

ZONE A IN THE EARLY 1950s, AS WE AMERICANS KNEW IT

James C. DAVIS

Professor emeritus, University of Pennsylvania, USA

e-mail: jamesdavis@snip.net

ABSTRACT

This article suggests how American soldiers who served in Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste in the early 1950s experienced Trieste and its hinterland. The article draws very little on published sources (almost none exist) and heavily on the experiences of the writer and another soldier. Most U.S. soldiers knew little or nothing about their role in the diplomatic situation of Zone A, and the American weekly newspaper had nothing to say about it. The soldiers were likely to notice that the local girls were pretty and the city was economically depressed. Soldiers who worked in the city were likely to profit from its cultural opportunities, while those who lived in barracks outside it were less likely to take advantage of these opportunities. Cold War attitudes made it difficult for the Americans to know and understand the Slovene population outside Trieste.

Key words: Trieste, 1950s, culture, American

LA ZONA A NEI PRIMI ANNI '50 VISTA DA NOI AMERICANI

SINTESI

L'articolo presenta una visione di come i soldati americani che prestavano servizio nella Zona A del Territorio libero di Trieste nei primi anni '50 vissero Trieste e il suo retroterra. L'articolo attinge pochissimo da fonti edite (data la loro rarità) e si basa in maggior parte sulle esperienze dell'autore e di un suo compagno d'armi. La maggioranza dei soldati americani sapeva pochissimo o niente riguardo al proprio ruolo nella situazione diplomatica della Zona A; anche il settimanale americano evitava il tema e non ne faceva menzione. Molti dei soldati probabilmente notarono come le ragazze del posto fossero belle e come dal punto di vista economico la città fosse in crisi. Era molto più probabile che, ad avvalersi delle opportunità culturali offerte dal nucleo urbano, fossero i soldati che lavoravano in città invece di quelli che vivevano nelle caserme fuori Trieste. A causa dell'atteggiamento negativo gener-

ale causato dalla guerra fredda era difficile per gli americani conoscere e capire la popolazione slovena fuori Trieste.

Parole chiave: Trieste, anni '50, cultura, americani

This article is not about the way U.S. statesmen viewed Zone A during the Cold War.¹ Instead, it suggests how ordinary American soldiers viewed Trieste and the rest of Zone A in 1953 and 1954, and how the people of the area helped to shape us. This is just a worm's eye view,² drawing largely on my own observations and partly on those of other worms.

It's true that I was not a typical worm. Compared to many other American soldiers in Trieste, I had had "advantages." I had graduated from a "good" university (Princeton) and I knew Michelangelo from Leonardo. Also, in the 14 months while I was a soldier in Trieste I didn't live in a barracks (*a caserma*). Although I married a young woman from the Carso, I was a reporter on a weekly American military newspaper, and lived mostly in the city.

Before we went there, we American soldiers knew nothing about Trieste. That includes me. In the fall of 1952, as I finished U.S. Army training near Washington, D.C., an Army friend, a clerk, told me that he had seen my orders and I was assigned to a city called Trieste. This was a relief, since the Army might have sent me to Korea, where a war was raging. But my friend the clerk and I did not know where Trieste is. Because of the way Americans pronounce "Trieste," ignoring the final e, the name seemed French to me, and for a while I wondered if Trieste was in French North Africa. Meanwhile my friend Tom Boyd, when he received his "orders," only knew the most important fact about Trieste: that it was not a combat zone (Boyd, 1992, 68).

I learned quite soon that Trieste enjoyed a certain reputation among the U.S. soldiers who had been there. They liked everything about it, but especially the female company. Before I left America I met a sergeant who had served in Trieste, and he told me that the city had many agreeable girls, who, he seemed to say, abounded on the beaches by the sea. Only recently I read a memoir by an American who served in

¹ Spirito (1994) deals readably with the subject of this article. Trieste as an international problem in the 1950s is *not* my subject, but a few useful English-language studies of that topic are Campbell, 1976; Novak, 1970; Rabel, 1988; and Sluga, 2001.

² The only memoirs by American soldiers that deal with Trieste in 1953 and 1954 that I am aware of are Boyd (1992) and my own unpublished memoirs. Two memoirs by Americans who served in Trieste immediately after World War II are Bowman (1982) and Hackworth (1996).

