

No. 31

Air Navigation and Trading Company, DH-89A aircraft, G-ALXJ, struck cliff and crashed at Skeirrip near Laxey Head, Isle of Man on 10 July 1951. MCA civil aircraft accident report MCAP 97.

Circumstances:

The aircraft was on a charter flight carrying newspapers from Blackpool, England to Jurby, Isle of Man. When approaching the Isle of Man in bad visibility it brushed the side of a cliff and crashed into the sea. Only small fragments of the aircraft were recovered. The pilot, the sole occupant is missing believed killed. There was no evidence of fire.

Investigation and Evidence

The aircraft was known to have flown to the Isle of Man and back on the day prior to the accident. No faults were reported. The loading of the aircraft was determined to be within the prescribed limits and the documentation of the aircraft was in order. The pilot had held a B licence periodically since 1928 and was said to have a total of 10,000 hours flying, about 6,000 hours of which were in Rapide aircraft. He was granted a commercial pilot's licence in October 1950 which was valid until November 1951. It was ascertained that the pilot failed his instrument flight test five times in 1950 and did not hold an instrument rating. In July 1949 he obtained a General Flight Radio Telephony Operator's Licence (Temporary) which was valid until March 1950. The pilot had not since renewed this licence.

Actual weather reports from Ronaldsway and Jurby and from a pilot who flew the route at the time indicate that below the parallel through Ramsay, the Isle of Man was obscured by low stratus which extended 20 miles beyond the eastern seaboard. Witnesses near the scene of the accident said that it was very foggy. The cliffs near the scene of the accident were almost certainly covered by clouds at the time. It was ascertained that the pilot was at all times fully informed of the existing weather situation.

Investigation revealed that immediately after becoming airborne the pilot informed Blackpool approach control by R/T that he was on course for Jurby and not Ronaldsway which was the intended destination. At 0604 hours he reported to Blackpool Approach Control that he was flying at 2,500 VFR and at 0611 hours, that he was flying VFR abeam the Morecambe Bay light. At 0629 hours he informed Ronaldsway Approach Control by R/T that his destination was Jurby with E.T.A. 0645 hours and asked if Ronaldsway Homer was working. In reply Ronaldsway Homer gave him a QTE of 070°. The pilot requested a QDM instead, which was given as 262° and acknowledged. This was his last communication with any station.

Investigation of the cliff at Skeirrip showed that the aircraft had struck the ground a glancing blow 255 ft. above sea level while on a heading of 270° M. The port lower wing tip had struck a sharp-edged rock protruding through the heather and bracken-covered surface and had been torn off together with the outer end of the port aileron. These were found lying near by. There were traces of silver and red dope and shreds of fabric adhering to the rock. The port propeller and port wheel had cut off the heads of the bracken for a distance of 5 yards straight up the cliff indicating that the aircraft was in a climbing attitude of about 50° at the moment of impact. Except for a chip off a second stone in the immediate vicinity no other mark was visible. The wreckage recovered by the Coast Guard and life boat services was the shattered escape hatch and part of the cabin roof. Although all the recovered pieces came from a Rapide type aircraft none could be identified as part of G-ALXJ. A week later, however, a piece of the fuselage flooring was picked up on the beach at Port Mooar near Maughold Head, which was definitely established to have come from the subject aircraft.

Probable Cause

The probable cause of this accident was the failure of the pilot to avoid rising ground when flying at a low altitude in bad visibility.