



GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

## AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT

Reference No.

AS/754/1010

Publication of this report is authorised by the Secretary under the provisions of Air Navigation Regulations 283 (1)

## 1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

	Height a.m.s.l.	Date	Time (Local)	Zone
Fitzroy Station, Northern Territory	130 feet	13. 3. 75	1703 hours	CST

## 2. THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model	Registration
Cessna 310N	VH-SDE

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 At 1703 hours CST on 13 March, 1975 a Cessna 310N aircraft, registered VH-SDE, struck a 60 feet high radio mast and dived to the ground at Fitzroy Station, Northern Territory. The aircraft was destroyed by impact forces and subsequent fire and the five occupants were killed.

3.2 The holder of the certificate of registration for the aircraft was D. W. Harris of 11 Mansion Road, Bellevue Hill, New South Wales. The aircraft was being operated by Arnhem Air Charter Pty. Ltd. of Post Office Box 39431, Winnellie, Northern Territory.

3.3 On board the aircraft were the pilot, Gary William Walker, and four passengers, George C. Gester (Jnr.) Malcolm H. McVickar, Norris B. Shumate and Walter G. Walton.

3.4 The pilot, aged 26 years, was the holder of a commercial pilot licence endorsed for the Cessna 310 type of aircraft. His total flying experience amounted to 701 hours of which 72 hours had been flown on this aircraft type.

3.5 The aircraft was operating under a certificate of airworthiness which was valid from 1 March, 1974 and there is no evidence that it was in other than an airworthy condition.

3.6 The aircraft had been chartered for a series of flights to transport a group of businessmen to various station properties in northern Australia over a period of about 10 days. On 12 March, 1975 it proceeded from Darwin to Kununurra where it remained overnight. It was refuelled to capacity on the following morning.

3.7 It was initially planned that the aircraft would remain at Kununurra for two days but, at 1352 hours CST on 13 March, 1975 the pilot telephoned the Flight Service Unit (FSU) at Wyndham, obtained the relevant area meteorological forecasts and notified flight plan details for a direct charter flight from Kununurra to Timber Creek. He advised that the flight was to be conducted in accordance with the Visual Flight Rules, the estimated time of departure was 1500 hours, the estimated flight time was 41 minutes, the fuel endurance was 280 minutes and there were three persons on board. The destination of the passengers who were to travel on the aircraft was Fitzroy Station, some 54 kilometres east of Timber Creek, but the airstrip at that location was unserviceable.

3.8 At 1526 hours CST, VH-SDE established radio communication with Wyndham FSU and the pilot reported that he was taxiing at Kununurra, confirmed the fuel endurance as 280 minutes and advised that there were now five persons on board the aircraft. He subsequently reported his departure time as 1535 hours, that he was proceeding via Lake Argyle and that his estimated flight time to Timber Creek was now 51 minutes. At 1547 hours the pilot reported that he was departing Lake Argyle on climb to 5000 feet and that his estimated time of arrival (E.T.A.) at Timber Creek was 1628 hours. At 1625 hours the pilot advised that his revised E.T.A. Timber Creek was 1633 hours and, at 1631 hours, he reported in the Timber Creek circuit area and requested that the Search and Rescue watch be cancelled. Some five minutes later, he advised that he was still in the circuit area at Timber Creek and would be proceeding on a survey flight of 30 minutes duration before landing at Timber Creek. He then acknowledged a request to report again by 1705 hours and this was the last message received from the aircraft.

3.9 A number of people at Fitzroy Station saw VH-SDE arrive overhead at about 1655 hours and then commence to circle in the area. At about this time a delayed radio telephone call from Katherine was received at Fitzroy Station and this advised that the aircraft would be landing at Timber Creek from where those on board would require road transport to Fitzroy Station. After completing several circuits of the area the aircraft made a low run towards the west in front of the homestead. An object which was subsequently identified as a passenger's cap, was seen to fall from the aircraft during this run and almost simultaneously the port propeller struck the top section of one of two 60 feet high steel radio telephone aerial masts adjacent to the homestead. The aircraft rolled to the left and, in an almost vertical attitude, it dived on to the bank of a dam some 400 metres west-south-west of the homestead. It came to rest right side up partly submerged near the centre of the dam. A fierce fire broke out following impact.

3. CONCLUSIONS (Cont'd)

3.10 At the time of the accident, weather conditions at Fitzroy Station were fine, the visibility was 30 kilometres, wind light and variable and there was 4/8 strato cumulus cloud with a base of 1000 feet.

3.11 Detailed examination of the wreckage did not reveal any evidence of pre-impact structural failure, malfunction of systems or other mechanical failure which could have contributed to the accident. It was established that the gross weight of the aircraft and the centre of gravity position had been within safe limits.

3.12 There was a note attached to the passenger's cap which fell from the aircraft and it contained the message "Can you pick us up at Timber Creek". It is apparent that the low run which resulted in the accident was for the purpose of dropping the note.

4. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The cause of the accident was that the aircraft was operated at an unsafe height.

Approved for  
Signature



( I. M. Leslie )  
Delegate of the Secretary

Date

29.8.1975

## DEFINITIONS

**ACCIDENT** - An occurrence associated with the operation of an aircraft which takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all those persons have disembarked and in which

- (a) any person suffers death or serious injury as a result of being in or upon the aircraft or by direct contact with the aircraft or anything attached to the aircraft; or
- (b) the aircraft suffers substantial damage.

**FATAL INJURY** - Any injury which results in death within 30 days.

**SERIOUS INJURY** - Any injury other than a fatal injury which

- (a) requires hospitalisation for more than 48 hours, commencing within seven days from the date the injury was received; or
- (b) results in a fracture of any bone (except simple fractures of fingers, toes or nose); or
- (c) involves lacerations which cause severe haemorrhages, nerve, muscle or tendon damage; or
- (d) involves injury to any internal organ; or
- (e) involves second or third degree burns, or any burns affecting more than five percent of the body surface.

**MINOR INJURY** - Any injury other than as defined under "Fatal Injury" or "Serious Injury".

**DESTROYED** - Consumed by fire, demolished or damaged beyond repair.

**SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE** - Damage or structural failure which adversely affects the structural strength, performance or flight characteristics of the aircraft and which would normally require major repair or replacement of the affected component. The following types of damage are specifically excluded: engine failure, damage limited to an engine, bent fairings or cowling, dented skin, small punctured holes in the skin or fabric, taxi-ing damage to propeller blades, damage to tyres, engine accessories, brakes, or wingtips.

**MINOR DAMAGE** - Damage other than as defined under "Destroyed" or "Substantial Damage".