

Aviacion Civil  
Comision de Accidentes  
A la atencion de Sr. don Francisco Soto, Secretario  
**Reference number A-049/80**

Civil Aviation  
Commission on Accidents  
Spain

Technical Report  
On the Disappearance of a  
DOUGLAS DC-3 Aircraft,  
Registration # ECT-025,  
on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1980,  
to the North of Palm of Majorca

## 1. -- INVESTIGATION

### 1.1. History of the Flight

The aircraft, a Douglas DC-3, with registration number ECT-025, left the Four Winds Airport, at 15:29 hours on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1980, in a transfer flight from Madrid to Perpignan, France. The plane disappeared during flight, without notice or subsequent news.

The plane, ECT-025, was bought at auction of the Spanish Air Force, (Ejercito of the Espanol Air) and was later authorized to make a ferry flight to Perpignan, from where it was bound towards Germany to become part of an aviation museum. It was anticipated that the plane would travel along with a Junkers JU-52 that was going to the same museum and a Cessna 337, which was to film parts of the flight. Due to the greater speed of the DC-3, its departure was delayed. The other two planes departed in the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Subsequently various problems arose with the installation of the radio in the DC-3, which delayed take-off. The plane finally took off at 15:29 hours, without authorization, using a runway which was not rated for the weight of the DC-3 aircraft. No other news of the DC-3 was received. A search was initiated when officials became aware that the aircraft was not in contact with the others and had not arrived at the expected waypoints of the flight.

### 1.2. Injuries to Persons

	Dead	Injured	Slight/Unharmed
Crew	1 (*)	--	--
Passengers	1 (*)	--	--
Others	--	--	--

(1) All hours are G.M.T.

(\*) Assumes a pilot and a passenger, who both have died.

1.3. Damage to the Aircraft

Disappeared. The damage is considered to be 100%.

1.4. Other Damage

There is no evidence of other damage.

1.5. Personal Information

The assumed pilot in command of the aircraft, Mr. Harold Whitaker<sup>1</sup>, of German nationality<sup>2</sup>, was qualified to fly a DC-3. Absent other information, it is assumed that he was accompanied by a passenger, co-pilot US Army Major Lawrence J. Eckmann<sup>3</sup> and perhaps a young German woman, but all the data are not known.<sup>4</sup>

1.6. Information on the Aircraft

The Douglas DC-3 aircraft, American serial #42-93461, Registration # ECT-025, was auctioned by the Spanish Air Force, after having been decommissioned. Purchased for 900,000 pesetas<sup>5</sup> in the name of: Kurfiss Aviation GmbH<sup>6</sup>, the transaction was completed on July 10, 1979. The aircraft was then repaired by mechanics contracted by the owner. On September 29, 1979, a woman representing the owner Ms. [name redacted], requested permission to ferry the aircraft. Permission was granted and a provisional, restricted Certificate of Airworthiness was issued.

The aircraft was powered by two Pratt & Whitney engines, Model R-1830, Serial # P-134951 and 77-861 with Hamilton Standard propellers, Serial#

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all parties were redacted from the report provided from Spain's Civil Aviation Authorities

<sup>2</sup> The report is in error in assuming that because Whitaker resided in Germany at the time, he was of German nationality. Whitaker, at the time was still a citizen of the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> The co-pilot was not reported as such in the Spanish report. His full name is now confirmed (2009).

<sup>4</sup> This is unconfirmed information and is not reflected in the casualty count earlier in the report but it certainly gives imagination free flight.

<sup>5</sup> US dollar equivalent \$7,924.03 at a 2008 exchange rate. The pasetas is no longer used, superseded by the Euro.

<sup>6</sup> The name of the buyer was redacted from the original report and was located in an online database of air accidents as Kurfiss Aviation GmbH, Eschenstra D-75328 Schömberg, Württ Germany.

NK-154202 and F-6950 mod. 23E50.

On the morning of October 3rd, a VHF radio was installed. It was a Becker 760 Ch, which had been tested for both transmission and reception, though two-way communications testing could not be completed after installation due to an incompatibility of the pins on the only headset available for use with the radio equipment.

The airship had a maximum take-off weight of 11.440 Kg.

