

**Ambassador Hartley's Remarks at**  
**the Ceremony at Metlika**  
**October 1, 2017**

Dober dan in hvala vam za povabilo.

Prime Minister Cerar, Mayor Zevnik, fellow Ambassadors, member of veterans groups, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It's an honor for me to join you today to commemorate our countries' shared experiences in World War II.

I am proud to confirm that in the last year the United States and Slovenia have expanded the shared bonds that still echo from that war.

In March, I participated in a ceremony in Žužemberk, where we unveiled a memorial at another crash site of a B-17 bomber, to honor those who gave so much so that others could live freely. That crew was lucky; all ten parachuted safely, were rescued by partizans, and after five days walking through enemy lines, they arrived to this area safely and were evacuated to Italy to fight another day.

In April, local Slovenian researchers and representatives from the municipalities of Andraž na Polzelo and Logatec welcomed U.S. family members of downed airmen to visit the places where these airmen gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. We were also honored to have Senator John McCain join President Pahor for a commemoration at Andraž na Pozelo in April.

In May, Prime Minister Cerar and Slovenian-born retired U.S. Air Force General Frank Gorenc dedicated the opening of the "To Hell and Back" exhibition at the Pivka Park of Military History. It is an outstanding interactive exhibition highlighting the links between our countries from World War II. I urge everyone to visit the exhibition.

Finally, in July, a team of U.S. military experts, in cooperation with Slovenian government officials and local volunteers, disinterred remains

that we believe belong to U.S. Airman Alfonso Duran, from a crash in 1945 near Pokojišče. Those bone fragments are now being tested in hopes of returning him to his family after so many years of not knowing his final resting place. The U.S. military is committed to continuing the search for our WWII missing throughout Europe, including additional cases in Slovenia.

The foundations of U.S.-Slovenian friendship and military cooperation were built here during the Second World War in Allied cooperation with, and support for, the resistance. It was fortified through massive American military assistance – tanks, artillery, trucks, fighter aircraft – in the early 1950s to help Yugoslavia defend its borders and sovereignty during the Stalin era.

Our security cooperation has been profoundly strengthened by Slovenia's accession to NATO and the European Union, through twenty five years of partnership between Slovenia and the Colorado National Guard – including joint military missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo – and now in the global effort to defeat ISIS.

And our partnership grows ever stronger. Today, we stand united in the face of challenges from those who seek to redraw the borders of Europe by force, from instability in the Middle East and North Africa, and against terrorists who would divide and warp the cohesion and culture of the United States, Europe, and other free and tolerant societies.

Of course U.S.-Slovenian relations extend well beyond security cooperation. We are building stronger trade relations especially as Slovenia moves forward with steps to improve the business environment. And we have increasingly active cultural and education cooperation, for example through the Fulbright Fellowships, visits by music and dance groups, and initiatives such as the cooperation agreement between Triglav National Park and Crater Lake National Park in my home state of Oregon.

For the local people in Metlika, Črnomelj, and throughout the Bela Krajina region who risked their lives to rescue downed Allied pilots during World War II, we thank you again. We will always remember the bravery of Slovenians who heroically saved the lives of American, British, and other Allied airmen, often risking their own safety.

Together we can face any challenge if we sustain faith in our values and our commitment to unity of purpose.

Najlepša hvala!