



**Accident** to the CESSNA 208  
registered **F-HSLE**  
on Sunday 15 October 2023  
at Monétier Allémont

<b>Time</b>	Around 10:50 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Operator</b>	Skydive Center
<b>Type of flight</b>	Skydiving activity
<b>Persons on board</b>	Pilot
<b>Consequences and damage</b>	Pilot fatally injured, aeroplane destroyed

This is a courtesy translation by the BEA of the Final Report on the Safety Investigation. As accurate as the translation may be, the original text in French is the work of reference.

**Collision with terrain during descent,  
during a skydiving flight**

**1 HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT**

*Note: the following information is principally based on statements, radio-communication recordings and radar data.*

At around 08:00, the pilot started a series of four skydiving flights overhead Gap-Tallard aerodrome. On completion of these four flights, the pilot landed and refuelled the aeroplane for a new series of four flights. During the second flight of this new series (the sixth flight of the day), after the skydivers had jumped from the aeroplane, the pilot started the descent to the west of the aerodrome (see Figure 1, point **3**), on a flight path similar to those of the five previous flights. During this descent, he carried out a wide LH turn to join the final approach. At an altitude of 6,400 ft, unlike the previous flights, the pilot turned right (see point **5**) onto a south-westerly route and then continued the descent in a straight line. The aeroplane collided head on with the side of the mountain (see point **6**) close to Crigne peak. A fire broke out in the collision.

<sup>1</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, the times in this report are in local time.

