

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT No 4/94

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INCIDENT TO BOEING 747-243, N33021 AT LONDON GATWICK AIRPORT ON 7 FEBRUARY 1993

SUMMARY

Continental 04 was a scheduled flight from Houston, USA to London Gatwick Airport. On the first approach to Runway 26L at Gatwick, with the automatic flight control system (AFCS) engaged in the 'LAND' mode, the aircraft flew through the localiser at 9½ nm from touchdown and established on an inbound track about 3,000 feet to the right of the centreline. The aircraft was still not established on the centreline at 3 nm from touchdown and a missed approach was initiated.

On the second approach the aircraft again flew through the localiser and established on an inbound track about 2,500 feet to the right of the centreline, at 7¾ nm from touchdown. At 1¾ nm from touchdown and 1,500 feet to the right of the centreline, the commander saw the approach lights, then the runway, to his left. He banked the aircraft left towards the touchdown point, however, he considered it imprudent to carry out the manoeuvres required to achieve a landing and a missed approach was initiated; power was applied at about 500 feet above mean sea level (amsl). The lowest recorded altitude the aircraft reached was 432 feet amsl, at ½ nm from touchdown; it was displaced about 900 feet to the right of the centreline. The published elevation of the highest point on the south terminal building was 316 feet; this point was about 500 feet to the right of the aircraft's track.

The commander elected to carry out a third approach under manual control and this approach and landing was uneventful.

The following causal factors were identified:

- (i) Failure of the AFCS to capture and establish the aircraft on the localiser.
- (ii) Failure of the aircraft crew to appreciate that the navigational information being presented to them on the flight deck was correct.
- (iii) Failure of the commander to appreciate the extent of the aircraft's displacement from the centreline, on the second approach, and to take prompt and effective action to regain the correct approach path.
- (iv) Failure of the No 2 radar director to appreciate the extent of the aircraft's displacement from the centreline which caused him to pass misleading information to the aircraft commander.

- (v) The commander's acceptance of the azimuth guidance given by the radar director and the ILS glidepath information as adequate reference to continue the approach beyond the final approach point.

It was recommended that the Federal Aviation Administration determine the effect of the failure experienced by the module in the roll computer serial No 0080480 on the behaviour of the aircraft; whether a failure warning indication should be provided for such a case; and the relevance of such a failure to other types fitted with this or similar roll computers.

[Safety Recommendation 94-9].