

MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE

TORNADO ZD718

Date: 13 January 1991
Parent Airfield: RAF Bruggen
Place of Accident: Oman - Gulf of Arabia
Crew: Two
Casualties: 2 Fatal

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. The crew of ZD718 were Number 4 in a 4-ship formation detailed to fly a training sortie in support of Operation GRANBY. The sortie was to have been the last before the formation was declared operational, 3 days before hostilities began in the Gulf. After 1 hour and 46 minutes into the sortie, while flying at very low-level over the desert in Oman, the aircraft struck the ground, killing the crew.

2. Start up was uneventful until 3 minutes prior to check-in when Number 3 announced that his aircraft was unserviceable; a 3 aircraft formation was therefore flown. The departure and the Air-to-Air Refuelling went according to plan, and so the formation descended to low-level with the Number 2 flying wide line abreast on the leader's right and Number 4 out of sight some distance directly behind. The Number 4 aircraft settled initially at 150 ft above ground level, but the pilot soon descended to operational heights. Some minutes later, in a featureless area of sandy desert and excellent visibility, the pilot commenced a left hand turn at a very low height and rolled rapidly to 55° Angle of Bank (AOB). Seconds later the AOB was reduced, but at 45° AOB the left wing tip struck the ground and the aircraft was destroyed without the crew attempting to eject.

CAUSE

3. Examination of the aircraft wreckage and Accident Data Recorder, including the voice track, provided overwhelming evidence to show that the aircraft was fully serviceable and operating normally up to the point of impact. There was no evidence of pilot incapacitation or distraction and the flight was properly supervised. It was concluded that the accident was caused by the pilot executing a steep turn while flying below his authorised height and allowing the aircraft to strike the ground. The featureless desert terrain and slightly rising ground in the area of the accident may have contributed to poor height references and given the pilot a false impression of his height above the ground.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

4. The lessons about flying over featureless desert terrain have been widely publicised again.