Trieste right after World War II. Above all he recalled "big-titted easy girls" (Hackworth, 1996, 10).

Along with the newly assigned American general in Trieste, his wife, and a host of ordinary soldiers, I sailed from America in the Private William Thomas. (Presumably because the ship was small, it bore the name of some enlisted soldier.) It took the ship three weeks to reach Trieste, because we stopped en route at Naples, Piraeus (i.e., Athens), and Istanbul. Istanbul? On the way from America to Trieste? We soldiers believed the ship detoured to Istanbul to leave a refrigerator there for an American general.

Let me introduce three fellow soldiers who were on the ship. One was a friend I had known during Army training, Jim Becker. He had studied at Notre Dame University and always saw the funny side of Army life. Another was Tom Boyd, whom I mentioned above. He was a lively and theatrically-talented fellow whom Becker and I met on the ship and who became our friend for life. In writing this essay I have drawn a lot on Boyd's memoirs, called *A Bowl of Cherries*. A soldier friend of ours in Trieste would later name Becker, Boyd, and me "the Moneyed Three." That name was accurate enough regarding the other two, but my father was a schoolteacher.

The other person on the ship whom I must introduce was more typical of the American soldiers who went to Trieste. This was Reginald Fauntleroy (not his real name), an ignoramus from the state of Arkansas. Fauntleroy was a rural "southerner," a group that "northerners" in the Army called "shit-kickers." When the Thomas made a stop at Naples, U.S. Army buses took us soldiers on a visit to Pompeii. According to Boyd, Fauntleroy observed some women bearing jugs of water on their heads and shouted to his friends, "Hey, looka there! See them gooks with them things on their hay-ads [heads]!" As we drove along, our guides called our attention to hectares of buildings destroyed in World War II by U.S. bombs. When we reached Pompeii and left the buses and looked down on the ruins, the egregious Fauntleroy exclaimed, "Shee-it [shit], we sho' [sure] bombed the hell out of this place!" (Boyd, 1992, 71).

I recall my first impressions of Trieste when the Thomas reached the city and docked at Stazione Marittima. I saw a handsome city, its buildings painted in pastel colors and ringed by hills which then, half a century ago, were green with grass and grape vines. To this day I swear that as I stood there on the ship, a hundred meters distant from the city's bars and shops, I smelled the splendid coffee of Trieste and "*Nazionali*" cigarettes.

While we waited to disembark, the British army band, drawn up on the pier, saluted us with music. (But we would see little of the British soldiers who also guarded Trieste. They had little money to spend, and stayed close to their barracks.) According to Boyd's memoirs, our general gave a speech to us and he ended by saying, in his thick Virginia drawl, that we were in a "soo-pah doo-pah [super dooper, i.e., splendid] command, and you're the besty in Triesty." As his wife stepped off the

ship, the band made the mistake of playing a song by Rodgers and Hart, "The Lady Is a Tramp" (Boyd, 1992, 75).

Because the Army wanted to prepare us for life in our new home, buses took us to a former hotel beside the sea in Sistiana for two weeks of "orientation." Local barbers there cut our hair extremely short, something the U.S. military delights in doing to soldiers. And local women sewed "patches" on our shirts that read "TRUST," meaning "Trieste U.S. Troops." (In English trust also means confidence or faith.)

In our orientation lectures, officers issued warnings. They stressed the need to stay away from COMMUNISTS and BAD WOMEN, and warned us that we might meet women who were both COMMUNISTS and BAD. To avoid these perils we should stay away from bars and other buildings (i.e., brothels) marked with an X in a circle (thus: ⊗) and the words "Off limits."

The Army told us that our mission was to keep both Italy and Yugoslavia from grabbing Trieste. What made this mission confusing to us simple soldiers was what we knew and didn't know about those nations. Although Italy had been an enemy in most of World War II, we had always pictured it as a warm and friendly country from which many people had come to America. When we were children, my brothers and I had had a nanny whose parents were Italian immigrants. Italy had given America pizza, the baseball player Joe DiMaggio, such songs as "That's amore!" and "Yes, We Have No Bananas," and pretty girls with whom we went to school. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was less familiar to us and its government was communist. We made no fine distinctions between Tito and Stalin, and were inclined to believe that Yugoslavia was a place of prison camps and spies. Its border, only several miles away, was the "Iron Curtain" that separated Western decency from communist evil.

