No. 4

AIRTACO AB, Lockheed 14 H, crashed on take-off at Stockholm-Bromma Airport on 14 July 1951

Circumstances

On 14 July 1951, at 0417 hours, the aircraft engaged in carrying newspaper to Jönköping took off from Runway 13 of Stockholm-Bromma Airport with four passengers and two crew. Weather conditions were good and the aircraft was cleared to fly VFR. The take-off and climb to approximately 20 metres appeared to be normal. At this point the starboard engine lost power and the aircraft, turning to the right and climbing, gradually stalled and crashed at the intersection of the runways. Three passengers and one crew member were killed - the surviving passenger and pilot being severely injured.

Investigation and Evidence

The investigation indicated that the failure of the starboard engine occurred immediately after take-off. The probable cause was a fuel supply failure due to the fact that the tank selector valve was set on a tank containing only a very small quantity of fuel.

The fact that the pilot probably did not check the fuel selector valve on departure, can be ascribed to his very poor flying condition as a result of insufficient sleep. (The pilot had flown every day for a period of fourteen days during which he totalled forty-seven hours of flight time. Prior to this particular flight he had slept at the most only four hours.)

From the circumstances of the accident, it would appear that the aircraft had begun to climb before it had reached a safe take-off speed. The pilot was placed in an extremely difficult position which was aggravated by the fact that his piloting ability was probably reduced through fatigue. This may explain why he did not take immediate action to complete the take-off on one engine. Instead, he endeavoured to re-start the starboard engine by using the hand fuel pump, thus hoping to be able to complete the take-off and then carry out a landing at the airport.

During the investigation, certain facts came to light which indicated that the pilot might not have been acting as pilot at the take-off. One of the accompanying passengers had acted as pilot under the supervision of the pilot five or six years earlier; according to the pilot, however, he had never performed a take-off or landing. The following circumstances would appear to indicate that the passenger had been piloting the aircraft on this occasion. After the accident, the pilot was found lying at some distance from and to the right of the aircraft and it is difficult to believe, therefore, that he was sitting in the pilot's seat. It seems more probable that he was standing behind the front seats or was sitting in the right-hand seat. Furthermore, pieces of clothing with the passenger's belongings were found in such a position that it is possible that he was sitting in the pilot's seat. If the passenger was seated in the pilot's seat, the pilot would not have been able to take over immediate control of the aircraft as it was not provided with dual controls. However, these circumstances cannot in any way be considered as proof that the passenger was piloting the aircraft. The surviving passenger, stated that there had been some changing about, but that he could not recall exactly where those on board were seated, since he did not know the other persons on board the aircraft personally and therefore had no special reason for noting how they were seated. He himself was seated nearest to the rear of the aircraft.

The investigation revealed that on this particular flight the number of persons on board exceeded the maximum number permitted by the certificate of airworthiness and in reporting the flight the pilot did not indicate the actual number of persons on board.

Probable Cause

The probable cause of the accident was a piloting error. The take-off speed was too low and consequently, when an engine failure occurred, the aircraft stalled. The engine failure was probably caused by lack of fuel in the tank on which the pilot had set the selector.

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