

PART 1.7 – REVIEWING AUTHORITY COMMENTS

1. I agree that the cause of this accident was the controlled flight of the Tutor G-BYXR into the Standard Cirrus glider G-CKHT, and I support all of the recommendations made by the Panel.
2. Air experience flying is a critical component of the Service's programme to encourage young people to take an interest in aviation, and to foster in them a better understanding of the Royal Air Force. It also supports the Government's intent to encourage positive activities for British youth. It affords an exciting opportunity to, literally, broaden horizons but, despite all of the precautions taken, and in common with other outdoor pursuits, it is not entirely without risk, as the tragic outcome of this accident attests.
3. The review of air experience flying, that I commissioned in the aftermath of this, and a similar accident, has confirmed that the foundations which underpin the activity are solid. However, diligent application of the rules that govern air experience flying and crucial application of the processes through which it is conducted are critical to ensuring that we discharge fully the duty of care that we owe to our cadets.
4. Accident theory can be viewed as a series of preventative measures to reduce the risk of an accident, and a series of ameliorating measures to reduce the consequences of an accident. In this accident greater risk materialised than had been expected, both in terms of the congestion of the lower airspace, which increased the likelihood of a collision, and the pilot's fitness to fly, which probably reduced the effectiveness of his visual lookout and ability to recover the aircraft. We will sadly never know for certain why Tutor G-BYXR collided with the Standard Cirrus glider G-CKHT, or why the Tutor aircraft was not subsequently recovered to controlled flight. Regarding the pilot's fitness to fly, the chain of command judged that the pilot's medical condition did not debar him from either air experience or instructional flying. Likewise it seems implausible that the pilot, who was a highly experienced instructor, would knowingly have put at risk the life of his passengers, and himself, by conducting an activity for which he knew he was unfit. The exact degree of contribution is not possible to judge. However, hindsight has tragically demonstrated that the degree of risk was too great.
5. Given the inherent risk that already comes with our profession, and the responsibilities that we have to our people, and more widely, we must constantly strive to reduce risk and additional risk should only be accepted when there is a clear operational imperative to do so; moreover, the evaluation of the risk and both the discussion and the outcome must be clearly recorded. In this instance a more rigorously applied and better documented process in arriving at those decisions would have removed much of the doubt with which we are now struggling. I have, therefore, directed that the orders of both the flying and medical supervisory chains are to be reviewed to ensure that this message is articulated with utmost clarity. Moreover, by way of further enhancing assurance, I have directed that a review be conducted of the way in which we manage and oversee debilitating conditions in our aircrew alongside the work, set in train by the Convening Authority, on the management of medical records for those who are not in full time service. Implementation of the remaining recommendations in this inquiry will further enhance our ability to both ensure and assure the safe delivery of air experience flying, and in particular, I have directed that the initiative to procure an abandonment trainer should be pursued as a matter of urgency.
6. Looking more broadly, I hope that the lessons learned from this tragic accident, in combination with recommendations from the AAIB Report, will deliver positive change outside my area of influence, to include universal fitting of CWS to air platforms and an enhanced notification system for GA and glider activity.

7. In sum, air experience flying is a core activity and important for the future health of the Service. Clearly all flying has associated risk but we have an extraordinary safety record in the delivery of air experience flights, which we are committed to maintain. The death of a young cadet and an experienced pilot is, therefore, a matter of profound regret for us all.

Sir Chris Moran
Air Chief Marshal
Commander-in-Chief
Air Command

20 April 2010