

Wednesday, December 12, 1990

The Battalion

Plane crash attributed to engine malfunction

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — An engine malfunction led to the August crash of a C-5 cargo plane in Germany taking part in Operation Desert Shield, says a military report issued to relatives of the victims.

"There was no crew error ... that is what we were all concerned with," said Sylvia Garza, mother of crash victim Daniel Garza of San Antonio.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Albert Bustamante asked Monday for congressional hearings on an Air Force probe of the Aug. 28 crash that killed 13 people, including

nine San Antonio-based reservists.

A lengthy report on the accident that occurred near Ramstein Air Base was distributed last weekend to families of seven of the nine Texas reservists who died.

The report given to the families states a mechanism used to reverse the thrust of the plane's far left engine for landing went into "full reverse" shortly after takeoff.

The "engine reverser" is used to slow the plane as it lands by opening a set of doors behind

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— Albert Bustamante, U.S. Representative

the engine, effectively reversing the direction of the thrust of that engine.

The military report mirrors an item about the crash investigation that appeared recently in

the publication Aviation Week.

A spokesman for the Air Force Military Airlift Command would not comment on the report or the investigation. The report is expected to be made pub-

lic later this month.

Bustamante contends Air Force officials knew about mechanical problems with the plane.

"It concerns me that the Air Force is issuing waivers on planes with serious mechanical deficiencies in order to meet the deployment needs in the Persian Gulf," he said in a letter to U.S. Rep. Earl Hutto, D-Fla., chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee on readiness.

The C-5, the largest transport plane in the Air Force fleet, was heading to Saudi Arabia in an

airlift for Operation Desert Shield.

Randy Herrera, 25, son of crash victim Rosendo Herrera, said his father had talked many times of small problems with the planes he flew as an Air Force reservist, but compared them to small problems with a car driven on a highway.

"I never really thought it would be pilot error," Randy Herrera said. "My God, it's like anything else. You drive a car and there is always something wrong with it that you need to get fixed."

Coast Guard searches Gulf for Navy pilots

PENSACOLA, Fla. (AP) — The Navy and Coast Guard were still searching Tuesday for two naval aviators whose training jets collided over the Gulf of Mexico on Monday while practicing carrier landings on the USS Lexington.

No sign of the pilots or any wreckage was reported Tuesday, said Lt. Cmdr. Ray Kempisty, a spokesman for the Naval Education and Training Command at the Pensacola Naval Air Station.

The Lexington is based in Pensacola but the two TA-4 Skyhawks and the pilots were from Chase Field at Beville, Texas.

The collision occurred in clear weather about 85 miles northwest of Key West and within a few miles of the carrier.

The Navy identified the pilots as Cmdr. Philip J. Palmatier Jr., 40, of Coudersport, Pa., commanding officer of Training Squadron 25, and Ensign Troy A. Moore, 25, of Greeley, Colo., a flight student attached to Training Squadron 24.

The Lexington and an undetermined number of Navy helicopters were joined in the search Tuesday by two Coast Guard helicopters and a cutter from Clearwater, Kempisty said.

Kempisty said he didn't know how long the search would continue.

Other planes were in the area and one of the jets was observed crashing into the Gulf after the collision. He said no one saw what happened to the second jet.

TA-4s are built by McDonnell Douglas Corp. They are two-seat training versions of the single-seat A-4, which is capable of carrying 10,000 pounds of munitions and can travel at a top speed of 675 mph, according to Jane's "All the World's Aircraft."

Last year, five people including the pilot were killed when a T-2 Buckeye trainer crashed aboard the Lexington. The other victims, including a woman sailor and civilian aircraft maintenance man, were on the ship's flight deck when the plane crashed on Oct. 29, 1989, while the Lexington was about 30 miles south of Pensacola.

The student pilot, Ensign Steven Pontell, 23, of Columbia, Md., was making his first attempt to land on a carrier. Navy safety investigators were unable to pinpoint a cause for the crash, concluding that pilot error or a throttle malfunction may have been to blame.

'Hope is what I held on to' Oil workers captured in Kuwait return home safely

Associated Press

Donald G. Whatley arrived in Kuwait on Aug. 1 at 10:30 p.m. He was at the Iraqi border by around 1 a.m., had a sandwich and was soon after in bed.

By 3:45 a.m., "the sky was saturated with helicopters, missile fire was showering down over my head." He never got a chance to relieve Charlie Amos, another American oil worker who was to have headed home Aug. 2.

"About 25 soldiers drove up (to the oil rig site), and they had guns," Amos said from his home in Gilmer, Texas. "It was tense. We were taken into custody at 5:30 a.m. By 6:30 a.m., we were in Iraq."

Among Saddam Hussein's earliest captives, both men by dawn had spent the first of many sleepless nights. Four months would pass before their vigil ended last week with the Iraqi leader's decision to free his "foreign guests."

It wasn't until Tuesday that Amos and Whatley let down. It wasn't until they'd finally collapsed into the arms of family, gathered around the kitchen table or nestled deep into familiar

"I've had four or five hours of sleep now and feel real fine. But the willpower's gone. All during it, I wouldn't let the Iraqis get into my head and break my mind. ... Now I'm exhausted."

— Donald G. Whatley, released hostage

blankets that they truly knew rest.

