



Press Clippings

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Staff Photo By CRAMER GALLIMORE

Sgt. Holmes Checks C-130 Electrical System



Military Profile

Crash Survivor Happy To Be Back At Old Job

By HENRY CUNINGHAM
Of The Times Staff

Pope Air Force Base Sgt. Tony P. Holmes, one of two survivors of the C-130 airplane crash on July 1, 1987, at Fort Bragg in which four crew members died, says he is happy to be back at his old job as flight engineer.

"It was my job," said Holmes, who is assigned to the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron. "If you were in a car crash, you wouldn't stop driving because you were in an accident. After I came back, I felt real good about it."

The pilot, navigator, two load masters and a Fort Bragg soldier on the ground died in the fiery crash in front of more than 4,000 spectators as the C-130 was performing a LAPES, Low-Altitude Parachute Extraction System, at Sicily Drop Zone.

He and 1st Lt. Marc A. Lenke, the co-pilot, spent months after the accident in a burn center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Lenke also has returned to work as a pilot in the squadron, Holmes said.

"There's not a day goes by that I don't think about it," said Holmes, 30, a Danville, Ill., native. "It's definitely in my mind. As far as flying again, I don't have any fear of that. I really don't want to dwell on it."

Holmes said he has flown recently on missions ranging from moving equipment for President Bush to resupplying U.S. forces at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"I was just up at Kennebunkport, Maine, to move some equipment," Holmes said. "Our crew duty days are up to 16 hours. It's usually a 12-hour day whenever we fly."

Holmes attended Danville Area Community College for one year and enlisted in the Air Force in 1977.

"I always wanted to join," Holmes said. "The war

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pictures always got me going. I always wanted to fly. You needed a BA (bachelor of arts) to be a pilot. The next thing would be a flight engineer."

Holmes initially was trained as a crew chief and flew on a KC-135 tanker at Castle, Calif., with the 93rd Bombardment Wing, he said. The Air Force requires airmen to be non-commissioned officers with three years of maintenance experience before training to become a flight engineers, he said.

"Nobody really knows what he does," Holmes said of flight engineers. "The pilots get the glory."

Before flying, Holmes checks for hydraulic leaks and makes sure the batteries are charging properly, he said. In flight, he computes cruise data and monitors fuel, electrical panel, pressurization panel and anti-icing systems, he said. After the flight, he completes forms about flight data for maintenance personnel.

"I don't think I ever talked to anybody who is a flight engineer and didn't like the job," he said. "It's one of the few jobs enlisted (personnel) can have and fly and use their head. You've constantly got to be thinking about what's going on about you."

Flight engineers calculate the amount of runway

required for takeoff and data for flying with three engines, he said.

"This airplane flies very well with three engines," he said. "I want four of them out there turning, but it flies well with three."

The flight engineer sits behind the pilots, and part of the job is talking to the other crew members about flying conditions, he said.

"We use a lot of charts," he said. "Different cargoes go on the aircraft. We figure what the engines can perform at. You take weights, pressure, altitude and temperatures into consideration for engine performance."

Holmes said he is looking forward to further challenges in his career.

"I want to get more into the special operations side of flying," he said. "That seems to be the next challenge for me. They go to different places. If push came to shove, it would be special operations who would be going in first."

And he wants to remain in his field after he leaves the military, he said.

"I'd like to be a flight engineer for a commercial airline when I retire," Holmes said. "I don't see I'd be leaving here anytime soon."

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