After the orientation, real life in Zone A began. Most of the American soldiers who had been on the ship (including Reginald Fauntleroy) were taken to barracks in Duino, Opicina, Banne, Roiano, and San Giovanni. But the Army had decided that I should be a clerk/typist, and they took us clerks to what would be our home, a handsome house in Barcola. This building once had housed the German Gestapo, and a concrete bunker nearly filled its small front yard.

We clerks, many of whom had college educations, had nothing at all to do with U.S. policy regarding Trieste. We did nothing but type and file letters, forms, and "orders" having to do with mundane Army life. We did this in a building in Trieste that still stands on Corso Cavour left of the Jolly Hotel. I believe that no one who worked in that building had the slightest thing to do with international politics. The people who did that worked somewhere else, and we soldiers never met them.

My job, at first, was sending certain unimportant forms to officers. But I was judged incompetent at this, even by the Army's not exacting standards. (It's possible that I had exaggerated my typing skills.) So the officer in charge demoted me, and had me run a mimeograph. This machine, which made copies of orders by printing

from a stencil, called for modest mechanical ability. But even that ability I did not have, and I proved to be even worse at handling stencils than at typing forms.

In the meantime Becker got assigned as sports reporter on the weekly Army newspaper, *The Blue Devil*. Once arrived there he told the captain responsible for the paper that I had newspaper experience, which was true. So that officer invited me to write for *The Blue Devil*, and I was happy to accept. The young officer for whom I had first typed badly and then ruined stencils accepted my departure uncomplainingly. When I left he shook my hand and I noticed that he smiled and looked content.

I moved to the large house where the reporters and radio announcers lived, and started work in *The Blue Devil*'s small quarters in the *Piccolo* building on Piazza Goldoni. Meanwhile, Tom Boyd escaped from the barracks to which he had been assigned at first and became a radio announcer, so Becker, Boyd, and I were all together.

On a typical day we *Blue Devil* reporters reached our office shortly after nine a.m. We would immediately phone the bar across the street and order cappuccinos, and our editor, a sergeant, would order the first of his many rum and Coca Colas of the day. Then I would have a Triestino driver take me in a jeep to the various barracks, or to Miramar Castle, where the American general and his staff did their work. I would poke my head into people's offices and ask if they had any news. Usually they didn't.

Historians might suppose that old copies of *The Blue Devil* would be a useful source of information on Trieste in the early 1950s. That would be a big mistake. Our officers were terribly cautious about what they allowed us to say in the paper. The military mission always took precedence over the truth. Our lieutenant colonel, whom we rarely saw, once explained to me that our task was to make the Army effective, not to state the facts. Mere facts might hurt the troops' morale and give "the Communists" useful information.

In civilian life our captain had been the editor of a lowly American humor magazine called *Gags* (*Barzellette*). We saw him mainly on Friday afternoon, when we put the newspaper to bed. On that day he would come to the office and telephone various officers and make sure that what we had written wouldn't get him and the lieutenant colonel into trouble. They seemed to believe that the Secretary of Defense in Washington read every issue of our little rag.

The best example of what *The Blue Devil* could not report on were the yearly "maneuvers." Once a year, in spring, all the troops spent several days "in the field" on the Carso. The real soldiers, the ones from the barracks like Reginald Fauntleroy, pretended to make war, while we reporters sat in tents and pretended to work on the newspaper. For all of us spending this week in the field was a very big event. And yet we reporters weren't allowed even to mention the maneuvers in *The Blue Devil*. Presumably our officers believed that "the Communists" had no other way of learning about them.

Here is another example of censorship. All American soldiers dressed in uniform at all times. But then our general changed the rule, and allowed us to wear civilian clothes when we were not on duty. For every American soldier this change was almost as important as the maneuvers. But I had to beg our officers to permit us even to briefly mention this new rule about civilian clothes in the paper. Again, they must have thought that "the Communists" had no other way to learn about this change – assuming that they cared.

