

**I remember ...**  
*by Harry Zirkelbach 01-11-2010*

**This moment began in the Operations Room of Ramstein AB,  
Germany.**

**This field is a hub for transport of military material and  
personnel to and from lands beyond.**

**One weekly departure is listed as a 02:00 call Monday,  
for Tel Aviv, Israel.**

**Inquiries on this trip were confirmed,  
passage seriously discouraged.**

**I sign up for Barbara and myself. Then took a a three day tour of  
the Netherlands, returning shortly before midnight the day of  
departure. The Terminal confirmed that the flight is still  
scheduled. A brief wait,  
and I am one of three passengers on a spacious C-141.**

**Take a nap after takeoff. As dawn neared I obtain permission to  
visit the cockpit. Am provided a seat between, slightly above,  
and behind, pilot and copilot.  
They are Reservists on special Active Duty.**

**They provide me a headset to converse with them and listen to  
the radio chatter.**

**Soon we are leaving the Alps, flying 41,000', on a clear dawn, no  
turbulence. A short time later, outside the left window, there is  
the Boot, Italy,  
even more precise than in geography books. What a sight.  
Population centers are identifiable, and later I can see the trailing  
puff from Mt Etna. I spend the next half hour glancing at this  
scene, unavailable to mankind until the advent of the pressurized  
jet aircraft, not that long ago.**

**But, I learn something else that morning.**

**The sky of Europe and Mediterranean showed vapor trails of other jet aircraft. More than I would see in American airspace.**

**But there's something else. Air Traffic Control (ATC), at unseen ground locations, directed the course, altitude, monitor the speed, of all these planes. They provide separation. And every transmission from ATC was in English. That was as in the States.**

**So were the replies. Hopefully.**

**For this our crew monitored every communication. When any transmission seemed vague, incorrect, unintelligible, these two Air Force pilots conferred.**

**When agreeing that clarification was needed, they contacted ATC.**

**The question was immediately resolved, sometimes with a follow-up to the crew whose message was questionable. There would be no misunderstandings to our crew. And others could be heard asking ATC for clarification.**

**It was a common exchange.**

**I would learn, this monitoring is routine. All must be certain that the ATC is understood. The challenge, pilots from anywhere in the world, where English may not be familiar, had been trained not only in the complexity of their aircraft, but to communicate, unmistakably, in English. Their welfare, that of their passengers, and other flights could not risk any misunderstanding.**

**In a world of 6 billion, several hundred nations, how many languages and dialects, everyone who flies and benefits from world travel, are directed safely to destinations with this understanding of basic English language words.**

**In flight everywhere, via the English language, we move toward one world.**

**To me this was equally spectacular to the viewing of the moving Boot of Italy from 41,000'.**