



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

38/11

8/87

12 June 1987

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT TO ROYAL AIR FORCE TORNADO GR1 ZA610

Date: 12 December 1985
Parent Airfield: RAF Marham
Place of accident: North Sea, off Flamborough Head
Crew: 2 (1 Pilot, 1 Navigator)
Casualties: 2 Fatal

1. On 12 December 1985, Tornado ZA610 was the second of 3 aircraft that were to rendezvous at 30 minute intervals with Buccaneer Tanker aircraft for night air-to-air refuelling. There was a cloud layer at 4,000' in the area, with good visibility below.
2. The Tornado crew flew to the rendezvous area over the sea but could not contact their tanker aircraft. They were advised by another Buccaneer crew to make a further attempt on the area radar frequency but this was also unsuccessful. The other Buccaneer tanker then advised the Tornado crew to try an alternative contact frequency and their acknowledgement was the last call heard from ZA610.
3. Meanwhile, ZA610's tanker, having completed its task with the first Tornado, flew on a Southerly heading to the rendezvous at 2500'. The ground radar trace showed that initially the Buccaneer

was trailing its Tornado receiver by about 5 miles, and the Buccaneer crew saw aircraft lights in their 11 o'clock position. Both aircraft then started a port turn together. After passing through about 90 degrees, the Tornado seemed to tighten its turn, and rolled out on a Northerly heading, passing behind the tanker at about one mile. The Buccaneer crew then caught a glimpse of aircraft lights in their 9.30 position, but did not see them again. A radar trace confirmed that ZA610 appeared to start a climbing turn to the right, but the trace then disappeared. Substantial amounts of the wreckage of ZA610 were recovered from the sea, which showed that the crew probably did not eject.

CAUSE

4. It has not been possible to positively determine the cause of the accident, but the most likely possibility was a loss of control following either a pilot induced oscillation, or disorientation. Less likely, was a technical defect, either as the cause or as a contributory factor to the loss of control.

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