

AAIB Bulletin No: 12/93

Ref: EW/G93/05/33

Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration:

Isaac's Spitfire, G-BBJI

No & Type of Engines:

1 Continental O-200-A piston engine

Year of Manufacture:

1975

Date & Time (UTC):

3 May 1993 at 1430 hrs

Location:

Ranksborough Farm, Nr Oakham, Leicestershire

Type of Flight:

Private

Persons on Board:

Crew - 1

Passengers - None

Injuries:

Crew - None

Passengers - N/A

Others - 1 Serious

Nature of Damage:

None to aircraft

Commander's Licence:

Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age:

62 years

Commander's Flying Experience:

615 hours (of which 351 were on type)

Last 90 days - 4 hours

Last 28 days - 3 hours

Information Source:

Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further inquiries by the AAIB

Background information

The facts relating to this accident were originally published in AAIB Bulletin 8/93. Subsequent to publication, additional information was brought to the attention of the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents who directed that the investigation be re-opened. This Bulletin summarises the circumstances of the accident and sets out the additional information obtained during the re-opened investigation.

Synopsis

The accident occurred at a farm strip with two grass runways, one oriented north/south and one east/west. Whilst the Isaac's Spitfire and a WAR Sea Fury were operating from the strip, two men, who were known to the land owner, arrived and sought permission to use metal detectors near the airstrip. One of the men moved into an adjacent area to use his metal detector and the other remained at the southern threshold of the north/south runway to take photographs of the two aircraft.

The pilot of the Isaac's Spitfire stated that he flew back to the strip because of deteriorating weather, and, while making a left hand curved approach to land on the northerly runway, noticed a person standing to the side of the strip but lost sight of him on levelling the wings due to the poor visibility over the nose of this type of aircraft. Just before touchdown, he felt a slight bump but did not consider it to be significant. Due to poor braking conditions he went around and landed on the westerly runway. While taxiing in, the pilot noticed a person lying on the ground close to the threshold of the northerly runway. The pilot considered that the probable cause of the accident was that the person, a known aircraft enthusiast, had been on the runway to take photographs, had misjudged the distance of the aircraft while looking through the camera lens and had been struck by an undetermined part of the aircraft. The person was seriously injured having been struck on the head.

Additional evidence

The pilot of the Isaac's Spitfire stated that the surface wind was variable but generally from the north and that both aircraft taxied in turn along the northerly runway before taking off on the easterly runway. However, the man who was metal detecting stated that both aircraft took off from an area to the west of the northerly runway as, at the time of the accident, the northerly runway was in poor condition. Examination of the strip by the AAIB on 21 September 1993 indicated that the area to the west of the northerly runway was unfit for take-off and had probably been so at the time of the accident. The northerly strip showed no signs of recent work having been carried out on it. The pilot of the Isaac's Spitfire stated that after take off, he flew to an area to the north west of the strip, but the man who was metal detecting stated that both aircraft remained in the vicinity of the strip and made low passes along the southerly runway. A photograph taken at the time shows the Sea Fury, but not the Spitfire, making a low level pass along the southerly runway. This photograph also indicates that the northerly runway was in a similar condition to that observed by AAIB inspectors during their examination.

The pilot of the Isaac's Spitfire stated that he flew a left hand curved approach to land on the northerly runway. However, the witness who was using his metal detector in an area adjacent to the strip stated that the Spitfire approached the northerly runway in a left hand turn "on its wingtip", levelled its wings and passed low over the hedge at the threshold before striking the photographer on the head with either the underside of the wing or tailplane. He also stated that the Spitfire was "on full throttle and was not coming in to land" and that the Spitfire made a further low pass before landing. However, the Spitfire pilot denies this. The witness also stated that the photographer was not standing on the runway at the time of the accident. This view is supported by evidence from the ambulance crew who attended the scene. However, the pilot of the Isaac's Spitfire maintains that the injured person was lying 96 feet in from the start of the runway and 18 feet in from the right hand edge.