

News Digest

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1998

PAGE 2

U.S. military plane downs cable car 20 dead after accident at Italian ski resort located near air base

TRENTO, Italy (AP) — A U.S. military plane on a low-level training flight over the snowy Alps Tuesday sliced through a cable-car line, sending a gondola full of skiers crashing hundreds of feet to the ground.

At least 20 people inside the car died.

The car was flattened by the 240-to-300-foot drop. It "opened up like a cardboard box," one police official said, and bodies were in pieces.

Officials at the U.S. air base in Aviano in northern Italy, where the Marine EA-6B Prowler was based, said all low-level missions by U.S. military aircraft in Italy have been suspended.

President Clinton, on a visit to New Mexico, issued a statement saying he was "deeply saddened" by the accident and that the United States will cooperate fully with the Italian government to find out what happened.

The pilot and his three-member crew returned safely to Aviano, 60 miles east of the resort, said Brig. Gen. Tim Peppe, commander of the base's resident 31st fighter wing. The plane sustained minor tail damage.

Peppe, speaking at a news conference at Aviano, did not speculate on a cause, though he discounted engine trouble.

In Washington, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the pilot "was apparently unaware that he had struck a cable or injured anyone."

Base officials said American pilots fly dozens of training missions over Italy every day. The plane is a surveillance aircraft attached to the NATO force overseeing the Bosnian peace.

The accident occurred at 3:15 p.m. local time under sunny skies at a ski resort in the Val di Fassa area of

the Dolomite Mountains near Trento. The cable car was traveling from the town of Cavalese, 80 miles northeast of Trento, to the top of Cermis mountain, site of a popular local ski resort.

The cabin had just begun its ascent from the base at Cavalese, at an altitude of about 3,000 feet, and was heading toward a mid-station when it fell, said Alessia Dezugliana, an employee of the Alpe Cermis ski area.

"You couldn't guess the shape of the car anymore," said Andrea Russo, a police official who arrived at the scene an hour after the accident.

"All the four walls of the car had opened up like a cardboard box. The bodies were all laying beneath the sheet metals. Most of them were torn apart," he said.

One of the victims was the car's Italian operator. The rest were skiers, at least six of them German, said police Officer Robert Cavada in

Cavalese. RAI said two victims were Hungarian, and two were Poles.

The scene was near the spot where a 1976 accident on the same gondola lift killed 42 people. The accident was blamed on operator error.

"Compared to the 1976 accident, this was even worse," Russo said. "Then you could at least see the dead bodies. Now, they were all torn apart."

The pilot was remaining on the base, said spokeswoman Capt. Tracy O'Grady-Walsh.

"It's definitely fair to say he is concerned for all the families ... involved in this," she said. "I'm sure if he had the opportunity he would express his deepest sympathy for them."

President Clinton expressed his sympathies to the victims' relatives and friends.

"I have expressed my condolences to Prime Minister Prodi and

assured him that we will cooperate fully with the Italian government and do everything we can to find out what happened and prevent an accident like this from happening again," Clinton said in his statement.

The accident drew an immediate political response in Italy.

The Communist Refoundation party, which traditionally opposes the American military presence and supplies the government a majority in Parliament, renewed its call to close the Aviano base. Other leftist parties demanded an end to U.S. military flights over inhabited areas, and punishment for the pilot.

Aviano, about 62 miles east of the accident scene, is the largest U.S. air base in Italy, with nearly 6,000 military and civilian personnel. It has played a major role in NATO intervention efforts in Bosnia and has hosted President Clinton for several visits to U.S. military personnel.

Arraignment set for Ammons case

■ The Omaha police officer charged will appear in court Thursday.

OMAHA (AP) — The police officer charged with manslaughter in the shooting of an Omaha man is expected to appear in court Thursday for his arraignment.

Douglas County District Judge Robert Burkhard ruled last week that Todd Sears could remain out of jail until his trial without posting bail.

Sears, 32, was indicted by a Douglas County grand jury in the Oct. 26 death of Marvin Ammons, a veteran of the Persian Gulf War who was drunk the night he was shot.

On Tuesday, his younger brother, Travis Sears, read from a statement at Omaha Police Union

headquarters, thanking those who supported his brother.

"This is not just about Todd Sears," Travis Sears said. "This involves all of our law enforcement officers, and it is time we as a community stand up and support and thank them for the difficult and dangerous job they perform in our society on a daily basis."

At least two families are suffering as a result of the Oct. 26 shooting, said Travis Sears, who works for the Nebraska Department of Roads. Another brother, Preston Sears, also is an Omaha police officer.

While the Sears family continued to cope, "our hearts go out to the Ammons family," he said.

