



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT

Reference No

SI/792/1050

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

1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

2.6 km south-south-west of Armidale Aerodrome, New South Wales	Height a.m.s.l. 3450 feet	Date 19.6.79	Time (Local) 1812 hours	Zone EST
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2. THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model Piper PA23-250	Registration VH-SLM	Certificate of Airworthiness Valid from 18.4.74
Certificate of Registration issued to	Operator	Degree of damage to aircraft Destroyed
		Other property damaged Nil
Defects discovered	Nil	

3. THE FLIGHT

Last or intended departure point Goondiwindi	Time of departure 1712 hours	Next point of intended landing Armidale	Purpose of flight Positioning	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
	Pilot	39	Commercial	123	8556	Fatal

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

Name	Status	Degree of injury	Name	Status	Degree of injury

6. RELEVANT EVENTS

The pilot contacted the Tamworth Briefing Office by telephone at about 1500 hours and obtained details of the relevant meteorological forecasts for a flight from Armidale to Goondiwindi and return. The forecasts indicated low cloud and rain generally in the area and the terminal forecast for the return to Armidale indicated visibility 5000 metres, slight intermittent rain, 6 oktas stratus cloud base 1000 feet, 6 oktas strato-cumulus cloud base 2000 feet, with temporary periods of slight continuous rain with visibility reduced to 3000 metres. The pilot held a Class One Instrument Rating and he submitted an IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) category flight plan which nominated Tamworth as the alternate for Armidale on the return flight.

During the late afternoon, weather conditions at Armidale gradually deteriorated and, at about 1700 hours, the visibility was about 400 metres and the cloud base was 300 to 400 feet. The end of daylight was about 1730 hours.

The aircraft cruised at an altitude of 7500 feet during the return flight from Goondiwindi to Armidale. The pilot reported over Inverell at 1744 hours with an estimated time of arrival at Armidale of 1801 hours. At 1753 hours, he reported leaving cruising altitude on descent. Shortly afterwards, the Chief Pilot of the Operator established radio communication from another aircraft on the ground at Armidale, advised that weather conditions at Armidale were not very good and suggested that the pilot of VH-SLM could consider diverting to Tamworth from his then position. The pilot of VH-SLM replied "I'll continue for the time being - it's not too bad here - just north of Guyra". The two pilots then had a conversation on a discrete frequency. At 1800 hours, the pilot of VH-SLM reported "Armidale - for an instrument approach - call again by time one zero".

The only radio navigation aid at Armidale (elevation 3546 feet) is a non-directional beacon (NDB) and the instrument approach procedure requires an aircraft to initially overfly the NDB at an altitude of 6300 feet on a heading of 068° . This heading is to be maintained for two minutes while the aircraft descends to 5500 feet and a left turn is then made on to a heading of 230° towards the NDB on which the aircraft descends to the minimum night altitude of 4700 feet. The missed approach procedure requires the heading of 230° to be maintained while the aircraft climbs away.

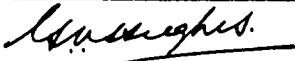
6. RELEVANT EVENTS (Cont'd)

At 1808 hours, the Chief Pilot observed VH-SLM overfly the aerodrome at a low height on a south-westerly heading and he then asked the pilot "... did you get a look at the airport?" and the pilot responded "... that's affirmative". The Chief Pilot then advised "... it's improving quite rapidly - if you want to have another crack at it - you were too far over to the left" and "... it is improving - there's a little bit of wind picking it up - up at the end of the strip now - it's very very thin - I could see the aeroplane throughout - the entire shape of it - not just the line." The pilot of VH-SLM apparently acknowledged this information by depressing his microphone button but no further communications were received from the aircraft.

Several minutes later, a severe impact noise was heard and the glow of an intense fire was observed by persons located some two kilometres south-south-west of the NDB site. There was fog or low cloud, light rain and poor visibility at that location at the time. Investigation revealed that the aircraft had been in substantially level flight, with the undercarriage extended, heading towards the aerodrome, when it struck a succession of trees and crashed to the ground. Impact and fire damage was extensive and no evidence was found of any defect or malfunction which might have contributed to the accident.

7. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The probable cause of the accident was that the pilot persisted with an unsafe landing approach procedure in adverse weather conditions.

Approved for publication		(G. V. Hughes) Delegate of the Secretary	Date 17.8.81
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