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Accident to the SCHEMPP HIRTH DISCUS 2C registered OE-5751 on Sunday 16 July 2023 at Méolans-Revel (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence)

Time	At 16:08[1]
Operator	Aéroclub Flugsportverein Nötsch (Austria)
Type of flight	Local
Persons on board	Pilot
Consequences and damage	Pilot fatally injured, glider 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.	

Mountain flight, collision with ground

1 HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

Note: the following information is principally based on statements and data from the glider's on-board computer.

The day before the accident, a group composed of four pilots, including the pilot of the accident glider, arrived by road at Gap Tallard aerodrome (Hautes-Alpes) towing gliders belonging to their Austrian flying club. They planned to stay for two weeks in Gap. An association based at Gap aerodrome provided them with accommodation, the information required to prepare the flights and towed take-offs.

The flights started the day after the arrival of the group of pilots. At 13:34, the pilot of OE-5751 carried out a towed take-off. At 13:42, the glider pilot released the cable at an altitude of 1,645 m (see **Figure 1**, point 2). The pilot used thermal lifts and continued his route eastwards. At 15:27, he reached the altitude of 4,200 m. At 15:30, at an altitude of 4,015 m and at a distance of 82 km from Gap Tallard aerodrome, the pilot performed a U-turn towards the south-west (point 3). He was able to benefit from a few thermal lifts, and then at 15:54, started tracking with an average rate of descent of 1 m/s. At 16:07:47, when the pilot was at an altitude of 2,918 m and a height of 263 m, the glider suddenly dropped (point 4). The last calculated rate of descent was 32 m/s. The glider collided with the slope of the mountain, 130 m to 150 m below the last recorded point, which corresponds to a fall on a gradient of 50°.

[1] Except where otherwise indicated, the times in this report are given in local time.

