

UNCLASSIFIED

Force families benefitted from fundraising projects carried out by a number of community service organizations while more than 4,000 "Toys for Tots" were distributed to German Red Cross agencies and childrens' homes located in some of the surrounding civilian communities to spread good cheer across international borders as well.⁷

Flugtag 88

(U) Ramstein's annual open house, known as "Flugtag" since 1973, has been a tradition since 22 May 1955 when a few thousand visitors walked through the gates to get their first close-up view of a few American aircraft and ground equipment displays. Originally designed to increased public understanding of the Air Force mission and display the spirit of mutual cooperation among allied nations, this one-day event soon grew to become the largest and most effective means of promoting community relations not only within the Federal Republic of Germany but throughout all of Western Europe. Aerial demonstrations entered the list of activities for the 1956 edition of Armed Force Day at Ramstein (then Landstuhl) AB as USAFE's own team, The Skyblazers, joined a sports car race and a soccer game as the primary drawing cards for an open house that required only a small portion of the flightline for a display area. Since that time, the number of static displays and aerial performances have increased to the point that nearly half of the base undergoes a change to accommodate crowds of visitors that peaked at 700,000 in 1981 when celebration of the twentieth such event was included in the agenda of open house activities. Plans for the 1988 edition of open house at Ramstein AB actually went beyond earlier preparations for this event as growing public opposition to the air show prompted division planners to include some extra security and safety measures such as close coordination with German medical and fire officials that included arrangements for reserve response

UNCLASSIFIED

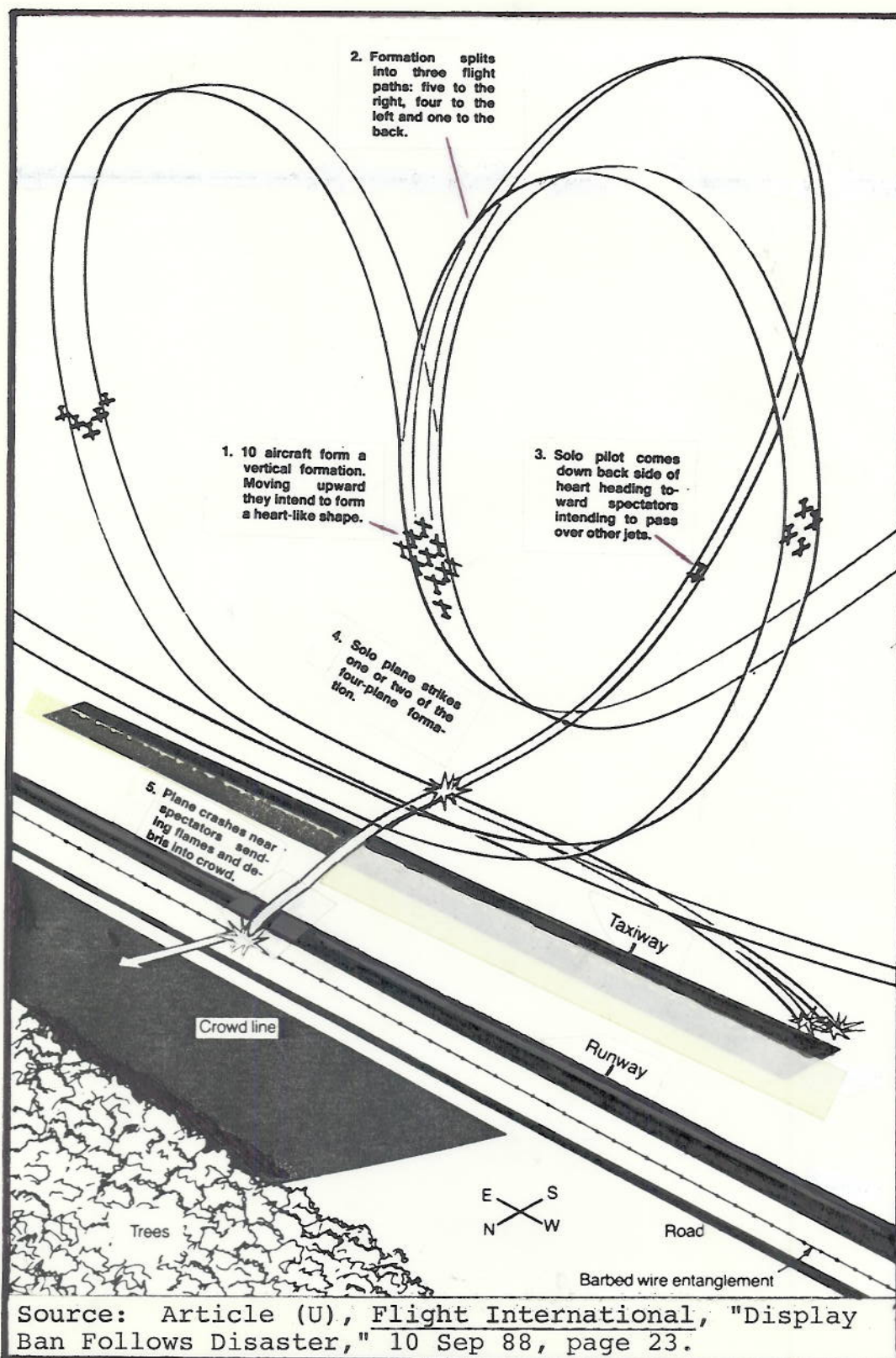
forces in six villages surrounding the base. These stand-by personnel served as the immediate backup for more than 1,280 police, 56 fire fighters, and 193 medical personnel that were dispersed to nine locations on and around the flightline area along with 12 fire/rescue vehicles, 15 ambulances, and five helicopters that went on alert before the crowds began to arrive. Overcast skies threatened open house activities on the morning of 28 August 1988 but soon gave way to a bright, warm sun that shined over a crowd of approximately 300,000 visitors who will clearly remember that day for the rest of their lives.⁸

