Military Plan Crashes on Training Flight, Killing 16

By Bob Sector

EVANSTON, Ill.

A huge military transport plane nose-dived into a parking lot just outside the regional airport here Thursday, tearing off a鲱el of burning aviation fuel that engulfed a motel and restaurant and killed at least 16 people.

"I heard a plane quieter and then the building started shaking and the lights flickered," said garage mechanic Eric Huffman, who was working across the street. "It felt like an earthquake had hit." The Lockheed C-130 turboprop was based in Louisville, Ky., and was on a training flight for the Kentucky National Guard. Witnesses said that it had been practicing a series of "touch-and-go" takeoffs and landings when it appeared to lose power shortly before 10 a.m. CST and plunged almost nose first into the ground. Debris from the crash slid into JoJo's restaurant and an adjacent four-story motel called the Drury Inn.

Authorities said that all five crew members appeared to have died in the crash. Two other victims were found in the restaurant kitchen and nine in the motel, mostly on the fourth floor, said a spokesman for the coroner. At least 14 others were admitted to local hospitals suffering from burns and smoke inhalation. It was the second worst aviation disaster in the history of this Southern Indiana community. In December 1977, a chartered DC-3 crashed on takeoff from the same airport, killing 29 people, including the entire University of Evansville Purple Aces basketball team.

The latest tragedy also brought back eerie reminders of another accident only four years ago when an Air Force trainer plane lost power and smashed into the side of another airport motel, killing 10 people inside. That crash also took place in Indiana, only 200 miles up the road in Indianapolis.

Military investigators dispatched from Scott Air Force Base in Belleville, Ill., were still poring over the debris Thursday night. "I've never seen anything like it, even close. The fireball was unreal. ... There was extremely black smoke and flame. There was a real brilliant core. I have no idea what caused that," Capt. Dan Gethner, a spokesman for the Indiana Air National Guard, said that the aircraft had completed two touch and goes, a procedure where the pilot settles the plane down on the runway but lifts off again without coming to a stop. The crash took place on the third such procedure.

The aircraft was assigned to the 123rd Tactical Air Lift Wing of the Kentucky National Guard based in Louisville, about 100 miles away.

Lt. Col. Ed Tomlin, chief of public affairs for the Kentucky Guard, said that the Evansville airport is frequently used for training flights because it is close to Louisville but has far less commercial traffic. All five crewmen on the aircraft were members of the Kentucky National Guard. The pilot, who flew commercial cargo flights in civilian life, was identified by guard officials as Maj. Richard A. Strang, 39, from Floyds Knobs, Ky. Authorities did not immediately release the identities of the civilians killed on the ground.

The four-cybercoper C-130, a model with a good safety record, has been a workhorse for the Air Force and Air National Guard for more than 35 years. Almost 100 feet in length, with a 120-foot wingspan, the C-130 can carry a payload of about 70 tons at a cruising speed of more than 350 mph.

Under normal conditions, the plane carries almost 7,000 gallons of fuel, this reservoir of fuel that fed the devastating blaze after the crash.

Yeltsin Presses for More Western Aid during Visit to France

By William Drudulak

WASHINGTQN, D.C.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin bluntly warned the international community Thursday that unless financial assistance is stepped up dramatically, a new dictatorship might arise to crush his country's fragile community Thursday that unless financial assistance is stepped up dramatically, a new dictatorship might arise to crush his country's fragile community Thursday. "Perhaps you can save a friendship treaty with a Western power," he said, "but if the French and Russian officials, France will "in turn abstain from increasing its nuclear armament. The French government has repeatedly declared that it will not match the drawdown in nuclear armaments because its nuclear forces are much smaller than that of the two larger powers.

During talks with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, Yeltsin vowed to go further in reducing Russia's nuclear arsenal than is called for under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed by U.S. and Soviet officials last year. "We are ready to cut the number of nuclear warheads nearly six times, from 12,000 to 2,500, which I consider a minimum number to deter terrorists and irresponsible leaders," he said.

Yeltsin acknowledged that it could take up to five months to stabilize Russian republics and alleged the selling of some supplies to the black market. Under one of several cooperation agreements signed Thursday by French and Russian officials, France will provide about $300 million in credit for future grain purchases. Prime Minister Edith Cresson also said France will extend a similar line of credit to permit Russia to buy French industrial goods.

At a meeting with French business leaders, Yeltsin chided the companies for failing to invest in his country. "Perhaps you can save a friendship treaty," he said, "but if the Cold War returns, you will end up paying a thousand times more."