

MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE
PHANTOM XV421

Date: 30 October 1991
Parent Airfield: RAF Mount Pleasant
Place of Accident: 50nm north of Port Stanley
Crew: Two
Casualties: Two Fatal

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Two Phantom aircraft from RAF Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands were manoeuvring against each other during a routine Practice Interception sortie. The leader entered cloud tops at about 1500 feet, in a semi-inverted dive, and struck the sea. The pilot and navigator did not eject and were killed.
2. The Phantoms had planned to take off together, but the Number 2 aircraft was delayed by an unserviceability. The leader, therefore, took off alone and rendezvoused with a Hercules aircraft, against which it flew three medium level Practice Intercepts. The Phantom then refuelled from the Hercules and began a Practice Intercept against the Number 2 Phantom which had, meanwhile, taken off.
3. Although both Phantoms were carrying similar weapon loads, the leader's aircraft was considerably heavier following

in-flight refuelling. The aircraft met, about 50 nautical miles north of Port Stanley, at approximately 4000 feet over the sea, which was covered by a layer of sea fog and cloud, the tops of which were at about 1500 feet. They began manoeuvring against each other with the object of obtaining a simulated missile release. During these manoeuvres, the lead aircraft gained some advantage but lost airspeed in so doing. Finally, the Number 2 pilot saw his leader at about 3000 feet in a descending turn towards the cloud tops. He made a radio call for his leader to check his height, but the aircraft continued its descent, by now having rolled almost inverted, until it disappeared into the cloud. All contact with the Phantom was lost and search operations began.

CAUSE

4. Despite an air and sea search which lasted five days, very little wreckage was recovered and the cause of the accident could not be positively determined. However, the most probable cause was loss of control due to incorrect aircraft handling. At slow speed, the Phantom exhibits well-known but unconventional handling characteristics, whereby rudder rather than aileron is used to control roll. This characteristic is more pronounced when the aircraft is heavy. If, by mistake, aileron is used in such circumstances, the aircraft may depart from controlled flight by rolling in the direction opposite to the demand. Phantom pilots regularly practise controlling their aircraft in

this flight regime. During the final stage of the leader's flight, before disappearing into cloud, the aircraft displayed symptoms typical of such a departure. However, technical problems could not conclusively be ruled out and other factors could have aggravated the crew's predicament. The most significant of these was the possibility that the crew became disorientated when the aircraft entered cloud. This is possibly why they did not eject.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

5. The Phantom has since been withdrawn from RAF service, which renders unnecessary any subsequent action specific to the aircraft. However, the recommendations put forward by the Board that are relevant to current aircraft types are being pursued.