(U) It was almost a picture-perfect day at Ramstein AB as the weather cooperated with well constructed plans and preparations that included a contained spectator area more than 1520 feet away from the center of the air show area and exceeded all US and NATO requirements for events that involved flying demonstrations in the program. Even the aerial demonstrations progressed on schedule right up to the take-off of Italy's Frece Tricolori, the last aerobatic team on the day's flying schedule. Practically everyone in the crowd watched with bated breath as this ten-member team completed its initial movements and began an intricate "Pierced Heart" maneuver where team elements would cross each other from three different directions with the team soloist looping in the middle and quickly climbing out in front of the crowd well within the designated air show area (see illustration on following page). A hushed silence prevailed over the entire area right through the moment that three of the Italian aircraft collided at 1546 in the afternoon and began the series of events that were later described as one of the greatest disasters in air show history, the worst of which followed impact of the solo aircraft immediately in front of the then densely-populated spectator area. Fire-fighting equipment and medical personnel were on the scene within seconds and the first helicopter was airborne only four minutes after

UNCLASSIFIED

CHART 4-1

THE TRAGIC PIERCED HEART



UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

the aircraft exploded. All three aircraft fires were under control in seven minutes and put out in 13 minutes while the Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel secured all six ejection seats from the Italian aircraft, but the greater damage was already done.⁹

(U) Unbelieving spectators stood in shock as security, medical, and fire-fighting personnel rushed to the aid of those injured by flying debris or a wave of jet fuel that passed over the crowd creating a total of 500 victims that were treated by various medical facilities within 24 hours of the accident. A total of 34 fatalities (31 spectators and the three Italian pilots) resulted from the initial impact and about 169 seriously injured cases were evacuated by 18 American, British, and German helicopters within 77 minutes after the crash, leaving those with less serious injuries to be moved by motor vehicles that also completed all initial response runs within 96 minutes after recovery operations began. Of the 500 patients identified at the crash site, over 300 were treated and released in a 24-hour period which left a total of about 200 victims that were either unidentified casualties or patients admitted to a string of some 50 medical facilities that stretched from West Germany to the United Kingdom. Criticism by German politicians and medical officials not involved in the rescue efforts came almost as quick as the hundreds of volunteers from the crowd who moved in to immediately help every wounded person in sight regardless of their condition, but neither side could do much to stop the death count that continued to rise on almost a daily basis. Some of these volunteers quickly moved to establish a casualty information center manned by military and civilian personnel alike for 24 hours a day until hundreds of daily injuries were answered and all the missing were accounted for about a week later. There was no doubt that these unsung heroes saved more than a few lives on what became a day of infamy for Ramstein AB when the number of fatalities reached

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

a total of 70 and included four Americans along with the 66 foreign nationals, but it will take a long time for wounds to heal where German-American relations and disputes over future flight operations are concerned. Nonetheless, General Boese was extremely proud of the humanity shown by community members during recovery from an event that will be clearly remembered for all the wrong reasons.¹⁰

Awards

(U) Going above and beyond the call of duty was nothing new for air division personnel as the 316 AD and its units received a number of accolades over the past three years as the result of superlative efforts by assigned personnel, and the latter half of 1988 was no exception. Great unit level accomplishments were typified by receipt of the Seventeenth Air Force Daedalian Award, previously mentioned in Chapter III, which seemingly set the stage for other kudos in the maintenance area as the 86 Aircraft Generation Squadron was also selected as winner of Maintenance Effectiveness Awards at both numbered air force and major command level. This recognition also lined up the aircraft generation squadron for competition at the Air Force level as did USAFE's choice of Ramstein's weekly newspaper, the Kaiserslautern American, as the best of its kind in the commercial enterprise category which followed the 316 AD's receipt of a USAFE Special Achievement Award for response to the Flugtag tragedy by the division's Public Affairs staff. Participation in the air show accident recovery effort and numerous other community support programs designed to improve the physical welfare of community members also brought command attention to other improvements made by the 316 AD Clinic which resulted in the clinic's selection as the best medical treatment facility in USAFE for 1988. As previously indicated, none of these unit honors would have been possible without the gallant efforts of people assigned to the respective organizations, some of whom received very impressive forms of individual recognition

UNCLASSIFIED