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Air Force Report Doesn't Say Much About What Caused July C-130 Crash

By HENRY CUNINGHAM
Of The Times Staff

A 179-page report released by the Air Force on the C-130 crash which killed five servicemen July 1 at Fort Bragg says a lot about what did not cause the crash, but little about what may have caused it.

Air Force officials said at the time of the crash that the cause would never be released to the public.

The report was obtained by The Fayetteville Times from Headquarters Air Force Inspection and Safety Center at Norton Air Force Base, Calif.

It shows that:

- There is no indication of engine problems or mechanical failure.
- There were no problems with the low-altitude parachute extraction system or hydraulic and flight control systems.
- And that there is "no evidence of any foreign-object damage prior to impact" in any of the four engines.

But Air Force officials say a second report, which contains the conclusions, if any, of the five-member

investigating board about the cause of the fatal crash probably never will be made public.

"Findings the board may or may not have come up with will be in part two, that's the part that's not releaseable to the public," said Capt. Brian Irving, chief of public affairs for Pope Air Force Base and the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing.

"As best as I can determine, Air Force policy is that the cause of a crash is never released if it is determined," Irving said.

Four Air Force crewmen and a soldier on the ground were killed when the airplane crashed and exploded into an orange fireball before more than 4,000 horrified spectators at 10:24 a.m. during an annual capabilities exercise.

The estimated cost of the airplane, destroyed by ground impact and the post-crash fire, was more than \$2.7 million, according to the report.

The accident has not caused the Air Force to stop flying the C-130 airplane or performing the low-altitude parachute extraction system, the maneuver during which the crash occurred.

Irving said the LAPES "is still part of our training program" and is performed two or three times each week by Pope crews.

"We're still doing things the way we've been doing them," he said.

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The airplane was supposed to have descended to five to 10 feet above the ground, deposited a 34,540 Sheridan tank out of its rear by means of parachutes and reascended.

The report contains the names of members of the investigating board which previously had not been released.

Col. Sherman W. Bear, deputy commander for operations of the 834th Airlift Division, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, was board president.

Other voting members were: Maj. Jeffrey W. Smith, investigating officer, 314th Tactical Airlift Wing; Maj. Lowell P. Mattingly, pilot member, 22nd Air Force; Capt. Dennis C. Simonson, maintenance member, 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing; Capt. Donald R. Lewis Jr., medical member, Air Force Clinic, Pope Air Force Base; and Maj. Ken A. Larson, 21st Air Force representative. Capt. Walter F. Anderson of the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing, a non-voting member, was the recorder.

Simonson states in the report: "All available records were carefully reviewed for write-ups contributory to the mishap but none were found."

An inspection of the engines "leaves no other possible conclusion that the engines were operating normally and providing good service prior to impact,"

stated Ofilio Solano Jr., an equipment specialist at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas.

"All hydraulic and flight control systems were considered to have been operational up to the time of impact," stated Benjamin R. Puckett, a C-130 and C-141 systems engineer.

"The LAPES system functioned as required," stated Chief Warrant Officer David P. Blacka, an airdrop technician at the U.S. Army Quartermaster School's Airborne Department at Fort Lee, Va.

The C-130E aircraft departed Pope Air Force Base at 9:33 a.m. to perform a LAPES at Sicily Drop Zone on the Army post, according to the report.

The report states the following sequence of events prior to and during the crash of the plane, Even 44:

"During Even 44's run-in to the extraction zone, the drogue chute was deployed and a descent in excess of 2,500 feet per minute was initiated. The descent rate was not sufficiently arrested to prevent impact with the ground. Just prior to impact, the extraction chutes deployed and the extraction sequence was initiated. Initially, the extraction chutes started to inflate, but after the aircraft impacted the ground, the aircraft ramp and portions of the ramp conveyors passed through or remained in two of the extraction chutes. Only one extraction parachute fully inflated. The load was extracted and decelerated to a stop. The aircraft remained on the ground and continued to break up as it passed the extraction zone climb panels. The aircraft then departed the extraction zone and entered an area of uneven, sandy terrain altering its ground path slightly to the right of centerline."

Three Army vehicles were parked at the edge of a

wooded area about 1,800 feet from the initial point of impact, according to the report.

The report continues: "An explosion occurred as the right wing tip struck an Army high-mobility multi-purpose vehicle (HMMWV). A second HMMWV was severely damaged by the No. 3 engine. An Army jeep was destroyed by fire after contact with the left external fuel tank. An Army soldier in the passenger seat (Staff Sgt. Douglas L. Hunter of the 82nd Airborne Division, Ft. Bragg) was killed instantly. Fuel leaking from ruptured fuel tanks ignited. The aircraft continued to disintegrate as it passed through the wooded area and came to a rest with the remaining wing structure inverted 2,040 feet from the initial impact point.

The report states that "extensive fire hindered rescue attempts" and both loadmasters, Tech. Sgt. Timothy J. Matar and Airman 1st Class Albert G. Dunse, were killed in the crash.

The pilot, Capt. Garry M. Bardo Jr., and the navigator, 1st Lt. John B. Keiser III, survived the crash, but "received fatal injuries in the post-crash fire."

The two survivors, 1st Lt. Marc A. Lenke and Sgt. Tony P. Holmes, exited the flight deck area but received "serious" burns. They were taken to Womack Army Community Hospital. They were flown that night to the burn center at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Lenke, the co-pilot, and Holmes, the flight engineer, are back at Pope Air Force Base after being treated for about two months at the burn center.

"They're both technically patients at Womack Army Community Hospital, living at home and recovering," Irving said.