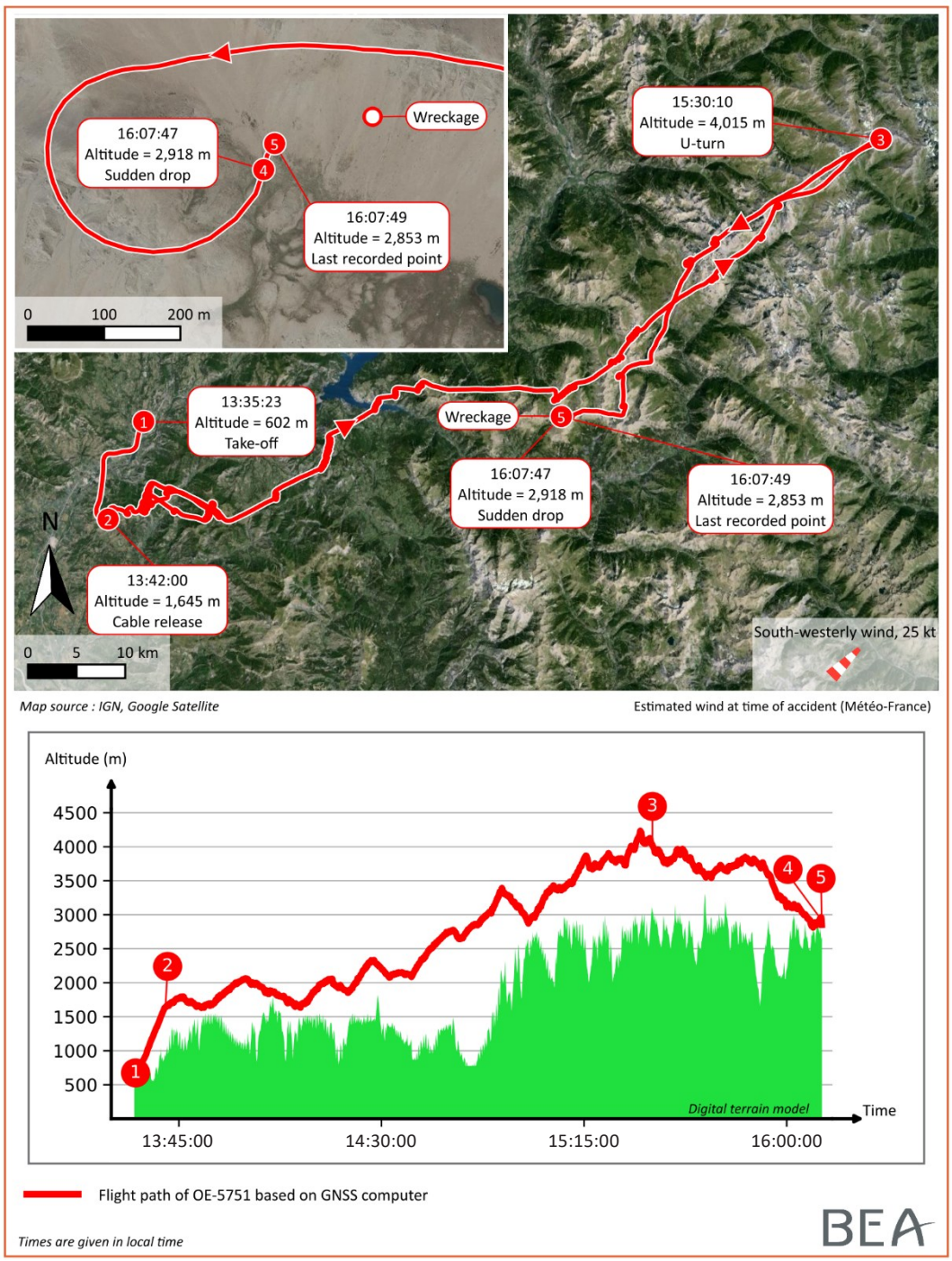

Figure 1: flight path (source: BEA)

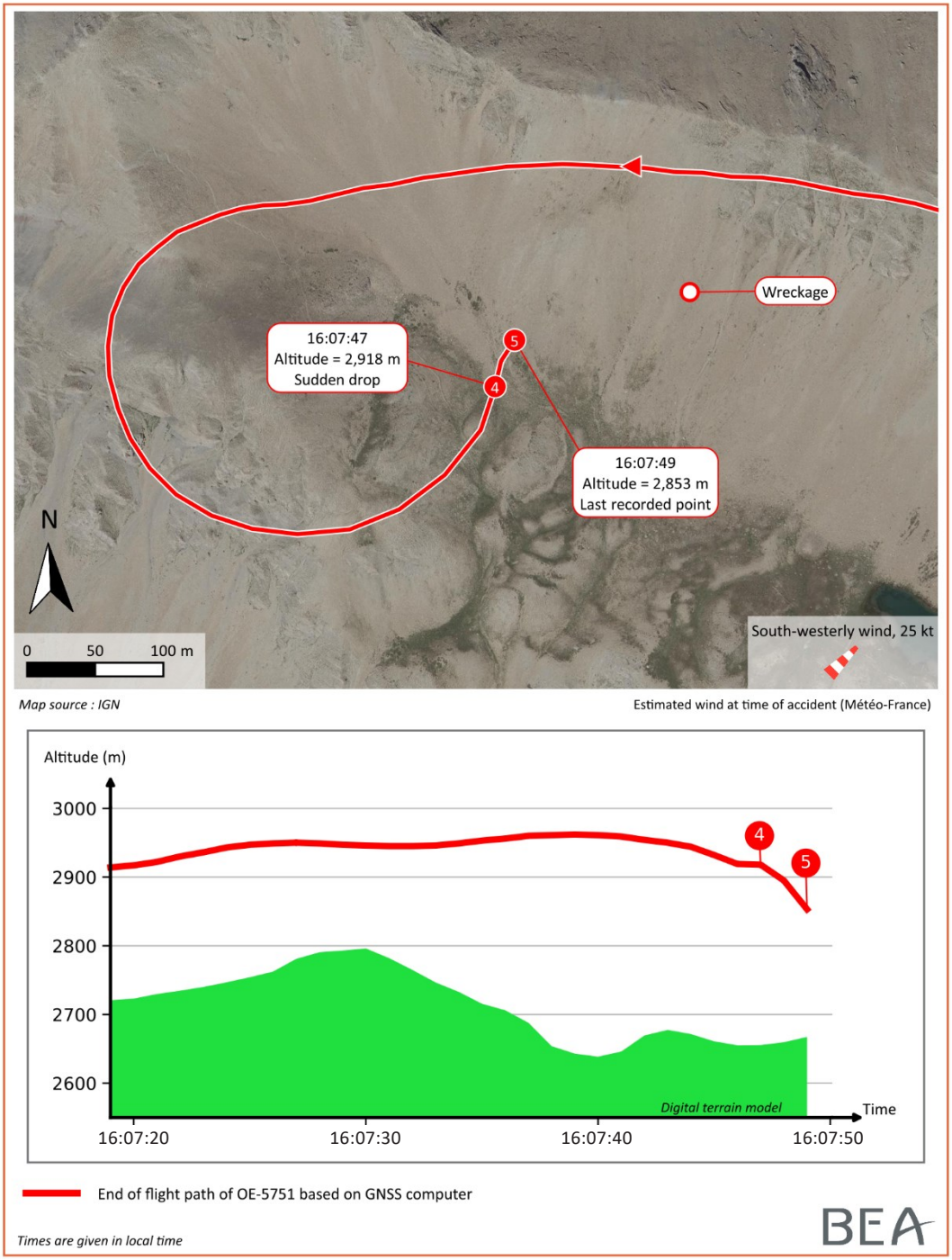

Figure 2: end of flight path (source: BEA)

2 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Site and wreckage information

The glider was resting on the side of the mountain which has a slope of around 30°. The grouped wreckage was situated at an altitude of 2,690 m close to the peak La Tête de l'Aupet.