Let me illustrate the way Americans saw the Cold War. We reporters had another duty besides reporting for the weekly Blue Devil. Along with some British Army reporters we produced each night a newsletter containing three pages of worldwide news. The reporter who had this duty on a given night chose a number of paragraphs of news from what was provided by a wire service on a teletypewriter. Then a triestino employee typed these paragraphs on stencils, and mimeographed and distributed them.

One day when this editing duty fell to me I included in this newsletter a story about election day in a polling place in Russia (then the U.S.S.R.). According to the story, the Russian "voters" were cheerful as they cast their "yes" votes, and in the polling place there was a bouquet of flowers on a table. When he saw this story next day our officer reprimanded me for publishing this item. Didn't I know, he asked, that the election was a sham? When American soldiers read this story they would be confused about the evils of communism.

How did triestini react to us, and we to them? Being triestini, they were mostly very friendly. Of course, it didn't hurt that we spent money. (Britain and the United States together were spending about 15 million dollars a year in Trieste.) In any case, bartenders, secretaries, the men who drove me in jeeps, ticket sellers, and people in the street whom I asked for directions all were cordial. When we Blue Devil reporters entered the Piccolo building the aged doorkeeper always pretended to shoot us with a machine gun, since that's what U.S. criminals did. We called him "Gangster."

It's true of course that soldiers, not just Americans but any kind of soldiers, aren't always welcome everywhere. Once some friends and I entered a restaurant on Via Carducci and began to sit at a table in the front, by the window. We were in our uniforms, and while the owner was glad to have our patronage, he knew that our presence in the window might be bad for business. So he showed us seats in back. No thanks, we said, and sat down by the window.

To us soldiers Trieste was interesting and lively but also worn and poor. Italy's recovery from World War II was just beginning. Cars were still uncommon and those there were looked very small to us. During winter thinly dressed triestini on Vespas used to drive dangerously close behind our truck, taking shelter from the wind. Workers swept the streets with brooms made out of twigs. Poor men picked up discarded cigarettes and smoked them. The seats on local railroad trains were made of

wood, and hard. In the bathrooms at the Piccolo the toilet paper was yesterday's Piccolo, torn in squares.

The result of Italy's hard times was that our Army pay, supplemented perhaps by money sent us by our families, would buy a lot. On a soldier's pay I traveled, sometimes went to restaurants and operas, and paid a woman to do my laundry.

The typical American soldier, living in barracks on the Carso, saw less of triestini than my friends and I did. A more typical "G.I." was Reginald Fauntleroy, whom we met above. A typical G.I. was young of course, and scantily educated, and had never been away from home. Since his home in America was probably far from U.S. borders, he had never in his life heard people speak in any other tongue but English. To say the least, he had never been where people (quoting poet T.S. Eliot) "come and go talking of Michelangelo." He thought in simple, sometimes racist, sometimes Cold War terms, and was inclined to think that those who didn't speak his language were "gooks" or "Reds."

The critic Tullio Kezich writes about us U.S. soldiers in Zone A that, "*il loro linguaggio era basico, il livello della loro conversazione era sotto la media, i loro gusti apparivano rozzi e la loro disponibilità a socializzare riguardava solo un'attenzione mirata verso le "mule" appariscenti. ... In genere i soldati se ne stavano fra loro, facevano gruppo a parte anche nei pochi locali notturni all'esterno dei quali non figurava la X con la scritta 'Out of bounds'*" (Spirito, 1994, 11).

My wife, a Slovene from the Carso whom you will meet below, sometimes compares the American soldiers she saw around her village after World War II with the German ones who had been stationed there during the war. When Americans entered a bar or restaurant they were noisy, and might even put their feet on a chair or table. The Germans on the other hand, though they had burned her village to the ground, had at least been polite. When they walked inside a restaurant they said hello and hung their helmets on the coat racks.

The average American soldier and the average triestino didn't often meet. However, to that generalization there was one big exception: relations with those *mule appariscenti* whom Kezich mentions. I'll have more to say regarding them below.

Trieste had much to teach a soldier from the provinces, or what Americans call "the sticks." So how did we Americans respond to all that higher culture? Did we reap the benefit?

