

British European Airways Flight 548

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from Staines air disaster)

On June 18, 1972, **British European Airways Flight 548** (callsign **BEALINE 548**), a Hawker Siddeley Trident 1C operated by British European Airways (BEA), crashed two minutes after takeoff from Heathrow Airport, killing all 118 passengers and crew on board. The crash occurred close to the town of Staines, near London, United Kingdom, and was the worst air accident to have occurred on British soil until the Lockerbie disaster of 1988.

Contents

- 1 Accident Synopsis
- 2 Investigation
- 3 Autopsy
- 4 Memorials
- 5 See also
- 6 External links and references

British European Airways Flight 548

Summary	
Date	June 18, 1972
Type	Deep stall
Site	Staines, England
Fatalities	118
Injuries	0
Aircraft	
Aircraft type	Hawker Siddeley Trident 1C
Operator	British European Airways
Tail number	G-ARPI
Passengers	112
Crew	6
Survivors	0

Accident Synopsis

The aircraft, registered as G-ARPI and known familiarly as "Papa India", was on a scheduled flight from London to Brussels

under the command of Captain Stanley Key, one of BEA's most senior captains. 22-year-old Second Officer J.W. Keighley sat in the right-hand seat, while the slightly more experienced 24-year-old Second Officer S. Ticehurst acted as monitoring pilot. During the climb-out from Heathrow, while the aircraft was flown at the correct speed for the configuration, the leading-edge lift-augmentation droop was prematurely retracted. This led to a series of stalls. The condition was not rectified by the pilots despite the operation of the stick pusher, and the aircraft entered a deep stall

from which there was no possibility of recovery. The aircraft rapidly descended with a high, nose-up attitude, until striking the ground close to the A30 near the King George VI Reservoir on the outskirts of Staines. There was no fire on impact.

This aircraft has previously been involved in an accident when its tail was torn off by an Airspeed Ambassador which crashed at Heathrow on 3 July 1968.

Investigation

The question facing the Air Accidents Investigation Branch was the underlying cause of the crash. Although the immediate cause of the stall was easily determined, detailed examination of the wreckage and flight recorder revealed no evidence of any mechanical or structural failure. Investigators soon discovered, however, that human factors likely played a major role. At the time of the accident, BEA was involved in a labour dispute with the British Air Line Pilots Association. Approximately one hour before the flight, the vehemently anti-union Captain Key had entered into a heated argument with another captain about the desirability of strike action. Both of Key's subordinate officers on the flight were present during the confrontation. Also, among the wreckage of Papa India, investigators found a crew table on which the following offensive graffiti directed at the captain had been scribbled:

- KEY MUST GO
- YEAH BUT WHERE?
- BOAC?
- ANYWHERE WILL DO!
- WHEN KEY DIES, WHO WILL BE GOD'S NEXT REPRESENTATIVE IN BEA?
- DOWN WITH KEYLINE MANAGEMENT



The wreckage of *G-ARPI*

A handwriting examiner testified at the inquiry that neither S/O Ticehurst or S/O Keighley were responsible for the graffiti. It is not known if Captain Key saw it on the day of the accident.

Autopsy

Post-mortems of the accident victims showed that all on board had died from injuries received in the accident. However, the autopsy of Captain Key also revealed undiagnosed coronary artery disease, including evidence of a small healed and possibly silent heart attack. More telling, a recent tear was found in the inner lining of the left descending coronary artery. Two cardiologists who examined the Captain's remains testified that the tear probably occurred during or after his outburst in the flight crew room. The cardiologists were not agreed as to the level of incapacitation likely experienced by Captain Key in the minutes and seconds preceding his death, but both felt that the Captain would have been distracted to some extent by the developing cardiac event.

The AAIB also examined a number of crew interaction aspects which it found wanting, including Captain Key's forbidding personality and S/O Keighley's previously documented lack of initiative in simulated emergency situations. The Board also examined how BEA's training schedule for new staff had been disrupted by the labour dispute, leaving inexperienced pilots like S/O Keighley unable to undertake the more complicated but less critical duties of monitoring pilot and in effect forcing them into the role of first officer long before they were ready for that position.

The main questions remained, however: who moved the droop retraction lever, and why was action not taken to correct the error? Furthermore, did the crew override the automatic stall warning system because prior experience with false activations led them to believe it was unreliable, or did a medical emergency in the cockpit distract the crew from its duties?

The AAIB ultimately could not determine a probable cause for the accident. Based on evidence presented during the inquiry, the Board made a series of recommendations with respect to operation of the Trident, crew training, cockpit resource management, cockpit voice recorders, and effective medical examinations. The Board's findings were confirmed by a judicial inquiry under Mr Justice Lane. Load control measures were also taken. Prior to the accident, the cabin of the aircraft was divided into 3 sections, A B C. Section B was immediately in the middle of the aircraft over the wing area. When the load sheet was worked out the middle section of the aircraft, section B was not considered as important. It was more important to trim the aircraft by balancing section A and section C. The incident made loading the aircraft stricter by making sure that section B was also taken into account for the aircraft to be in trim for take-off.

Memorials

Two memorials in Staines were dedicated on 18th June 2004.

The first is in the form of a stained glass window in St. Mary's Church, Church Street. The second is a slightly more accessible area of reflection with seating on the Moormede estate, close to where the accident occurred.

See also

- List of accidents and incidents on commercial airliners

External links and references

- The official AAIB formal report (http://www.aaib.gov.uk/publications/formal_reports/no_4_73_502559.cfm)
- BBC On This Day (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/june/18/newsid_2515000/2515787.stm)
- Airliners.Net - Picture of 'Papa India' before the crash (http://www.airliners.net/search/photo.search?regsearch=G-ARPI&distinct_entry=true)
- Macarthur Job; *Air Disaster: Volume 1*; Aerospace Publications Pty Ltd. (Australia); ISBN 1-875671-11-0 (paperback, reprinted 1996)
- Stewart, Stanley; *Air Disasters*; London: Ian Allan Publishing Ltd, 2001 (first published 1986); ISBN 0-7110-1585-6; pp. 91–112

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_European_Airways_Flight_548"

Categories: Airliner crashes caused by pilot incapacitation | Aviation accidents and incidents in 1972 | 1972 in the United Kingdom | History of Surrey | Aviation accidents and incidents in the United Kingdom

-
- This page was last modified 21:07, 17 April 2007.
 - All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.) Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.