

Aircraft: Piper PA-23 Series 250 Aztec E G-PUMP
(light twin engine fixed wing aircraft)

Year of Manufacture: 1973

Date and time (GMT): 27 February 1982 at 1446 hrs

Location: Rubery, near Birmingham

Type of flight: Private (Business)

Persons on board: Crew - 2 Passengers - Nil

Injuries: Crew - 2 (fatal) Passengers - N/A

Nature of damage: Aircraft destroyed

Commander's Licence: Airline Transport Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 37 years

Commander's total flying experience: 2,813 hours (of which 20 were on type)

The aircraft left Mona, Anglesey, at 1400 hrs to fly to Halfpenny Green. At this time there was a cold front lying north-south over the Welsh border moving quickly eastwards; Halfpenny Green lay in the narrow warm sector ahead of this front. Before departure the pilot had telephoned the Meteorological Office at Birmingham requesting forecast conditions at Halfpenny Green for 1600 hrs. He had been told to expect a cloud base of 800 ft and warned of extensive hill fog over Wales.

The aircraft flew to Birmingham via Knighton, initially at 4,000 ft in VMC, but climbed to FL55 over Wales and continued in IMC. Early in the flight the pilot called Birmingham approach control, advised that his ETA Halfpenny Green was 1445 hrs and asked for the latest weather. He was told that at Birmingham visibility was 5,000 m in drizzle with one-eighth cloud at 900 ft and eight-eighths at 1,200 ft; at Halfpenny Green visibility was 3,000 m and the estimated cloud base was between 500 and 700 ft. Confirming that he had copied the weather details, he requested permission to carry out a cloud penetration at Birmingham and continue VMC to Halfpenny Green.

At 1435 hrs, having been given radar direction to the ILS for Runway 15, the pilot reported that he was established on the localizer, read back the QFE and was cleared to continue to the ILS. At approximately three miles from touchdown, the pilot advised that he was VMC below cloud and was breaking off from the ILS. The aircraft was tracked on radar flying south-west from Birmingham Airport and, at 1442 hrs, four minutes after he broke off the ILS, the pilot was passed a QDM of 310° for Halfpenny Green and asked if he was skirting round the city. He replied that he was. At 1444 hrs, as the aircraft was fading from radar some eight to nine miles to the south-west, the pilot was invited to call Halfpenny Green, flying towards a lowering cloud base as the cold front approached.

On his first contact with Halfpenny Green, the pilot asked for the present weather. He was advised that visibility was 5,000 m with eight-eighths cloud at an estimated height of 600 ft and that the QFE was 996 mbs, the same as at Birmingham. He acknowledged this call and passed his flight details. He did not reply to the next call from Halfpenny Green which passed him joining instructions. In all, the pilot's RTF exchange with Halfpenny Green lasted 58 seconds. At about the same time, the aircraft was seen by eye-witnesses flying very low below cloud in the area south of Birmingham. One eye-witness saw the aircraft enter cloud covering high ground a moment before it collided with an electricity pylon 60 feet above ground level. The crash occurred at 1446 hrs, 950 ft above sea level, unbanked flight at the moment of impact and heading north-west.

Examination of the wreckage revealed no pre-existing defect in the aircraft which might have contributed to the accident, nor had the pilot notified either Birmingham or Halfpenny Green of any aircraft unserviceability. The pilot's altimeter was set to the Birmingham/Halfpenny Green QFE, the second altimeter was set to the Birmingham Zone QNH and the radio compass was tuned to the Halfpenny Green NDB, which was radiating normally.