

C-130 Crew Had No Hint Flight In Trouble

file 45 ②

By JASON BRADY
Staff Writer

Radio transmissions from a Lockheed C-130E transport that crashed during a capabilities exercise at Fort Bragg July 1 never hinted the flight was in trouble.

The radio transmission transcripts were part of an accident investigation report obtained by The Fayetteville Observer from the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, Norton Air Force Base,

Calif. The released portion of the full accident report provides little insight into the cause of the crash, saying only that the pilot's "flare" to ascend from a low-altitude parachute extraction system maneuver did not "sufficiently arrest" descent, and the plane hit the ground.

At 9 a.m. that morning, Capt. Garry M. Bardo Jr. started the

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plane's engines at Pope Air Force Base. The airplane would be one of four C-130s of the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron, 317th Tactical Airlift Wing, flying a formation toward Fort Bragg's Sicily Drop Zone.

The airplane was to demonstrate a LAPES maneuver before a crowd of about 5,000 at the annual Fort Bragg-Pope Air Force Base capabilities exercise. The maneuver involves descending to 5 to 10 feet above the ground and having a piece of equipment pulled from the rear of the plane by cargo parachutes.

After takeoff at about 9:37 a.m., the Pope control tower handed the airplane off to Fayetteville approach control. In the next hour the C-130s flew designated routes over Pope and Fort Bragg.

At 10:17 a.m., Even 44 was given permission to start its descent over Sicily Drop Zone, and at 10:25, Even 45, the second ship in the formation, reported to the Fayetteville control tower that Even 44 "went down."

Killed were Bardo; Capt. John B. Keiser III, navigator; loadmasters TSgt. Timothy J. Matar and Airman 1st Class Albert G. Dunse, and a soldier spectator SSgt. Douglas "Lance" Hunter, who was sitting in a vehicle at the end of the runway.

Surviving the crash were Lt. Marc A. Lenke, co-pilot, and Sgt. Tony P. Holmes, flight engineer. Lenke and Holmes have recovered from severe burns and have returned to Pope Air Force Base.

According to the report, both loadmasters sustained fatal head and chest injuries during the crash. The pilot and navigator survived the crash but were killed by fire. Lenke and Holmes survived because they escaped the flight deck.

Hunter was killed when the airplane skidded slightly off center of the runway and crashed into three Army vehicles sitting in a woodline some 1,800 feet from where the plane initially hit the ground.

According to a summary of the report written by Col. Sherman W. Bear, president of the investigating board, the airplane's "flare," or ascent, did not prevent the plane from hitting the ground.

In addition the extraction parachutes did not properly inflate when the aircraft hit the ground because parts of the plane became entangled with the large chutes. Only one chute fully deployed and eventually pulled a Sheridan armored reconnaissance vehicle from the plane.

An explosion occurred as the plane's right wingtip struck an Army vehicle at the end of the runway, according to the report. The airplane, in flames, came to rest about 2,040 feet from the initial impact.

The accident report was obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and contains only a portion of the full report. According to Air Force officials, portions of the report dealing with the investigating board's analysis, findings and recommendations are exempt from disclosure, as are the statements of witnesses giving unsworn testimony, medical reports and technical reports given by contractors.

"Release of these portions of the safety report would jeopardize a significant government interest by materially inhibiting its ability to conduct future safety investigations pertaining to the crashes of Air Force aircraft," according to a cover letter provided with the report.