Final Report on Aircraft Accident 18 December, 1998 – Cessna 206 6Y-JNH
Submitted to the Director General Civil Aviation and the Civil Aviation Authority Board
19 February, 1999

Summary:

Aircraft 6Y-JNH, a Cessna 206 operated by Airways International Limited (AIL) was on a chartered courier flight with the pilot and two passengers, on board. The flight departed Tinson Pen Aerodrome at approximately 0700 hours on a flight plan that would take it north to Annotto Bay and then west along the coast to Boscobel Airport, the intended point of landing. At approximately 0715 AM, the pilot broadcast a position report over Annotto Bay at 1600 feet descending. This was the last reported radio communication from the aircraft.

At approximately 0730 hours, personnel at Boscobel realized that the aircraft was overdue and informed AIL. At 0845 AIL, following an unsuccessful radio and telephone communications search, informed the Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA) that the aircraft was overdue. A ground search party organized by AIL was informed at approximately 1000 hours that a fisherman returning to Robin's Bay, St. Mary's, had found debris floating in the channel to the port. AIL personnel arrived at the port and identified the debris as coming from 6Y-JNH and at 1145, the JCAA was informed of the discovery.

JCAA investigators arrived on the scene at 1500 hours. Two or three people reported hearing an aircraft fly past at low altitude, followed by a loud noise (possible impact) in the vicinity. However, due to squalls and extremely low visibility in the area, no one saw the aircraft. Those hearing the impact placed the distance from shore at between ¼ and ½ mile. It was later that morning that a fisherman returning to port discovered the debris floating in the channel. With the delay between the crash time and the discovery of the wreckage, it was almost impossible to determine the point of impact with any degree of accuracy, as wave action and currents would have moved the floating wreckage. Water depths in the area range from 3 to 15 fathoms inside the reef, dropping off to 100 and then 600 fathoms a few hundred feet from shore.

An extensive search by the Coast Guard, police and private individuals turned up no new evidence and the search was called off 26 December, 1998. It is presumed that all souls on board the aircraft perished in the crash.

Analysis:

Pilot:

The pilot was properly licensed and had approximately 1000 hours in single engine aircraft. He was Visual Flight Rules (VFR) qualified and did not hold an instrument rating. He had been flying for the company for over a year and currency on the aircraft type is not considered a factor in this accident. Training records were up-to-date and there was nothing pertinent in them. He held a valid medical and appeared to be in good health. He had sufficient time for rest before the flight and fatigue is not considered a factor in this accident.

Weather:

Weather probably played a part in this accident. Weather in the vicinity of the crash site was reported by another pilot as squalls with tops at 7500 feet with a overcast layer above that. The base of the cloud was between 600 and 800 feet and squalls were separated by gaps of ¼ to ½ mile. Persons on the ground at Robin's Bay reported the visibility at times to be near zero in heavy rain.

Aircraft – General

The aircraft was a Cessna U206 with 10,020 hours on the airframe. The aircraft and all components were properly maintained and it appeared that all Airworthiness Directives and Inspections had been completed. There was no evidence of a defect, or recurring defect, that might be considered a factor in this accident. With minimal cargo, three souls and five hours of fuel on board, the aircraft would have been within its load and balance limits, eliminating an out-of-balance condition as a cause factor.

The type of wreckage and small amount found indicated that the aircraft struck the water with great force, probably while under power and probably in uncontrolled flight. As the exact crash site could not be determined, the main fuselage and the engine of the aircraft were never located.

Cause of Death

No bodies were recovered from the crash site and it is therefore presumed that all souls on board perished in the crash. While no definite cause of death could be determined, the manner in which the aircraft broke up would indicate it struck the water with tremendous force, and it is highly unlikely that anyone could have survived the initial impact.

Cause Factors

Examination of aircraft maintenance records could not establish a mechanical cause factor for this accident. Pilot decision-making likely played a major part in that the pilot, faced with deteriorating weather conditions, made a decision to press on to destination rather than return to the point of departure or fly to an alternate aerodrome. Squalls with heavy rain can produce downdrafts and limited visibility that can create serious problems to even the most experienced pilots. A non-instrument rated pilot, flying into such conditions, could be hard pressed to make a successful recovery.

Although a positive cause factor cannot be determined, the most likely factor is;

1. **Pilot Error:** in that the pilot pressed on in weather conditions that were rapidly deteriorating and lost control of the aircraft in heavy rain, cloud or a combination of both. The resulting crash destroyed the aircraft and took the lives of the three souls on board.

Recommendations:

The inexperienced pilot often feels that turning back from a flight reflects on his/her piloting ability, and peers will consider them inferior pilots. Flight schools and companies employing low-time pilots should remind them that turning back is often more prudent than continuing into deteriorating flight conditions.