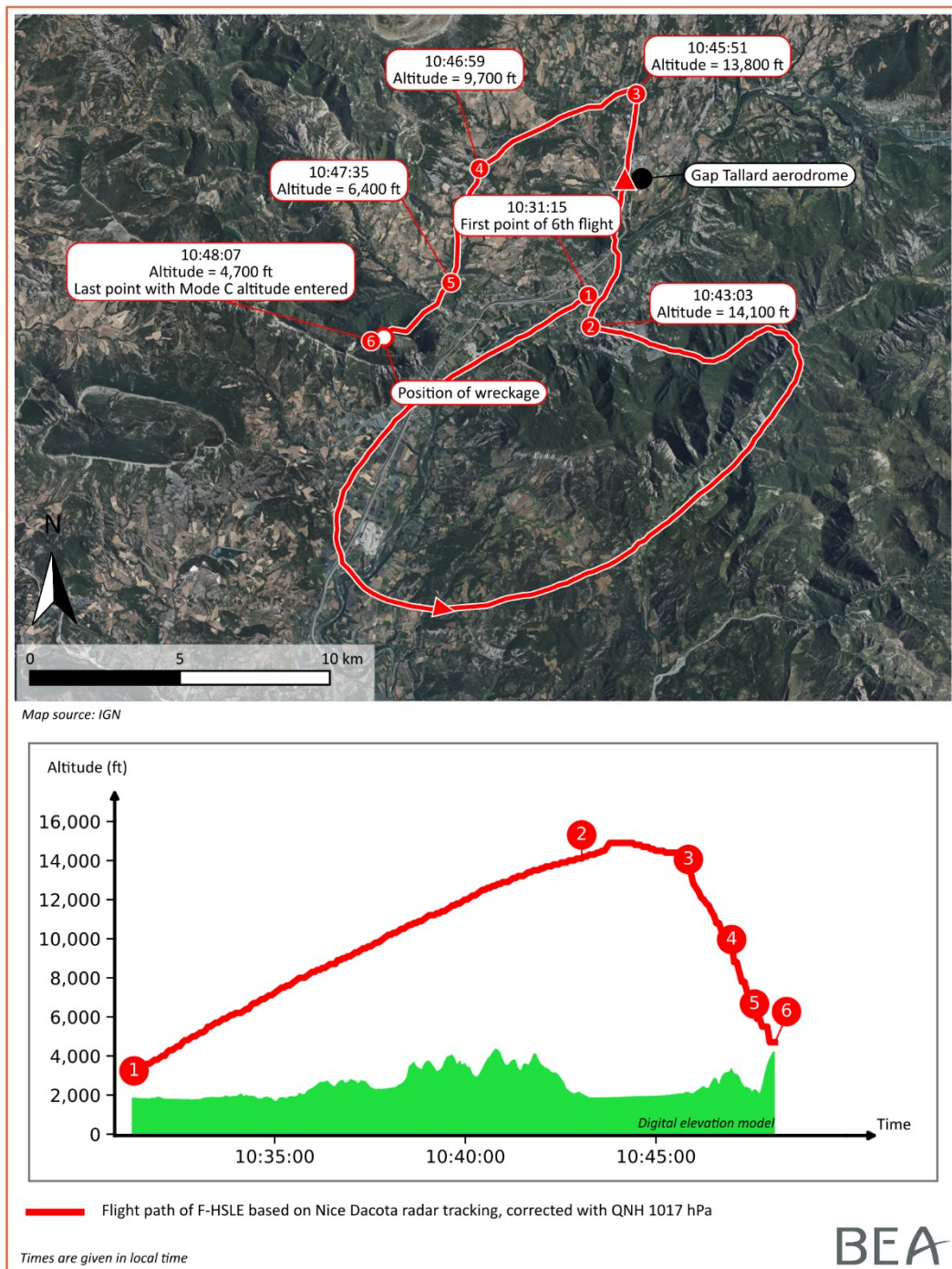


Figure 1: flight path followed during 6th flight

## 2 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### 2.1 Aircraft information

The Cessna 208 registered F-HSLE was an aeroplane of metal construction, with a fixed landing gear and high wings connected to the fuselage by means of struts. It was equipped with a Pratt & Whitney PT6A-140 engine and a Hartzell HC-B3TN-3AF three-blade metal propeller.

The last maintenance operation on 5 October 2023 was a 200-h inspection. The aeroplane had logged 3,793 flight hours and 7,447 cycles; the engine had logged 1,608 hours and 1,948 cycles.



## 2.2 Accident site and examination of wreckage

The examinations on the accident site were limited due to both the condition of the wreckage, destroyed during the collision with the ground and the subsequent fire that broke out, and to the difficulties of accessing and working on the site (slope of ground).

The wreckage was scattered in a mid-mountain ravine at an altitude of around 1,300 m, 10 km south-west of Gap-Tallard aerodrome (the aeroplane's operating base). The point of collision with the terrain was situated on the extended flight path. The accident site was located at the bottom of the northern slope of the mountain.

The aeroplane was dispersed and substantially damaged by a fire which broke out after the collision. The main components of the aircraft were present on the accident site which indicates that the aeroplane was complete at the time of the collision with the terrain.

