FIFTY YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

A History of Aviano Air Base

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By

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Aviano Air Base, or Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, is located 2 miles south of downtown Aviano, 7 miles north-northwest of Pordenone, and about 50 miles north-northeast of Venice, Italy.
PREFACE

This 50th Anniversary edition of the Aviano Air Base Heritage Pamphlet is designed to familiarize you with the distinguished history of Aviano Air Base. It is intended to inspire pride among all members of the Aviano community—military, civilian, Italian, and American.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the staff of the United States Air Forces in Europe Office of History for their research assistance. Thanks also to my wife Elizabeth Waller and Mr. William Butler, Sixteenth Air Force Historian, for their helpful suggestions and kind editorial assistance. Special thanks to Col Edward Ryder, Vice Commander of the 31st Fighter Wing, Lt Col Andy Uribe, Director of Staff, and Mr. Paolo Tarchi, 31st Fighter Wing Community Relations Advisor, for their help. Thanks to Mr. Lawrence Chiarotti, Sixteenth Air Force Host Nation Advisor, for translating the pamphlet into Italian. Finally, as with many historical products, much of this work is built upon that of my predecessors. Thus, great appreciation goes out to the Air Force Historians who have served at Aviano Air Base since 1955.

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1 February 2005
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A History of Aviano Air Base

On 19 April 1911, the Italian government established its first flight training school at Aeroporto Aviano, an airfield just south of the town of Aviano. During World War I, the Italian Aeronautical Corps flew Caproni bombers from this field and nearby La Comina airfield on missions against Austro-Hungarian forces.

Two heroes from World War I provided the airfield with a new name. On 10 May 1916, Italian aviators, Cap. Maurizio Pagliano and Ten. Luigi Gori, conducted an unauthorized, but heroic and successful air raid on the Austrian naval yards at Pola, Yugoslavia. This raid earned both men immediate status as national heroes.

By December 1917, the battle line between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces had stabilized along the Piave River. In order to maximize the effect of each sortie Pagliano and Gori flew, the two aviators adopted the practice of strafing enemy lines along the Piave whenever they returned from a mission. Unfortunately, the two aviators died while flying one of these low-level strafing missions. On 30 December 1917, their Caproni bomber fell near Santa Lucia di Conegliano. In 1919, in honor of the two heroes, the base became “Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori.”

(Left to right) Captains Maurizio Pagliano and Aurellio Barbarisi and Lieutenant Luigi Gori. ITAF photo.
From 1919 to 1939, the base returned to a flight training mission, hosting fighter and bomber training schools. During the later half of the 1930's, the six Savigliano hangars on the airfield—now known as Hangars 1, 2, and 3 on the north side and Hangars 4, 5, and 6 on the south side—were built. A grass field comprised the actual airfield and was so large that the Italians actually divided the base into two airstrips: Aviano Nord (North) for the bombers and Aviano Sud (South) for the fighters. Support buildings located midfield divided the airfield into its northern and southern portions. The drawing below clearly depicts the layout of the airfield.

A schematic drawing of Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori showing its layout during World War II. Note the many well-dispersed revetments for aircraft. Drawing from *Air War Italy, 1944-45*, by Nick Beale.

During WWII, the Regia Aeronautica and Luftwaffe flew combat missions from Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori. Aircraft based at the field included Ju-88 medium bombers and Me-109 fighters. United States Army Air Force fighters and bombers from the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces attacked the Aeroporto nine times during the war.
U.S. Army Air Forces Missions against Targets in the Vicinity of Aviano

