

Kirtland Plane Crashes; 11 Airmen Killed

By Joe Cassidy
And Patricia Gabbett

JOURNAL STAFF WRITERS

MAGDALENA — An Air Force HC-130P search-and-rescue airplane with 11 crew members crashed 16 miles north of Magdalena on Wednesday, exploding into flames and killing all aboard.

The four-propeller Kirtland Air Force Base plane crashed at about 1

p.m., said George Pearce, base spokesman. The craft took off on a navigational training mission from Kirtland at 9:49 a.m.

The victims, who were all Air Force personnel, included one New Mexican, Tech. Sgt. Antonio C. Medina of Las Cruces.

The bodies will be removed from the aircraft this morning, Pearce said. Darkness set in before rescue workers could recover them

Wednesday.

Snow and high winds at the time of the crash may have been factors in the crash, but its cause was unknown, Pearce added.

By late afternoon, flags around Kirtland were being lowered to half-staff.

Rudy Chavez, State Police dispatcher in Socorro, said the wreckage was scattered over a mile radius in rough terrain.

Joe Sanchez, a ranch hand from Magdalena, told the Associated Press he saw the crash from about 10 miles away.

"I was checking heifers that were having some calves," he said. "At the time I was looking at a cow out there and I looked up and saw it.

"We saw a big ball of smoke, then another one, then a big ball of fire. It was a big old explosion — like a forest fire."

Richard Bavier, Magdalena village deputy marshal, told the Journal he was having a sandwich when he saw smoke "mushroom out of the ground" north of the village.

Bavier phoned the fire department and raced to the scene. He was the first to arrive.

"The ground was scorched for acres around, the juniper and piñon

MORE: See ELEVEN on PAGE A3

Crews recovering 11 crash victims

From staff and wire reports

The bodies of 11 crewmen killed in the crash of an Air Force search-and-rescue plane that went down in a ball of flames near Magdalena were to be returned to Albuquerque today.

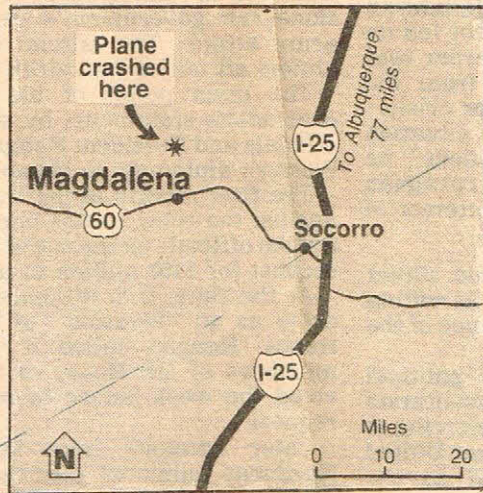
The bodies will be brought to Kirtland Air Force Base, where the doomed HC-130 was assigned, said George Pearce, deputy director of public affairs for the base.

About 60 rescue personnel were attempting to recover the bodies and debris at the crash site, 16 miles north of Magdalena in central New Mexico, Pearce said.

One of the dead men was from Las Cruces.

The plane, which was on a low-level navigation training mission, crashed Wednesday afternoon. Investigators still do not know what caused the crash, Pearce said.

The bodies could not be recovered



Wednesday because of darkness, Pearce said.

Weapons disposal experts were going to the scene today as a precautionary measure, Pearce said, adding that the

plane was not carrying any weapons.

He said that neither he nor investigators would speculate on the cause of the accident.

The wreckage was scattered over a mile radius in rough terrain, said state police dispatcher Rudy Chavez.

Ruben Leal, public affairs specialist at Kirtland, said the airplane was on a training mission. The crew was performing low-level navigation exercises, said Pearce.

Joe Sanchez, a ranchhand from Magdalena, said he saw the crash from about 10 miles away.

"I was checking heifers that were having some calves. At the time I was looking at a cow out there, and I looked up and saw it," he said.

"We saw a big ball of smoke, then another one, then a big ball of fire. It was a big old explosion — like a forest fire."

He said he met sheriff's officers on the way to the crash site, an isolated area known as Bear Mountain.

The wreckage was "spread in little canyons and little hills ... and little trees," Sanchez said.

The four-engine turbo-prop plane is a search and rescue version of the C-130 cargo plane, said base spokeswoman Kay Peterson said.

She said a board of officers was investigating the crash.

The Air Force identified those killed as Tech. Sgt. Antonio C. Medina of Las Cruces; Lt. Col. Stephen J. Tullis, Van Nuys, Calif.; Capt. David S. Miller, Woodridge, Ill..

Also, Capt. William L. Stogsdill, Lawrence, Kan.; Staff Sgt. Johnny Rye, Kingsville, Texas; Sgt. David Garcia Eloy, Ariz.; Tech. Sgt. John R. McGehee, Fort Pierce, Fla.

And, Staff Sgt. Michael D. Perro, Citrus Heights, Calif.; Staff Sgt. Robert W. Kimbrel Jr., Charlotte, N.C.; Sgt. Leo M. Purchiaroni, Marlatt, Mich.; and Sgt. Arther Zozaya, Whittier, Calif.

