



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summary

Aircraft:	Wessex HCMK5C XS518
Date of accident:	5 November 1986
Parent Airfield:	RAF Akrotiri
Place of accident:	3 miles east of Akrotiri
Crew:	1 Pilot, 1 Crewman, 2 Medical Staff
Casualties:	3 Fatal

Circumstances

1. In response to a request to airlift a pregnant woman to hospital, the night standby crew of Wessex XS516 - a pilot and a crewman - were called out at about 0212 hours on 5 November 1986. Augmented by a service midwife and a flight nursing attendant, the crew took off at about 0237 hours intending to fly direct to the pick-up point over a sea bay at 500 feet above the surface.

2. Shortly after take-off, the pilot was distracted by the difficulty encountered in shutting the cabin door of the aircraft. In order to give him time to consider this problem, he elected to continue his climb to 1000 feet. During the climb, he reset the height scale on the radio altimeter but did not reset the system that would have warned him that he was flying low. In an attempt to facilitate the closure of the door by easing the aerodynamic forces on it, the pilot then reduced speed. The door still could not be closed. However, after consulting the crewman and midwife, the pilot elected to continue the flight.

3. He started to increase speed and reduce height back to his planned transit parameters, and called a radar station for a regional barometric pressure to set his barometric altimeter. In adjusting the setting of this altimeter, he suddenly realised that

it read only 50 feet. He attempted to climb the aircraft, but almost immediately it struck the surface of the sea, filled rapidly with water, probably rolled quickly to the right, inverted and sank in 60 fathoms of water. The flight lasted approximately 4 minutes. Of the four personnel aboard, only the pilot survived. Despite a comprehensive air and sea search there was no sign of any of the cabin occupants. The aircraft wreckage and casualties were not recovered.

Cause

4. The pilot was able to give a lucid account of the events leading up to the accident. He deemed the aircraft to be serviceable, the only problem being the jammed cabin door. Although the weather was excellent for the flight, there was no moon and, in choosing to fly over the sea, the only visual references were limited coastal lights. The pilot should have flown by sole reference to flying instruments but chose to use a mixture of visual references and instruments. By doing so he became spatially disorientated which, together with the distraction caused by the problem with the cabin door, made him unaware of his height above the water; by the time he became aware of this, the aircraft was too low for him to prevent it striking the water.

Subsequent Actions

5. In order to make it easier for aircrew to check their instruments, modifications have been made to improve the flight instrument layout of the Wessex MK5C. In addition, an operating instruction has been introduced for the management of the radio altimeter. Furthermore, consideration is being given to increasing the aircrew complement for night medical evacuation sorties.

6. Appropriate action has been taken in respect of the pilot.

Claims

7. No claims have been received.