

# Plane losses precede Air Force anniversary

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Air Force, celebrating its 50th anniversary, was bruised by the spectacular loss of an F-117A stealth fighter at a Maryland air show and the mysterious disappearance of one of its long-haul C-141 transports.

The crash of a Navy jet in the Persian Gulf brought to 10 the number of servicemen presumed lost in U.S. military air accidents in a two-day span.

Aviation experts noted say there was no apparent connection between the three weekend incidents given the disparate type of aircraft and geographic separation.

But the coincidence of timing came as the Air Force sought to herald its successes in the kickoff of its 50th anniversary celebration Monday.

Defense Secretary William Cohen paid tribute to the pilot of the F-117 but did not mention the other incidents as he addressed the Air Force Association, a booster club.

He said Maj. Bryan Knight displayed "courage and competence" and "helped divert a much larger disaster" Sunday by steering his fighter jet away from heavily populated areas outside Baltimore, Md.

The secretary said video replays show Knight waited "until the final moment" to eject, something Cohen called "a compliment to the kind of courage and dedication that is exhibited day in and day out by men and women in the Air Force all over the world."

The 53 remaining F-117 stealth fighters were grounded as officials investigated the mishap. Meanwhile, the Pentagon was probing the mysterious Saturday disappearance — and possible midair collision — of an Air Force C-141 cargo plane with a German air force plane off the coast of Africa. Nine Americans and 24 Germans were feared dead.

In the third incident, a Navy F-A-18 fighter crashed Sunday in Oman, killing the pilot.

The F-117 garnered fame with its night-time bombing runs on Baghdad during the Persian Gulf War.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., said Monday that he was introducing legislation that would prohibit the use of F-117 fighters and B-2 bombers at air shows.

Cohen responded that it would be best to await the formal outcome of the Air Force investigation.

"I don't think we should ever rule out any aircraft participating in shows. It could happen to any other type of aircraft that we have as well. Let's wait and see what the facts show," Cohen said.

Pentagon officials argue that taxpayers are the beneficiaries of such shows, because they allow the military to display how the defense dollar is being spent. As well, the shows are major recruiting tools for the all-volunteer force.

Warner, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the cost is just too high, asserting the taxpayer pays \$100 million a

## Military crash

No survivors were found at the Ute where U.S. and German military planes are believed to have collided and plummeted into the ocean.



copy for the F-117.

"We only have 53 left and they are needed for special missions in the national security interests of this country, and I just do not believe that type of asset can be put at this type of risk," the senator said on the Senate floor.

The B-2, which was built to use nuclear weapons and evade the radar of the former Soviet Union,

## Tupolev TU-154



Wingspan 123 feet, 2 1/2 inches (37.55 m)  
Length 157 feet, 1 3/4 inches (47.90 m)  
Height 37 feet, 4 3/4 inches (11.40 m)

## C-141 Starlifter



Wingspan 160 feet (48.5 m)  
Length 168 feet, 4 inches (51 m)  
Height 39 feet, 3 inches (11.9 m)

Source: Jane's All the World's Aircraft, United States Airforce

cost \$2 billion a plane, making it the most expensive aircraft ever built. It recently has been outfitted to conduct long-range conventional bombing runs.

"I feel it is a matter of principle that this nation cannot subject that costly an aircraft, one that is essential to the performance of a very specialized mission, in this type of circumstance," Warner said.

# Military seals off jet crash site

MIDDLE RIVER, Md. (AP) — Citing national security, military police kept nine families from returning to their homes Monday, seized photographers' film and cordoned off the site of a stealth fighter crash as they searched for pieces of an aircraft whose very existence was once a state secret.

The clamp down in this quiet waterfront neighborhood began almost immediately after the F-117A jet went down during an air show performance Sunday, crashing into a house and causing six minor injuries on the ground.

"There was military everywhere. This road was full, the sky was loaded. I tell you it was something," said Paul Canatella, standing in his driveway less than a 100 yards from the mangled canopy, which was watched by two armed military guards.

"I've never seen anything like it," Canatella said. "You name it they were here."

Three blocks of the Baltimore suburb were quickly evacuated and military troops moved in to scour the area for pieces of the \$45 million, black, bat-winged plane.

"It is a secret aircraft, obviously we want to protect it the best way we can," said Capt. Drew Sullins, a Maryland National Guard spokesman.

Film was confiscated from members of the media, including Associated Press photographer Roberto Borea, who had chartered a boat to take him to the neighborhood.

"As soon as we stepped on shore, the military was

there and that was it," Borea said. "Had I chosen not to surrender my equipment, I would have been taken into custody."

Sullins said pool photographers were later allowed on the scene for a few minutes Monday under tight military supervision.

The boomerang-shaped F-117A Nighthawk uses special design and materials to avoid enemy radar. During much of the 1980s, it was so secret the military didn't acknowledge its existence.

It was used in the Gulf War against heavily defended Iraqi targets because of its strange shape, tight construction and special surface paint, to evade radar and radar-guided missiles.

Amateur video of Sunday's crash showed a piece of the aircraft, apparently from the tail or a wing, flying off before the wedge-shaped jet went down in a slow spin as the pilot ejected safely.

Retired bomber pilot Norman Mack said he called the military to come retrieve the first two pieces he saw fall off the plane; they landed in shallow water behind his house. Mack said several boats showed up and officials called his daughter later asking permission to retrieve a smaller piece of debris from her boat.

Emma Wetzelberger, a clerk at Wilson Point Liquors near the airport, said dozens of diners at the restaurant she was in Sunday night couldn't return in the boats they had used to get there because the military had closed down the Middle River.

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