

No. 21

Christian and Missionary Alliance, Short Sealand JZ-PTA, crashed on mountain in highlands of Netherlands New Guinea on 28 April 1955. Report released by Director of Civil Aviation, Netherlands New Guinea.

Circumstances

The amphibian aircraft departed Sentani aerodrome near Hollandia on a VFR flight plan for the Baliem River at 0840 hours (local time) on a transport flight carrying a load of furniture, foodstuffs and aluminum sheets. At 0922 the Biak area control centre and Sentani aeronautical radio station both received a report from the aircraft that it was over the Idenburg River, course 220 degrees, VFR at 9 000 feet in slight rain, operation normal. When the next position report over the Baliem became overdue, the Sentani aeronautical radio station and the Biak area control centre attempted to contact the aircraft, but to no avail. The aircraft was found after one month of extensive searching, crashed on a 10 335 foot high mountain. The sole occupant, the pilot, did not survive the crash.

Investigation and Evidence

Prior to departure a Visual Flight Rules flight plan was filed with Sentani air traffic control station indicating a flight to be flown clear of clouds and with a visibility of at least one mile. There was sufficient fuel on board for four hours. The flying time to the Baliem and from there back to Sentani was estimated to be two hours and thirty five minutes. The gross weight of the aircraft at the time of take-off was within the allowable gross weight of 9 600 lbs. and the load was properly distributed.

After departing Sentani the flight progressed in a routine manner and the following position reports were received at the radio communications stations at Sentani and Biak:

2317 Z 4 000 ft. climbing 8 000,
course 225° VFR.

2341 Z 60 miles out, course 225°,
9 000 ft. operation normal,
slight rain.

2412 Z over Idenburg River, course
220° VFR, 9 000 ft. operation
normal, slight rain.

This was the last radio contact with the flight.

On the morning of 28 April the weather was as follows: - the intertropical front was situated along the north coast of New Guinea. It was rather active and locally even very active. Overcast at 10 000 ft. with rain over the lowlands, mountain tops well in clouds with valleys partly closed with stratus, generally westerly winds of approximately 20 knots. Air reports from scheduled flights into and out of Sentani aerodrome gave poor weather conditions in the Hollandia area.

At take-off time the Sentani weather conditions were: - no wind; visibility 2 km; moderate continuous rain.

past weather - rain, cloud 4/8 stratus
1 200 ft. 8/8 alto stratus 10 000 ft.

At 0915 (local time) an improvement message was issued.
- no wind, visibility 5 km. moderate continuous rain.

past weather - rain, clouds 3/8 stratus
1 800 ft. 8/8 alto stratus 10 000 ft.

At 0930 (local time) the Sentani synoptic report indicated:
- no wind, visibility 3 km. moderate continuous rain.

past weather - rain, 2/8 stratus 1 800 ft.
8/8 alto stratus 10 000 ft.

Since no arrival report from the aircraft was received over the Baliem River an alert was declared by the Biak area control centre at 1045 hours (local time).

Search and Rescue flights were executed by PBY aircraft of the Royal Netherlands Naval Air Services, a Piper Pacer of the Unevangelized Fields Mission and a de Havilland Beaver of New Guinea Airline "Kroonduif". Extensive searching was done over jungle covered mountainous terrain for more than two weeks in succession. When reports came in that an aircraft had been seen to crash into Sentani Lake adjacent to Sentani aerodrome, an extensive diving operation was carried out, but not the slightest traces of an aircraft could be found.

On 28 May an Australian Avro Anson was chartered in order to carry out a final search flight. This aircraft spotted JZ-PTA at an altitude of approximately 10 000 ft, crashed on a mountain slope. There were no traces of fire, but from pictures taken from the searching aircraft it was learned that the aircraft had completely disintegrated and survival of the crash by the only occupant - the pilot - was highly unlikely.

In view of the inaccessibility of the terrain where the aircraft crashed it was not possible

to send out a ground party to the scene of the crash.

Probable Cause

The investigating authority reached the conclusion that the probable cause of the accident was the fact that the pilot was caught in adverse weather conditions during his attempt to reach better visibility conditions by climbing to a higher flight level and during this manoeuvre collided with a mountain.