Perhaps you'll find my answer to that question snobbish. The ordinary U.S. infantryman, such as Reginald Fauntleroy, never saw that higher culture of Trieste, and never even knew that it was there. He didn't go to concerts or museums, and didn't have the opportunity to speak to well-educated triestini. At most, he may have benefited somewhat from such experiences as watching women hauling water on their heads in Naples, seeing ruins in Pompeii, hearing people speak in tongues he didn't understand, and taking furloughs in Vienna and in Venice.

My friends and I and other soldiers whom I knew, better educated and living and working in the city, were another matter. Boyd and Becker and I went to concerts and we saw "Tosca," "Rigoletto," "The Pearl Fishers" and "*L'elisir d'amore*" in the Teatro Verdi or, in summer, in the courtyard of San Giusto Castle. We loved the dear old Birreria Dreher, where beer was served in boots of glass, the band was charming, and everybody, triestini and Americans, would join each night in singing "*Ndemo a Servola doman*" and "*La mula de Parenzo*." We also ate *cannelloni*, *osso buco*, and *saltimbocca*, and Becker got so plump he could not button the topmost button on his Army trousers. (But he was damned if he would buy another pair.)

Many of us learned at least some Italian. It's true that Becker, though a university graduate who wrote and painted pictures very well, barely learned, in thirteen months, to utter "*grazie*." He simply wasn't good at languages. But Boyd, who had an aptitude for languages as well as an Italian woman friend, became fluent in Italian.

I was keen to learn the language. On our first evening at Sistiana, only several hours off the ship, I wished a policeman "*Buona sera!*" and was thrilled to hear him answer "*Buona sera!*" Even in the early weeks on the Blue Devil, when I knew scarcely any Italian, I nevertheless served as interpreter between us reporters and Peppi, the Piccolo compositor. I learned Italian (but not the Trieste dialect) that way, and from hearing it in movies. I even paid for lessons. Once, when I spoke on the telephone to a triestina secretary who worked for us Americans, she thought that she was speaking to an Italian.

You might say (jokingly) that Americans did bring a bit of culture to Trieste. Tom Boyd and the other radio announcers played programs of jazz, classical music, and "hillbilly" or "country" songs. They called the country music program "Your Hillbilly Hit Parade," and the songs included such gems as "Don't Let Them Stars Git in Your Eyes" and "Cigareets and Whusky [whiskey] and Wild, Wild Women." For reasons we effete Americans (Becker, Boyd, and I) could never understand, not only hicks-from-the-sticks like Reginald Fauntleroy but also triestini, especially girls, adored these songs. They often telephoned the station and requested that the announcers play them. So Boyd and his radio colleagues helped to spread American "culture."

All right, all right, it's true. What most of us recall the most about Trieste are girls. Trieste and villages around it abounded with pretty women, dressed in well-cut clothes. Beauteous blondes worked as cashiers in bars, seated near the window where the passersby could ogle them. In a tram I saw the prettiest girl I've ever seen, her hair so black that it seemed faintly tinged with blue. Once I joined a waitress from the bar across the street from Il Piccolo who was bringing our editor his rum and Coca Cola. As we walked upstairs she held my hand.

On the whole of course, *ragazze per bene* avoided us. To be seen in the company of a soldier would destroy her reputation. On one occasion when Boyd and I had

"double dates" the girls insisted that we take them to the movies not in Trieste but in Gorizia, so we drove there, tucked inside his tiny Topolino. Once when Boyd was walking with a respectable young secretary, a woman shouted at her, "*Vacca!*"

Of course some of the young Americans ignored the advice the officers gave us at our orientation to avoid BAD WOMEN. It wasn't hard to find these girls on the streets, at bars not far from barracks, in "night clubs," and in Trieste's eleven *case di tolleranza*. Most of these places were "Off limits." But from these contacts many marriages resulted.