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Dec 1943</td>
<td>12 AF</td>
<td>Fighters and fighter-bombers attack airfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Jan 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>B-17’s bomb airfield with fighter escort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Jan 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>B-17’s and B-24’s bomb airfield. Escorted by P-38’s and P-47’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>48 P-38’s strafe airfield.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Jul 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>B-17’s and B-24’s bomb oil and gasoline storage. P-51’s and P-38’s provide escort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Oct 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>Heavy bombers attack airfield.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Nov 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>Heavy bombers attack airfield with fighter escort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Nov 1944</td>
<td>15 AF</td>
<td>Heavy bombers attack airfield with P-51 escort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mar 1945</td>
<td>12 AF</td>
<td>Fighters and fighter-bombers attack airfield.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 31 January 1944 attack against the airfield at Aviano provides a closer look at one of these missions. After launching from their bases at Grottaglie and Manduria in the “heel” of Italy, the B-24 Liberators from the 449th and 450th Bombardment Groups, Fifteenth Air Force, rendezvoused over Lake Varno, northeast of Foggia, and proceeded to the target. Once over the airfield, the aircrews met a significant flak barrage, with the 449th calling it “... the largest yet experienced by this Group.” Two 449th aircraft fell to the “intense, accurate, heavy flak,” including the lead ship, Lurchin’ Urchin’, piloted by the 449th’s commander, Col Darr H. Alkire. Other bombers sighted nine parachutes before the aircraft slammed into a mountainside; three of the crew died in action and eight became prisoners of war. Also lost to flak was Brady’s Gang, with two crewmen killed in action and eight taken prisoner. Though eight of 450th’s aircraft were damaged by flak, none were lost and gunners claimed two Me-109’s destroyed and one damaged.

Despite the losses, the mission met with some success. In all, 41 aircraft released 114 tons of general purpose bombs on the airfield with many of the bombs falling among the administrative and quarters buildings (the area in an around our base theater and Mensa) and along the northern line of hangars, completely destroying two of the hangars.
Following the surrender of German forces in northern Italy on 3 May 1945, the British 6th Armored Division liberated the area. Later, the Royal Air Force's (RAF) 55 Squadron moved from Udine to Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori and flew Boston medium bombers (Douglas A-20 Havocs) from the field until September 1945. Following the squadron's departure, the RAF maintained control of the field until 1947.

After the RAF departed Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, the Italian Air Force, known as the Aeronautica Militaire, resumed control of the base. Three years later, the Aeronautica Militaire loaned the southern half of the base, called the Zappala, to the Italian Army for use in housing and training an armored division. In 1952, Italy joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in August, the 51º Stormo Caccia (Fighter Wing) and 20º and 21º Gruppi (Groups) moved to the airfield and converted from the Republic F-47D Thunderbolt to the Republic F-84G Thunderjet. In February 1954, the Stormo transferred to Istrana Air Base (AB), near Treviso, where it still resides today.

On 2 June 1954, personnel from Unites States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) utilized Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori as a temporary station until permanent facilities at Campoformido, near Udine, were completed. Later, in October, the U.S. and Italy signed a basing rights agreement allowing USAFE to use several Italian air bases, including Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori.

On 22 November, Tactical Air Command transferred the 629th Air Control and Warning Squadron (629 ACWS) to USAFE. In turn, USAFE based the unit at Campoformido. Arriving at the port of Livorno on Thanksgiving Day 1954, the 629 ACWS was the first Air Force unit stationed in Italy since the withdrawal of United States Army Air Forces units after WWII. The squadron temporarily billeted in today's Area 2 until their facilities were completed at Campoformido. Using the call sign "Charlie," the squadron operated search radars and a target directing post, provided ground control and approach services to aircraft flying into Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, and trained the Aeronautica Militaire in the maintenance and operation of the equipment. In September 1957, with the Italian personnel fully trained, the
629th turned its equipment over to the Aeronautica Militare and inactivated. Today, the Italian controllers still use the call sign “Pedro,” as they did in the 1950’s.

Two months after the 629th arrived in Italy, on 15 February 1955, USAFE designated and activated “Aviano Airfield #1” to support NATO-committed rotational units from Tactical Air Command. The next day, 16 February 1955, the 7207th Air Base Squadron moved from Giebelstadt AB, Federal Republic of Germany, to Aviano Airfield #1. The 7207th, consisting of personnel from Detachment 1, Seventeenth Air Force (located at Udine) and some personnel from the 629 ACWS, served as the base’s first USAF host unit.

