

# Boeing 747-436, G-BNLZ, 13 February 1996

**AAIB Bulletin No: 5/96 Ref: EW/G96/02/05 Category: 1.1**

**Aircraft Type and Registration:** Boeing 747-436, G-BNLZ

**No & Type of Engines:** 4 Rolls-Royce RB211-524H turbofan engines

**Year of Manufacture:** 1993

**Date & Time (UTC):** 13 February 1996 at 1525 hrs

**Location:** In-flight, London Heathrow to Miami

**Type of Flight:** Public Transport

**Persons on Board:** Crew - 18 Passengers - 403

**Injuries:** Crew - None Passengers - None

**Nature of Damage:** None

**First Officer's Licence:** Airline Transport Pilot's Licence last routine medical examination 29 January 1996

**First Officer's Age:** 41 years

**Commander's Flying Experience:** 17,100 hours (of which 2,000 were on type)

Last 90 days - 180 hours

Last 28 days - 70 hours

**Information Source:** Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

The aircraft, with a 'heavy' crew (the commander with two first officers) on board, departed from London Heathrow at 1239 hrs on a scheduled flight to Miami. Shortly after reaching cruise altitude the first officer, seated in the right hand seat, complained of an acute pain above his right eye. He believed that this pain was due to a sinus problem and took a couple of 'paracetamol' tablets for pain relief. He remained at the controls but was monitored by the commander and the other relief pilot. The medication provided some relief but approximately two hours later, during a conversation with the commander, the first officer failed to respond to a question asked of him.

Almost immediately he began to 'fit' and became unconscious, with his right leg stiffened so as to apply right rudder. The autopilot, which remained engaged, countered the yaw by applying aileron. Although the resulting sideslip was noticed by the cabin crew, the passengers apparently did not notice the event. The commander attempted to move the first officer's seat rearwards but

encountered difficulty because of the pressure of the first officer's leg locked between the seat and the rudder pedals.

The relief pilot and two members of the cabin crew were summoned to the flight deck to assist and a doctor, who was known to be seated on the upper deck, was also requested to attend. With his seat now to the rear of its travel a cabin crew member introduced a plastic 'airway' into the first officer's mouth to aid his breathing. With some difficulty the first officer was removed from the seat and transferred to the bunk area where, after approximately 45 minutes, he recovered.

On the doctor's advice, the commander declared a medical emergency with the intention of landing at Gander which was just under two hours flying time away. The weather at Gander, Torbay, St Johns and Halifax was very poor with freezing rain, vertical visibility less than 100 feet and nil horizontal visibility. Gander ATC, on hearing of the emergency, advised the crew that Torbay would be the better option as the first officer would have to be transferred from Gander to Torbay in order to receive appropriate medical treatment.

By now the first officer had recovered with no noticeable ill effects and it was decided to downgrade the emergency and continue to the planned destination, retaining the option of diverting to one of the US east coast airfields should the first officer's condition deteriorate. The aircraft landed at Miami at 2144 hrs after being airborne for 9 hours and 5 minutes.

On landing, the first officer was attended by two paramedics and transferred to the nearby hospital. With medical advice and the operator's approval, the first officer returned home as a passenger on the following evening's flight. He subsequently received medical treatment.