#### 1.7. Weather Information

The weather conditions were suitable for good flight visibility. The two pilots of the other aircraft reported a zone of “calm”, with a loss of vertical visibility near the Province of Lerida, - which was in the theoretical route of the aircraft.

#### 1.8. Aids to Navigation

The flight was planned to use VFR<sup>7</sup>. The aircraft had a variety of navigation equipment though none of it was functional, according to what the pilot told a witness.<sup>8</sup>

#### 1.9. Communications

The aircraft maintained no communication with the Tower of Four Winds Airport or with the other two aircraft. The other pilots had agreed prior their departure to communicate using frequency 135.90.

#### 1.10 Terrestrial Airport and Facilities

The aircraft took off from the asphalt runway of the Four Winds Airport. That runway is limited to use only by planes lighter than the DC-3. The

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<sup>7</sup> Visual Flight Rules

<sup>8</sup> This un-named witness may be one of the last people to speak with Harold. It would be nice to identify who it is.

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pilot was supposed to use an earth runway, parallel to the asphalt one which allows use by the heavier aircraft.

#### 1.11 Flight Recorders

The aircraft had no flight recorders and they were not required.

#### 1.12 Remainder of the Aircraft and Impact

Not affected.

#### 1.13 Medical Information and Pathology

No information is available on the activities of the crew in the hours preceding the event and there is no indication with respect to any impairment or decrease of aptitude of the pilot.

#### 1.14 Fire

Not affected.

#### 1.15 Rescue and Survival

Given the phases of Incerfa, Alerfa and Detresfa<sup>9</sup>, proceeding to a work search, as much aerial territory was searched during the following days. The search continued while there existed a reasonable hope to find survivors.

#### 1.16 Tests and Investigations

The disappearance of the aircraft resulted in an exhaustive analysis of the records of existing radar and communications. The investigation also involved interviews with the personnel connected with the event.

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<sup>9</sup> UNCERTAINTY PHASE, ALERT PHASE, DISTRESS PHASE.

These are Internationally used terms for the phases of all search and rescue operations

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### 1.17 Other Information

The pilot of an aircraft registered as EC-DEP, a Piper PA-28, proceeding to Madrid from Santiago, while flying near the town of Villaviciosa of Odon, notified officials that a DC-3 taking off from the Four Winds Airport came so near to him that it forced him to turn aside to avoid a collision with his aircraft. The DC-3 was at approximately 3,700 feet altitude with a heading of 270° which it maintained until they lost sight of it. The only DC-3 in flight the day and hour of the event was ECT-025.

## 2. -- ANALYSIS

The Douglas DC-3 aircraft was purchased at auction from the Spanish Air Force, along with another aircraft, a Junkers JU-52, to become part of a “static” Museum of the Air. For this reason, given the available data on the condition of the aircraft, this plane was not in a condition to fly such as would be required today. This does not mean that it was not capable of flying, only that the information available did not indicate that the navigation instruments of the aircraft, with the exception of the compass, did not work and it is probable that the radio could not be used to receive.

Given where the aircraft was destined, it was granted a restricted certificate of airworthiness for a ferry flight to leave the Spanish territory, proving itself capable to make the flight.

Various delays and problems arose which compounded resulting that the airship took off behind schedule from the Four Winds Airport, and due to the hour of sunset on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, presumably this would result in arrival at Perpignan at night.

As it seems that they realized there were problems with the radio, it is probable that after requesting authorization, they were directed towards the point of takeoff, without actually receiving authorization, nor desiring to

wait for it, presumably in a state of nervousness by the hour and with the knowledge that if they did not take off they would not be able to do so until the following day, with the consequent upheaval to the other two aircraft which had already left.

The aircraft presumably reached the zone of Barcelona in very low visibility conditions, due to both the hazy conditions and the diminishing daylight hours. It is not known what decisions were made by its crew. Speculation advises to think that they were headed towards the sea, descending to look for luminous references. The possible disorientation, together with the lack of navigation aids could cause an accident, and to not to have found the aircraft, it is possible that it fell to the sea, sinking.

### **3. -- CONCLUSIONS**

The cases of disappearance of aircraft are surrounded by the mystery that results from the lack of data. In the case of the ECT-025, no one knows what occurred after take-off from the Four Winds Airport, and as a result, no probable cause of an accident can be determined.

### **4. -- RECOMENDATIONS**

None