

No: 8/89 **Ref:** EW/C1122 **Category:** 1b

Aircraft Type and Registration: Spitfire Mk 5C, G-MKVC

No & Type of Engines: 1 Rolls-Royce Merlin 35/2 piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1942 (rebuilt 18 November 1988)

Date and Time (UTC): 1 July 1989 at 1757 hrs

Location: Hartley Wintney, Hampshire

Type of Flight: Private (pleasure)

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers -None

Injuries: Crew - 1 (fatal) Passengers -N/A

Nature of Damage: Aircraft destroyed

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 46 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 518 hours (of which 101 were on type)

Information Source: Air Accidents Investigation Branch Field Investigation

Progress of the Investigation

The aircraft took-off from its base at Roundwood, Micheldever, Hampshire at about 1730 hrs. At about 1745 hrs it was in the Wokingham, Berkshire area where it carried out a series of climbing and turning manoeuvres at between 1000 and 1500 feet. Witnesses saw or heard nothing which indicated that the aircraft was performing other than normally. It flew off in the direction of Hook in Hampshire, where several witnesses heard the engine spluttering and misfiring and saw a trail of vapour coming from the aircraft. A Mayday call from G-MKVC was heard which said that an attempt was to be made to land at Blackbushe Airfield. This was followed, within seconds, by another call which changed the landing point to a field to the west of Blackbushe. The aircraft was seen, with the propeller stopped, to just clear some high tension cables, bank left at an angle estimated as almost 90° and fly along the perimeter of a the field with the wing tip only a few feet above the ground. At the last second the pilot levelled the wings and the aircraft struck the ground in a nose-down attitude. It caught fire immediately and the complete centre section was destroyed. The last contact recorded from the Heathrow radar indicated that the accident occurred at about 1757 hrs.

The impact had been taken primarily by the engine, which was embedded in the ground at an angle of 22 degrees below the horizontal; the propeller blades had failed in a rearwards direction and had not been under power at impact. The leading edges of both wings had been deformed upwards by the

impact and this corresponded to ground marks which indicated that the aircraft had struck with wings approximately level on a heading of 274 degrees magnetic.

A fuel fire had destroyed the centre section of the aircraft, leaving the tail section, starboard wing, outer port wing and the engine. The starboard tailplane upper and lower surfaces were contaminated by oil. The canopy had fragmented and a number of fragments had been thrown clear of the fire; some of those to the right hand side were covered in oil. Although the engine was half buried an oil deposit was observed in the exhaust stub from cylinder 1A, and the fractured end of a blade-type connecting rod was found lodged outside the crankcase. When the engine was lifted the crankcase was found to be holed on both sides. The engine was removed for strip examination the results of which will be published later.

Article in the Daily Telegraph

Some readers of the AAIB bulletin may have seen the article on this accident that appeared in the Daily Telegraph on Monday, 3rd July which contained statements alleged to have been made by "an AAIB engineer". This article was the subject of comment by Group Captain David Green of the Spitfire Society in a letter published on 11th July. Being concerned that the Daily Telegraph article might have been accepted by readers as in fact being based on information from AAIB the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents faxed the following letter to the Daily Telegraph on 12th July. As this letter has not been published at the time of going to press it is reproduced here for the information of Bulletin readers who might be concerned about the content of the Daily Telegraph article:-

"Like Group Captain Green I was myself surprised to see the statement on the opinions of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch in your article two days after the recent fatal Spitfire accident.

None of the information in fact came from the AAIB. The article does not reflect current AAIB thinking".