

**AAIB Bulletin No: 6/94**

**Ref: EW/G94/04/02**

**Category: 3**

**Aircraft Type and Registration:** ABC 60 Plus Lightship, N2017A

**No & Type of Engines:** 2 Limbach piston engines

**Year of Manufacture:** 1990

**Date & Time (UTC):** 4 April 1994 at 0840 hrs

**Location:** Little Farley Wood, Romsley near Birmingham

**Type of Flight:** Positioning

**Persons on Board:** Crew - 2                      Passengers - None

**Injuries:** Crew - None                      Passengers - N/A

**Nature of Damage:** Left hand rail on Gondola bent - lower fin and bottom rib dented - two tears in envelope

**Commander's Licence:** CAA and FAA Commercial Pilot's Licences (Airships)

**Commander's Age:** 39 years

**Commander's Flying Experience:** 5,133 hours (of which 165 were on type)  
Last 90 days - 119 hours  
Last 28 days - 25 hours

**Information Source:** Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and enquiries by the AAIB

On the day of the accident it was intended to fly the airship from Halfpenny Green and position it at Cambridge. A ground handling party was to proceed by road. Prior to the flight, at 2130 hrs on 3 April 1994, the commander obtained a weather forecast for the route. He reported that this indicated a fine start to the day with cloud increasing from the west and rain showers during the afternoon. At 0600 hrs on 4 April 1994 he obtained an updated forecast which indicated a band of rain by 0900 hrs. The forecast temperature was plus 4° C.

The airship took off at 0600 hrs and set course for Cambridge. After about an hour's flight the airship commander was informed that the ground handling party vehicle had been involved in a road accident and it was therefore decided to return to Halfpenny Green. The airship and ground handling party were reunited at Halfpenny Green at 0720 hrs when the decision was made to continue with the plan to position the airship at Cambridge. At this time the weather was light rain, cloudbase estimated at 2,000 feet and visibility of about 15 km.

Shortly after departing Halfpenny Green on the second flight, the airship encountered a sudden deterioration in weather conditions which had changed from light rain to heavy wet snow. The build-up of snow on the envelope and control surfaces was rapid and the commander realised that the airship was becoming tail heavy and that he was losing control authority. He contacted Birmingham ATC, and it became apparent from radar position checks that the airship was heading towards the south Birmingham suburbs and their associated motorway system. The commander therefore elected to land as soon as possible.

Touchdown was firm at the upwind end of two ploughed fields separated by a dividing hedge. The airship continued through the hedge, which failed to decelerate it, before coming to a stop against a line of trees. The Birmingham ATC radar controller had already alerted the emergency services and rescue vehicles and helicopters were quickly at the scene. Both occupants of the airship had released themselves and vacated the gondola without injury. During deflation of the envelope a gust of wind lifted the airship into the trees when the envelope was torn and the gondola sustained minor damage.

A weather observation taken at Birmingham Airport which is 12 nm from the accident site, recorded a surface wind of 300°/08 kt, sky obscured, visibility 800 metres in heavy snow with a surface temperature of plus 1°C.