

The main wreckage lay in about 20 ft. of water at the bottom of Loch Tarbert, pieces of wing, spars and three-ply being scattered over a mile or so of the East shore of the Loch. None of the bodies recovered were wearing life-saving waistcoats, although these were available in the aircraft. From inspection of the wreckage the Court was of the opinion that the aircraft was on fire before striking the water, the only definite locality being the starboard wing, root and fuselage. According to the Salvage crew reports on an underwater inspection, fire extinguishers had been used on at least one engine.

F/Lt. Knox was an experienced pilot, and is reputed to have a total solo flying experience of 1385 hrs. (his flying log books were not available). He had flown 239 hrs. during the last six months, 60 of which had been in Fokker Mk. XXII. Other points of interest are included in the following finding, observations and remarks.

Finding of the Court (President W/Cdr. Leggate) 16.7.43.

1. Owing to the state of the wreckage it is not possible to ascertain the exact origin of the fire, but there was evidence of a fierce fire having occurred around the petrol tank compartment.
2. Whilst examining the petrol system of Fokker H.M. 160 (a similar type of aircraft undergoing a complete overhaul at Prestwick) it was noticed that there was a gap between the filler neck of the petrol tank and the filling aperture of the upper surface of the mainplanes, so that in the event of the tank being overfilled, petrol would flow into the tank compartment.
3. No blame should be attached to any member of the crew of Fokker H.M. 159.

Recommendations

1. That immediate modification action be taken on filler necks of petrol tanks in Fokker H.M. 160 to prevent surplus petrol caused by over-filling, spilling into the petrol tank compartment.
2. That No. 43 Group Headquarters be requested to issue instructions to the effect that the recovery of bodies from crashed aircraft in shallow water should be given highest priority. According to the statement of one witness ten days had elapsed before any more bodies were recovered, other than those recovered on the day of the crash.

Remarks of Officer Commanding

Concurs with the Findings of the Court and with the Recommendations, except that he regards the use of the superlative in the second recommendation as inadvisable, bearing in mind the inability to forecast the vital service requirements and prevailing circumstances which may accompany the removal of the dead from the scene of the accidents which may occur in the future. Considers the saving of life is of more importance and that the recovery of secret or special equipment may well be allowed very high priority. States that No. 43 Group and No. 63 M.U. were advised of this accident.

Remarks of Air Officer Commanding, 12.8.43

1. In concurring with the conclusions is satisfied that, although the route forecast was not particularly good, the pilot was an experienced one, and capable of completing the flight under the weather conditions existing.
2. Has taken action recommending modification as mentioned in the first recommendation.
3. Draws attention to second recommendation for action as necessary by Air Ministry.

/Remarks.....

Remarks of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief. -/8/43

Agrees with the Findings and Recommendations, but would qualify the second Recommendation. Unless there is till a chance of saving life, does not consider that the recovery of bodies from crashed aircraft in the circumstances of this accident should demand the highest priority unless the recovery of the bodies has urgent Service value - e.g. it might perhaps furnish some additional means of discovering the cause of the crash. It is however considered that action should invariably be taken to recover bodies with all possible speed.

Remarks of C.I. Accidents

This accident was investigated by this Branch. It is considered that it was caused by a fire which broke out at the back of the starboard inner engine.

Has circulated file to the following:- 'C.S.B.2., S.M.1(a)
R.D.A. (Defects)., R.D.T.k(e). P.4 (Cas).

27/4 48/6