were not burned out so much as becoming impossibly tired.

We got tired because you’d get up—I’d get up at 9:00 o’clock at night—and have a coffee. I’d prepare to go into work with a shave and a shower and everything else. We’d go down the

mountain. By 10 o'clock at night you're saying good morning to people. I'd debrief with the other warrant officer till 12 p.m., he'd go up the hill then he'd come down the next morning at about 11 a.m. Quite often our debriefs went to 1 p.m. and then we'd have to get something to eat. Then we'd try to get to sleep at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It was almost impossible. In the first forty-three days, we had one day off, but that didn't do you a helluva lot of good. You couldn't go anywhere in one day.²⁰

One of the hardest lessons the ground crews learned was that after years of cutbacks to the Forces' budgets, the inability to recruit younger workers into their ranks exacted a physical toll on the Canadian servicemen and women in Aviano. Loading bombs and other weapons onto airplanes is hard, heavy work. Although they have machines to help them, they were still dealing with 500- and 2,000-pound bombs. Most of the older corporals who would have been promoted to a supervisory position in years gone by were frozen in their line jobs doing physical work. As one aviation technician who supervised a crew of fifty-five explained: "If you look in the hangar you finally see some privates now that are in the eighteen, twenty, twenty-two-year range. In '99, in Aviano, we had no privates. Everybody was at minimum rank of corporal."²¹

One sergent explained why that was a problem:

The armament world is a young man's world because you move things. You lift things, you push things. That's why, by trade, armourers have always been bigger and stronger. In Aviano, most of us were, the average, I think, about thirty-five years old and a lot of people were getting hurt. Old guys, like me, we had bad backs or bad knees. So, we went over there and we worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week for a while. Then we switched to six days a week. But old injuries will flare up, especially on the loaders. I think that was one of the main problems. We were older people. We were too old to do our work.²²

Many of the weapons loaders ended up being medical evacuees sent back to Canada with knee, shoulder, and back problems. Among them was a corporal, who understood that the military was egalitarian. She was out in the cold and rain in Aviano with the men, putting in up to fourteen hours on the night shift in the dark and in the rain. She was just doing her job as part of a team until she was returned to Canada at the end of April with a herniated disc in her back.²³ The ground crews agreed that they had never worked so hard and that they had never been as close as a team as during their experience in Aviano. One 416 sergent explained. “As a result of ten or fifteen years as a weapons loader, they’d all do the same thing. The weapons people, we work together as a group. It’s just our nature and I’m sure that most of them, most of the old armoured people would say they don’t regret being an armourer, bad backs, knees and all.”²⁴

The spring weather brought a relief from some of the winter cold, at least, but it also created another problem: heat. Although the hottest Italian weather is in July and August, it was still hot enough at 40 degrees Celsius by the end of May and early June that the wheels of the 23,832-pound CF-18s routinely sank right into the asphalt sitting on the tarmac at Aviano.²⁵ A technician explained:

There were a couple areas that they just built for us, eh, like elephant ears we call them. They were just round circles, enough for three jets. They’d start to melt into it. That would make extra work because we could turn them real tight to park them, get them in there, and you’d just tear it up. It’d be like an old piece of driveway that’s not finished, just rock and no asphalt. You’d have to sweep it out of the way because now it can go up the engines.²⁶

The second problem the heat caused was with the CF-18s’ sensitive electronic equipment. The CF-18s were not designed to sit idle in the heat, but that was precisely what they had to do in Aviano because of the tight windows for takeoff times to rendezvous with the refuelling tankers and then join the strike packages. Edelman explained the problem and what that meant for the ground crews. “The avionics system wasn’t prepared to be sitting for long without getting cooling air through it. Honestly, apart

from the armourers, like the loaders and the bomb dump guys, the avionics guys probably worked the next hardest, continuously changing out boxes because they were overheated.”²⁷

That was on the outside. On the inside, the second-line maintenance technicians were coping with heat problems of an entirely different nature. The electronic testing equipment they used generated a lot of heat on its own. One sergent elaborated:

When you touch your TV, you feel how warm it is. Your TV, your stereo, all that kind of stuff generates heat. Heat is the worst enemy of electronic equipment. We had problems finding air-conditioning to bring the heat to a normal level. Like the tire bays, we didn't get the tire stuff until pretty much the end of the war.²⁸

