

No. 25

Swissair, DC-4, HB-ILO crashed due to a failed overshoot operation on 14 December 1951 at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. (Special Aircraft Accident Bulletin, Series 1952; No. 2, NFPA).

Circumstances

This aircraft, a DC-4, HB-ILO operated by Swissair was making an ILS approach in dense fog at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, on 14 December 1951. The crash occurred at 1757 (GMT) due to a failed overshoot operation. All twenty occupants of the aircraft escaped.

Investigation and Evidence

The crash landing occurred in ploughed clay ground and the aircraft touched ground some 650 feet outside the boundary of the airport. At the time of initial impact both the left and right wings were severed and the hull came to rest in a ditch some 328 feet from the point of first impact. The high speed impact (140 mph) separated the wing structures from the fuselage, the latter skidding some 328 feet beyond the point of first impact. Thus the greatest percentage of the 1,200 gallons of gasoline aboard burned at a distance from the occupied portion although the fuselage was gutted due to the entry of flames through the wing root.

Fire was instantaneous with the impact and entered the fuselage through the wing roots although the major spill and fire was, by virtue of the wing severance, some distance from the hull. A trail of fire connected the separate sections; some 1,200 U.S. gallons of gasoline were aboard. Eighteen persons escaped unaided and unhurt, one (a stewardess) suffering major burns when she fell into the ditch where fuel was burning. All passengers were able to evacuate through the normal (rear) exit door although some of the crew escaped through the navigation dome and cockpit windows.

Crash trucks at the airport had been on an alert status because of bad visibility conditions and were immediately dispatched by the Air Traffic Center. Three crash trucks and two ambulances responded. The exact accident site could not be seen by the tower but the correct location was radioed to responding equipment enroute. Arrival near the scene was therefore delayed (8 minutes total time), although this was of no consequence as far as rescue was concerned

as the passengers and crew had already escaped. The crash trucks could not approach the wreckage closely because of a trench running parallel with the ditch in which the fuselage came to rest. On arrival both the fuselage and wing sections were burning and extinguishment could not be secured for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Both premixed and "pick-up" foam solutions were employed. The crash trucks carried a total of about 1 900 gallons of water and an additional 1.800 gallons was supplied from an airport hydrant about 3 000 feet distant. The report secured from the local fire authorities indicates that a total of 140.000 litres of air foam was used and that "in view of the circumstances, we are of the opinion that this fire was extinguished in the best possible way". A total of 11 fire fighters were available.

Probable Cause

The crash occurred due to a failed overshoot operation.