

GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT

Reference No
AS/741/1009

This report is authorised by the Director-General of Civil Aviation under the provisions of Air Navigation Regulation 283(1)

1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

Probably between Gladstone and Longreach, Queensland

Height a.m.s.l.
Unknown

Date
16.2.74

Time (Local)
Unknown

Zone
-

THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model

Beech 95/B55 "Baron"

Registration

VH-FWR

3. CONCLUSIONS

(i) On 16 February, 1974 a Beech 95/B55 Baron aircraft registered VH-FWR disappeared whilst on a flight from Gladstone to Longreach, Queensland, and no trace has been found of the aircraft or its two occupants.

(ii) The holder of the certificate of registration for VH-FWR was E. M. Investments Pty. Ltd. of Alice Springs, Northern Territory, and the aircraft was normally based at Alice Springs.

(iii) The pilot, Edward Maxwell Smith, aged 52 years, held a private pilot licence endorsed for the aircraft type. His total flying experience amounted to approximately 1750 hours of which 450 hours had been gained on Baron type aircraft. He did not hold any class of instrument rating.

(iv) The only passenger on board the aircraft was Elizabeth Smith, the wife of the pilot.

(v) The certificate of airworthiness was valid until 12 September, 1977, and there is no evidence that the aircraft was in other than an airworthy condition. The aircraft was fitted with radio communication equipment capable of operation on the high frequencies and very high frequencies used in the area over which the flight was to take place.

(vi) There is no evidence to suggest that the gross weight of the aircraft or the position of its centre of gravity were not within safe limits.

(vii) On the previous day this aircraft, with the same two occupants had attempted to fly from Gladstone to Longreach, but had returned to Gladstone some 34 minutes after departure because of the adverse weather conditions existing along the route. At approximately 0910 hours EST on the day on which the aircraft disappeared the pilot telephoned the Rockhampton Flight Service Unit and requested a meteorological forecast for the proposed flight. The area forecast current between 0900 hours and 2100 hours and covering that section of the route between Gladstone and longitude 145 degrees 53 minutes east approximately, was read to him, as was the terminal aerodrome forecast for Longreach valid for the period 0600 hours to 1800 hours. The forecasts indicated that, en-route, the wind was expected to be generally easterly to north-easterly, with scattered stratus cloud based at 1000 to 2000 feet above mean sea level, broken cumulus cloud between 2000 and 14000 feet with occasional tops to 18000 feet, together with scattered middle level cloud above 12000 feet. Visibility was expected to be generally 15 miles but there would be areas of restriction to 3000 yards. Rain showers and areas of rain were forecast with the freezing level at 14500 feet and moderate turbulence in cloud. At Longreach the surface wind was forecast to be from 070 degrees true at 10 knots with a visibility of 10 miles and rain showers. 4/8ths of cumulus cloud with a base 5000 feet above the aerodrome and 6/8ths of middle level cloud above 12000 feet were expected. Reports from pilots and other persons in the general area at the time as well as a post-analysis of the weather situation by the Bureau of Meteorology all suggest that the weather existing over the proposed route did not differ significantly from that described in the forecast given to the pilot.

(viii) During this telephone conversation the pilot was also advised that a light aircraft proceeding from the Lake Gallilee area to Rockhampton had encountered bad weather to the west of Clermont and had diverted to Barcardine.

(ix) The pilot then submitted flight plan details which indicated that he intended to follow the direct route from Gladstone to Longreach, and that the aircraft would fly below 5000 feet. He said that he would nominate a SARTIME (time for the initiation of search and rescue action) when the aircraft departed Gladstone. This action implied that the aircraft would not report its position during the flight, but the Longreach Flight Service Unit would be advised when the flight had terminated and the search and rescue watch was no longer required. The details submitted also indicated that the flight was to be conducted under the Visual Flight Rules; the aircraft's fuel endurance was 330 minutes and there were two persons on board.

(x) At Gladstone, the aircraft took off on runway 10 and made a left turn before departing in a westerly direction. At 0954 hours the pilot established radio contact with the Rockhampton Flight Service Unit. He advised that the aircraft had departed Gladstone at 0953 hours and that his SARTIME was 1200 hours. At the request of the Rockhampton Flight Service Unit he indicated that his estimated flight time to Longreach was 114 minutes and he confirmed that the pilot's name was E.M. Smith. The pilot then acknowledged advice of the altimeter setting and correct time. This was the last recorded communication with the aircraft.

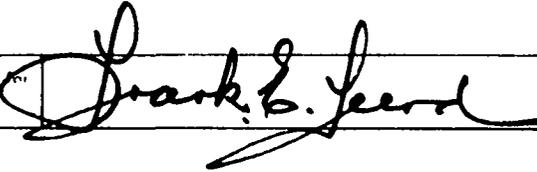
(xi) Longreach Flight Service Unit declared the Uncertainty Phase of the Search and Rescue Procedures at 1200 hours when no report had been received and attempts to contact VH-FWR by radio were unsuccessful. The Alert Phase was declared at 1323 hours and the Distress Phase was declared at 1522 hours which was the time calculated for the fuel on board the aircraft to be exhausted.

(xii) The search for the aircraft continued on an intense scale until 25 February, 1974. During this time civil and military aircraft flew a total of 532 hours and searched an area in excess of 40,000 square miles, within which the areas of high probability were examined many times. Much of the eastern section of the search area consists of rough mountainous terrain covered with dense tropical vegetation. A number of sighting and hearing reports were received and investigated but the aircraft and its occupants have not been located.

4. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The reason for the failure of the aircraft to reach its destination has not been determined.

Approved for
publication



(Frank E. Yeend)

Delegate of the Director-General of Civil Aviation

Date

7.10.1974