The Canadians' lack of equipment was an ongoing story. Despite the defence minister's calm assurances in the House that the aircrew in Aviano were well equipped, that was anything but the case. Much of their equipment was borrowed on the fly from the Americans. The maintenance and bomb loading crews said it was humiliating, always going to the Americans with cap in hand. The biggest embarrassment was that they had to borrow the Americans' MJ loaders, forklift-like tractors that lift bombs for loading onto the CF-18s. They also had to use the Americans' testing equipment. One sergent of 1 Air Maintenance Squadron from Cold Lake, said: “The lack of equipment we went in with was embarrassing.”²⁹

On 17 April 1999, Defence Minister Art Eggleton announced in Ottawa that Canada was increasing its commitment of CF-18s in Aviano by six, bringing the total number to eighteen. However, the ground crew in Aviano didn't know what to do with them. 441 Squadron's Capt. Barker, who managed a midnight-to-noon shift of eighty aircraft technicians, noted the problems the additional six jets created.

When they sent the last six, everybody in Aviano is going: “Huh? What are we doing?” We never ended up truly using those six jets. We weren't sure where we were going to park them. We were looking at all kinds of things like roll-

ing out runway mats and stuff and it seemed like the commander was then trying to find a role for them because we had them, so let's send them into the fight. But they weren't fully equipped. They didn't have the targeting pods so they couldn't do smart bombing. All they could do was combat air patrol missions, which, if we wanted to truly integrate them into the operation, we couldn't.

The way they were configured for air-to-air missions was very different than the way they're configured for air-to-ground. Air-to-ground, generally all we had to do was put the bombs on, take the bombs off, put the bombs on. But with the air-to-air role, there's all different kinds of pylons and monitors and stuff that all needed to be tested with an associated workload, so we had two sets of jets. We had one set for the bombers and one set for the air-to-air. The air-to-air were parked on the other side of the airfield with all the related problems of commuting and back and forth.³⁰

Barker, however, identified one bright spot in having six extra warplanes on the tarmac. The \$35-million jets could be cannibalized for parts. "They turned into a ready parts bin because we had far more airplanes than we needed for the operation. I think we almost always did have one airplane on the ground as a parts bin. We'd pull whatever we needed off that."³¹ When the necessary replacement parts eventually arrived in Aviano on a Hercules transport plane, Barker said the aircrews would then rebuild the cannibalized aircraft, only to cannibalize it again when something else went wrong. "So, having all those extra jets did help us, which was good, because our supply line back to Canada was pretty long."³²

Some Canadians toiled in and around a series of cement bomb-proof aircraft shelters positioned on either side of a semi-circular loop. Located on the south side of the Aviano airport, the shelters had a rounded half-moon roof and a floor space the size of a small outdoor hockey rink. A shelter generally housed one CF-18, but two could fit in with delicate manoeuvring. With such limited space, however, the ground crews responsible for aircraft inspections between flights mostly had to work outdoors, all too often in the rain.



3.5. A CF-18 emerges from a half-moon shaped hardened shelter at the Aviano Air Base, Italy. Photo courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Canadian soldiers fighting in Italy during the Second World War learned all about the rain that drenched them, turned streams into angry torrents that washed away Bailey bridges, and transformed slit trenches into cold, miserable mud holes.³³ Four decades later, everyone who worked on CF-18s in Aviano remembered the rain. Master Cpl. Edelman was one of them.

We really weren't prepared for the climate and environment that we would be working in. I never saw so much rain in my entire life, that place. I lived in a big swimming pool. It rained from the moment we got in to the moment we left, so we were soaked. We were soaked right through. The saving grace is that was it was warm. There were cold times but, had it been raining and cold all the time, then we would have been in a world of hurt. I think from the armament perspective, one of the saving graces in all of this is that



3.6. Canadian armorers working in pouring rain carry an AIM9M8/9 Sidewinder Missile that locks onto and tracks Infrared energy emitted by an enemy aircraft. Photo courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

you're sitting there and you know that you've got a job. This is the one time in your life that you have the opportunity to make a difference. So, from our perspective it kept us going. If you had too much time on your hands then you'd sit around and you worry about how cold you are or how wet you are, or whether your clothes are nice or not.³⁴

A sergeant who spent most of his time indoors, said his heart bled for the crews working outside in the rain:

When I was a master corporal, I loaded with them so I knew every loader that was there. A lot of them were my friends. I knew what they were going through, although not to that level. Fortunately for me I was in a building most of the time and I stayed dry most of the time. I cringed every time it rained.³⁵

Edelman noted that the Canadians weren't prepared for the climate. The publicly released after-action report on Kosovo by the Canadian Forces ignored the clothing issues, but the standard-issue boots were totally inadequate for the Aviano weather. Their misery nearly repeated the experience of the First World War, when Canadian soldiers found out that their boots could not handle the mud of an English winter and there was no chance to either dry them or waterproof them.³⁶ While the Canadian boots held together in 1999, that wasn't the problem.

