

ACCIDENT TO CESSNA 182K AIRCRAFT VH-DVN,
AT BURRENDONG DAM, NEW SOUTH WALES
ON 31ST JULY, 1969

CONCLUSIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION

On 31st July, 1969 at 1416 hours EST a Cessna 182K aircraft, registered VH-DVN, crashed into the waters of the Burrendong Dam, twelve miles south-east of Wellington, New South Wales. The bodies of two of the four occupants of the aircraft were recovered but the bodies of the other two occupants and the aircraft itself could not be located.

2. The aircraft was owned by Arthur Samuel Laundy of Bass Hill, N.S.W. and, at the time of the accident, it was engaged on a private flight from Wellington to Bankstown via the Burrendong Dam. The aircraft was operated under a certificate of airworthiness which was valid until 11th October, 1976. There was no evidence that the aircraft was in other than an airworthy condition. An examination of the debris recovered from the water and consisting of the left front seat and minor items of cabin furnishings and papers associated with the flight revealed no evidence of fire or explosion.

3. The aircraft was piloted by Arthur Samuel Laundy who was the holder of a Private Pilot Licence. He had aeronautical experience totalling 140 hours, of which 60 hours were on this type of aircraft, and he had flown approximately fifteen hours during the preceding 90 days. He had a licence restriction requiring him to wear glasses while flying and he was wearing his glasses at the time he entered the aircraft for the flight.

4. The passengers were Mrs. Elaine Williamson, Mrs. Patricia Grindley and Mrs. Iris Bambridge.

5. On the morning of the day of the accident the pilot submitted a flight plan for flights from Bankstown to Wellington, and return to Bankstown. He obtained a weather forecast for the flights and this indicated that the weather over the route would be fine, with no significant cloud, that visibility would be good and that light winds only would be encountered. The flight plan submitted by the pilot indicated that the estimated total time interval for the flight to Wellington and return was 136 minutes and that 68 gallons of fuel, sufficient for 300 minutes of flight, was carried.

6. The aircraft departed Bankstown Airport at 1115 hours and at approximately 1225 hours landed at Bodangora airstrip near Wellington. The pilot and passengers went into Wellington by car and had a light meal. Mr. Laundy conducted his business and the party then prepared to return to the aircraft. While in Wellington Mr. Laundy was heard to remark that he would show his passengers the Burrendong Dam on the return flight. The reservoir is located 13 miles south-east of the airstrip and close to the track shown on the flight plan for the return flight.

7. The aircraft took off from Bodangora airstrip at approximately 1405 hours and flew towards the reservoir over high ground which is about 700 feet above the level of the water in the dam. When about two miles from the spill-way of the dam, the aircraft flew over a saddle on the southern slopes of Black Mountain and began a long shallow descent. According to witnesses the engine sounded to be operating normally but at less than normal power. Two witnesses who were working on the spill-way heard the aircraft approaching and saw it pass over them at a height of between 100 to 200 feet and heading towards the centre of the dam. The aircraft continued its descent without alteration to its attitude or flight path and struck the water and sank.

8. The weather conditions at the time were a cloudless sky with no wind, and the surface of the water was calm and glassy.

9. Rescue efforts were began almost immediately and the bodies of Mrs. Williamson and Mr. Laundry were recovered. A large search was then organised using boats, aircraft and divers. Sections of the dam were searched by teams of divers but underwater visibility was extremely poor and diving conditions were difficult due to the coldness of the water of the dam which is up to 150 feet in depth. Extensive dragging operations were carried out but they were hampered by snags on the bottom of the dam. Ground parties searched the shores of the dam and aircraft were used in the general search. The search was conducted for fourteen days but the bodies of the other two occupants and the wreckage of the aircraft were not found.

10. In flying the aircraft at a height of less than 500 feet over the terrain the pilot contravened Air Navigation Regulation 133(2)(b).

11. The probable cause of the accident was that the aircraft was flown at an unsafe height.