Many, many soldiers got involved with women of all kinds. The sergeant who ran our radio-newspaper section had a mistress so attractive that you wondered why she tolerated him. Another sergeant kept a photo of his girl friend tacked above his desk. She was blonde and naked, and you had to wonder whether she was merely uninhibited or BAD. But other soldiers (myself included, as you'll see) found ragazze per bene. A clerk I knew (a frowsy Harvard graduate) married a gorgeous university student, and another G.I. married a librarian, and another married the secretary of the chief Army chaplain. The radio announcer friend who named my friends and me "the Moneyed Three" married a salesclerk in the Army "P. X." store, and a lieutenant married a stylish secretary whom I knew when I was typing forms and tearing stencils. You had to wonder whether these women from sophisticated Trieste would be happy in their husbands' towns in America – towns that may have been small and provincial.

This talk of women brings me to another "minority": Slovenes. (English-speakers sometimes call the people and the language "Slovene," sometimes "Slovenian.") In the 1950s one triestino in eight in the city was Slovene-speaking, although the language one heard on the streets was, as today, mostly Italian. However, in the villages on the Carso, in the early 1950s, nearly all the people conversed in Slovene.

But what did the American soldiers know about the Slovenes? Most of the soldiers lived in barracks on the Carso, close to Slovene-speaking villages. So they must have met some Slovenes, and they may have been aware that these people spoke another language as well as Italian. They also knew that communist Yugoslavia was almost in walking distance and that in the villages slogans such as "*Hočemo Jugoslavia*" were painted on the walls. So these American soldiers, confused about the ethnic kinship of the local Carso Slovenes with the Slovenes across the Yugoslavian border, probably wondered sometimes if the local Slovenes were "the Communists."

Before I met my future wife, a Slovene, I had seen a little of the Slovene villages on the Carso. When I visited offices in the barracks there, seeking news for *The Blue Devil*, I used to ask the Jeep drivers to drive me through these hamlets, and we sometimes stopped at a *gostilna* for a cup of coffee.

But how did an American soldier who worked in Trieste meet a young Slovene woman from a village on the Carso? Well, I first met Elda in a bar. Since that doesn't sound so good, permit me to explain.

In the summer of 1953 we reporters and radio announcers moved to new sleeping quarters in a former small hotel outside Trieste. This building, called the Bellavista, perched on the side of a hill that overlooked the sea. (Today it is part of a physics research institute.) Sloping down below it was a vineyard and a wooded park, and farther down, on the shoreline, was Miramar Castle, where our general lived. The members of the American army band, who often played at receptions and reviews at the castle, were already living in the Bellavista when we reporters and announcers went to live there. These musicians were a vivid lot, earnest when on duty, "hip" when not. They tied their neckties in Windsor knots and called each other "man."

Among the Bellavista's many winning points was a snack bar where you could buy a hamburger or a bottle of Löwenbräu. In my first day at the Bellavista I stepped inside this room. I think that one of the band members was with me and he introduced me to someone behind the bar, and said "This is Elda." I saw a young and pretty woman with dark eyes, dark hair, and a dazzling smile. Suffice it to say that after several months we were engaged to marry.

Only after I had met Elda did I really get to know the Slovenes of the Carso, and decades later I would write a history of her family (Davis, 1986a; 1986b). What impressed me most about the Slovene villages in 1953 and 1954 was how small and primitive they were. That statement includes Vizovlje, or Visogliano, Elda's little village, which lies above the train tracks between Trieste and Monfalcone and today is virtually a part of Sistiana. For an American like me who had had "advantages" to see a house that had no plumbing, no telephone, and very little heating was a shock, although it's true that places in America were just as "backward." Many of the Slovene men I got to know were blue-collar workers who were also farmers on a tiny scale. I could not believe that they kept only two or three cows.

When I met Elda I was already fairly fluent in Italian, and I always spoke that language with her and other Slovenes. I only tried half-heartedly to learn to speak Slovene. (Most Italian-speaking triestini would never have made even that much effort.) But I heard about another American soldier who courted a young Slovene woman in a village for a year or two and helped her family to farm their land and became fluent in Slovene. He may have been unique.

The Slovenes I met on the Carso in Zone A were uniformly bitter about the way Mussolini's government had treated them in the 1930s and early 1940s. To them "fascism" was not a system of government; the word fascism meant simply "harshness toward Slovenes." They distrusted not Italians but "Italy." They also considered anyone who was born and lived on the Carso very lucky.