The biggest problem we had was that our boots were not made for that kind of weather. What we had was Canadian-standard safety boots. They were very thick and insulated. They were made to work like in November, December, for outside in Canada, not in Aviano. I suffered from what they called Aviano rot, my feet both covered in blisters because you were working for twelve hours, without you know, without removing your boots.³⁷

One technician recalled: "I remember that people were having a lot of problems with their feet over there with the poor boots. You got to remember that the focus over there was getting weapons on targets so for the ground crew, a lot of our annoyances they'd sort of just say: 'That's OK. They can live with that.'"³⁸ While war is hell and asking the troops to live with an inconvenience like sore feet makes sense to some, it damaged morale. Capt. Barker recalled:

I can sit back and see the other things that had to get done like, "Hey, make sure we don't run out of bombs before the war ends." Some pretty important things were occupying people's attentions. But it was a significant morale issue for the guys on the line. They saw it as just their needs not being looked after. All they wanted was a decent pair of boots to do their work with.

Everyone seemed to agree that the solution to the problem was a steel-toed, steel-shanked hot weather boot that the Americans were selling over the counter at their Base

Exchange. They were canvas-sided like the Canadian military's desert boots, but they had steel toes which are one of the fundamental safety requirements for working around airplanes. Everybody agreed that, yeah, these boots were an important thing to get but nobody wanted to pay for them. So it went up and down and around and through and everybody who came, every general who came, I said: "Hey, Sir. You know, things are going good over here, but what we would really like is boots."³⁹

A solution finally came in early June, just days before the air war ended on June 10. "I can't remember how much it was, but they just went to the American base exchange and bought everybody a pair of boots. They asked you your size and went over there and bought them."⁴⁰

Whether cold and wet, or hot and wet, exhausted and often injured to varying degrees, ground crew personnel said that seeing bits and pieces of the situation in Kosovo on television and talking to the pilots helped keep them motivated.

We had CNN playing every night, all the time, you know, 'cause there's some military things the military is not going to tell everybody. But CNN had a bit of an overview, so we watched the cars from Kosovo pulling up to the border—moving out of the trouble zones—and they'd get their licence plates taken off and their passports taken so they couldn't come back. Now we're thinking: "OK, that's pretty bad." But the image that got me was the picture of this guy pushing his grandmother or mother-in-law or mother in a wheelbarrow. She was an old lady—wrinkles, the works—being pushed across the border to get away from the trouble zone. I'm thinking: "Well, you know, maybe we're doing some good here. Maybe we're going to stop this kind of stuff, so the Canadian people could maybe know that we were there for a reason." I think we helped.⁴¹

Capt. Barker explained that talking to the pilots also helped boost morale:

Everyone out there was working real hard. People were taking a great deal of satisfaction from the job that was being done. The pilots would come down and say: “Yeah, you know, hey that one went great.” The guys would feel good about that. Every once in a while the pilots would be able to show their tapes from the FLIR pods to folks and say: “Hey. Here’s what I just did. Here’s what you helped me do.” They’d tell them whatever the target was and, you know, we’re doing our bit to end this thing and guys would feel good about that. They’d mark the number of successful bombing missions on the side of the airplanes and get a sense of pride out of that.⁴²

As tough as the work in Aviano was, ground crews also knew that what the pilots were going through was equally so. One technician explained:

Some guys were pretty shaken up. We had to help them out of their cockpit. They tape everything. They can see where their bombs are going with their pods. I saw one tape—you see it’s an air base and you see people. You can actually see people running around, then see the bomb drop, a big explosion and no more people running around. They just weren’t used to bombing people.⁴³

For Edelman, seeing the tapes after the pilots returned made him think about soldiers, their roles, and the difference between an infantryman and the ground crews servicing CF-18s:

I have a lot of respect for infantry men and engineers. They see the results of the war. We never really saw that. I saw a bridge blow up on an odd day. I saw a building blow up, but it’s not the same thing. I speak at schools and that on Remembrance Day, and when I talk I don’t know if it will ever settle in me that we actually killed people. It’s kind of surreal, like you were there. The jets came back without bombs.⁴⁴

