Dozens die in collision of 3 planes at air show

By DEEDEE ARRINGTON DOKE
Kaiserslautern bureau
RAMSTEIN AB, West Germany — An Italian air force jet crashed in a ball of fire into spectators at an annual air show Sunday afternoon after colliding head on with two other low-flying jets, killing at least 46.

More than 100 people were injured in the fiery crash, which also killed the three pilots of the two-seat Aermacchi MB-339A fighters.

The accident occurred about 3:35 p.m., shortly after the 10-plane Italian Frecce Tricolori aerial demonstration team began its performance. A plane clipped two others flying in close formation toward it, sending the two crashing onto a runway.

The lone plane came at the crowd tail down, crashing in flames into hundreds of the estimated 300,000 at the air show. Concession stands and several vehicles, including a German police car, burst into flames.

In the moments after the crash, people were screaming and running, some of them with their clothes on fire. Flames from the explosion burned a number of spectators, while others were hit with parts from the exploding planes.

"I felt the heat of it," said Staff Sgt. John Flanagan of Wiesbaden. "I saw the guy coming right at us. I was out there with my family — my wife and two kids. I just pulled my kids and ran."

"We were lucky. If we had been 100 Continued on Page 28
115 injured in crash at Ramstein air show treated at hospitals

By The Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AB, West Germany — Civilian and military hospitals as far away as Frankfurt were treating more than 115 people Sunday, many with serious burns suffered when an Italian jet crashed into a crowd of spectators and exploded.

The most seriously injured were taken to the emergency hospital in Ludwigshafen, about 30 miles east of the large air base that was hosting its annual open house and air show.

A hospital spokesman said the injured were coming in too fast to count, adding that it would take hours to get exact numbers and nationalities.

At Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center, a triage center was set up in the hospital's main entrance. The first of 115 injured arrived at 4 p.m. Some of the injured later were transferred to civilian hospitals in Homberg, Kaiserslautern, Baumholder, Ludwigshafen and Koblenz.

Landstuhl began recalling off-duty personnel, who were assisted by German army members and Red Cross workers.

An information center for families was set up in a Landstuhl radiology waiting room, and officials established special telephone numbers for information regarding the injured. The numbers are ETS 486-7115 or 8127 and German civilian 06371-86-7115 or 8127.

Hospital officials confirmed a total of 46 dead in the catastrophe. The Associated Press quoted a German television network as saying, "For about 60 of the injured, it's questionable whether they will survive their injuries."

Kaiserslautern's City Hospital was treating about 50 German and American adults and children, with additional victims being brought in through the evening. Injuries ranged from cuts and broken limbs to severe burns. Several of the injured were in critical condition.

Ludwigshafen's City Hospital received at least 10 Germans and Americans, almost all with burns and some in serious condition.

The Mannheim Klinikum, that city's main hospital, received four badly burned adults and two children. The hospital was not immediately able to identify any of the injured or give their nationalities. Both children and three of the adults had what the hospital described as life-threatening injuries.

The Kussel City Hospital, about 15 miles from the crash site, received eight Germans with minor injuries. One man was treated for minor cuts and released. The others were treated for minor burns, cuts and scrapes and were expected to be kept at least overnight, a hospital spokesman said.

At Frankfurt Army Regional Medical Center, U.S. Army emergency medical helicopters flew in four injured, none of them Americans.

Three Germans, one a 16-year-old boy, were treated for third-degree burns and sent to other clinics. A British woman was in fair condition with second-degree burns on her hands and face, said Bill Swisher, hospital spokesman.

UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the 421st Air Ambulance Bn continued flying the injured after dark, when German emergency aircraft, which cannot fly at night, had to stop, Swisher said.

The Italian air force aerobatic team Frecce Tricolori performs the last maneuver over the crowd at Ramstein AB just before the disastrous three-plane collision.
**THE STARS AND STRIPES**

**Monday, August 29, 1988**

**Dozens killed in crash at air show**

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meters more down, we would have been burned.”

Jim Beichler, a University of Maryland teacher, said people next to him had said jokingly: “He’s going to hit. He’s not going to make it.”

“Then there was a silence,” Beichler said. “The plane blew up, and people started running. One guy was on fire. Other people were wrapped up in barbed wire. There were small fires all around me.”

Farther away, there was shocked silence throughout the crowd, then crying.

Shortly after the crash, the sound of sirens filled the air. Air Force buses and “anything with wheels” were pressed into service as ambulances.

Emergency first aid was administered in the area. Helicopters carried the more seriously injured to the nearby Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center.

“It’s a mess here,” Landstuhl spokesman Marie Shaw said. “We’ve got Germans coming here, Americans going to German hospitals, planes flying in, and my son was out there. I really don’t know how many people were hurt, but it’s a lot.”

A morgue was set up at the Ramstein southside clinic, while injured were taken to Landstuhl and German hospitals throughout the Kaiserslautern area.

Authorities put out an appeal for blood donors and, within the first hours, more than 600 people had arrived. Air Force officials opened an information center at the Falcon Theater to help people locate missing family members.

