



# MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

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MAAS16/81  
16 December 1981

### AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE PHANTOM FGR2 XV413

Date: 12 November 1980  
Parent Airfield: Royal Air Force Coningsby, Lincolnshire  
Place of Accident: North Sea - approx 50 miles NE of Cromer  
Crew: One pilot, one navigator  
Casualties: Two - missing believed killed

#### CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Phantom XV413 was one of three aircraft involved in routine night air defence training. The crew were experienced both on type and in role. The mission was to consist of interceptions with each aircraft in turn making practice attacks against the other two. The weather in the operating area was good with no significant cloud; it was however, a dark night with only an ill defined horizon visible to the west and it was not possible to see the surface of the sea from the air.
2. After carrying out a successful interception, the crew of XV413 flew 2 miles behind the last aircraft intercepted. While positioning for a run in as targets, they were briefed by the lead pilot on the profile to be flown. This was to be the first aircraft at 3500 ft amsl and 420 kts with XV413 at the same speed but 2000 ft below and 2 miles behind. The pair descended to 7000 ft, with XV413 flying some 2 miles behind the lead, and turned about on to a south westerly heading to begin the run as targets. They then made a gradual descent, the lead Phantom levelling at 3500 ft. During the ensuing interception the crews of the lead target and the inbound fighter noted a bright flash which, at the time, they attributed to a light reflection on a patch of cloud or a flare from a gas rig. It was only after the initial interception of the lead target that the aircrew became alarmed by the loss of radar and radio contact with XV413 and associated this with the previously observed flash.

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3. Crewmen aboard an oil rig support vessel saw the lights of the two target aircraft cross their bows some 6 mls ahead of them. The rear aircraft was the lower and they saw it gradually descending until it flew into the sea and exploded.

CAUSE

4. A comprehensive air and sea search failed to find any trace of the crew of XV413. Despite the prompt arrival of the oil rig support vessel and other ships at the scene of the crash and subsequent extensive salvage operations, less than 1% of the aircraft structure was recovered. The lack of material evidence hampered the inquiry to the extent that it has proved impossible to determine the cause of the accident. However, investigations into various possible causes revealed that, in certain circumstances, a partial electrical system failure in the Phantom aircraft could result in erroneous flight instrument indications of height. It is possible that such a failure might have arisen but there is no evidence to suggest that it actually did nor, consequently, that such a failure played any part in causing the accident.

SUBSEQUENT ACTION

5. As a precaution, consideration is being given to introducing a modification to provide a low altitude audio alarm and warning of such a partial electrical failure in the Phantom.

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