

AAIB Bulletin No: 12/95

Ref: EW/C95/8/3

Category: 1.1

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration: McDonnell Douglas MD-87, SE-DHG

No & Type of Engines: 2 JT8D-219 turbofan engines

Year of Manufacture: 1988

Date & Time (UTC): 10 August 1995 at 1140 hrs

Location: Cardiff Airport, South Wales

Type of Flight: Public Transport

Persons on Board: Crew - 2 Passengers - 10

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - None

Nature of Damage: None

Commander's Licence: Airline Transport Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 37 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 7,763 hours (of which 3,105 were on type)
Last 90 days - 251 hours
Last 28 days - 74 hours

Information Source: AAIB Field Investigation

The aircraft was on a positioning flight from Gatwick to Cardiff with two operating crew and 10 positioning crew on board. The weather at Cardiff at the time of their approach was good with a visibility of 16 km, nil weather, scattered cloud at 3,500 feet, temperature +24°C and a surface wind of 080°/11 kt.

The crew contacted Cardiff Approach Control at 1136 hrs as the aircraft passed FL060 in the descent to FL050. The controller instructed the crew to maintain FL050 on reaching and to expect an ILS approach to Runway 12. After a further descent to FL040 the crew informed the controller that they had the airfield in sight and asked for a visual approach. The controller could not approve this request due to inbound VFR traffic from the north west. He did however clear the aircraft to descend to 2,500 feet saying that he would give a "short radar to visual approach".

At 1141 hrs the controller advised the crew that RAF St Athan (a military airfield 4 nm to the west of and south of the final approach to Cardiff with a runway orientated 08/26), was active and that they were to turn left onto a heading of 220°. The crew acknowledged this transmission. A few moments later the crew was instructed to "DESCEND TO 1,700 FEET, CONTINUE THE LEFT TURN HEADING 150°, REPORT FIELD IN SIGHT". The crew replied that they still had the field in sight. They were then instructed to contact Cardiff Tower and the controller concluded his transmission with the words "DON'T FLY SOUTH OF THE FINAL APPROACH DUE TO ST ATHAN ACTIVITY".

At 1143 hrs the tower controller gave the crew clearance to land on Runway 12. A few seconds later he transmitted to the crew "CONFIRM THAT YOU ARE NOT APPROACHING RAF ST ATHAN, YOU SEEM TO BE WEST OF RAF ST ATHAN AT THE MOMENT". The controller continued by transmitting "BREAK OFF AND REPOSITION ONTO RUNWAY 12 AT CARDIFF THAT IS A MILITARY AIRFIELD YOU'LL LAND UP WITH!". The crew replied "roger we're breaking off", circled the aircraft to the north and repositioned for an uneventful landing at Cardiff. At the time of their incorrect approach to RAF St Athan an aircraft was about to depart from Runway 08 south west bound.

The commander reported that due to a lack of knowledge of any other airfield in the vicinity he had assumed St Athan to be Cardiff. He had, however, realised that it was the wrong runway as his aircraft started the turn onto finals.

The approach charts used by the crew at the time of the incident were supplied by SAS and did not show the presence of RAF St Athan. As a result of this incident SAS have amended and issued a new approach chart. The airline company have also issued, through their crew contact system (CCS), a notice warning crews of the proximity of St Athan to Cardiff.