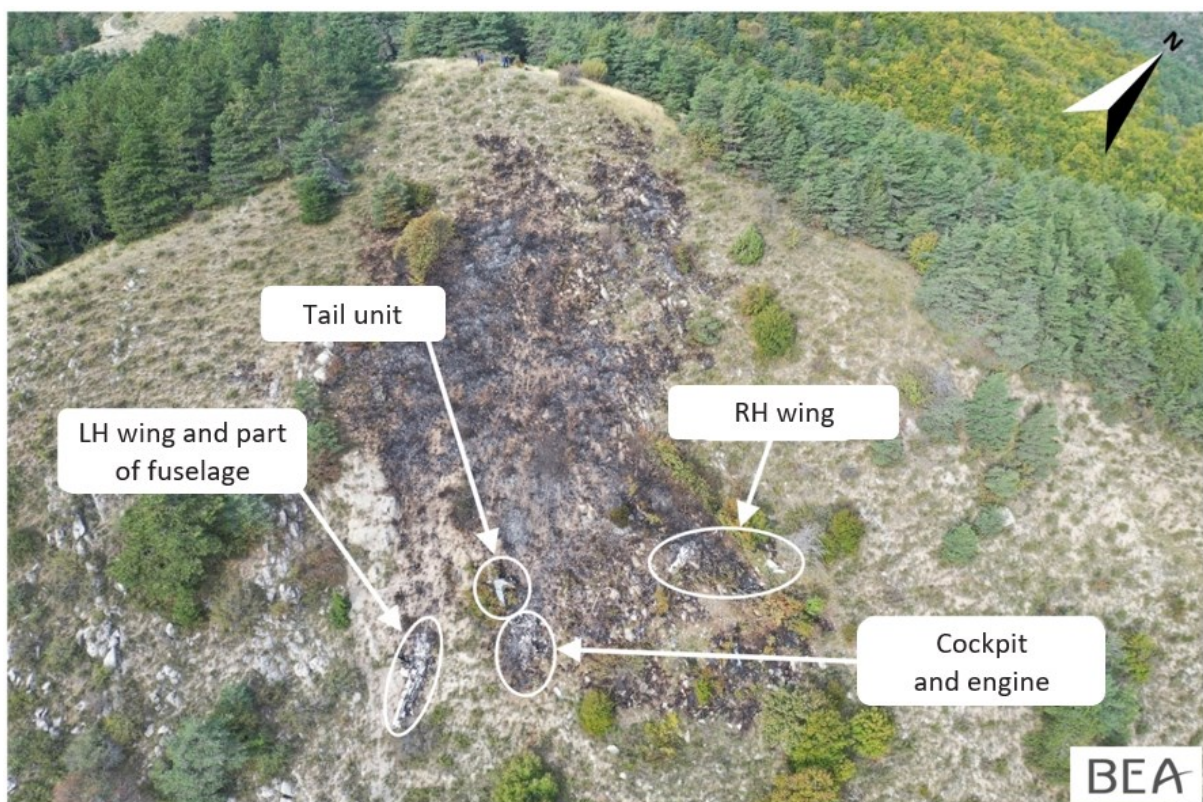


Figure 2: distribution of debris (aerial view, source: Gendarmerie)

The ruptures to the various elements of the airframe and their distribution on the ground were consistent with a high-energy impact and a nose-down attitude at the time of the collision with the ground. The aeroplane then turned over before completely dispersing.

The engine and cockpit were destroyed by fire. Given the pitch attitude of the aeroplane at the time of the collision with the terrain, the positions of the various engine controls do not reflect their position before the collision with the terrain. Certain instrument panel instruments were identified but the damage caused by the fire meant that they could not be analysed.

It was only possible to partially check the continuity of the flight controls.

### 2.3 Meteorological information

The meteorological information transmitted by the AFIS officer, on duty in the Gap-Tallard aerodrome control tower at the time of the accident, was the following: CAVOK, wind calm, visibility greater than 10 km.

### 2.4 Radio communications

The radio communications between the aeroplane pilot and the AFIS officer on 119.100 Mhz and between the pilot and the Starter Para (responsible for the skydiving activity on the ground) on 131.500 Mhz were retrieved and analysed.

The content of the radio messages between the pilot, the AFIS officer and the Starter Para was consistent with what was expected for a skydiving activity and being in aerodrome traffic from the first flight up to the start of descent of the sixth flight.

During the descent and return to the aerodrome of the sixth flight, neither the reported positions nor the various flight paths of the aircraft flying in the aerodrome airspace can explain the change in flight path of F-HSLE (see point 5, Figure 1).

A last exchange which could be associated with the pilot, at 10:47:44, i.e. around ten seconds after the flight path of F-HSLE changed and seventeen seconds before the accident, reveal a change in intonation compared with the previous exchanges.

There was no communication from the pilot indicating a technical problem or an emergency situation just before the accident.

### 2.5 Pilot information

The 34-year-old pilot held a commercial pilot licence (CPL(A)) obtained in 2018 along with a single engine piston (SEP) and single engine turbine (SET) rating and the approval to carry out skydiving flights on the Pilatus PC6 and Cessna C208. He had logged more than 3,000 flight hours.

The pilot was a permanent member of staff at Skydive Center where he was the main pilot. He was also responsible for flight operations, crew training and continuing airworthiness.

