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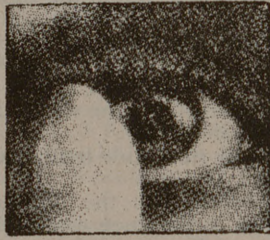
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Warped

by Scott McCullough



Officials say plane flying low for load

PARIS (AP) — A new Airbus 320 that crashed at an air show was flying too low for the load it carried and the pilot did not have time to maneuver it out of danger, officials said Monday following a preliminary investigation.

Three passengers were killed and 50 injured as the jetliner crashed into the woods Sunday during a demonstration flight near Mulhouse in eastern France.

Daniel Tennenbaum, chief of the Civil Aviation Authority, said the Air France jet was flying at 30 feet.

In Mulhouse, prosecutor Jean Volff said, "The A320 passed at 30 feet altitude, which is completely outside the technical norms when it is carrying passengers."

He said the normal minimum altitude for such conditions was 100 feet and added, without giving details, that the pilot had "disconnected the automatic controls at the moment of the accident and was in manual control."

Tennenbaum told a news conference in Paris the fully computerized aircraft needed eight seconds to respond to the command of pilot Michel Hasseline and only five seconds were available because of the low altitude.

Hasseline was quoted in the French press Monday as telling a rescuer, "I wanted to increase the power, but the aircraft did not respond."

Louis Mermaz, the transport minister, said the crash did not reflect on the performance of the A320.

He said there was "no available element that puts into question the good functioning of the aircraft and the security of A320 flights during normal functioning. Nothing justifies ending A320 flights."

Mermaz said he called the news conference because news reports questioned the new aircraft's reliability and "it was important to respond quickly to the legitimate public questions."

A spokesman for Airbus Industrie, the manufacturer, said earlier there were indications human error caused the crash, but Christian Roger, president of the Air France pilots' union, said the engines may have failed to restart at the pilot's command. The aircraft was carrying 133 people.

The union added in a statement, "if the breakdown was in the computer, there would be no information on it in the black box."

Mermaz said both flight recorders were recovered, "so the inquiry should be rapid."

Government officials said privately the pilot, Hasseline, and co-pilot Pierre Mazieres were not injured and should be able to help investigators.

The narrow-bodied A320 was developed by a European consortium over four years at a cost of \$2 billion.

National Briefs

AMA wants crackdown on drug users

CHICAGO (AP) — The nation is losing the "war on drugs" by concentrating on catching traffickers rather than treating abusers, contends a report considered Monday at the American Medical Association's annual policymaking convention.

"The heart of the problem lies in the demand," the report says.

It recommends against legalizing drugs, but calls for the federal government to ease restrictions on those who may receive methadone treatment.

The 420-member House of Delegates, a legislative body representing the AMA's 295,000 members, is expected to act on the proposed drug policy before the convention ends Thursday.

The report is by the AMA's board of trustees.

"We think this lays out a blueprint for the American people to effectively do something about the drug problem," said Dr. Lonnie Bristow, an AMA trustee and internist from Berkeley, Calif.

"We frankly hate to see more just going down the tubes as our nation talks about what we should have the Army and Navy patrolling the borders against terdric drug sellers," he said.

He said the AMA board's report shows the nation's drug problem is a failure because it's "been the wrong focus."

"As long as we concentrate on the supply end of the problem we're just pouring money down the sieve," Bristow said in an interview Sunday.

Reagan backs AIDS discrimination law

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan on Monday accepted the report of his AIDS commission with a hint that he is ready to back stepped-up efforts to bar discrimination against people who suffer from the deadly disease.

"The report represents an impressive effort and significantly increases our level of understanding to deal with AIDS," Reagan said after meeting with retired Adm. James D. Watkins, the panel's chairman.

The president announced in a written statement that in response to the commission's nearly 600 recommendations, he had directed Dr. Ian MacDonald, a special assistant for drug policy, to recommend within 30 days "a course of action that takes us forward."

But what Watkins found heartening was an additional statement that Reagan made connection with the study panel's principal recommendation — enactment of federal legislation prohibiting discrimination against AIDS victims.

"At Admiral Watkins' suggestion, I have also directed Dr. MacDonald to include among his priorities consideration of specific measures to strengthen implementation of the guidance from 'AIDS in the Workplace,'" Reagan said.

These guidelines, which went out to the Office of Personnel Management, the agency responsible for the federal government's employees.

Old testimony foreshadowed probe

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Department officials routinely bypassed their own contracting system by giving key documents with classified information to private consultants, according to long-buried court testimony.

A massive criminal investigation of Pentagon contracting practices is centered on the passing of secret information to private consultants, who in turn sold it to contractors.

The system wasn't widely talked about between the Defense Department and contractors and so "my mouth fell open" when a contractor she had never met called to ask her for an interpretation of a document she had written, testified Caroline A. Chewning, who works for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

But in general Chewning defended the system.

She said the official contracting

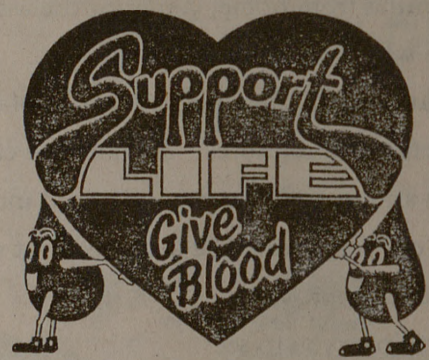
system was unworkable, and officials in her agency — which worked on futuristic military technology — viewed it "in the government's interest" to cooperate with contractors, "or else we are hurting ourselves."

Chewning was a witness at a January 1984 trial in Baltimore of William V. Miller, a private defense consultant who was charged with two counts of conspiracy and unauthorized sale of government property. Miller was acquitted.

The attorney who defended Miller, Selig Solomon, said in an interview that Chewning's testimony likely won the case for defense. It showed that Miller was accused of taking matters that was given to consultants at the time, he said.

Chewning said "95 to 99 percent" of the information that consultants and contractors sought from her section was willingly handed out under the unofficial cooperative system she described.


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