

No. 6

Union of Burma Airways DC-3, crashed on approach-to-land at
Mergui Aerodrome on 10 January 1953.
D. C. A. Burma, Civil Aircraft Accident Report

Circumstances

The accident took place while the aircraft was approaching to land at Mergui Airstrip on Runway 01 on a schedule Rangoon-Tavoy-Mergui flight with 15 passengers and 3 crew. The port wing of the aircraft hit trees on its final approach and the aircraft landed heavily about 820 feet from the threshold of the runway. On impact with the ground, the starboard engine became detached from the aircraft and the aircraft ran along on its port wheels and starboard propeller approximately 270 feet and finally came to rest about 475 feet from the threshold and approximately 50 feet from the edge of the runway. Fire broke out on the starboard side, possibly due to severed fuel lines and electrical short circuits. The fire consumed the forward portion of the aircraft up to the main rear entrance door. The wings sustained damage but were not consumed by the fire. The crew and passengers were safely evacuated although two of the passengers sustained minor injuries. The fire fighting equipment at the aerodrome was totally inadequate and the local fire brigade with its 400 gallons of plain water could not save the aircraft.

Investigation and Evidence

The flight was routing to within 7 minutes of Mergui Airfield, when permission was asked by the aircraft to descend on course. On receipt of permission landing instructions were requested which were given as Runway in use 01; QNH, 29.85 inches; wind North 5 knots. At a height of 1,300 feet on the downwind leg the undercarriage was lowered and descent was continued until a turn was made on base leg when the flaps were half lowered. The height was then 800 feet. While lining up with the runway full flaps were applied and the tower was contacted for final clearance. The airspeed at this time was between 95 and 100 mph. A few minutes later, the aircraft struck trees and then the ground, finally finishing up approximately 475 feet from the end of the runway. Fire broke out on the starboard side of the aircraft but all passengers and crew were able to escape. The aircraft was destroyed. Witnesses described the approach as low and banked steeply to the left. The ground level slopes at a gradient of 1 in 100 from the end of the runway.

Investigation showed that the lower portion of the starboard side of the aircraft brushed the top of a Betel palm 38 feet in height at a distance of 1543 feet from the end of the runway, then the port wing tip struck a forked tree branch 663 feet further on and another tree 35 feet in height 60 feet further on. The port undercarriage, port propeller blades, starboard undercarriage and propeller blades contacted the ground in that order, the aircraft then slid along the ground until it came to rest.

Probable Cause

The crash was attributed to an error of judgment on the part of the pilot, but there was nothing in the evidence to show what may have caused the error nor is there any evidence to show that the error was caused by negligence on the part of the pilot.

Recommendations:

1. That adequate means be provided at all airports for fire fighting.
2. That the engineers and other licensed personnel in the employ of the Union of Burma Airways be required to maintain their licenses in a current state.

3. That the first officers in the employ of the Union of Burma Airways be instructed on the correct procedure in case of emergencies.
4. That Union of Burma Airways lay down definite instructions as to the securing of passengers to their seats on take offs and landings.
5. That Union of Burma Airways make it compulsory that its pilots report personally for briefing.