

## **Royal Air Force Avro Shackleton MR3 PH 3, XF702 “B”, with a 206 Squadron crew which crashed on December 21st 1967.**

### **Brief History of Shackleton XF702 MR 3 at Kinloss**

1. Arrived on 120 Sqn 6/66 coded **B**.
2. To HSA Woodford for Viper jet engine fit 11.66, became MR3 **Phase III**, returning to Kinloss 3.67 on **Flying Wing charge**, still as B.
3. On 21.12.67 crashed into Creag Bhan, Lochailort, Inverness-shire, following severe icing in cloud.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

I was a young Senior Aircraftman (SAC), Aircraft Instrument Mechanic, stationed at RAF Kinloss when this accident happened.

All the aircrews were allocated to a specific Squadron i.e. 120, 201 or 206 Sqn but in early 1967 all the aircraft were designated as being part of Flying Wing and not allocated to individual squadrons. The same happened to us, the squadron ground crew (120, 201 & 206), we became part of Shackleton Handling & Rectification Flight (H&R Flight) e.g. I was on 120 Squadron before this reorg. I had flown in XF702 in 1966 when it belonged to 120 Sqn.

All of the aircraft and ground crew were based on the North side of the airfield on Shackleton Handling & Rectification Flight (H&R Flight), which was also coincidentally 120 Sqn headquarters - so I didn't have to move far. The aircraft had returned to Shackleton H&R Flight the previous afternoon from Aircraft Servicing Flight (ASF) after an air test. I was involved as a member of the towing team relocating the aircraft from the ASF hangar on the main site to the H&R dispersal and replacing it with another for deep servicing.

### **DECEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup> 1966**

I was on day shift when XF702 made its final flight leaving our dispersal about midday – I can't remember whether I was on the “seeing-off” crew. We realised that something terrible had happened around 2 pm when an officer arrived on the H&R Flight Control Office and retrieved the current aircraft servicing documents for XF702. This occurrence only ever happens when an aircraft is involved in an accident and only after this had taken place were we informed about the possible loss of the aircraft.

A number of “techies”, including myself, were later called in to see the OC Flight. There was a Chief Technician and 6 tradesmen representing the different aircraft servicing trades (airframe, engine, electrician, instrument, armourer, radio & radar). We were to form the service element of the crash recovery team. We were briefed to be ready to leave Kinloss that evening and travel to Fort William.

## **DECEMBER 22<sup>ST</sup> 1966**

We climbed to the crash site to assist the accident investigators in identifying any parts of the aircraft relevant to our trades. The pathologist had almost completed his task with the help of the RAF Kinloss mountain rescue team and local police. It was a scene of total devastation - the only large items to be seen within 100 yards as far as I can remember were one or two of the Griffon engines and one of the Viper jet engines. It was a very moving and upsetting time since the aircraft had disintegrated into small pieces. These were semi-buried in the boggy ground but there were also lots of personal effects which kept coming to the surface. Army personnel from Fort George were drafted in to do a fingertip search, pick up any metal, and bring it for us to identify and mark before loading it into a net ready to be airlifted by helicopter to the castle grounds below. I can honestly say that apart from some the engine parts and a part of a control surface I personally only found a small number of components which I recognised.

This continued for a few days and meantime we were accommodated in a school hall in Fort William. Although it was a very sad time and we had been finding the conditions extremely demanding I remember late one afternoon we (RAF & Army) were issued with a "rum ration" which we opted to take before leaving the crash site. It was very big mistake and we all found the 700 foot "climb down the hill" very difficult indeed. I declined the same offer next day.

I returned to Kinloss on Xmas eve because I was to flying out to Sharjah on another Shackleton in early January.

I also still think of the men who lost their lives and their families – it must have been a terrible time for them. During my career in the RAF I was on other squadrons (Tornado) where aircraft have crashed but none had the impact of XF702 and WR976, also from Kinloss, which had crashed the month before (November 1967) off the Cornish coast. I was on detachment to St Mawgan with 6 aircraft (including WR976), aircrew & groundcrew when WR976 crashed.

All these details are from a long time ago but it still remains pretty vivid in my mind. I have never revisited the site although I did go to the foot of the hill on Sept 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 when I was on holiday in Scotland. I believe there is now a memorial cairn at the crash site.