

No. 33

Douglas DC-2 ZS-DFW aircraft, crashed on 29 August 1952 at Kosti Airfield
Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. No. 38/52. J. LO/2/679

Circumstances

The aircraft took off on a non-scheduled flight from Palmietfontein Airport to Southend Airport, England, by Lusaka, Tabora, Juba, Khartoum, Wadi Halfa and other places en route, with a crew of four, two passengers and a load of Karakul pelts. The passengers left the aircraft at Bulawayo, deciding not to complete their journey. The aircraft started in company with another of the same operator which also crashed en route (see report No. 32). On attempting a diversion landing at Kosti at night without suitable ground aids, the aircraft ran off the runway and collided with a steel support for a windsock and afterwards with trees causing major damage. Two crew were killed and two injured.

Investigation and Evidence

Both pilots held valid Airline Transport Pilots' Licences, but neither licence was endorsed for DC-2 aircraft. The co-pilot, however, was entitled to fly in such a capacity without a DC-2 rating. The airplane was overloaded at take-off from Palmietfontein, and was still overloaded at take-off from Juba, the weight at landing at Kosti being above the permissible landing weight.

The Captain stated that the airframe and both engines were serviceable up to the time of collision with the obstruction on Kosti airfield.

On departure from Juba for Wadi Sudna at 1545 on 29 August, the aircraft had not received a route weather forecast, however, two Tafot reports were sent from Khartoum stating that thunderstorms were developing in the Khartoum area and the aircraft was asked whether it could overfly to Wadi Halfa and stated that diversion could be made to Kosti if required. Khartoum suggested that the aircraft land at El Obeid. At 2040 the aircraft stated there was not enough fuel to make El Obeid and a landing would be made at Kosti and at 2047, signalled that a dummy run would be made over Kosti with landing lights to attract attention, in view of the fact that Khartoum was unable to contact or alert Kosti. At 2103 the aircraft sent the following message: "Going in to land now, will call again, now over Kosti, will call again from the ground". No flare path had been laid out. The aircraft touched down on the NE-SE runway from the SW and ran off the runway striking a strong steel tubular support for a windsock, careened along into trees causing major damage.

Probable Cause

The primary cause of the accident was that extremely bad weather forced the Captain of the aeroplane to divert from his original destination. No proper preparation had been made for a possible landing at an alternate airfield prior to commencement of flight. The secondary cause was due to the Captain's attempt to execute a landing at Kosti aerodrome which was not equipped with night landing facilities. The Captain landed on the runway but was unable to align himself with the centre line and in consequence ran off the runway and struck a steel windsock support and thereafter struck various obstructions such as trees which lay in the path.

Contributory Causes

Because of radio interference due to a storm, proper use could not be made of the radio navigational facilities carried on the aircraft.

The lack of appreciation by the Captain of his final responsibility for the operational control of the aircraft, which includes diversionary action, and his apparent failure to appreciate the purely advisory responsibility of Khartoum as a flight information centre.

Recommendations

All aeroplanes operating in the public transport category at night should be equipped with parachute flares.