



# MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## Military Aircraft Accident Summary

### MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT SUMMARY

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AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE

#### GAZELLE HT MK3 ZB628

Date: 9 September 1993

Parent Airfield: RAF Shawbury

Place of Accident: Mediterranean Sea, 60 nm south west of Genoa, Italy

Crew: Two pilots

Passengers: One

Casualties: Slight injury - one pilot and passenger

### CIRCUMSTANCES

1. On 9 September 1993, a formation of three Gazelle helicopters was returning from Frosinone, near Rome, to RAF Shawbury. On rounding Cape Nero, 60nm south west of Genoa, the formation was suddenly enveloped in a torrential rain storm, which drastically reduced the in-flight visibility. The pilots of the second and third aircraft both experienced extreme difficulty in maintaining formation and visual contact with the other aircraft. During an attempt to escape from the storm and make a precautionary landing on the nearest beach, the third aircraft in the formation, ZB628, hit the sea. The aircraft capsized and sank shortly afterwards. All three occupants, two pilots and a passenger, escaped from the aircraft and were rescued by an Italian Coastguard launch.

2. One of the pilots and the passenger, who was also a pilot from RAF Shawbury, received slight injuries during their underwater egress from the helicopter. The aircraft was not salvaged.

### CAUSE

3. The Board of Inquiry determined that the accident was caused by the failure of the crew of ZB628 to notice an inadvertent loss of speed and height in time to prevent the aircraft from striking the sea. Contributing factors identified by the Board included: the bad weather conditions; lack of

windscreen wipers; the limitations of the low height warning system connected to the Radar Altimeter; the lack of formal guidance on crew management procedures for operation of Gazelle aircraft with two qualified pilots; and, the failure of the crews to reduce the spacing between aircraft in the formation on encountering bad weather.

#### SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

4. Both the pilots of ZB628 were the subject of administrative action. Staff action has been initiated to investigate the fitment of windscreen wipers and improvements to the low height warning facility of the Radar Altimeter system on Gazelle HT Mk3 aircraft. The procedures for the division of cockpit responsibilities are being formalised.