



# MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

8/88

August 1, 1988

### AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE PHANTOM F4J ZE358

Date: August 26, 1987  
Parent Airfield: RAF Wattisham  
Place of accident: Pont-y-Gwair, 10 miles SE Aberystwyth  
Crew: Two  
Casualties: Two fatal

#### CIRCUMSTANCES

1. A formation of 3 Phantoms were undertaking a training sortie in mid-Wales to practice low level intercepts using silent procedures, where possible. The general weather conditions in the area, although not good, were considered suitable for such an exercise. The formation leader and his No 2 set up a patrol to the east of Aberystwyth, aiming to be as high as possible so as to be in clear weather. The third aircraft went to an agreed point in the south to act as a target. Prior to commencing the exercise the leader climbed to check the cloud base and reported small amounts of cloud in a thin layer between 1500-2500 ft above ground level.

2. As the intercepting pair approached the target point, the leader saw his No 2 flying to his right, below him and at a range of 3 to 4 nm. The leader initiated an about turn to the left and half way round looked for the No 2, but could not see him. The leader continued the turn and made a radio call to No 2 asking if he was in visual contact. Despite several attempts no answer was received, so the leader called the emergency services. It was confirmed that a military jet crash had been reported in the area: No 2 had crashed on a ridge some 12 nm south east of

Aberystwyth, observed by several witnesses on the ground. A Search and Rescue Sea King arrived on the scene with a doctor, who confirmed that both crew members were dead.

3. It was ascertained that the No 2 had hit the ground with little or no rate of descent at a speed judged to have been 388 kts. It seemed that just before impact the pilot had made a violent attempt to roll the aircraft to the right and to pull up. However, this failed to achieve any appreciable alteration to the flight path. The high yaw angle at impact indicated a departure from controlled flight brought about by the abrupt roll demand. There was no evidence to suggest any pre-impact failure of the aircraft, and neither crew member had attempted to eject.

#### CAUSE

4. The cause could not be positively determined, but the most probable was a misjudgement by the crew of their ground clearance. The seemingly insignificant layer of cloud would have made No 2's task of maintaining visual contact with the leader more difficult and this may have been exacerbated by the poor formation integrity before the turn started. Furthermore, a lack of visual cues on the featureless ridgeline could have led the No 2 pilot to misjudge distance. The slight hump of the impact point, being of the same featureless terrain, could have remained indistinct and have merged with the background until just before impact.

#### SUBSEQUENT ACTION

5. A review of the procedures for overland low level intercept training has been carried out and the hazards of visual illusion in low level flight have been re-emphasised.

CLAIMS

6. Five claims totalling approximately £8000 have yet to be settled in respect of damage to land, fencing and trees and compensation for temporary loss of grazing land and loss of income from a field used for camping.

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