CJO/D/LM (56/07)

12 Oct 07

PSO/CINCAIR

BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HERCULES ZH876

Reference: BOI report into the loss of Hercules ZH876 dated 17 Jul 07.

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the findings of the BOI into the loss of Hercules ZH876 forwarded at Reference A. The Board should be congratulated on their thorough investigation in challenging circumstances. The identified cause of the accident, explosions of 2 IED arrays in the near vicinity of ZH876's touchdown point, seems indisputable. I also concur with the Board's findings, observations and recommendations together with the Station Commander's comments and offer the following from a PJHQ perspective.

2. Immediate actions. Following the loss of ZH876, TLZ operations in both the Op HERRICK and Op TELIC Theatres were suspended temporarily pending the outcome of the immediate investigation. Subsequently, TLZ operations have recommenced on Op HERRICK as TLZs in this theatre have a permanent FP presence and are continuously monitored. TLZ operations remain suspended on Op TELIC, although this is primarily due to the change in disposition of UK forces within the AOR.

3. TLZ Search Procedures. At the time of the incident, the decision to [redacted] was driven by operational priorities. The resultant [redacted] in order to limit the ability of insurgent groups to exploit the sites. In this instance it is clear that there was a lack of understanding of TLZ clearance procedures, resulting in [redacted]. To compound this lack of understanding, [redacted] S26 S26 S26 S26 S26

4. Training. Personnel charged with conducting TLZ operations must understand their role and the appropriate procedures to follow. It is, therefore, essential that the relevant RAF Regiment TTPs are further developed in conjunction with those units who are tasked in this role. The RAF FP Centre has initiated work in this area and we support the Board's recommendation that the NSC should take a lead advisory role in accomplishing this. Ultimately, all units that may be required to conduct TLZ clearance procedures should possess the correct level of training; the NSC is the lead authority.

5. Pattern Setting. PJHQ agrees with the Board's observation that a degree of pattern setting was inevitable as a result of [redacted] at the time of the accident. Noting that [redacted], any future decision to conduct TLZ operations must factor pattern setting into the overall risk / benefit analysis during the planning phase. S26 S26

6. Command and Control. Incoherent C2 at the TLZ in the aftermath of ZH876's loss allowed another aircraft, 2nd C130 to land unannounced. Clearly, this situation placed 2nd C130 at some risk and the aircraft could have been destroyed or damaged by the [redacted] or ZH876's debris. It appears that all involved acted in good faith in reaction to what was perceived to be the prevailing situation despite the incoherency of the C2 arrangements. However, this incident should serve as a salutary reminder that incidents of this nature can deteriorate rapidly and any divergence from established procedures can have serious consequences. The Board's recommendation for an expansion of Tac ATC orders, to include more operationally-focussed guidance, particularly with respect to the potential [redacted], is prudent. S26 S26 S26 S26

7. Communications. [redacted] could have alerted the insurgents that an aircraft was due to arrive imminently on the TLZ. The Board's recommendation that [redacted] should be fitted to the C130J fleet and provided for Tac ATC is therefore supported. The Board also notes that the FP search of the TLZ [redacted] and was therefore a contributory factor to the incident involving ZH87. This point is agreed albeit the judgement remains that this was an acceptable operational hazard given the alternative of [redacted]. S26 S26 S26 S26

8. Summary. This accident has much in common with the loss of XV206 in 2006. Following this earlier accident, significant improvements to TLZ operations had been made in both the Op TELIC and Op HERRICK theatres, including the use of [redacted]. Following this latest event, we have reviewed all applicable TLZ procedures in order to minimize the level of inherent risk. S26

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