

1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

23 miles north east Marble Bar, Western Australia	Height a.m.s.l. (ft) 780 feet	Date 1.6.71	Time (Local) 0647	Zone WST
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2. THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model Beech D55 Baron	Registration VH-DRT	Certificate of Airworthiness	Valid from 17.1.68	Valid to 16.1.77
Registered Owner Australian Transport Air Services Pty. Ltd., 462 Belmont Avenue, Kewdale, Western Australia	Operator Australian Transport Air Services, Pty. Ltd., 462 Belmont Avenue, Kewdale, Western Australia	Degree of damage to aircraft Destroyed		
		Other property damaged Nil		
Defects discovered				

3. THE FLIGHT

Last or intended departure point Shay Gap	Time of departure 0637	Next point of intended landing Nullagine	Purpose of flight Travel	Class of operation Charter
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4. THE CREW

Name	Status	Age	Class of licence	Hours on type	Total hours	Degree of injury
Harry Donald BAKER	Pilot	32	Senior Commercial	814	1,282	Fatal

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

Name	Status	Degree of injury	Name	Status	Degree of injury
John Malcolm WINWOOD	Passenger	Fatal	Julian Frederick WATTS	Passenger	Fatal

6. RELEVANT EVENTS

The aircraft took off from Shay Gap under a very low overcast with the intention of proceeding to Nullagine some 85 miles to the south. The low cloud persisted throughout the route and the tops of hills in the area, at a general level of about 750 feet above mean sea level, were enveloped in cloud and mist. Before taking off from Shay Gap the pilot called the Flight Service Unit at Port Hedland by radio and requested the winds forecast for the local area. Port Hedland did not respond but the aircraft calls were acknowledged by Derby Flight Service Unit. The pilot advised Derby when the aircraft departed Shay Gap at 0637 hours WST and he again requested the forecast winds for the area in which he was operating. He also indicated that the flight to Nullagine would occupy 30 minutes, that his fuel endurance was 250 minutes and that he would be proceeding at a height below 300 feet. The pilot held a Class 1 Instrument Rating and the aircraft was fitted for flight under the Instrument Flight Rules. There were no navigation aids at Nullagine which would have enabled an approach to the aerodrome under instrument flight conditions. Derby passed the forecast winds to the aircraft at 0640 hours and this information was acknowledged. There is no evidence that the pilot had obtained any other weather information apart from personal observations at Shay Gap and in flight, and there was no further communication with the aircraft. The first section of the route to Nullagine lay above a broad valley with a flat base averaging about 350 feet above sea level and bounded in the south by hills orientated east to west across the flight path of the aircraft. These hills rise abruptly from the valley floor and reach a maximum height in excess of 900 feet above sea level. The wreckage of the aircraft was found in this area by a searching aircraft at 0800 hours on the following morning. The aircraft had struck the ground at a height of approximately 780 feet above sea level near the crest of a ridge, apparently whilst in substantially level flight and under control. The accident site was some 23 miles south of Shay Gap on the direct track to Nullagine. The aircraft had been on a southerly heading and probably at normal cruising speed at the time of the initial impact with the ground.

7. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The probable cause of the accident was that the pilot did not conduct the flight at a safe height when the weather conditions were such that visual flight with adequate terrain clearance could not be continuously maintained.

Report released

(D.S. GRAHAM)

Designation

Assistant Director-General
(Air Safety Investigation)

Date

9.6.72