



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

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AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVOLVING ROYAL AIR FORCE HUNTER F MK6A XG197

Date: 6 July 1979
Parent Airfield: Royal Air Force Brawdy, Haverfordwest, Dyfed
Place of Accident: Tintagel, Cornwall
Crew: One (Pilot)
Casualties: One seriously injured (Pilot)
Two slightly injured (Civilian)

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. The pilot of the single-seat Hunter, an experienced flying instructor, was leading a formation of 3 aircraft on a navigation exercise. This included flight at low level and simulated attacks against ground targets, with fighter interception training being provided by Hawk aircraft. After attacking the second and last target, the Hunter pilot set course to base. When he was about 8 miles out to sea, he saw a Hawk aircraft and increased speed to intercept it. As he closed he reduced his speed, only to find when he re-opened the throttle that the engine would not respond. Using his speed to gain height and, for the same purpose, jettisoning his external fuel tank into the sea, the pilot climbed to about 3500 feet and turned towards the nearest suitable airfield, RAF St Mawgan.

2. Further attempts to achieve engine response failed and the aircraft could neither maintain height nor reach an airfield. A crash was now inevitable, and probably within less than a minute. At a height of about 1000 feet and some 8 miles off the coast, the pilot turned the aircraft even further away from land, trimmed the wings level and ejected. He was subsequently rescued by a fishing boat and was later discovered to have suffered serious injury.

3. The trim of the aircraft was apparently upset by the ejection and it started a gentle turn. Soon after, it was seen to cross the coast near Tintagel, between The Island and Barras Nose, in a descending left turn. It then hit a stone wall at a height of 300 feet above sea level. The impact tore off the airbrake and the outer section of the left wing. The aircraft continued across a hay field for about 110 metres, leaving a trail of minor wreckage before demolishing a garden wall, a swimming pool and another wall. After hitting another, more substantial, wall the remains of the wings and the fuselage aft of the cockpit came to rest in a narrow lane between 2 houses in the village of Tintagel : leaking fuel formed a pool in one of the gardens. The nose section, including the cockpit and the gun-pack, continued through the gap between the houses before coming to rest in the main street of the village. The gun-pack had been loaded with 480 rounds of 30 mm practice ammunition (ie solid shot ammunition containing a propellant but no explosive), but the guns were not loaded and were electrically disconnected. Ammunition was strewn around and some minor pieces of wreckage reached a car park adjacent to a petrol station. Resulting from the crash, 2 local residents were treated in hospital for slight injuries, but were not detained; several others were treated for shock.

CAUSE

4. The engine was a reconditioned unit that had flown for only 3 hours 40 minutes up to the time of the accident. The fuel control unit was recovered from the wreckage and, under test, performed consistently with the pilot's description of events in the air. Examination of the fuel control unit after disassembly established that the air metering orifice in the acceleration control section had been blocked. The restriction, caused by a hardened grease deposit, was sufficient to prevent the engine from producing sufficient power to sustain flight. There was nothing the pilot could do to rectify the fault in the air. No grease of the type found is specified for use in the Avon engine. Since no rectification work was carried out by the RAF on this part of the engine prior to installation in Hunter XG 197, investigations indicate that this grease must have been introduced prior to delivery of the engine to the RAF and indeed some was found on surfaces of a joint that was last closed while the engine was in the possession of the contractor who carried out the overhaul. A claim has been lodged against the contractor concerned.

5. The precise manner in which the ejection forces altered the aircraft's course cannot be computed and could certainly not have been predicted by the pilot who did everything he could to avoid any risk to the public before he finally ejected. Indeed since the Hunter is not equipped with a rocket seat allowing safe ejection at any height or speed, the pilot took a risk in remaining in the aircraft as long as he did. For an abandoned aircraft to change course in this way, while not

completely unprecedented, is most unusual and there was no reason to expect it would happen in this case. It was, of course, pure chance that the aircraft landed on Tintagel rather than in the sea or nearby country-side and good fortune that no-one on the ground was killed or seriously injured.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

6. The aircraft was totally destroyed. All Avon Mk 207 engines have been checked for grease contamination : none was found.

CLAIMS

7. Twenty two claims were received from members of the public for property damage and 6 for personal injury (mainly shock). Some £50,000 has so far been paid in settlement. Negotiations on outstanding claims continue.

Note to Editors: This summary is published in connection with a parliamentary question from Mr Gerry Neale (Cornwall North) which has been answered at 1200 hours today by Mr Geoffrey Pattie, Under Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force. A copy is attached.