Following the activation of the 7207th in 1955, the Air Force made improvements to the airfield by constructing a weather observation site, replacing revetments, installing special lighting, resurfacing the runway, and paving the overruns. The 7207th had two C-47 Dakotas assigned for liaison duty—the first USAF aircraft permanently assigned to Aviano. Aviano AB became an operational NATO base on Christmas Eve 1955 when F-84s from the 390th Fighter Bomber Squadron arrived from Alexandria AFB, LA. On 1 January 1956, HQ USAFE redesignated Aviano Airfield #1 as “Aviano Air Base.” On 1 July 1957, the 7227th Support Group transferred from Udine to Aviano, becoming the new host unit.

On 1 April 1966, USAFE inactivated the 7227th and activated the 40th Tactical Group as the new host unit. In 1970, Aviano became one of three weapons training sites in USAFE. While rotational alert deployments continued, units deployed to Aviano AB also conducted weapons delivery training at the nearby Maniago Bombing and Gunnery Range. Training at the range continued through the mid-1990's until noise complaints and budgetary constraints ended Aviano’s tenure as a weapons training site.
Despite continuous alert activity and a heavy exercise schedule, Air Force personnel at Aviano also extended a helping hand to the surrounding communities. For instance, on 6 May 1976, an earthquake registering 6.5 on the Richter scale shook northeastern Italy. Though Aviano AB was not damaged, several towns north of Spilimbergo were severely damaged or destroyed. The 40th Tactical Group leapt into action clearing 15 miles (24 kilometers) of roads, hauling 19 tons of debris, and erecting 159 tents in nine villages in the affected area.

The 1970's and 1980's saw deployments of various aircraft and units to Aviano for rotational deployments and exercises. The base hosted many CORONET readiness exercises, in addition to the DISPLAY DETERMINATION deployments held as part of REFORGER exercises. The base also supported U.S. Army airborne exercises.

On 30 July 1990, USAFE redesignated the group as the 40th Tactical Support Wing. The mission of the wing included maintaining one of a few large War Reserve Material (WRM) sites in Europe. The wing also maintained a large stockpile of mobility assets, construction equipment, and munitions. With the start of Operation DESERT SHIELD in 1990, the wing deployed much of its WRM, mobility and construction equipment, and munitions in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. All told, the 40th deployed over 200 personnel, over 4,000 short tons of cargo, and over 13,000 short tons of munitions. As well, it assisted in the bedding down of units deployed to other bases in southern Europe in support of operations in the Persian Gulf.

The early 1990’s saw many organizational changes at Aviano AB. On 4 May 1992, USAFE moved the 401st Fighter Wing from Torrejon AB, Spain, to Aviano and inactivated the 40th Wing, making the 401st the new host unit at Aviano. Three months later, Sixteenth Air Force completed its own move from Torrejon to Aviano.
Though USAFE planned to relocate of the 401st to Aviano as only a temporary expedient until another site in the Southern Region could be found, operations in the Balkans starting in April 1993 demanded the permanent presence of a large USAF operating unit at Aviano. In November 1993, the U.S. and Italian governments signed a memorandum of understanding for basing two squadrons of F-16s at Aviano and, on 1 January 1994, USAFE moved the 603rd Air Control Squadron from Sembach AB, Germany, to Aviano and assigned the squadron to the 401st. This was the first unit movement to establish a major permanent force presence at Aviano.

With the start of Operation DENY FLIGHT in April 1993 and the signing of the basing agreement in November, the base population quickly outpaced the base’s infrastructure. Designed to support about 1,500 military personnel, Aviano grew to 3,500 personnel in 1993. For the base to support its population and new mission, the Air Force programmed $50 million in funding for urgently needed infrastructure improvements. By 1996, NATO funding also started to flow and emergency construction projects were underway.

