

AMC releases KC-135 accident investigation results

12/20/2006 - **SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. (AFPN)** -- Air Mobility Command officials here Dec. 20 released the results of its investigation into the Sept. 26 KC-135 Stratotanker and TU-154 Kyrgyz passenger plane accident at Manas International Airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic.

The collision between the TU-154 and KC-135 was clearly an accident and not the result of any intentional conduct.

The accident investigation board, convened by AMC officials, determined that the accident was caused by the Kyrgyz aeronavigation air traffic controller who cleared a civilian airliner for takeoff without verifying the KC-135 was clear of the runway. In addition to the air traffic controller, the AIB found evidence of several contributing factors involving the KC-135 aircrew, conflicting published airport notices, and a tower liaison employed by the U.S. government to facilitate communication between the tower and U.S. aircrews.

Although the AIB found the air traffic controller primarily at fault, the KC-135 crew and tower liaison shared responsibility for ensuring the KC-135 cleared the runway to a safe location following landing. The accident might have been avoided had any of them exercised better awareness of their situation.

At approximately 8:03 p.m. local time Sept. 26, a KC-135 landed at Manas International Airport following a combat mission over Afghanistan. After landing, the KC-135 was parked at the intersection of the active runway and a taxiway while the crew awaited clarification on instructions from the air traffic control tower.

The KC-135 was struck by a host nation TU-154 that was taking off. The TU-154's right wing struck the fairing of the KC-135's No. 1 engine. The force of the impact nearly severed the No. 1 engine from KC-135 and destroyed a portion of the aircraft's left wing. The TU-154 lost approximately six feet of its right wingtip, but was able to get airborne and return to the airport for an emergency landing with no additional damage to the aircraft.

The three aircrew members on board the KC-135, as well as the nine aircrew members and 52 passengers aboard the TU-154, survived the accident. None of the aircrew or passengers onboard the TU-154 sustained any injuries. One KC-135 crewmember sustained minor abrasions while evacuating the aircraft.

The primary purpose of the AIB was to provide a publicly releasable report of the facts and circumstances surrounding the accident. Although the AIB determined the principal cause of the mishap was the Kyrgyz aeronavigation controller clearing the TU-154 for takeoff without verifying that KC-135 was clear of the runway, there was evidence the following factors also contributed to the mishap:

-- The Kyrgyz air traffic controller's instruction to vacate at taxiway Golf after dark conflicted with a published Notice to Airmen that limited that taxiway's use to daylight hours. The contractor safety liaison, or LNO, employed by the U.S. Air Force to facilitate communication between its aircrews and Kyrgyz controllers did not clarify the apparent discrepancy.

-- After questioning the Kyrgyz controller's instruction to vacate the runway at taxiway Golf, the LNO instructed



This general diagram of the Manas International Airport (Kyrgyz Republic Airfield) shows the approximate location of the control tower in relation to Taxiway Golf, as well as the approximate location of the KC-135 (inset diagram) when it was struck by a commercial aircraft Sept. 26, 2006. This diagram is based on an investigation completed by an Air Mobility Command Accident Investigation Board.

the KC-135 crew to hold short of Alpha. The mishap KC-135 crew misperceived the LNO's instructions and responded "holding short of Golf." The LNO failed to catch the read-back error.

-- The Kyrgyz controller failed to maintain awareness of the KC-135's location.

-- The LNO failed to maintain situational awareness and intervene when the controller's actions endangered the KC-135 and aircrew.

The KC-135 is assigned to the 92nd Air Refueling Wing at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash. While deployed at Manas AB, the KC-135 and its aircrew were assigned to U.S. Central Command's 376th Air Expeditionary Wing, flying missions supporting coalition aircraft over Afghanistan.

(Courtesy of Air Mobility Command Public Affairs)

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