

ACCIDENT TO AUSTER J5/F AIRCRAFT VH-AFK NEAR  
JENOLAN CAVES, NEW SOUTH WALES, ON 16th OCTOBER, 1954.

. . SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION . .

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This accident was investigated by the late R. W. Adsett, then Senior Examiner of Airmen, New South Wales Region, and his report appears at Enclosure 6B. The following is a summary of the evidence.

2. Auster J5/F VH-AFK, owned and operated by C. M. Hazelton, trading as Hazelton Air Taxi and Charter Service, Toogong, New South Wales, departed Bankstown Aerodrome, New South Wales, at 1517 hours on the 16th October, 1954, for Toogong, 124 miles on a bearing of 287° T from Bankstown and directly across the Great Dividing Range. The aircraft was being flown solo by the owner on a private flight and, as the pilot did not hold an instrument rating and the aircraft was not equipped for instrument flight, it was to be conducted under the visual flight rules. The forecast weather throughout the route was "8/8th cloud, base 300-400 feet above terrain about highlands and base at times 100 feet or less in rain on western part of the route" (Enclosure 6B, page 15).

3. As the aircraft neared Katoomba, 36 miles from Bankstown and approximately on the direct route to Toogong, the pilot found that he would be unable to continue the flight "visual" and turned back for Bankstown. The pilot states that shortly after altering course for Bankstown he noticed that the weather appeared to be "very much better to the south" whereupon he turned onto a southerly course to see if he could find a break in the cloud over the range. He reports that after flying south for approximately 10 miles he saw a break in the cloud through which he could see to the other side of the range and attempted to fly through this break (Enclosure 6B, page 8). Shortly after altering course to fly through this break the pilot found the cloud "closing in all round" and decided to turn back. However, during the turn the aircraft entered cloud, and the pilot "eased the stick forward hoping to come out of it again" but without success. The pilot states that at this stage he noticed the airspeed had increased to 160 m.p.h. and the aircraft was in a spiral dive to the left. The pilot alleges that he stopped the turn, reduced power and by "holding a gentle back pressure on the stick" reduced the airspeed to 70 m.p.h.. However, at this moment the aircraft came out of the cloud heading towards and in close proximity to trees. The pilot was unable to manoeuvre the aircraft away from the trees in the time and space available. The aircraft crashed at about 1600 hours in heavily timbered terrain  $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles east-south-east of Jenolan Caves at an altitude of approximately 2,000 feet. The aircraft sustained substantial damage.

4. The pilot was uninjured in the accident but was somewhat dazed and did not fully recover consciousness until sometime after the accident when he found himself walking around in rain and fog. He climbed to the top of a hill in an endeavour to determine his position but could not see more than a few yards because of fog and decided to return to the aircraft. However, he was unable to find his way back to the aircraft. On the

following day, Sunday, he searched for the aircraft until mid-afternoon without success and then decided, as there was still considerable cloud and fog in the area which did not show any sign of improving, to attempt to walk out. He walked down the mountain slope, on which the accident had occurred, and found a "good stream of water" (apparently the Cox's River) which he commenced to follow. He had no food, watch (broken in accident) or compass or any survival equipment. On Wednesday, four days after the accident, he reached Cox's River Post Office, 16½ miles east of the scene of the accident, not unduly affected by his ordeal.

5. When VH-AFK failed to arrive at Toogong on the 16th December, 1954, an extensive ground and air search was carried out for several days without locating the pilot or wreckage. This search had been abandoned before the pilot arrived at Cox's River Post Office.

6. The pilot, Charles Maxwell Hazelton, 27 years of age, held current Commercial Pilot Licence No. 3213 properly endorsed for Auster aircraft. His total flying experience at the time of the accident amounted to 696 hours and 515 of these hours had been flown on Auster aircraft. In the 90 days preceding the accident he had flown a total of 48 hours, all of which were on Auster aircraft. Hazelton was issued with his commercial pilot licence in April, 1954, at which time he had accumulated a total of 10 hours on instrument flight. From that date until the day of the accident there is no record of him having carried out any further instrument flying.

7. On the morning of the day of the accident Hazelton attempted to fly VH-AFK from Bankstown to Toogong but was forced to return to Bankstown because of adverse weather over the Great Dividing Range. At approximately 1500 hours Hazelton states that the weather appeared to be improving over the Range whereupon he telephoned the Weather Office at Sydney Airport and asked for a weather forecast for a V.F.R. flight from Bankstown to Orange (near Toogong) on that afternoon (Enclosure 6B, pages 8 and 14). The weather office advised him that "there would be no improvement in the weather (which was overcast throughout with intermittent rain and occasional heavier showers) on that day and that the cloud would extend right down onto the ranges . . . . . that Mt. Victoria was reporting fog, indicating that the cloud was right down." Despite this advice Hazelton, after submitting flight details to Air Traffic Control at Bankstown, departed Bankstown for Toogong at 1517 hours. The Regional Investigating Officer states that the weather on the afternoon of the 16th October, 1954, was as forecast by the Weather Office, Sydney Airport, and this is also confirmed by the weather encountered by Hazelton on his attempted flight to Toogong. Hazelton by attempting the flight under V.F.R. when the forecast for the meteorological conditions along the route to be flown showed that the conditions were such that it would be impossible to conduct the flight under V.F.R., apparently disregarded Air Navigation Regulation 228.