In October 1953 Britain and the United States declared their intention of pulling their troops out of Zone A and handing it to Italy. Early in November, pro-Italy students and others demonstrated and rioted for several days. Exactly what happened was much debated, but while the world was watching six people were killed. Only

after British and American troops surrounded Piazza Unità did peace return (Valdevit, 1986, 266–267; Spirito, 1994, 41–42).

I wish that I could offer useful testimony about that controversial event, but I can't. When it happened I had just become engaged to marry, and I'm afraid that I regarded the riots mainly as an inconvenience that prevented my seeing Elda. I can't recall, but I would be surprised if The Blue Devil ever mentioned these bloody riots.

While they happened, at San Antonio Nuovo church and Piazza Unità, several of us reporters and radio announcers guarded the Idroscalo, site of the American army radio studio. (It is now the Capitaneria di Porto.) I was posted in a window that faced down the shoreline toward Piazza Unità and I held a rifle. But the rifle was not loaded. An officer told us that he would give us ammunition only if the situation became desperate. Boyd was also there, and at one point our captain (the former editor of Gags) started to hand Boyd his rifle, bayonet, and steel helmet. But Boyd told the captain he was on his way to lunch, and he drove off blithely in his Topolino.

From my window I could not see Piazza Unità, but I could see a crowd of triestini – men, women, and, yes, little children – on the waterfront watching the events happening there as if they were a show put on to entertain them. Repeatedly I saw this crowd surge toward the piazza, anxious to see the demonstration, and then, when they heard rifle fire, run away, then halt, gather up their nerve, and surge again toward the big piazza.

More than I, Boyd had opinions about these riots. He wrote to his father that "The riots were definitely fascist-inspired, appealing to the chauvinism of these emotionally unstable and immature people. Italy is a selfish and ungrateful country and is anti-everything. The blame can be placed on the students' nauseatingly nationalistic education and [on] fascist leaders and priests who excite the students and incite violence." Boyd remarks in his memoirs, after quoting from that letter, that his comments on the riots were "Strong stuff from an indignant and more than a touch pompous twenty-one year old, but that's obviously just how I felt at the time." (Boyd, 1992, 93)

Relations between the people of Zone A and us Americans were complex, and it's hard to draw conclusions about them. That is not surprising because relations between soldiers and civilians have been complicated at least since the time of Alexander the Great, whose tiny army in Persia was nearly absorbed by marriages with Persian women. Today, half a century after the Allied "occupation," the people who live in the former Zone A no doubt look back on the Allied soldiers (British and Americans) in 1953 and 1954 as instruments of Cold War politics. I see us that way too, but I also look back upon us as like pupils in a classroom where there was a lot to learn. While some dozed off others learned a lot.

When the British-U.S. occupation ended in October 1954, Becker, Boyd, and I were no longer in Trieste. While skiing in Switzerland with Becker, Boyd had broken

his ankle, so the U.S. Army had sent him home. He later moved to England and today, purely out of love of music, he translates opera libretti, including those of Verdi, Puccini, and Donizetti, into English, and then directs productions of these operas. Becker went back to the United States, survived a bad automobile accident, and became a writer and an art teacher. He died several years ago. I married Elda and we went to America, where I became a history professor. We recently celebrated our golden (fifty-year) wedding anniversary.

Soon after I had returned to the United States, I put my modest knowledge of Trieste to use. At that time it wasn't certain what would happen to the city, and a well-known journalist, C. L. Sulzberger, had published an article about the question in *The New York Times*. He wrote that "A growing number of Triestini feel [that] their only [economic] salvation lies in a free zone which could attract back the dwindling hinterland trade."

So on June 7, 1955 I wrote a letter to the *Times*, and they published it. I explained that I had been a reporter and editor of an Army newspaper in Trieste and had known many triestini. I wrote that "Except for noisy minorities, the people preferred independence to union with either of their neighbors." (Their neighbors, of course, were Italy and Yugoslavia.)

However, the main point of my letter was that whatever triestini wanted had been ignored. The reasons were that (1.) *Il Piccolo* was pro-Italy, (2.) Western Europe and the United States backed Italy and simply assumed that triestini wanted to join their western neighbor, and (3.) "an either-or settlement had to be made between Italy and Yugoslavia."

