

Three missing as B-1 crashes

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LA JUNTA, Colo. (AP) — A B-1B bomber with six people aboard crashed Monday in a ball of orange flame in the Colorado prairie after birds were sucked into the engines, but three crew members parachuted to safety, authorities said.

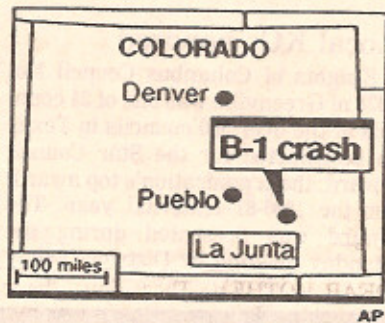
Hours after the crash, the Air Force said only that the other three crew members were missing. It was the first crash of a regular production model of the B-1B, the nation's newest long-range strategic bomber.

The survivors were reported in good condition with minor injuries at the U.S. Air Force Academy hospital in Colorado Springs.

The Air Force identified the surviving crew members as Capt. Joseph S. Butler, 33, of Rocky Mount, N.C., a student defensive systems officer; Capt. Lawrence H. Haskell, 33, of Harrisburg, Pa., a student aircraft commander; and Maj. William H. Price, 42, of Yuma, Ariz., an instructor offensive systems officer.

The service identified the missing men as Maj. James T. Acklin, 37, of Champaign, Ill., an instructor pilot; 1st Lt. Ricky M. Bean, 27, of Farmington, Maine, a student pilot, and Maj. Wayne D. Whitlock, 39, of Johnson City, Tenn., an instructor defensive systems officer.

The bomber, attached to the 96th Bombardment Wing, left Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas, early Monday for the Strategic Training Range Complex near La Junta, 60 miles southeast of Pueblo, the Strategic Air Command said.



The plane went down two miles south of La Junta at 9:34 a.m., said Capt. Dave Thurston of SAC command headquarters in Omaha, Neb.

Bob Buckhorn, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington, said the pilot radioed air-traffic controllers that he had run into birds during a low-level practice bombing run.

The pilot immediately began climbing and managed to reach an altitude of roughly 15,500 feet, Buckhorn said, but then reported that the two engines on the right side had caught fire because of "bird ingestion."

It was apparently at that point that the crew attempted to eject from the aircraft, he added.

"We're going down," the pilot radioed, according to Laurie King, spokeswoman at Dyess.

Sgt. Warren Wright, spokesman for Petersen Air Force Base near Colorado Springs, said the B-1B is designed to carry four crew members, but because it was a training mission two people on board probably were evaluators.