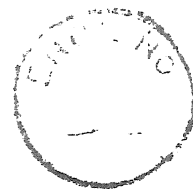




MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries



MAAS 16/83

19 May 1983

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE HARRIER GR3 XZ973

Date:	12 February 1982
Parent Airfield:	RAF Wittering, Peterborough
Place of Accident:	8nm South of Corwen, Wales
Crew:	One
Casualties:	One killed

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. On 12 February 1982 a student on the Harrier Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) was programmed to fly a solo navigation sortie in XZ973. The route was to take him past Stoke-on-Trent, Ruthin, Welshpool, Ludlow, Stafford and back to Wittering. The weather over the majority of the route was forecast to be good, but poorer weather was approaching from the west and it was expected that there would be cloud over the Welsh hills. In view of this the pilot was briefed to avoid areas of poor weather, if possible, by deviating around them and, if necessary, by turning back. The aircraft took off at 1139 and departed en-route. Overdue action was taken at 1245 when it failed to return from the sortie. At 1107 the following day search parties discovered the wreckage of the aircraft and the pilot's dead body in the Berwyn Mountains.

CAUSE

2. The Board were hampered in their investigation by lack of evidence. There were no eyewitnesses of the crash, (the aircraft was not fitted with an Accident Data Recorder), no transmissions were received from the pilot and only limited information could be obtained from the fragmented wreckage. However, it was established that the aircraft had followed the pre-planned route until near Ruthin. Subsequently, the aircraft entered the Dee Valley, probably to avoid cloud on the hills; shortly thereafter the pilot is believed to have climbed. At some point during the climb the pilot lost control of the aircraft in cloud and it crashed without his making any attempt to eject.

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3. Due to the lack of positive evidence the Board found it impossible to rule out or choose between several possible causes which could have led to the loss of control. A systems failure (particularly of the flight instruments), pilot incapacitation, the effects of severe turbulence, and distraction leading to disorientation were all possible contributory causes; however, the reason why the pilot lost control remains unknown.

CLAIMS

4. Three claims were lodged as a result of this accident, all in respect of damage to land caused by the wreckage recovery operations. The total amount paid was £400.

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