

GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT  
**AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT**

Reference No  
AS/723/1035

Publication of 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 Eddystone Point,  
Tasmania and Flinders Island

Height a.m.s.l.  
Not Known

Date  
8.9.72

Time (Local)  
Not Known

Zone  
EST

**2. THE AIRCRAFT**

Make and Model  
De Havilland DH82A "Tiger Moth"

Registration  
VH-AQL

**3. CONCLUSIONS**

(i) On 8 September, 1972, a De Havilland DH82A aircraft registered VH-AQL, disappeared whilst on a private travel flight from Cambridge, Tasmania, to Flinders Island, in Bass Strait. No trace has been found of the aircraft or its occupants.

(ii) The pilot, Maxwell Henry Price, aged 58, held a valid commercial pilot licence which was endorsed for the aircraft type. His recorded flying experience was 1,968 hours of which 962 hours had been gained on DH82 type aircraft.

(iii) The only passenger was Brenda Mary Hean and she occupied the rear cockpit.

(iv) The pilot was the holder of the Certificate of Registration for the aircraft.

(v) The Certificate of Airworthiness for the aircraft was valid until 9 November, 1975.

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

(vii) The aircraft was fitted with an auxiliary fuel tank and approval had been obtained for the installation of a smoke generating system for use in sky writing operations. The owner/pilot, however, had integrated these two installations in a way which was not approved and would not have been approved by the Department on safety grounds. Thus, during this flight and arising from this situation there were potential hazards such as of undetected fuel loss or of fire in flight but there is no evidence that these or any other hazardous flight situations which could be related to this installation actually occurred or contributed to the disappearance of the aircraft.

(viii) The pilot submitted a flight plan to the Hobart Flight Service Unit for a flight expected to commence at 1030 hours from Cambridge to Yarram, Victoria, with an intermediate landing at Flinders Island aerodrome. The plan indicated that the flight would be made in accordance with the Visual Flight Rules at altitudes below 5000 feet and that the pilot did not intend to report his progress by radio en route. The estimated time interval to Flinders Island was 160 minutes and the aircraft's total endurance was shown as 250 minutes. The plan indicated that the pilot would report to Flinders Island Flight Service Unit before 1400 hours EST.

(ix) There is no record of the pilot having requested or received a meteorological forecast before departure. The current area forecast indicated that the weather on the planned route would be suitable for the flight, and a post-flight analysis of reports and observations made in the area confirmed that the weather was substantially as forecast. There is nothing to indicate that weather was a factor in the disappearance of the aircraft.

(x) The flight plan indicated that the aircraft would carry life-jackets, first aid equipment and a VHF (Very High Frequency) survival beacon. There is evidence that the VHF survival beacon was not carried on the flight and that the life-jackets were not worn by the occupants but were stowed behind the rear seat.

(xi) The aircraft departed Cambridge at 1016 hours and, one minute later, the pilot made an on-course radio report to Hobart Control Tower. No further transmissions were heard from the aircraft.

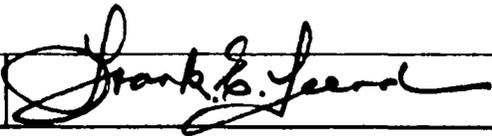
(xii) At 1400 hours, when the pilot had not reported his arrival at Flinders Island, the Flight Service Officer on duty at the aerodrome commenced checking possible alternative landing places in the area. These checks failed to establish the whereabouts of the aircraft and search and rescue procedures were initiated at 1430 hours.

(xiii) An intense air, sea and land search was conducted over a period of twenty days and the search was continued on a reduced scale for a further twenty-nine days. During this whole period a total of 374 hours 36 minutes were flown by search aircraft and 105 sighting or hearing reports were evaluated. The weight of the evidence indicates that the aircraft proceeded in a northerly direction along the east coast of Tasmania to Eddystone Point where it headed seaward in the direction of Cape Barren and Flinders Islands. The last reported sighting, by a witness at Eddystone Point, indicates that the aircraft was then flying at an altitude of about 2,000 feet and appeared to be operating normally.

(xiv) It was the normal practice of the pilot, when carrying fuel in the aircraft's auxiliary tank, to conduct the take-off with the main tank selected and then change to the auxiliary tank when established in cruise flight. He would then run the auxiliary tank completely dry, allowing the fuel supply to the engine to be interrupted, before re-selecting the main tank. Calculations based on the aircraft's estimated fuel consumption and probable en-route wind velocities suggest that, had the pilot followed his usual procedure on this flight, the auxiliary tank would have become exhausted in the Banks Strait area, between Eddystone Point and Cape Barren Island.

## 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

29.10.1974

## 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".