8. The pilot states that while searching for a break in the cloud over the ranges to the south of the direct track the aircraft was flown at an altitude of 4,000 feet (presumably on an altimeter sub-scale setting of 1013.2 mbs.) and from the evidence it appears that the flight across the ranges was attempted

at approximately the same altitude. The terrain in the area over which the aircraft was flying at this time varies from approximately 1,000 to 4,000 feet and the vertical height of the aircraft above the terrain during this flight would be fluctuating continually and to a large degree. For the purpose of determining the flight rules applicable to this flight it is considered that it was being conducted for substantial periods at an height less than 1,500 feet above the terrain and consequently, in accordance with Air Navigation Regulation 150(1)(a), was to be conducted with a flight visibility equal to or greater than one mile and the aircraft flown clear of cloud and in sight of the ground or water. There is no suggestion in the evidence that the aircraft was flown in visibility conditions less than one mile or that it entered cloud until the pilot found that the break through which he was attempting to fly through was closing in and commenced to turn back. Although, there is no suggestion that the pilot deliberately attempted flight through cloud it is considered, in view of all the evidence concerning the existing weather conditions, that he made an error of judgment in attempting a V.F.R. flight into prohibitive weather.

9. The pilot states that shortly after the aircraft entered cloud he found that the aircraft was in a steep spiral dive to the left at an airspeed of 160 m.p.h. and furthermore that he had recovered to 70 m.p.h. when the aircraft broke cloud. As previously stated the pilot had only little experience on instrument flight and none during the six months preceding the accident. On this occasion it appears that he lost control of the aircraft shortly after entering the cloud and although, as alleged, he may have reduced the airspeed from 160 m.p.h. to 70 m.p.h., it is seriously doubted that he had fully regained control of the aircraft when it came out of the cloud and it is considered most unlikely that he could have sustained instrument flight to a clear area.

10. The wreckage was moved without the permission of the Director-General, which is required by Air Navigation Regulation 275(1) except under certain conditions specified in Air Navigation Regulation 275(2). The Regional Investigating Officer suggests that the pilot's (owner's) explanation of how the wreckage was moved could be a satisfactory explanation and was for the protection of the wreckage from destruction by fire or other cause in accordance with the exception specified in Air Navigation Regulation 275(2)(b). The removal of the wreckage was carried out by the owner's brothers. The owner discussed the project for the removal of the wreckage with his brothers (see Enclosure 6B, page 9) prior to their departure for the scene of the accident and his statement that he "had not the slightest chance of stopping them" from removing the wreckage does not make sense. Although it was probably desirable that the wreckage be recovered as soon as possible, some two days elapsed from when the pilot (owner) arrived at Cox's River Post Office until the wreckage removal party departed for the scene of the accident, during which time there was ample opportunity for the owner to have obtained the Director-General's directions as to the disposal of the wreckage. From the fact that no attempt was made to obtain the Director-General's permission to move the wreckage and in view of all the evidence it appears that the owner disregarded Air Navigation Regulation 275(1).

11. From the evidence it is concluded that:-

- 11.1 At approximately 1600 hours on the 16th October, 1954, Auster J5/F aircraft VH-AFK, owned and operated by C. M. Hazelton trading as Hazelton Air Taxi and Charter Service, Toogong, New South Wales, crashed in heavily timbered terrain  $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles east-south-east of Jenolan Caves, New South Wales.
- 11.2 At the time of the accident the aircraft was being flown by the owner on a private flight from Bankstown Aerodrome, New South Wales, to Toogong. The pilot, who was the sole occupant, was uninjured and on the day after the accident commenced to walk out and arrived at Cox's River Post Office,  $16\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of the scene of the accident, four days later. An extensive air and ground search during this period had failed to locate the wreckage or the pilot.
- 11.3 Damage to property was confined to the aircraft which sustained substantial damage.
- 11.4 The aircraft was operating under current certificates of registration, airworthiness and safety and was loaded within its permissible limits.
- 11.5 The pilot held a valid commercial pilot licence correctly endorsed for Auster aircraft, but did not hold and had never held any form of instrument rating.
- 11.6 The cause of the accident was an error of judgment by the pilot in attempting to continue visual flight in prohibitive weather.
- 11.7 The pilot's error of judgment led him into conditions of visibility which demanded a skill beyond the limits of his experience and ability and resulted in his losing control of the aircraft.
- 11.8 The pilot apparently disregarded Air Navigation Regulation 228 by attempting a visual flight when the forecast for the meteorological conditions along the route to be flown showed that it would be impossible to conduct the flight under the visual flight rules.
- 11.9 The wreckage was moved from the scene of the accident without the permission of the Director-General contrary to the requirements of Air Navigation Regulation 275(1).

  
(W. L. Burdus)

Inspector of Accidents.

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8th September, 1955.