'These were friends we worked with'

Loss of pals gives grief to airmen

By DAVE NORDSTRAND
Tribune staff writer

After work Wednesday, Air Force Tech. Sgt. Edward Pachecano stopped by the Lazer Lounge for two beers.

At 11 p.m., he went home and tried to sleep. At midnight he woke up and spent the rest of the night thinking about his friend Sgt. David Garcia. Garcia, 25, had died that day.

"Mostly I thought about the fun we had together," Pachecano said.

"Last time was Easter Sunday. We went to a friend's house for a picnic.

This weekend we were supposed to double date. The four of us were going to go to Bennigan's, then dancing."

Garcia had been a career airman. He was loadmaster on the HC-130 that crashed in rugged terrain near Magdalena Wednesday.

He was responsible for cargo and passengers and for rigging packs of supplies dropped to paramedics.

"He was happy-go-lucky, yet very professional," Pachecano said. "He lived to fly."

Garcia perished with the 10 others on board.

Today, investigators from around the country continue to arrive at Kirtland Air Force Base. They'll be collecting the airplane's instruments because the instruments are electrical and stop at the last indicated position.

The experts will analyze oil samples to see if there was fuel contamination. They'll pace off distances between charred chunks of wreckage. Then they'll pool their data and offer an explanation.

Meanwhile, members of the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing continue to work, even as they deal with their grief.

Capt. Robert Burbridge, 41, was a friend of Lt. Col. Stephen J. Tullis, who died in the crash. The Burbridge and



Pachecano

for cargo and passengers and for rigging packs of supplies dropped to paramedics.

"He was happy-go-lucky, yet very professional," Pachecano said. "He lived to fly."

Garcia perished with the 10 others on board.

Today, investigators from around the country continue to arrive at Kirtland Air Force Base. They'll be collecting the airplane's instruments because the instruments are electrical and stop at the last indicated position.

The experts will analyze oil samples to see if there was fuel contamination. They'll pace off distances between charred chunks of wreckage. Then they'll pool their data and offer an explanation.

Meanwhile, members of the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing continue to work, even as they deal with their grief.

Capt. Robert Burbridge, 41, was a friend of Lt. Col. Stephen J. Tullis, who died in the crash. The Burbridge and

Please see KIRTLAND, Page A-3

Searchers cover the remains of a victim found amid the wreckage of an HC-130 plane Thursday afternoon.

Tribune photo by Joe Cavaretta

Overflow Crowd Hears Eulogy for Airmen

By Joe Cassidy

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

An overflow crowd attended memorial services at Kirtland Air Force Base Monday for the 11 crewmen killed in the crash of a search-and-rescue plane, and heard them eulogized as men "bound together by a machine, a mission and a spirit."

An hour before the service began at 11 a.m., the 650-seat East Chapel was filled with families, friends and colleagues of the 11 airmen, all members of the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing. Other mourners listened to the tributes, hymns and prayers over loudspeakers as they stood outside.

The four-engine, turbo-prop HC-130 plane, based at Kirtland, was on a low-level training mission when it crashed last Wednesday 16 miles north of Magdalena. One eyewitness said the craft burst into flames before hitting the piñon and juniper-studded ground in the Cibola National Forest.

"They were an air crew called by a loving creator when their work was finished," Maj. Gen. Robert B. Patterson, commander of the 23rd Air Force, told the mourners.

"They were men of different means and backgrounds, but bound together by a machine, a mission and a spirit — a spirit that few men have known. And they soared, just as an eagle soars over his brothers."

Other eulogies described the crew mem-

bers' love of country and family and their devotion to their duty.

The mourners filed outside behind the Air Force color guard at the conclusion of the service and watched as a 21-gun salute was fired and taps were played by a lone bugler.

Overhead, four A7D Corsair fighters came into view from the east. The planes were part of the New Mexico Air National Guard 150th Tactical Fighter Group.

When they were overhead, one plane peeled off and disappeared northward, leaving an empty place in the formation, the traditional "Missing Man" flyover.

While Air Force investigators continue to search for a cause of the crash, a fund for

relatives of the downed airmen has been established. People wishing to contribute may bring donations for the HC-130 Crew Memorial Fund to any First Interstate Bank branch office in Albuquerque or mail contributions to the First Interstate Bank Kirtland Branch at P.O. Box 5580, Albuquerque, N.M., 87185.

The 11 crew members were: Lt. Col. Stephen J. Tullis, 40; Capt. William L. Stogsdill, 33; Capt. David S. Miller, 33; Tech. Sgt. John R. McGee, 33; Tech. Sgt. Antonio C. Medina, 29; Staff Sgt. Robert W. Kimbrel Jr., 29; Staff Sgt. Michael David Perron, 29; Staff Sgt. Johnny Reyes, 29; Sgt. David Garcia, 26; Sgt. Leo M. Purchiaroni, 27; and Sgt. Arthur R. Zozaya, 24.