Additionally, the Italian Army returned the Zappala to the Aeronautica Militaire, increasing the usable space available for growth. In 1995, the Aviano 2000 Program began. Because of the scope of the project, Sixteenth Air Force created the Program Management Office to oversee the largest construction program in the Department of Defense—almost 300 projects valued at over half a billion dollars.

On 1 April 1994, USAFE transferred the 31st Fighter Wing from Homestead AFB, Florida, to Aviano AB, replacing the inactivated 401st as the base’s host unit. Also on that day, USAFE activated the 555th Fighter Squadron at Aviano and assigned it and the 603rd to the wing. In light of these reassignments and the pending activation of the 510th Fighter Squadron, on 1 July 1994, NATO upgraded Aviano to a major operating base. The 31st’s aircraft came from Ramstein AB, Germany, as part of USAFE’s effort to transfer Ramstein’s fighters to the Southern Region. With the signature of a technical agreement on 11 April 1994, Aviano’s permanently assigned force structure had finally stabilized.
In the midst of these organizational changes, Aviano continued supporting NATO operations over the Balkans. On 28 February 1994, two F-16 pilots deployed from Ramstein AB to Aviano AB in support of Operation DENY FLIGHT downed four Federal Republic of Yugoslavian Super Galeb in the Bosnian no-fly zone. The pilots, from the 526th Fighter Squadron, 86th Wing, performed NATO’s first combat engagement in its 45-year existence. The painting at left depicts one of the three aerial victories gained by Capt Robert Wright that day.

From the start of DENY FLIGHT, through Operations DELIBERATE FORCE, DECISIVE EDGE, DELIBERATE GUARD, and DELIBERATE FORGE, Aviano played an important role in restoring and maintaining the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 1999, the 31st formed the core of the Air Force’s largest air expeditionary wing, the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing (31 AEW). Comprised of 150 aircraft and over 6,000 personnel, the 31 AEW conducted the 78-day Operation ALLIED FORCE air campaign, putting an end to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. From 24 March to 10 June 1999, the 31 AEW flew nearly 9,000 combat sorties and accumulated almost 40,000 hours of combat service over the skies of Kosovo, Serbia, and the rest of the Balkans in support of NATO operations.

On 11 June 1999, the day after Operation ALLIED FORCE sorties ceased, Operation DELIBERATE FORGE (NATO air support to Stabilization Forces in Bosnia) resumed and Operation JOINT GUARDIAN began. JOINT GUARDIAN involved enforcement of the no-fly zone over Kosovo and support of NATO’s Kosovo Forces. Reporting for JOINT GUARDIAN ended in March 2002, and all subsequent sorties fell under DELIBERATE FORGE. With the transfer of the Balkan mission from NATO to the European Union, Aviano’s air support to DELIBERATE FORGE ended on 31 December 2004. However, the 401st Air Expeditionary Wing, based at Aviano, continued to provide administrative control of USAF units supporting Balkan operations—a mission previously performed by the 31st and 16th Air Expeditionary Wings—until the complete transfer of operations to the European Union.
In March 2003, the base's first major support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM occurred during the deployment of the Southern European Task Force, based at Vicenza. Aviano AB served as the launch point for the airborne/air-land operation that opened a second front in northern Iraq. Air Force units at Aviano secured, bedded, and fed over 2,300 personnel from the Army and USAF. The operation, the largest airborne operation since 1989's Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, constituted 62 missions transporting 2,146 passengers and 2,433.7 tons of cargo.

