



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

MAAS 5/81
20 May 1981

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVOLVING ROYAL AIR FORCE PHANTOM XV418

Date: 11 July 1980
Parent Airfield: RAF Wildenrath, Federal Republic of Germany
Place of Accident: Near Lohne, Federal Republic of Germany
Crew: One Pilot, one navigator
Casualties: Two crew killed

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. RAF Wildenrath was tasked to take part in the production of a documentary film that was intended to portray the station's war role. The film was planned to include some air-to-air shots of the station's Phantom aircraft. To enable these to be taken a rearward facing camera had been fitted into the space normally occupied by the braking parachute in the tail cone of one of the Phantoms.
2. On 11 July 1980, XV418 was one of 6 Phantoms participating in the film sequences. Various formation manoeuvres were performed after which it had been planned for one of the aircraft to position an appropriate distance behind the camera-equipped lead aircraft, and then to execute a 270° roll followed immediately by a sharp, level turn. This task fell to the pilot of XV418 and, following a short delay to allow the aircraft to reach a clear area beyond the town of Lohne, filming started. The other 4 aircraft had returned to base. After a short while the leader lost radio communication with XV418 and when he re-traced his tracks he discovered that it had crashed in open farmland. Both crew members lost their lives in the impact.

CAUSE

3. Analysis of the film showed that XV418 was some 200 yards behind and 20° below the lead aircraft when the manoeuvre was started. Initially the aircraft rotated about its longitudinal axis but the nose began to drop and as the aircraft passed through the inverted (180°) position the nose was about 10° low. Without any significant change in the rate of roll it dropped to almost 45° down some time before reaching 240° of roll. The pilot appeared to try to recover from this semi-inverted position, but there was insufficient height available.

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No positive reason could be determined for the loss of control of the aircraft. No evidence of structural failure or technical defect in the aircraft or any of its systems was found. The possibility of an undemanded control movement at a critical stage in the manoeuvre, or of distraction by a loose article (such as a map), or of a pilot disorientation or handling problem could not entirely be ruled out.

FOLLOW UP

5. As a precautionary measure following this incident, the procedures for the planning and authorisation of non-standard sorties have been reviewed, and some additional measures introduced.

CLAIMS

6. Eight claims for property damage have been received. The best estimate at present of the total bill is DM 17,000 (approximately £3,500), mainly for damage to crops, fields and soil pollution.

Issued by - Public Relations (RAF)
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HB
01-218 3253/4 (RAF)