Sears' indictment was the first indictment of an officer on a felony since the state law requiring grand jury investigations took effect 10 years ago.

Albright seeks approval from Egyptians on Iraq

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Egypt said Tuesday that "all the options are still on the table" in dealing with Iraq's defiance of U.N. weapons inspections, but stopped short of endorsing a military attack as a last resort.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the end of a six-day round of diplomacy aimed at gaining Arab support for a U.S. attack if Iraq's President Saddam Hussein refuses to permit unfettered inspections of its weapons sites.

Mubarak, who has spoken to more than a dozen Arab leaders in the last few days, sent his foreign minister, Amr Moussa, to a joint news conference with Albright and remained inside his presidential palace.

"All the options are still on the table," Moussa said. A senior administration official told reporters this meant Egypt had joined Saudi Arabia and Jordan in firmly backing the Clinton administration.

Moussa emphasized his desire for the use of diplomacy to persuade Saddam to adhere to U.N. Security Council resolutions designed to strip Iraq of dangerous weapons.

Albright said she remained skeptical of diplomacy succeeding.

Before boarding a U.S. Air Force jet for a 14-hour flight home, Albright said the Iraqi president was using "feint, parries and blocks" to prolong the impasse.

The United States has no quarrel with the people of Iraq and "we do not wish to see women and children used as human shields," she said.

But she said time for diplomacy is running out and the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait and the Palestinian Authority all agreed: "This crisis was created by Saddam

“

We believe we have all the cooperation we need across the board.”

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT
secretary of state

Hussein's defiance of the Security Council."

Moussa explained Mubarak's absence as due to a busy schedule, including a meeting with the president of Panama. Albright told reporters she did not feel slighted.

A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Egyptian statement that all options were on the table was welcomed by Albright as a sign of support.

Bahrain backed the United States in warning Iraq of "grave consequences" if it fails to heed U.N. demands that it open suspect weapons sites to unconditional inspection. A day earlier, Saudi Arabia said Iraq bears responsibility if diplomacy fails to end the inspection impasse. But the Saudis stopped short of granting U.S. warplanes use of their air bases for possible strikes against Iraq.

Bahrain, the Persian Gulf emirate where the U.S. 5th Fleet maintains its central command, apparently pledged its military support in the event of an attack on Iraq.

"We believe we have all the cooperation we need across the board," Albright said after meeting with the emir, Sheik Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa.

In Bahrain, Albright dismissed as "diversionary" an overture by Iraq through Russia to open some presidential sites to U.N. inspectors.

While she did not object to further diplomatic efforts by Russia or

any other nation, she stressed that "it's the message that counts" and the message should be insistence on total compliance with the United Nations.

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin also rejected as "another diversionary tactic" an offer by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to meet with a U.S. congressional delegation.

In Washington, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, a senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said today a U.S. strike appears to be inevitable. "It's not absolutely certain we're going to go," McCain said on ABC's "Good Morning America." "But I think the series of events that are transpiring will lead us to that action unless there is something that happens within the next few days to a couple of weeks."

McCain said a U.S. attack, if it comes, "has to be severe, has to be sustained and has to be significant."

Bahrain's foreign minister, Sheik Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, agreed that Iraq must "give access to the inspectors of the U.N. special commission" or face "grave consequences."

Bahrain is the nerve center of a powerful armada sent during the Gulf crisis, and the U.S. Navy has had a presence here for 50 years. There are two U.S. carriers and more than 300 warplanes in the area.

Daily Nebraskan

Editor: Paula Lavigne
Managing Editor: Chad Lorenz
Associate News Editor: Erin Schulte
Associate News Editor: Ted Taylor
Assignment Editor: Erin Gibson
Opinion Editor: Joshua Gillin
Sports Editor: David Wilson
A&E Editor: Jeff Randall
Copy Desk Chiefs: Bryce Glenn
Photo Director: Ryan Soderlin
Design Co-Chiefs: Jamie Ziegler
Tony Toth
Art Director: Matt Haney
Online Editor: Gregg Stearns

Questions? Comments? Ask for the
appropriate section editor at (402) 472-2588
or e-mail dn@unlinfo.unl.edu.

Asst. Online Editor: Amy Pemberton
General Manager: Dan Shattil
Publications Board: Melissa Myles
(402) 476-2446
Chairwoman: Don Walton
(402) 473-7301
Professional Advisor: Nick Partsch
(402) 472-2589
Advertising Manager: Daniel Lam
Assistant Ad Manager: Marni Speck

Fax number: (402) 472-1761

World Wide Web: www.unl.edu/DailyNebr

The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1998

THE DAILY NEBRASKAN