

No: 5/89

Ref: EW/C1101

Category:1b

Aircraft Type

and Registration: Britten-Norman B2T Islander, G-OTVS

No & Type of Engines: 2 Allison 250 - BI7C turbo-prop engines

Year of Manufacture: 1974

Date and Time (UTC): 11 March 1989 at 1225 hrs

Location: Lashenden (Headcorn) Kent

Type of Flight: Parachute dropping (private)

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - None. Other - 1

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - None. Other - 1 (fatal)

Nature of Damage: Substantial to left engine and propeller and left cockpit window

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 21 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 580 hours (of which 300 hours were on type)

Information Source: AAIB Field Investigation

At approximately 1215 hrs the aircraft took off with a pilot and 10 parachutists, including the jumpmaster, to carry out a free-fall exercise. The aircraft's height was limited to 8,000 feet because of ATC restrictions, and the jumps were carried out from that height. The weather was fine with good visibility, and a meteorological aftercast wind of 255°T/40 kt at 10,000 feet was obtained with an observed wind of 285°T/08 kt on the airfield.

The parachutist who was fatally injured had completed an "Accelerated Free Fall" course and was briefed to exit in the second group and join up with 3 other parachutists during the free fall phase of the jump, before splitting up to deploy canopies. She had logged 34 jumps and was considered to be sufficiently experienced to undertake this exercise.

The Dropping Zone (DZ) was a small field on the south eastern edge of the airfield, in the middle of which was a circle containing gravel, which was approximately 20 metres in diameter and known as the "pit". This was the target area for experienced parachutists permitted to use this DZ and is shown on the upper right centre of the photograph. Students and inexperienced parachutists use the area to the north east of runway 29 where there are a number of suitable fields available for use as a DZ.

The licensed grass runway 11/29 is delineated by the white markers and has a take-off run, and landing distance available of 796 metres. The runway has been extended 200 metres to the east from the runway 29 threshold end, but this section is unlicensed. The aircraft was certificated in the private category and as the flight was not for the purposes of public transport, or flying instruction, the commander was entitled to land on this 200 metre strip if he judged it to be a suitable surface.

The aircraft was positioned overhead for the start of the jumps and the first group of six parachutists exited the aircraft, followed by the remaining four. The freefall part of the drop was without incident, but after all the canopies had been deployed at between 2000 and 3000 feet, one parachutist was seen to be above the rest of the group. The first nine parachutists landed safely in the DZ area. The tenth and last continued to drift over the DZ parallel to the extended landing strip and south of it, heading into wind. The aircraft landed on the extended strip, slowed down, and halfway between the first and second markers of the licensed runway, cleared the runway to the left. The parachutist continued descending parallel to the runway and collided with the left side of the aircraft and the left propeller, which stopped. The parachutist was killed instantly.

The pilot has stated that he observed the parachutists descending and landing in the DZ area, and he was satisfied that a hazardous situation did not exist. He continued his approach and landed normally on the extended strip, reducing his speed to an estimated 5 kt before turning off the runway to complete his after landing checks. Whilst carrying out the checks, he heard a bang and his left cockpit side window was propelled inboard and hit him on the head. Almost immediately there was another bang and he brought the aircraft to a stop, and shut the aircraft down before being led away from the scene.

A Board of Inquiry of the British Parachute Association (BPA) was convened to investigate the parachuting aspects of the accident in conjunction with the AAIB field investigation. They also examined the parachute equipment involved and found it to have been in an airworthy condition and properly rigged. Recommendations were made to the BPA Safety and Training Committee, and Council, relating to operational conditions at Headcorn by the Board of Inquiry. Briefly they are as follows:-

- 1 The DZ for all parachutists is moved to the North of Headcorn Airfield and the use of the DZ to the south east be discontinued.
2. An approved parachute instructor be positioned by the runway with appropriate RTF equipment, to monitor the air/ground frequency and act as Aircraft Controller.
3. All student parachutists (less than 50 jumps) to be equipped with radio receivers in order that they can be instructed or advised by an instructor on the ground on a discrete frequency.
4. Use of the unlicensed runway extension by aircraft be prohibited while parachuting is in progress.

5. Student parachutists to be marshalled across the runway 29 extension by the Aircraft Controller.

The post mortem examination revealed no pre-existing medical condition that could have contributed to the accident.

