

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT No 1/96

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REPORT ON THE ACCIDENT TO BOEING 737, 7T-VEE AT WILLENHALL, NEAR COVENTRY ON 21 DECEMBER 1994

SUMMARY

The accident occurred when the aircraft, which had been chartered for the export of live animals to the Continent, was making a Surveillance Radar Approach (SRA) to Runway 23 at Coventry Airport in conditions of patchy lifting fog. The aircraft descended below the Minimum Descent Height (MDH) for the approach procedure, and collided with electricity cables and a transmission tower (86 foot high pylon) which was situated on the extended centreline of the runway, some 1.1 miles from its threshold. Following the collision the aircraft rolled uncontrollably to the left and the left wingtip struck the gable end of a house, causing major structural damage to the property. The aircraft continued rolling to an inverted attitude and impacted the ground in an area of woodland close to the edge of Willenhall housing estate. An intense fire ensued, during which a large part of the forward and centre sections of the fuselage were consumed. The five occupants suffered fatal multiple injuries on impact. There were no injuries to other persons.

The report identifies the following causal factors:

- (i) The flight crew allowed the aircraft to descend significantly below the normal approach glidepath during a Surveillance Radar Approach to Runway 23 at Coventry Airport, in conditions of patchy lifting fog. The descent was continued below the promulgated Minimum Descent Height without the appropriate visual reference to the approach lighting or the runway threshold.
- (ii) The standard company operating procedure of cross-checking altimeter height indications during the approach was not observed and the appropriate Minimum Descent Height was not called by the non-handling pilot.
- (iii) The performance of the flight crew was impaired by, the effects of tiredness having completed over 10 hours of flight duty through the night, during five flight sectors which included a total of six approaches to land.

Nine safety recommendations have been made. Five of them are addressed to the CAA and concern; the publication in the UK Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) of relevant Aerodrome Operating Minima applicable to each aircraft category and type of approach; a review of the Standard Phraseology

relevant to the conduct of SRA approaches which is contained in the Manual of Air Traffic Services Part 1; a review of the current procedure whereby the UK Approach Ban regulation is notified to foreign operators; measures to ensure that weather reporting at UK airfields used for Public Transport aircraft operations are made at half hourly intervals and; an examination of the post-qualification training and supervision of newly qualified Meteorological Observers.

It has also been recommended that the Algerian Civil Aviation Department should review its policy for monitoring the operating standards of Air Algerie, with a view to providing a more independent assessment of the standards being attained. Air Algerie itself should introduce a programme of Crew Resource Management training for all its flight crews using the guidelines set out in ICAO-Circular-217-AN-132. The airline should also establish a Flight Safety Management function within its Operations Department.

The report recommends that the procedures adopted by the Department of Transport for the issuing of Permits to Operate should include a standardised Permit application and approval scheme designed to ensure compliance with the requirements of the FAL section of the UK AIP. The procedure for issuing Permits to Operate and Air Service Agreements did not include any physical check of an applicant's airworthiness status since to do so might be in breach of UK obligations under Article 33 of the Chicago Convention. The Article does not normally permit States to refuse certificates of airworthiness which have been issued by other ICAO contracting States. In safety terms this can result in unsafe practices and inadequate standards being imported to UK airspace. It was noted that the US and ICAO are in the process of initiating 'safety oversight' programmes for foreign carriers based mainly on a voluntary acceptance of guidance and advice aimed at helping States to achieve ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices. The Department of Transport have indicated that steps are being taken to increase the surveillance of foreign aircraft flying to the UK. They are also taking action to ask the CAA to carry out ramp checks where there is evidence to suggest safety failings eg through passenger complaints or following FAA adverse assessments of particular countries.