



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

MAAS 5/82

19 February 1982

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVOLVING ROYAL AIR FORCE JET PROVOST T3A XN590

Date: 31 July 1980
Parent Airfield: Royal Air Force Church Fenton, Tadcaster, N Yorks
Accident Site: Close to Royal Air Force Elvington, 5 miles SE York
Crew: One
Casualties: On Major

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. On 31 July 1980, Jet Provost XN590 was flown solo by a qualified flying instructor on a staff continuation training sortie. Towards the end of the sortie he went to another airfield near to his base to practise circuits and landings. At about 400 to 500 feet and 140 knots, whilst climbing away from a roller landing, the pilot noticed a large flock of birds directly in front of the aircraft. The birds were too numerous to avoid; the pilot felt and heard several thumps and almost immediately lost engine power. Realising that he had insufficient height and speed to land back on the airfield, the pilot pointed the aircraft towards open ground and ejected at less than 250 feet. The aircraft landed in wooded country and was destroyed. The pilot ejected safely, but suffered back injuries and bruising.

CAUSE

2. The evidence of the pilot and eye-witnesses quickly established that the engine flamed-out after ingestion of at least 2 racing pigeons following an unavoidable multiple bird strike. Investigation revealed that the birds had blanked off an estimated 30-40 per cent of the total front area of the engine compressor, and engine failure at such a low height and speed left the pilot with no reasonable alternatives to a low-level ejection.

/...

3. It transpired that some 500 racing pigeons had been released 10 miles to the south of the airfield with an intended destination that was likely to lead them to overfly the airfield at about the time of the accident. However, the code of practice for pigeon fanciers that existed at the time did not require the release to be notified to that airfield and so neither the pilot nor the controllers at the airfield were aware of the potential danger.

SUBSEQUENT ACTION

4. The Royal Air Force and the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (RPRA) co-operate closely at national level to reduce risks to aircraft and airfield operations arising from pigeon racing; both give wide publicity to the problem. Following this accident it was agreed that the RPRA should issue more detailed guidance to local clubs, including wider notification arrangements and firmer controls on the release of racing pigeons in the vicinity of RAF and other airfields.

CLAIMS

5. A sum of £1,000 has been paid to the Forestry Commission for damage to woodland, whilst a claim concerning damage to a private driveway (caused by vehicles on their way to the scene of the accident) is under negotiation.

Issued by - Public Relations
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HB
01-2183253/4 (Royal Air Force)