

# 1988 USAFE HISTORICAL REPORT

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Chapter IV

## Flugtag 88

(U) The spark which ignited German public opinion against low-level flying occurred during the Ramstein Air Base Open House. On 28 August Ramstein hosted an air show known as "Flugtag 88." The Flugtag had become a tradition at Ramstein. Conducted for 25 years, organizers invited military aircraft of the NATO nations to participate in aerial activities and static displays in addition to requesting national aerobatic teams from NATO air forces to fly their programs in these shows. Flugtag proponents hoped to provide an open house setting which displayed the equipment and capabilities of the allied air forces to enhance public understanding, awareness, and acceptance for the mission of NATO air power. (56)

(U) That acceptance was tragically shaken at approximately 1545 as an estimated crowd of nearly 300,000 witnessed three MB-339A jets from Italy's aerobatic demonstration team, Frecce Tricolori (Tricolor Arrows) collide above Ramstein's main runway. All three aircraft crashed and burned, with one of the aircraft spewing parts and burning fuel into a crowd of spectators. A joint American-Italian-German commission (under the direction of the German Federal Armed Forces Director of Flight Safety) investigating the accident declared that human error--misjudgment on the part of the solo pilot--caused the accident. (57)

(U) Fire, rescue, and security personnel rushed to the scene while medical teams responded from the four major medical aid stations and two prepositioned flight surgeon's vehicles. Despite initial crowd dispersal complicating access to the scene, on-site medical personnel handled triage while military personnel administered first aid and buddy care. The German Red Cross reported that all of the injured patients had been cleared from the base via helicopter, ambulance, or public vehicles 96 minutes after the crash. More than 200 spectators were treated on base or at local German hospitals and released the same day. Another 100 patients were admitted to various hospitals and released the following day. Overall, within 24 hours, an estimated 500 injuries had been treated mainly at surrounding American and German hospitals, as well as English, French, and Belgian facilities. Initial fatalities at the scene totaled 34 (31 spectators and three pilots) with an additional 15 fatalities reported from various hospitals within hours of the accident. As of 18 October, USAFE officials reported a death toll of 69, with 31 still hospitalized. (58)

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