



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summary

Aircraft:	Chinook HC1 ZA715
Date of accident:	13 May 1986
Parent Airfield:	RAF Mount Pleasant
Place of accident:	West Falkland
Crew:	2 pilots, 2 crewmen - 12 soldiers
Casualties:	3 fatal, 3 major, 5 minor and 4 slight injuries

Circumstances

1. Shortly after 0815 hours on 13 May 1986 the crew of RAF Chinook ZA715 were tasked to return some troops that had been on exercise to their base located at the southern end of West Falkland. A direct route was chosen which involved the aircraft overflying a section of high ground just short of their destination. The weather was bad and included snow showers, strong winds and low cloud. At about 0840 hours radar contact with the Chinook was lost and repeated radio calls to the aircraft were unanswered. Overdue action was taken and an airborne Hercules was diverted to search. An intermittent signal from a Personal Locator Beacon was detected and it became apparent that the aircraft had crashed into gently sloping ground about 40 feet below the crest of a saddle feature, some 4 miles short of its destination.
2. A Chinook flew to the crash site and the crew found the majority of the aircraft's cabin structure intact, but that the forward parts of the cabin and cockpit were badly crushed.
3. All the personnel in the aircraft were knocked unconscious by the crash. One soldier subsequently regained consciousness and was able to free some of his colleagues and administer first aid to the aircraft's captain who had been badly injured in the crash.
4. An intensive evacuation operation was mounted involving 6 British military helicopters together with medical and engineering staffs. The conditions were increasingly severe with movement hampered by blizzards and winds of up to 70kts.
5. Three personnel died as a result of the accident, a crewman shortly after the crash and the co-pilot and a soldier during transit to hospital.

Cause

6. No evidence was found of any technical defect which could have led to the accident. It was concluded that the most likely cause was that the air crew had become victims of a phenomenon known as "white-out" whereby a combination of cloud, precipitation and a snow-covered land surface merge and cause spatial disorientation. In severe conditions, such were experienced, it is also not uncommon to encounter false horizons and it is possible that the aircrew mistook the crest of the saddle for a layer of cloud. The situation was probably compounded by strong gusts of downdraughting air on the Chinook.

Subsequent Actions

7. Considerable publicity has been given to the problems of disorientation and visual illusions since they can affect operations in all aircraft. Specific operating procedures for flying in snow conditions have been adopted by Chinook crews.