



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

MAAS 13/85

21 May 1985

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE

BUCCANEER S2B XZ430

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| Date: | 20 May 1984 |
| Parent Airfield: | RAF Lossiemouth, Scotland |
| Place of Accident: | 58° 07'N 000° 54'W |
| Crew: | Two |
| Casualties: | Two Killed |

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. At the time of the accident, the aircraft was in the lead of a 5-aircraft formation on a maritime training sortie over the northern North Sea. Having received directions towards a simulated target, the lead crew specified that the practice attack would be of a "standard method" which includes a sustained pitch-up from low level and results in simulated weapon release with the aircraft in a moderate climbing attitude. At the appropriate position, the lead aircraft was seen to commence a moderate climb before entering cloud prior to the apex of the manoeuvre. The other aircraft in the formation completed their attacks and subsequently regrouped at the pre-determined position, but the lead aircraft was not seen or heard from again. Overdue action was taken and search aircraft were dispatched to the last known position of XZ430. Debris was sighted floating on the surface at position 58° 07'N 000°54'W, evidence from the subsequent recovery of which was sufficient to confirm that XZ430 had crashed and that both crew members had been killed.

CAUSE

2. Following a thorough and protracted search which lasted approximately 5 weeks, the wreckage of XZ430 was located near to the datum position in a water depth of 470ft. Unfortunately, the extensive disintegration of the wreckage and the depth at which it lay precluded practical recovery; search and salvage operations therefore ceased on 5 July 1984.

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3. The investigation deduced from the position of the wreckage that control of the aircraft had been lost at some point during the attack after the aircraft had entered cloud. What might have caused this loss of control remained speculation, but there were no indications to suggest that the aircraft was other than fully serviceable as it began the attack. The fact that the crew had not attempted to eject any appreciable altitude militated against a major technical failure being the cause of the accident, although it was conceivable that an instrument malfunction at a critical point in the attack might have induced pilot disorientation and led to a loss of control; however, the aircraft had no history of instrument failures. In the absence of any specific evidence as to the cause, the investigation concluded that the most likely explanation for the accident was pilot disorientation leading to loss of control, with possible instrument failure as a contributory factor.

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