

Aircraft type and registration: Piper PA 23-250 (Aztec), G-ARMH
(light twin engine fixed wing aircraft)

Year of manufacture: 1961

Date and time: 7 August 1983 at approximately 1230 hrs

Location: Approximately 40 miles southwest of Tangier

Type of flight: Private

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — 1

Injuries: Crew — 1 (minor) Passengers — 1 (minor)

Nature of damage: Aircraft ditched and sank

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 34 years

Commander's total flying experience: 360 hours (of which 188 hours were on type)

The aircraft was making a flight from Casablanca Aupa Airport to Gibraltar. Before departure the pilot supervised the loading of fuel for the flight into the outboard fuel tanks. The flight itself was flown at about 1500 feet and the track followed the coast about 5 miles out to sea in order to avoid Moroccan danger areas. After flying for about 1 hour the pilot changed from the inboard to the outboard fuel tanks and approximately 10 minutes later the right-hand engine began to run roughly and lose power. The pilot re-selected the inboard tank and then the outboard again but the engine lost all power and he feathered the propeller. An attempt to re-start the engine failed and so the fuel and the electrics were shut down. The pilot informed ATC of the circumstances and requested that Tangiers should be alerted to a diversion and arrival in approximately 30 minutes time.

Shortly after this the oil temperature on the left-hand engine began to rise to a critical point and the engine itself started to run roughly and lose power. The pilot changed fuel tanks but this made no difference to the engine's performance. He decided to shut the engines down because of a possible fire hazard and broadcast a 'MAYDAY' to Casablanca control.

A successful ditching was carried out with gear and flaps retracted in a position approximately 3 miles from the coast and about 40 miles from Tangier. When the aircraft came to rest it began to fill rapidly with water. The pilot and his passenger were at first unable to open the door or kick out a window but eventually they managed to open the door and they then scrambled out and swam clear wearing their life-jackets. Almost immediately the aircraft sank having remained on the surface for no longer than about 1½ minutes. Since there was no sign of any shipping the two occupants decided to swim to the coast although the waves were about 6 feet high. Eventually, after swimming for some while they reached the shore. They then had a long walk lasting about 5 hours before they reached an inhabited area. There they were given help and were able to inform the authorities of their survival.