Extent

28 folders, approximately 1,751 pages

Summary

This collection contains records related to the crash between a U.S. military aircraft and a cable car on Alpe Cermis, near the Italian town of Cavalese on February 3, 1998. The collection consists of correspondence, press materials, cables, and research materials. The records concern legislation regarding victim’s compensation, the court martial of the pilots, and the impact of the incident on the U.S.-Italian diplomatic relationship.

Scope and Content Note

The materials in FOIA 2019-0047-F are a selective body of documents responsive to the topic of the FOIA. Researchers should consult the archivist about related material. This FOIA case contains records related to the crash of a cable car on Alpe Cermis, near the Italian town of Cavalese. On February 3, 1998, a United States Marine Corps EA-6B Prowler on a low-altitude flight struck the support cables for a cable car lift. The subsequent crash of the cable car killed 20 people from 6 countries, including all 19 passengers and 1 operator. The aircraft was able to return to Aviano Air Base. President Clinton and U.S. Ambassador to Italy Thomas Foglietta immediately issued apologies and commitments to investigate the incident. Due to the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the U.S. and Italy, the U.S. had jurisdiction for any prosecution of the service members involved in the accident. The pilot, Captain Richard Ashby, and his navigator, Captain Joseph Schweitzer were court-martialed on charges of involuntary manslaughter and negligent homicide. In March 1999, a jury acquitted Captain Ashby and the charges against Captain Schweitzer were dropped. This outraged the Italian public and further strained the diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and Italy. Captains Ashby and Schweitzer were then court-martialed again on charges of obstruction of justice and conduct

unbecoming an officer and a gentleman for the destruction of the aircraft's videotape. Both were found guilty and dismissed. Another source of strained U.S.-Italian tensions was the compensation for the victims of the crash. In May 1999, the U.S. Congress rejected a bill to create a compensation fund. This further angered the Italian public. In December 1999, the Italian Parliament passed a monetary compensation plan for the families of those killed. The U.S. government, in accordance with NATO agreements, covered 75% of this compensation. White House Office of Records Management Subject Files contain correspondence dating to 1998 and 1999 that regards the report of the Tricarico-Prueher Bilateral Commission on the Cavalese Ski Gondola Incident, the Italian Parliament's passage of the Cavalese Compensation Law, and the process of compensating victims in the Cavalese EA-6B accident. Most of the records processed for this FOIA case come from the National Security Council (NSC) staff and office files of Charles Allen and Mary Derosa in the office of the Legal Advisor, as well as Antony Blinken and Keirn Brown in the European Affairs directorate. These materials include email and physical correspondence, cables, press materials, and research materials on all aspects of the incident. The records especially focus on issues and legislation related to victims' compensation, the court martials, and impact on the U.S.-Italian diplomatic relationship. In addition, there are records related to a bilateral commission headed by American Admiral Joseph Prueher and Italian Lieutenant General Leonard Tricarico operational and safety procedures in the aftermath of the incident, including copies of the final report. The collection also includes NSC Cables related to the Cavalese incident. These records, which primarily originate with the State Department and date from February 1998 through March 1999, focus on reactions to the incident and the court martial verdicts, as well as the impact on diplomatic relations. NSC Records Management packets were also processed in response to this FOIA case. They include correspondence with the attorney representing the 5 Belgian victims, with former Congressman Beryl Anthony regarding victim's compensation, and with the mayor of the city of Bergstaedt – the home of the 7 German victims. The last NSC packet contains a March 1999 memo to National Security Advisor Samuel Berger that includes annotations in Berger's handwriting.

Record Type

Textual

System of Arrangement

Records that are responsive to this FOIA request were found in these collection areas— Clinton President Records: White House Office of Records Management (WHORM) Subject Files, Clinton Presidential Records: White House Staff and Office Files, and Clinton Presidential Records: NSC Cable, Email, and Records Management Systems. The White House Office of Records Management (WHORM) contains a variety of series created to organize and track documents and correspondence. The WHORM Subject File was compiled by the White House Office of Records Management and is a series of categories designated by a letter/number combination. Staff and Office files were maintained at the folder level by staff members within their individual offices and document all levels of administration activity. WHORM files are processed at the document level; whereas, Staff and Office files are processed at the folder level, that is, individual documents are not selected and removed from a folder for processing. While this method maintains folder integrity, it frequently results in the incidental processing of documents that are not wholly responsible to the subject area. Staff and Office files are processed at the folder level, that is, individual documents are not selected and removed from a folder for processing. While this method maintains folder integrity, it frequently results in the incidental processing of documents that are not wholly responsive to the subject area. FOIA 2019-0047-F includes WHORM records from these subject codes: CO083 Italy, Italian Republic FG001 President of the United States JL Judicial - Legal Matters.

Access

Collection is open to all researchers. Access to Clinton Presidential Records is governed by the Presidential Records Act (PRA) (44 U.S.C. Chapter 22, as amended) and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 U.S.C. 552, as amended) and therefore records may be restricted in whole or in part in accordance with legal exemptions.

Copyright

Documents in this collection that were prepared by officials of the United States government as part of their official duties are in the public domain. Researchers are advised to consult the copyright law of the United States (17 U.S.C. Chapter 1) which governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Provenance

Official records of William Jefferson Clinton’s presidency are housed at the Clinton Presidential Library and administered by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) under the provisions of the Presidential Records Act (PRA).

Processed by

Staff Archivist, 2024. Previously restricted materials are added as they are released.

Last Modified Date

2024-11-26

Container List

The following is a list of documents and folders processed in response to FOIA 2019-0047-F:
Box 1
Clinton Presidential Records : WHORM: Subject File
CO083 281235SS
CO083 306330SS
CO083 405629
FG001 407051
JL 265703CU
Clinton Presidential Records: White House Staff and Office Files
National Security Council

European Affairs
Blinken, Antony
Italy-Cavalese Accident [1] [OA/ID 3439]
Italy-Cavalese Accident [2] [OA/ID 3439]
Brown, Keirn
Cavalese [OA/ID 2194]
Legal Advisor
Allen, Charles
Cavalese [1] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [2] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [3] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [4] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [5] [OA/ID 2675]
Box 2
Cavalese [6] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [7] [OA/ID 2675]
Cavalese [8] [OA/ID 2675]
Derosa, Mary
Cavalese [1] [OA/ID 2847]
Cavalese [2] [OA/ID 2847]
Clinton Presidential Records: NSC Cable, Email, and Records Management System
NSC Cables
Jan 1997-Dec 1998 [OA/ID 520000]
[Cavalese...]
[02/04/1998 – 02/19/1998]
[03/02/1998 – 03/31/1998]
[04/01/1998 – 06/30/1998]
[07/14/1998 – 12/30/1998]
Box 3
Jan 1999-Dec 2000 [OA/ID 530000]
[Cavalese…]
[02/04/1999 – 03/12/1999]
[03/17/1999 – 03/31/1999]
NSC Records Management System
[Cavalese…]
9806774 [OA/ID 2062]
9806801 [OA/ID 2062]

9900643 [OA/ID 2708]
9901761 [OA/ID 2716]