



# MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

12/86

3 November 1986

### AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE HARRIER GR3 XV742

Date: 28 October 1983

Parent Airfield: RAF Wittering, Peterborough

Place of Accident: Holbeach Air Weapons Range

Crew: 1

Casualties: 1 killed

#### CIRCUMSTANCES

1. On the morning of 28 October 1983, a student on the Harrier Operational Conversion Unit was engaged in a weapon delivery sortie on Holbeach range. The sortie comprised shallow angle dive bombing and 10 degree dive angle strafing, firing 30mm practice ammunition. The bombing portion of the sortie was uneventful, and having dropped 8 bombs the student changed to the strafing exercise. He completed 1 non-firing attack, followed by 2 further attacks during which he fired; these were completed well within the specified safety parameters. After the second firing pass, the aircraft was seen to make a positive recovery from the dive before it made a climbing turn to the right. The Range Safety Officer passed the pilot his score, which the pilot acknowledged with a "blip" on his transmit button. The aircraft continued on its climbing flight path to a position approximately half-way round the turn where it was seen to overbank, as expected, in order to regain the "downwind" leg of the pattern. However, instead of levelling out, the aircraft descended in a steep dive and crashed into the sea within the range danger area. The pilot made

a very late attempt to eject, but the ejection sequence was interrupted by the impact and he was killed.

#### CAUSE

2. Despite an extensive investigation, no positive cause for the accident could be established. However, there were indications that the pilot might not have been in control of his aircraft for the 10 to 15 seconds preceding the crash. Whilst he might have suffered a sudden and incapacitating medical condition, it was thought more likely that the aircraft might have been struck by a ricochet, which could have penetrated the cockpit and struck the pilot, causing a debilitating injury. In this event, it was possible that the pilot would have concentrated his efforts on ejection, and that he may have initiated ejection without appreciating the aircraft's proximity to the ground. Although this was the most likely cause it was but one of several possible explanations for the accident, none of which could be substantiated.

#### SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

3. All units which have a strafe commitment will be provided with a copy of a film on ricochets which will re-emphasise the vital importance of ceasing fire at the correct range from the target and of then establishing the aircraft in a steep climb away from the target before any turns are initiated.

Issued by: Public Relations (Royal Air Force)  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2HB  
01-218 3253/3254