"I've had four or five hours of sleep now and feel real fine," Whatley said from Shreveport, La. "But the willpower's gone. All during it, I wouldn't let the Iraqis get into my head and break my mind. ... Now I'm exhausted."

Whatley and Amos spoke in whispers, drained by their long journeys home from Iraq; numbed by the suddenness of Saddam's turnaround. All at once the monotony was broken, and the fear shaken out of them like a bad dream.

"It's been such a long trip," Whatley, 48, said before joining his wife for a breakfast of bacon and eggs like on just about any day.

Amos said he was perhaps most stunned by an unexpected shock of sympathy for the guards left behind. After praying day

and night for his freedom, "It was actually rather emotional saying goodbye."

Amos and Whatley were separated at the Baghdad hotel where they were taken shortly after the invasion.

During Amos' stay at a barren site near Syria, Iraqi guards played pool with their captives and scared up a few old spy novels. If he wanted a little exercise, Saddam's men went along for the run.

"It was a group activity ... they were actually friendly," said Amos, 60, who with Whatley works for Santa Fe Drilling Co. "They didn't like what they were doing any better than we did."

Guards told Amos, who has been drilling oil in the Middle East for the better part of 20 years, that he was being held at an abandoned phosphates mine.

But, he said haltingly, "It didn't look like that."

The site, he said, looked more like a military or chemical installation. "I tried not to think about it," Amos said before going to sleep for the first time since leaving Baghdad for home Sunday via Germany.

Whatley said his Iraqi guards never called him a "human shield." But he, like Amos, could guess at his part in Saddam's strategy by looking at the series of power plants and satellite centers that were his home over the weeks.

"We were meant to deter attacks," Whatley said.

It was perhaps that threat of death that bound captor and captive: "The installation where we were, we'd have been the first to die," Whatley said.

While living in the shadow of

that knowledge, Whatley had nothing to go on but the wife and family he holds so close. "Hope is what I held on to," said the oil worker, who received two letters from his wife while in captivity.

Doris Whatley, meanwhile, heard nothing at all. Like relatives of so many of the 900 American hostages, she spent 4½ months as a human barometer. Their emotions have risen and receded depending on the threat of war.

Sarrah Amos slept on a couch in the living room, bathed in the television's bluish light and ear cocked to the telephone always somewhere near at hand.

"I know emotionally our families had it worse than we did," Amos said. "We knew where our families were located and their conditions. They knew nothing."

Until Sarrah Amos and Doris Whatley awoke last Thursday to the news, they'd given up hoping for anytime soon: their husbands were coming home.

"It came as a surprise for us, too," said Amos, the father of three adult children. "It came as such as glorious surprise."

Company to replace lines Explosion kills one, injures 17

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Gas company officials said Tuesday that new gas lines will be installed in a Fort Benjamin Harrison housing complex where a weekend explosion killed a child, injured 17 people and destroyed an apartment building.

Meanwhile Tuesday, Marion County Coroner Dennis J. Nicholas positively identified the explosion's only fatality as 5-year-old Janna Encarnacion, the daughter of Army Sgt. Adolpho Encarnacion and his wife, Tracy.

"The autopsy revealed she was alive at the time the fire broke out. The cause of death is smoke inhalation and thermal burns," he said.

Seventeen other people were injured Sunday night when the blast

destroyed a four-unit apartment building and damaged another in Harrison Village, a housing complex for enlisted personnel. Eleven were treated and released by Monday, but the other six were burned severely and could face weeks of hospitalization, officials said.

Sgt. Maj. Ken Harley said there was no indication Tuesday of when occupants of the village's 240 housing units would be allowed to return home.

"Naturally we're not going to let them in until it's safe," he said. "It would really only be speculation when," people can go back.

"I just don't think anybody has any idea what the cause was," he said.

"It's still speculation that it was a gas leak," Harley said. "It could have been a defective stove and coincidental that the leak was going on at the same time." The fort owns and maintains its own gas lines, but Citizens Gas and Coke Utility supplies the gas.

"We are going to be installing some new lines in the village where the apartments were destroyed," Amelia Stewart of Citizens' public affairs department, said. "That is the only area of the fort where we will be taking care of the lines. It's probably about 10 apartment buildings in Harrison Village."

Stewart said the work was expected to begin by Wednesday.

Study finds no link between pill, cancer

GENEVA (AP) — A decade-long study of possible links between oral contraceptive use and cancer found the evidence too inconclusive to warrant changes in prescribing the pill, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

An expert panel said that family planning programs based on the pill do not need to be changed.

The agency reported on studies in eight developing and three industrialized countries that explored whether using the pill increases the risk of cancer.

Experts from 11 countries met privately at WHO headquarters in Geneva to review the studies and other evidence, according to a statement issued by the agency.

Their findings included: —Most studies suggest no general

link between the pill and cervical or breast cancer. More research is needed because some studies have found connections between long-term oral contraceptive use and the risk of either cancer among some groups of women. But the link could also be due to better disease detection or special characteristics of women using the pill.

—Oral contraceptives increase the risk of benign liver tumors, but this is a very rare complication.

—The pill can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer, cancer of the inner lining of the uterus and benign breast diseases.

More than 60 million women are believed to use the pill worldwide, nearly two-thirds of them in developing countries, WHO said.

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