

1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

Catombal Range, 10 miles S.S.W. of Wellington, N.S.W.	Height a.m.s.l. (ft) 2,000 feet	Date 31.5.71	Time (Local) approx. 0730	Zone EST
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2. THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model Beech E33	Registration VH-TYG	Certificate of Airworthiness	Valid from 3.6.68	Valid to 2.6.77
Registered Owner Hawker De Havilland (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., P.O. Box 90, Yagoona, N.S.W.	Operator Felix Benton Cunningham, 15/5 Stanley Street, Randwick, N.S.W.		Degree of damage to aircraft Destroyed	
Defects discovered			Other property damaged Nil	
The extent of destruction of the wreckage by fire restricted the examination, but no defects were discovered.				

3. THE FLIGHT

Last or intended departure point Dubbo	Time of departure 0718	Next point of intended landing Hoxton Park	Purpose of flight Travel	Class of operation Private
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4. THE CREW

Name	Status	Age	Class of licence	Hours on type	Total hours	Degree of injury
Felix Benton CUNNINGHAM	Pilot	49	Private	9	142	Fatal

5. OTHER PERSONS (All passengers and persons injured on ground)

Name	Status	Degree of injury	Name	Status	Degree of injury
Barry Thomas LOWE	Passenger	Fatal	Charles James ROBERTSON	Passenger	Fatal
Frederick William PHILPOT	Passenger	Fatal			

6. RELEVANT EVENTS

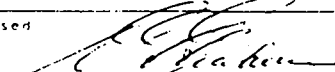
The pilot and the passengers, all residents of Sydney, had flown in the aircraft from Hoxton Park to Dubbo two days earlier. All four took part in bowling club activities during the week-end and, early on Monday morning, proceeded to Dubbo aerodrome to prepare for the return flight. Before departure the pilot received, from the Dubbo Flight Service Unit, area forecasts for the proposed flight and terminal forecasts for several aerodromes including Bathurst and Bankstown. The area forecasts indicated that there would be 5/8 stratus along the route, from 1,000 feet to 3,000 feet, and scattered rain showers or drizzle with associated areas of fog in which the visibility would be reduced to 500 yards; 2/8 cumulus from 3,000 feet to 10,000 feet and 5/8 to 6/8 strato-cumulus from 3,500 feet to 7,000 feet. Moderate turbulence was expected in cloud with isolated moderate to severe turbulence below 8,000 feet over the mountains. After discussing the forecast with the Flight Service Officer, the pilot submitted a flight plan which indicated that he would operate the flight at a cruising altitude of 5,500 feet. He remarked to the Flight Service Officer that he would assess the weather conditions and, if unsuitable, return to Dubbo. The flight was to be conducted under the Visual Flight Rules.

After take-off the pilot made a normal departure report. This was the last transmission heard from the aircraft.

At 0730 hours, or shortly after, residents of the Catombal Range area, about 7 miles to the right of the aircraft's planned track and 33 miles from Dubbo, heard the sound of an engine followed by a crash. The Catombal Range rises abruptly some 600 feet above the surrounding terrain and at this time was obscured by a continuous layer of cloud. Witness reports indicate that visibility below the cloud was 400 to 500 yards in drizzle. At 0920 hours, when the low cloud had lifted sufficiently to expose the range, the burnt-out wreckage of the aircraft was sighted near the crest. The aircraft had struck the ground in a steep nose down attitude.

7. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The probable cause of the accident was that the pilot, who was not qualified for instrument flight, lost control of the aircraft when he proceeded into weather conditions in which visual reference could not be maintained.

Report released  (D.S. GRAHAM)	Designation Assistant Director-General (Air Safety Investigation)	Date 8.5.72
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