About 75 people, many looking tired and worried, quietly waited for word about 8 p.m.

“Everybody’s in shock,” said Virginia Howard of Landstuhl, a volunteer at the theater. “People don’t know what they’re saying. They’re just looking.”

In a press conference, Kaiserslautern County Commissioner Rudolf Tattert initially put the number of people dead at 31, but Air Force officials estimated between 30 and 40. Several hours later, Landstuhl’s Shaw said 43 people were dead at Ramstein and three were dead at Landstuhl.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Lawrence E. Boese, commander of the 316th Air Div at Ramstein, called the collision a “tragic accident.”

“It is our opinion that every possible precaution was taken,” Boese said, calling the Italian team of the “highest quality and caliber.”

He estimated the accident occurred at the show center, 1,300 feet from spectators. Eyewitnesses said the collision occurred as close as 120 feet above the ground.

Access to the base was immediately cut off by German police, who directed traffic away. Spectators trying to leave the base were trapped in a 2½-hour traffic jam as authorities cleared the way for emergency vehicles.

The remaining seven Italian planes, which had been emitting smoke in the red, green and white colors of their nation’s flag before the collision, landed at nearby Sembach AB.

“This accident is too large for us to understand… and we have to learn consequences for it,” said Rudi Geil, minister of the interior for the state of Rheinland-Pfalz.

“I cannot see how we can take responsibility for holding such an event again,” said Geil, who described himself as “in great despair.”

Representatives of the Social Democratic and Free Democratic political parties had asked the state government to cancel the event, citing potential dangers of flying demonstrations.

But the Rheinland-Pfalz state government said Aug. 5 that the U.S. Air Force had operated the air show under regulations outlined by the German government, and there was no reason to cancel the show.

Immediately after the accident, West German Defense Minister Rupert Scholz, who had defended the shows, announced cancellation of a German air force air show scheduled for Sept. 25.

The Freccia Tricolori were the last show of the day, scheduled for 2:30 p.m., following flying demonstrations by U.S. aircraft from Ramstein, Hahn and Bitburg air bases, West Germany, and RAF Bentwixers, England. Also performing were military planes from Germany, France, the Netherlands and Portugal. The air show began at 12:30 p.m.

The three Italian pilots killed Sunday were identified as Lt. Col. Mario Naldini, 41; Lt. Col. Ivo Nutarelli, 38; and Capt. Giorgio Alessio, 31.

In Rome, Italian Premier Ciriaco DeMita expressed the profound sorrow of the government at what he called the “terrible disaster” at Ramstein.

The Ramstein air show included about 20 airplanes on display. They were to fly out as scheduled Monday, but base officials did not know when regular flying would resume.

**‘FLAME’**

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and wiped up and hit the other two planes, one witness said.

The solo plane, spewing fire and its nose gear missing, then lurched toward the crowd before plummeting, the witness said.

“There was a cotton puff of flame, voluminous,” Doke said, “then this incredible black smoke.”

The scene after the crash “looked like a tornado had blown through,” a witness said. “There was debris everywhere. Paper cups, Coke bottles, All kinds of paper.”

Near what remained of the concessions tent, a blackened van and a burned-out German police car stood near an array of mangled bicycles, apparently thrown to the ground as their owners ran.

**GI stabbed as 1,500 rock fans take to streets**

By ANITA GOSCH

Staff writer

SCHWEINFURT, West Germany — An American GI said his serious injuries, inflicted Friday night when a crowd of some 1,500 rock fans took to the streets of Schweinfurt in anticipation of Saturday’s Monsters of Rock festival.

Police spokesman Karl-Heinz Knochel said Sunday that Pvt. Michael Robinson, 19, was stabbed in the left side of his chest, an unknown assailant, said Robinson of 3 Co., 123rd Signal Unit in Würzburg, was taken to a local hospital, then transferred to a U.S. military hospital. His condition was considered serious but stable.

Knochel said that reports in German media of massive riots Friday night in Schweinfurt were exaggerated.

He said that, considering the number of people expected to attend the Saturday festival, things could have been worse.

“There was something going on, but it wasn’t as bad as described,” he said.

He said some 1,500 youths, many intoxicated, took to the streets around 11 p.m. and attacked “two or three” pedestrians, smashed some cars and windows and left the downtown area littered with debris and broken glass.

Knochel said 35 people were taken into custody before the racket ended about 4 a.m. He said 400 to 600 police had been called in and were assisted by 47 military police.

Knochel said things were much quieter Saturday evening after the festival ended about 9:45 p.m. He said 43 people were taken into custody and released.

Knochel said weekend incidents requiring police action totaled 315, and there were 587 calls to the Red Cross, mainly for drunkenness and problems suffered by the fans in the stadium.

More than 38,000 rock music fans attended the Monsters of Rock Festival, which included such acts as Iron Maiden, Kiss and David Lee Roth.

According to the Associated Press, on Aug. 20 two young men were trammped to death and two were seriously injured when a large wall with a video screen collapsed during a Monsters of Rock festival in Castle Donington, England.