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MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

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## MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT SUMMARY ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE JAGUAR GR1 XX963

Date: 25 May 1982  
Parent Airfield: RAF Bruggen Germany  
Place of Accident: 35 nm NE of RAF Bruggen  
Crew: 1 Pilot  
Casualties: Nil

### CIRCUMSTANCES

1. During a station exercise at RAF Wildenrath, Phantom aircraft were loaded with live weapons under simulated war conditions. This is a normal policy for exercising quick reaction air defence forces in NATO. For the purpose of the exercise other RAF Germany aircraft were treated as hostile forces. The aircrew briefing for those participating in the exercise covered prescribed safety precautions for the carriage of live weapons, which are intended to prevent the weapons being launched inadvertently.
2. A Phantom participating in the exercise took off from RAF Wildenrath to mount a combat air patrol under the control of a Sector Operations Centre (SOC). Shortly after take off the crew ran through the pre-attack checks, which armed the air-to-air weapons. At this time the navigator, who was engaged in other tasks, did not monitor the pilot's actions and was thus not aware that the pilot had rendered live one of the two main safety switches.
3. Later in the sortie the Phantom's radar detected a contact which the pilot later identified as a pair of Jaguars. In accordance with the exercise scenario, the Phantom crew decided to engage. The crew then followed the normal procedures for a simulated attack and completed a typical engagement which culminated in the pilot pulling the weapon release trigger. When inert training weapons are carried this action simply produces a witness mark on the film record; however, in this case a Sidewinder missile was launched which struck one of the Jaguar aircraft.

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4. Jaguar XX963, based at RAF Bruggen, was being flown as the number two of a pair of aircraft on a routine training sortie. The pilot detected an aircraft, which he thought to be a Phantom, approaching the formation head-on and reported this to his leader. The indication disappeared and then re-appeared from the rear. Shortly afterwards there was a loud explosion and the aircraft became uncontrollable. The leader saw the explosion and fire and called the pilot of XX963 to eject. The pilot did so. He landed in a field, sustaining only minor injuries, and was subsequently rescued by helicopter. The Jaguar crashed in open farmland and was destroyed.

#### CAUSE

5. The cause of the accident was the inadvertent firing of the missile by the Phantom crew who, when airborne, followed the procedures applicable to an unarmed aircraft despite carrying live weapons. It was not established positively why the experienced and well qualified pilot forgot the real situation. It is relevant, however, that the master armament switch in the pilots cockpit had not been taped in the safe position, which it should have been. In addition, it was found that a circuit breaker in the rear cockpit, which was normally used to isolate the firing system, was unreliable in that it was possible to depress the circuit breaker stalk just sufficiently to make electrical contact and render the circuit live, but without pushing the circuit breaker fully home.

6. A further prescribed safety procedure not under the direct control of the crew also failed. The SOC are required to broadcast a "check switches safe" call during any interception by an armed aircraft. In this case, however, there was a breakdown in communications caused by a simulated exercise emergency at RAF Wildenrath and the SOC, having not been told that the Phantom was armed, did not transmit the warning call.

7. The accident has been attributed to a combination of failures which together caused the prescribed safety procedures to be disregarded or rendered ineffective. However, it was determined that the ultimate responsibility for the loss of Jaguar XX963 lay with the Phantom crew.

#### SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

8. The Phantom pilot and navigator have been tried by Court Martial and found guilty of offences of negligence. An immediate revision of regulations governing flights by armed aircraft in peacetime was set in hand and new orders have since been issued. A modification is also in hand to provide a safety pin for the trigger rather than relying on the circuit breaker in the rear cockpit as an electrical isolate switch.

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