I hope that what I wrote was correct, although half a century later it doesn't matter.

CONA A V ZGODNJIH 50. LETIH, KOT SMO JO DOŽIVLJALI AMERIČANI

James C. DAVIS

Profesor emeritus, Univerza v Pensilvaniji, ZDA

e-mail: jamesdavis@snip.net

POVZETEK

Prispevek govori o ameriških vojakih, ki so služili v Coni A (v Trstu in njegovem zaledju) v letih 1953 in 1954. Ne vprašuje se, kaj so "Američani" naredili za Cono A ali kako so v njej delovali, temveč kako je Cona A delovala nanje. Prispevek se na objavljene vire skorajda ne naslanja, saj le malo tovrstnih virov sploh obstaja, ampak črpa pretežno iz izkušenj in opažanj avtorja ter enega njegovih sovojakov.

Večina vojakov pred svojim prihodom na to področje ni vedela ničesar o Trstu. In ko so prispeli, so vedeli zelo malo ali pa nič o svoji vlogi v diplomatski situaciji Cone A. Ameriški tednik, za katerega je avtor prispevka pisal, se je tej temi izogibal. Vojakom je bilo rečeno le, naj se pazijo komunistov, saj naj bi ti lahko bili vohuni.

Stiki med večino Tržačanov in vojaki niso bili običajni, kljub temu pa se je veliko vojakov srečevalo, nekaj tudi poročilo, z dekleti iz lokalnega okolja. Američani so seveda opazili, da mesto in njegovo zaledje pesti ekonomska depresija, zaradi katere so s svojo plačo lahko kar dobro živeli. Bolj verjetno je bilo, da se bodo naučili italijansko in izkoristili kulturne priložnosti, ki jih je ponujalo mesto, tisti vojaki, ki so delali v mestu, kot pa tisti, ki so prebivali v barakah zunaj njega.

Po naključju je avtor prispevka srečal slovensko dekle iz vasi blizu Sesljana in se z njo tudi poročil. Toda za večino Američanov je bilo težko srečati se s slovenskimi prebivalci, poleg tega pa so se morda tudi spraševali, če so Slovenci komunisti in potemtakem sovražniki iz hladne vojne.

Avtor prispevka je skupaj s svojimi prijatelji opazoval demonstracije v Trstu novembra leta 1953, a le na daleč. Pomagali so stražiti letališče za hidroplane, danes Luško kapitanijo, ki je bila takrat stavba ameriške vojske.

Ključne besede: Trst, 50. leta, kultura, Američani

SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bowman, A. C. (1982):** *Zones of Strain. A Memoir of the Early Cold War.* Stanford, Hoover Inst. Press.
- Boyd, T. (1992):** *A Bowl of Cherries. The Memoirs of Tom Boyd from 1932 to 1992.* Cirencester, Eng., Englang Publishing.
- Campbell, J. C. (1976):** *Successful Negotiation. Trieste 1954. An Appraisal by the Five Participants.* Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Davis, J. C. (unpublished):** *Memoirs.*
- Davis, J. C. (1986a):** *Rise from Want: A Peasant Family in the Machine Age.* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Davis, J. C. (1986b):** *Carso. Riscatto dalla povertà.* Gorizia, Goriziana.
- Davis, J. C. (1989):** *Vzpon z dna. Slovenska kmečka družina v dobi strojev.* Ljubljana, Slovenska matica.
- Hackworth, D. H. (1996):** *Hazardous Duty.* New York, Harper Collins.
- Novak, B. C. (1970):** *Trieste, 1941–1954. The Ethnic, Political, and Ideological Struggle.* Chicago, University Press of Chicago.
- Rabel, R. G. (1998):** *Between East and West. Trieste, the United States and the Cold War, 1943–1954.* Durham, N. C., Duke University Press.

- Sluga, G. (2001):** The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border. Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth Century Europe. Albany – N.Y., SUNY Press.
- Spirito, P. (1994):** Trieste a stelle e strisce. Vita quotidiana ai tempi del Governo Militare Alleato. Trieste, Mgs Press.
- Valdevit, G. (1986):** La Questione di Trieste, 1941–1954. Politica internazionale e contesto locale. Milan, Franco Angeli.