For 50 years, Aviano has stood as a symbol of Italian and American unity. This partnership helped bring the Cold War to a successful conclusion. Today's Global War on Terrorism ensures Aviano AB an important role in the future. Continued cooperation and friendship between Italian and U.S. forces guarantees unsurpassed support to NATO forces in the Southern Region.
ITALIAN AIR FORCE COMMANDERS OF AEROporto PAGLIANO E GORI

Magg. Francesco Secondo 1955
Ten. Col. Maurizio Laureati 1956
Col. Aldo Dominutti 1963
Gen. B.A. Harry Warigliun 1973
Cap. Gianfranco Da Forno 1976
Col. Danilo Franzoi 1976
Col. Renato Marozzi 1982
Col. Giorgio Pentericci 1991
Col. Riccardo Ziliani 1991
Ten. Col. Roberto Santi 1993
Col. Fermo Missarino 1993
Col. Luigi Stracciari 1996
Col. Orfeo Durigon 1997
Col. Alessandro Tudini 1999
Col. Rosario Scarpolini 2001
U.S. AIR FORCE HOST UNIT COMMANDERS OF AVIANO AIR BASE

7207th Air Base Squadron moved to Aviano AB from Giebelstadt, Germany, 16 February 1955
Maj Ovid M. Rey 16 February 1955 (temporary)
Lt Col Eugene F. Miller 8 May 1955 (temporary), 24 May 1955 (permanent)
Lt Col Donald E. Ewing early 1956

7227th Support Group moved to Aviano AB from Udine, Italy, 1 July 1957
Col Kenneth D. Kienth 1 Dec 1957
Col Clarence C. McPherson 5 May 1958
Col Glenn A. Stell 15 April 1961
7227th Support Group redesignated 7227th Combat Support Group 1 May 1962
Col Carl E. Lovell 22 June 1964
7227th Combat Support Group inactivated, 1 April 1966

40th Tactical Group activated at Aviano AB 1 April 1966
Col Carl E. Lovell 1 April 1966
Lt Col George M. Dwight Jr. 18 May 1966 (temporary)
Col Robert R. Fowler 3 June 1966 (temporary)
Col Richard L. Hamilton 27 June 1966
Col Glyn W. Ramsey 31 March 1967
Col Thomas A. Barr 7 July 1969
Col Morton C. Mumma III 10 May 1971
Col John L. Piotrowski 7 January 1972
Col Robert L. Miller III 16 July 1973
Col William L. Gibson 9 July 1976
Col Henry M. Yochum II 22 May 1980
Col Dean F. Vikan 8 July 1981
Col Lester P. Brown, Jr. 1 July 1982
Col Frederick A. Zehrer III 16 March 1984
Col George W. McKenna 10 May 1985
Col James T. Hannam 19 June 1985
Col Frank Plescha 25 June 1986
Col John W. Hawley 28 January 1988
Col James C. Evans 16 July 1989 (temporary)
Col Wayne Mayfield 10 March 1990

40th Tactical Group redesignated 40th Tactical Support Wing 30 July 1990
Col Thomas K. Speelman, Jr. 30 July 1990

40th Tactical Support Wing inactivated 4 May 1992

401st Fighter Wing moved to Aviano AB from Torrejon AB, Spain, 4 May 1992
Col James D. Kula 4 May 1992 (temporary)
Col Timothy A. Kinnan 30 June 1992

401st Fighter Wing inactivated 1 April 1994

31st Fighter Wing activated at Aviano AB 1 April 1994
Col John H. Campbell 1 April 1994
Brig Gen Charles F. Wald 24 May 1995
Brig Gen Timothy A. Peppe 3 July 1997
Brig Gen Daniel P. Leaf 30 November 1998
Brig Gen Daniel J. Darnell 21 January 2000
Brig Gen Donald J. Hoffman 25 May 2001
Brig Gen R. Michael Worden 9 October 2002
Brig Gen Philip M. Breedlove 18 June 2004

RETURN WYTH HONOR
Books and Pamphlets


Articles


Other


Edward M. Renna, letters and photographs to 31st Fighter Wing Office of History, various dates, on file at 31st Fighter Wing Office of History.

Marcel Roberts, letters and photographs to 31st Fighter Wing Office of History, various dates, on file at 31st Fighter Wing Office of History.

Paolo Tarchi, translation of biography of Captain Maurizio Pagliano, no date, on file at 31st Fighter Wing Office of History.

Orders and Unit Histories, on file at 31st Fighter Wing Office of History.