Extent

4 SRLs, 186 assets

Summary

This collection consists of records related to the 1998 Cavalese cable car incident in Italy. The electronic records responsive to this request came from the Automated Records Management System (ARMS) and the Tape Restoration Project (TRP). Records to be opened include press, USIA media reports of international news coverage, emails between White House staffers, and the initial incident report sent by the United States military.

Scope and Content Note

The materials in FOIA 2019-0047-F (Segment 2) are a selective body of documents responsive to the topic of the FOIA. The researcher submitted a request for materials related to the 1998 cable car accident near Cavalese, a ski resort town located in the Italian province of Tretino. On February 3, 1998, twenty people were killed when a United States Marine Corps aircraft struck the cables supporting a gondola lift at Alpe Cermis in the Dolomites, causing the cable car to fall 370 feet to the ground. An investigation determined that the aircraft had been flying both lower and faster than rules permitted when the accident occurred, and that the crew had been using obsolete maps that did not include the location of the aerial lift cables. The aircraft, a EA-6B Prowler, was piloted by United States Marine Corps Captain Richard J. Ashby. Captain Joseph Schweitzer was his navigator. According to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Status of Forces Agreement (NATO SOFA), the United States had jurisdiction over any potential case. The Italian government “requested a waiver of jurisdiction both for the seriousness of the incident, which had sparked a public outcry, and for the opportunity to make a complete assessment of responsibilities in a single trial…” but “[T]he United States declined to waive its jurisdiction.” Ashby and Schweitzer were court-martialed and each charged with involuntary

manslaughter, negligent homicide, damage to military property, and dereliction of duty. Two other crew members, Captains Chandler P. Seagraves and William L. Raney, received immunity in exchange for their testimony. Ashby stood trial at USMC base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and, in March 1999, a military jury acquitted him of all charges. The charges against Schweitzer were subsequently dropped. After the initial court-martial, it was discovered that Ashby and Schweitzer had used a personal video camera to record the flight and, upon landing in the damaged aircraft, they had agreed to remove the video cassette containing the recording and replace it with an unused, blank cassette. Days after the incident, and with the knowledge that they were under criminal investigation for the civilian deaths, Schweitzer destroyed the cassette containing the video recording of the mishap flight. They received a second court-martial, at which Ashby was convicted of “two counts of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman […] for obstruction of justice and conspiring to obstruct justice.” Both Ashby and Schweitzer were dismissed from the Marine Corps, and Ashby was sentenced to six months in prison. He ultimately served only four months, being let out early for good behavior. Materials responsive to this FOIA request include all emails referencing either Cavalese and gondola or cable car, and Richard J. Ashby. The bulk of the responsive records consist of press, including compiled foreign press summaries from USIA. There are also emails between White House staffers in the aftermath of the acquittal, as well as the initial incident report with updates sent by the United States military.

Record Type

Electronic Records

System of Arrangement

Records that are responsive to this FOIA request were found in these collection areas— Clinton Presidential Records: (SAS) Automated Records Management System [Email] & (SAS) Tape Restoration Project [Email]. The Executive Office of the President (EOP) subsystem of the Electronic Records Archive (ERA) contains electronic records created or received by Clinton Administration officials. These records are stored in Search and Access Sets (SAS) that represent their originating

computer program. Search strings are used to locate records responsive to FOIA requests, and responsive assets are placed into Search Results Lists (SRLs). Depending on the complexity of the search, there may be multiple SRLs within each SAS. The Automated Records Management System (ARMS) is a database that contains email records of the Executive Office of the President. This system maintained unclassified Presidential email. The Tape Restoration Project (TRP) is a database that contains restored emails from the Automated Records Management System (ARMS) from July 1994 through June of 2000. This system maintained unclassified Presidential email.

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

2024-08-23

Container List

The following Search and Access Sets were processed in response to FOIA 2019-0047-F (Segment 2):
Clinton Presidential Records: EOP ERA Search and Access Sets (SAS)
(SAS) Automated Records Management System [Email] contains 2 SRLs and 159 assets.
(SAS) Tape Restoration Project [Email] contains 2 SRLs and 27 assets.