

Aircraft type and registration: Cessna F172M 00-JEL (Belgium)

No & Type of engines: 1 Lycoming O-320-2D piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1974

Date and time (UTC): 30 April 1987 at 1006 hrs

Location: In the sea 3 nautical miles east of Ryde, Isle of Wight

Type of flight: Private (pleasure)

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — 2

Injuries: Crew — 1 (fatal) Passengers — 2 (fatal)

Nature of damage: Aircraft destroyed

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence (Belgian) VFR only

Commander's Age: 36 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 467 hours (of which 65 were on type)

Information Source: AIB Field Investigation

The aircraft was on a flight from Antwerp to Exeter, the intention being to refuel at Exeter before continuing the flight to the Scilly Isles. Fuel had been uplifted to full tanks before departure, and the pilot and two female passengers had embarked.

A Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flight plan had been filed, with the desired routeing in the London Flight Information Region (FIR) being overhead Dover, Lydd, Seaford, and direct to Exeter. The pilot made radio contact with a number of airfields requesting weather information and reported the aircraft's altitude which varied between 1000 and 4500 feet.

Just before 0956 hrs, the pilot made contact with Southampton Zone Control, giving his position south of Goodwood, altitude 3500 feet, and requesting the Southampton and Exeter weather. At 0957 hrs a Canberra at Flight Level (FL) 40 requested a transit through the Southampton zone from Ventnor to Boscombe Down to maintain FL 40 because of other military traffic. This was cleared. As 00-JEL was not identified on Southampton's primary radar, the pilot was asked if he could accept transit at 3000 feet. The pilot agreed and reported level at 3000 feet at 1000 hrs. There followed some confusion and discussion about the aircraft's routeing, and the pilot was asked to call when passing the 160 radial of the Southampton VOR (VHF Omnidirectional Range). The aircraft was still on a direct track from Seaford to Exeter.

At 1005 hrs Southampton called the aircraft and the pilot replied that the aircraft was just approaching the 160° radial. He was then told that Bournemouth were recovering a number of aircraft that were short of fuel, and was asked if he could accept radar vectoring towards Southampton to keep clear of Bournemouth before resuming a westbound track. The pilot replied "Wilco Oscar Echo Lima". After also replying that his heading was 250°, he was asked to

turn onto a heading of 360° for identification. This was acknowledged, and there was no further radio contact with the aircraft.

The recording of the primary radar trace from Ventnor indicates that the aircraft had turned through a heading of 360°, and was heading northeasterly when the radar return disappeared from the screen. The London Air Traffic Control Centre (LATCC) watch supervisor was advised.

At about the same time a number of witnesses in yachts heard a very high pitched, loud engine noise, and some identified a light aircraft coming out of low cloud, about 200 to 300 feet amsl, at an angle to the surface of 20 to 30 degrees. The aircraft hit a yacht and they both disintegrated and sank, the impact killing the occupants of the aircraft, and the two man crew of the yacht.

The weather in the area was poor with visibility estimated at between 1 to 3 kilometres, with low cloud and drizzle. The Canberra pilot has reported that over the Isle of Wight his aircraft was flying in and out of the tops of the cloud.

An early attempt was made to locate and recover the wreckage, although the aircraft appears to have been intact and under power prior to impact, but this was unsuccessful. There was evidence at the site of ample amounts of fuel.

The Chief Inspector of Accidents has ordered an Inspectors Investigation into this accident.