

2nd Report Released On C-130 Crash

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The Air Force has released a second report on the July 1 crash of a C-130E airplane at Fort Bragg before 4,000 spectators, but the 2-inch-thick document does not provide answers about why the crash occurred.

The Accident Investigation report includes testimony from 67 people, ranging from two survivors to the wing commander, but it reaches no conclusions on the cause of the crash that killed four crew members and a soldier on the ground.

Capt. Garry M. Bardo Jr., the pilot who died in

the crash of the Pope Air Force Base plane, was praised by several witnesses who dismissed the possibility that pilot error caused the crash.

Others, including Col. Edward N. Brya, commander of the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing, remarked that the plane took a noticeably steep approach to the drop zone but that the approach did not necessarily indicate trouble.

One survivor, Sgt. Tony P. Holmes, the flight engineer, told an investigative board there was a generator problem on the No. 2 engine, but the generator was disconnected and the flight continued.

Holmes said the engine start, taxi and takeoff were "pretty normal" but recalled the descent to the drop zone was "a little extreme."

The plane was performing during an annual display of Army and Air Force airborne capabilities. It was demonstrating a low-altitude parachute extraction exercise where the aircraft flies low over a field and drops a heavy load without landing.

The plane descended, touched the ground and skidded off a dirt landing strip into pine trees and

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exploded in a ball of flames before horrified spectators.

Investigators asked Holmes if he recalled whether the pilot attempted to stop the aircraft on the zone as it touched the ground.

He replied: "I don't remember. I've had a lot of dreams since then, and after the — there's a point there where I just don't remember anything — anything else."

The other survivor, 1st Lt. Marc A. Lenke, the co-pilot, told the board because of "head injuries" he did not remember many facts relating to the accident and mission planning.

Lenke said he recalled Bardo saying, "We're going to hit the ground."

The staff judge advocate of the Military Airlift Command at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., prepared the report in which witnesses were warned that testimony would be made public and used for "any purpose deemed appropriate by competent authority."

"The purpose of the accident investigation is to obtain and preserve all available evidence for use in claims, litigation, disciplinary actions, adverse administrative proceedings and for all other purposes," Col. Phillip E. Lackey, the accident investigating officer, stated in the report.

Officials compiling the report were instructed that the report was not to contain opinions, conclusions or recommendations.

A 179-page Safety Mishap Investigation report, prepared by the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center at Norton Air Force Base, Calif.,

and released in September, ruled out several possible mechanical causes of the crash.

That report stated the accident probably was not caused by foreign objects, engine or mechanical problems or the low-altitude extrac-tion, which the plane was performing when it crashed on Sicily Drop Zone.

But Air Force officials routinely refuse to release the second parts of such reports in which conclusions, if any, are stated. The reports contain the testimony of witnesses who are promised confidentiality.

The crew members were assigned to the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron of the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing at Pope Air Force Base.

Lt. Col. Steven D. Acuff, commander of the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron and overall mission commander for the capabilities exercise, described Bardo as "a very competent, professional pilot."

"If it was a high priority mission I had total confidence in Garry to perform and called on him often to do so," Acuff told the board.

The squadron commander said he talked to Bardo and the crew just before takeoff and "detected nothing out of the ordinary."

Other witnesses said Bardo appeared "nervous" prior to the flight.

Airman 1st Class Anthony W. Ratley described Bardo as "jittery" on the day of the mission.

Sgt. Anthony Richard Argara, a C-130 loadmaster who was a member of the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron, said: "I was a personal friend of both loadmasters on the accident

aircraft, but I do not know of anything that could have led to the crash."

Brya, who commands the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing and witnessed the crash from the reviewing stands, said: "You could certainly call it a steep approach, but it would be within parameters of the LAPES delivery. The airplane started its descent later than I would have and steeper than I would have but, then again, it was certainly within the envelope of how you make that approach."

First Lt. David Ray Evans, who originally was scheduled to be the co-pilot, described Bardo as "a rock-solid individual."

"Just from my past experience flying with Captain Bardo, he was one of the best pilots I've ever flown with," Evans told the board. "If the simple explanation is that it was pilot error, it would be hard to convince me of that because Garry was good and I just don't believe he would take an airplane and fly it into the ground like that unless something else was happening or something was going in that airplane. Something was wrong."

The report includes testimony from 1st Lt. Michael A. Kelly, assistant weather officer of Detachment 21, 15th Weather Squadron at Pope Air Force Base. He briefed the crews on the day of the crash.

"I'm reasonably sure that weather was not a factor in the accident," Kelly said.

Maj. Steven R. Springer, assistant operations officer for the squadron, said the pilot and crew were "the best in the squadron, in all respects."