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ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE PHANTOM FGR 2 XV484

Date: 17 October 1983
Parent Airfield: RAF Stanley, East Falkland
Place of accident: 9 miles NE of Goose Green
Crew: Two
Casualties: Two, Pilot and Navigator killed

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. XV484 was acting as a simulated target for a pair of Phantoms which were mounting a Combat Air Patrol (CAP) during a routine training sortie. The pair had taken off first in order to fly a short navigation exercise prior to the CAP at medium altitude. The weather was generally good, with excellent visibility below broken medium level cloud over the planned exercise area, which was the flat low-lying southern part of East Falkland. To the north of the area, however, high ground was covered by more extensive cloud, with cloud bases down to a height of 1500 ft above mean sea level.
2. A successful simulated engagement between the three aircraft took place towards the eastern end of the exercise area, and at its conclusion XV484 was seen to depart on a westerly heading, below the cloud, and at a height of about 1000 ft, in order to position for a further run through the exercise area as target. The pair of Phantoms resumed their CAP and shortly afterwards one of their radars detected a contact; however, this faded from

the radar display within a few seconds. Subsequently, some black smoke was seen above the cloud to the north-west of the pair. At the time this was attributed to a peat fire, but after several minutes had elapsed and no radar or radio contact with XV484 had been established, the appearance of the smoke assumed a greater significance. Search and Rescue operations were mounted and the wreckage of XV484 was found. The aircraft had hit the cloud covered slope of Mount Usborne 2 some 500 ft below the summit of the ridge which rises to 2300 ft. The aircraft had disintegrated on impact and the crew, neither of whom had initiated ejection, had been killed.

CAUSE

3. A painstaking investigation found no evidence of any pre-impact technical failure; it was also possible to rule out all likely external hazards which could have contributed to the accident. Ostensibly, XV484 had been operating normally and was in controlled flight when the aircraft hit the ground. It was therefore concluded that the crew may have been making a deliberate descent through cloud unaware of their actual position relative to the high ground. Some corroboration of this theory was subsequently obtained from specialist evidence which revealed that at impact, the aircraft's inertially derived present position display was indicating a position some $8\frac{1}{2}$ mm south west of the crash site. This indication would have suggested to the crew that they were over the low ground in the vicinity of Goose Green. Nevertheless, in accordance with standard operating procedures, the crew should not have relied solely and implicitly on the aircraft's inertial navigation system to fix their position before descending through cloud. Consequently, the erroneous present position indication could not be regarded in isolation as being a major contributory cause of this tragic accident. Indeed, because of the limited and largely circumstantial evidence available, the precise cause will never be known.