In October 2022, the pilot was on sick leave after a suicide attempt on 12 October. The gendarmerie had reported this suicide attempt to the French Civil Aviation Safety Directorate (DSAC). The Civil Aviation Safety Director, in compliance with the French Civil Aviation Code, suspended the pilot's medical fitness certificate on 17 October 2022 and referred him to the French Civil Aviation Medical Council (CMAC) which declared him unfit.

On 8 December 2022, the pilot underwent a medical and psychological examination at the Percy CEMPN<sup>2</sup> as part of a full class 1 medical check-up at the request of the CMAC. Following this medical-psychological examination, the CEMPN psychiatrist issued a guarded prognosis from a medical-psychological point of view, and indicated that, in the event of a return to service, a reassessment would be required after six months to assess his rehabilitation.

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<sup>2</sup> French flight crew medical expertise centre

On 8 March 2023, the CMAC, after hearing the pilot and re-examining his medical file, re-issued a medical fitness certificate to the pilot, with no restrictions or follow-up obligations.

In April 2023, the pilot and his employer signed an amendment to the contract for a move to part-time work, with a gradual resumption of flying over the months of April and May.

From 10 September to 7 October 2023, the pilot was on leave, during which he attended a training course to obtain an Instrument Rating (IR) with a view to a career advancement. However, due to an insufficient level in English to try for the IR rating, the pilot did not attempt the final test.

## 2.6 Statements

An eyewitness who was near the ridge line north of the accident site, indicated that he saw the aeroplane fly over him in a straight line and at a very low height which he estimated at around ten metres. He added that he had not seen any smoke and that he had heard the noise of the engine which seemed normal and constant. He then lost sight of the aeroplane due to the ridge, just before hearing the noise of the collision with the terrain.

A pilot of a microlight flying in an easterly direction in Barcillonnette valley (situated north of Crigne peak) indicated that he had seen the aeroplane higher than him at a height of around 6,000 ft in descent on a north-south flight path. He specified that he was surprised by the speed of the aeroplane and the descending flight path. He added that he lost sight of the aeroplane just before perceiving smoke. He called the aerodrome AFIS officer to inform him of the accident. He added that there was a light northerly wind and visibility was good.

The manager of Skydive Center confirmed that due to disagreements with the pilot after his sick leave at the end of 2022, a compromise had been reached in April 2023 for the pilot to work part-time. He specified that the pilot had informed him on Saturday morning (the day before the accident) that he was ill and could not come to work that day. He added that he had offered to find a replacement for him on Sunday (the day of the accident), but that the pilot had indicated that he would be present. The manager did not see the pilot on the day of the accident.

The pilot's wife stated that in October 2022, their relationship had deteriorated and they were considering separating. The pilot then made a suicide attempt. It was after this suicide attempt that the pilot's medical fitness certificate was suspended. The pilot's wife added that by early 2023, their personal situation had improved and the pilot had been awarded his medical fitness certificate again. She confirmed that her husband went to Valence to take a flying course to obtain his IR rating. She confirmed that in the days leading up to the accident, she and her husband had separated.

According to several of the pilot's close friends, he was having a very hard time with this separation.

A friend of the pilot's, who is also a pilot, stated that after the IR course, the pilot was very affected by this linguistic shortcoming, which compromised his chances of obtaining the IR qualification and constituted a hindrance to his career.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

*The conclusions are solely based on the information which came to the knowledge of the BEA during the investigation.*

At the end of the day's sixth skydiver drop, the pilot, in descent towards the aerodrome, took a south-easterly heading towards the terrain. The aircraft's flight path and speed, as well as the pilot's tone of voice during a final exchange with the "Starter Para" a few seconds before the collision with the terrain, point to a deliberate manoeuvre.

In the absence of elements to support other hypotheses, this "exit" from the return circuit to the aerodrome is compatible with a raptus<sup>3</sup> that enabled the pilot to escape from the psycho-affective context from which he appeared to be suffering.

***The BEA investigations are conducted with the sole objective of improving aviation safety and are not intended to apportion blame or liabilities.***

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<sup>3</sup> A sudden, violent impulse to commit a serious act (homicide, suicide, mutilation).