



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summary

MILITARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE

TORNADO GR1 ZA376

Date: 10 May 1991

Parent Airfield: RAF Laarbruch

Place of Accident: 20 nm North of Bremen, Germany

Crew: Two

Casualties: 1 Minor and 1 Major

CIRCUMSTANCES

1. ZA376 was carrying a standard training load of fuel tanks and mission related equipment and acting as the interceptor aircraft for 2 Tornados on a low-level training sortie in Germany. The formation was operating over the North German Plain where the weather was hazy, with 6.8 km visibility, no significant cloud and a distinct, but relatively high horizon. A number of successful interceptions had already been made.

2. The interceptor crew planned to engage the other 2 aircraft from head-on, intending to convert to a rear hemisphere attack after passing abeam, when at high speed the interceptor pilot spotted the target Tornados, in wide line-abreast formation, on a near reciprocal heading just to the right of his nose at a range of 6 km. The pair were at the same height but when they passed him there was a lateral separation of about 1000m. The pilot of the interceptor then rolled his aircraft to the right and commenced a medium to hard turn with the intention of positioning behind the pair. The navigator looked high and back through the canopy at the other aircraft and was aware of being in a high banked turn and descending as he expected. The pilot became confused after 30 to 40 degrees of turn, because the aircraft appeared to be turning far tighter than he wished and it continued rolling to the right despite his attempts to level the wings and climb. He was aware of the ground approaching rapidly and at some stage the wings were correctly swept fully forward and several selections of manoeuvre flap/slat were made in an

attempt to alleviate the situation. Full left roll control was applied but the pilot was not aware of any significant control response. To be certain that the navigator was aware of their predicament he called him by name; at about this stage the pilot believed that the aircraft was finally, but very slowly, responding to his control demands. However, the aircraft was still descending rapidly and the navigator believed that it was about to hit the ground. He therefore initiated a successful command ejection of both occupants. The aircraft was destroyed.

CAUSE

3. The investigation was hampered by the erratic behaviour of the Accident Data Recorder. However, after extensive examination of the wreckage by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch it was concluded that the aircraft was probably serviceable when it hit the ground. The weight of evidence suggested that the cause of the accident was that the pilot mishandled his aircraft in the turning manoeuvre and did not expeditiously recover to controlled flight. It was accepted that the navigator justifiably ejected the crew and in doing so saved their lives.

SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

4. The pilot concerned has since left the Royal Air Force, but a number of aspects of crew training and testing are being reviewed. An urgent investigation into the technical problems of Accident Data Recorders is being conducted.

CLAIMS

5. Claims to the value of some DM59,000 have been settled so far by MOD in respect of damage caused by this accident.