

Unconscious trainee pilot's plane flew itself into South Australia

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A trainee pilot flew this Tobago single-engine plane for 250km into South Australia while unconscious at the controls, an investigation has revealed.

Source: AdelaideNow

A TRAINEE pilot lay unconscious for 55 minutes while his plane flew itself for 250km into Adelaide.

A report released this week by the Transport Safety Bureau has revealed the young pilot - who has now been suspended from flying - woke to find he had overshot Parafield Airport and was heading out to sea.

The Middle Eastern man, who studied with Flight Training Adelaide for a year on an Emirates Airlines scholarship, has now returned home after the incident ended his career.

The bureau's report said the pilot, in his early 20s, left Parafield for a solo training flight to Mildura and back on December 27, arriving in the Victorian town for lunch.

He refuelled, ate and rehydrated, before getting back into the plane to head home.

It was while flying over Renmark that the pilot reported feeling hot and sweaty.

"He stated that the sun was directly in his eyes and he found it difficult to look out of the windscreen due to the sun glare," the report said.

The pilot, who was not named in the report, decided to climb to a higher altitude of 1980m in an effort to cool the cabin, but blacked out soon after.

"(He) regained consciousness about 55 minutes later over the water and uncertain of his position," the report detailed.

In fact, the plane had missed Parafield entirely and was on its way out to the open waters of the Great Australian Bight after passing Aldinga.

"The plane would have kept going until it ran out of fuel if he hadn't regained consciousness," bureau spokesman Dan O'Malley said.

The aircraft appeared on air traffic control radar at 3.30pm "outside controlled airspace" to the northeast of Adelaide.

Air traffic control tried several times to contact the man by radio, but their calls went unanswered.

The pilot finally responded at 4.35pm and was guided back to Parafield.

Flight Training Adelaide chief executive Pine Pienaar said the young man was "lucky to survive" the ordeal.

He said the single-engine Tobago plane had enough fuel to fly for another 60 minutes - and would have then pitched into the sea.

"I have never heard of anything like this during my 28 years in the industry," Mr Pienaar said.

"The fact he did come around saved him from ending up in the drink."

The pilot later told Mr Pienaar of his "scary experience" when he came to saying, "I looked up and didn't know where I was".

The man was among a number of Emirates Airlines employees enrolled at the Parafield Airport flight training centre. Mr Pienaar said the trainee pilot's blackout was baffling, given he had previously passed a medical examination for aviators.

"Every now and then a guy has an anomaly no one knows about," Mr Pienaar said.

Source: <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/unconscious-trainee-pilots-plane-flew-itself-into-south-australia/story-e6frea6u-1226064791535>

ATSB Source Report: <http://www.atsb.gov.au/media/3422442/ab2011040.pdf>