Figure 3: position of wreckage
(source: Jausiers Gendarmerie Mountain Rescue Unit (PGHM))

The speed brakes were found extended. The investigation was not able to determine if the speed brakes were extended before the impact or if their deployment was the result of the collision with the mountain.

The damage showed that the glider had collided head-on with the mountain. The forward section and the leading edge of the wings were destroyed. The rear section was in a relatively good condition.

The flight controls were examined. It was determined that the pitch and yaw control linkages were continuous. A rod from the roll control linkages was missing[2]. The examination of the roll control linkages found damage caused by the collision with the ground.

The oxygen system pressure gauge was showing zero and the selector was positioned between “normal” and “delay”. It is possible that the pilot used the oxygen during his flight and that the content of the cylinder emptied between the time of the accident and arriving at the wreckage. The glider was equipped with an Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) but the connection with the transmitter antenna ruptured during the collision with the ground. The ELT selector was found in the “OFF” position, but it may have been moved during the accident as an impact mark could be seen on the selector.

2.2 Meteorological information

The investigation was not able to determine what weather information was available to the pilot before the flight.

Météo-France estimated the meteorological conditions as being a south-westerly wind, mean speed of 10 kt[3] with gusts of 25 to 30 kt, CAVOK, temperature 16°C, QNH 1022 hPa.

According to the Météo-France AROME model, there were gusts of more than two to three times the mean wind speed indicating turbulence in the lower layers (See **Figure 4**). This turbulence was due to the strong thermal lifts over the terrain and the strong slope and valley breezes (significant daytime heating, temperature of 30°C in the Ubaye valley).

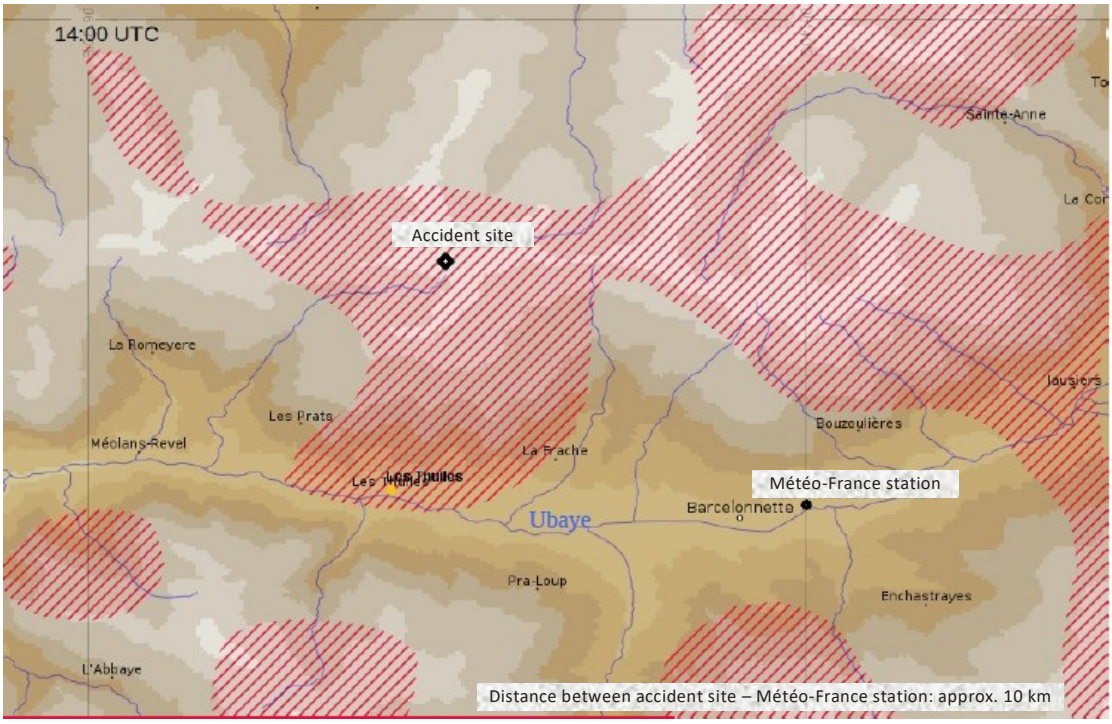

Figure 4: 16:00 turbulence chart (source: Météo France, AROME model).
The red hatching shows the areas of moderate to strong turbulence.

[2] It was probably left on the accident site.

[3] The glossary of abbreviations and acronyms frequently used by the BEA can be found on its web site.

Hikers situated close to the accident site indicated that visibility was excellent with a few cumulus at the end of the afternoon based at an estimated altitude of more than 3,500 m. They had observed at 2,700 m, a south-westerly wind which they estimated as being between 50 and 60 km/h whereas at 2,200 m, there was no wind.

The manager of the association hosting the pilots at Gap indicated that the day of the accident was very turbulent. The wind was around 40 kt at an altitude of 3,000 m. Pilots who had flown in the region told him that they had been shaken about. It was also very hot in Gap.

2.3 Pilot experience

The 62-year-old pilot held a sailplane pilot licence obtained in 2001 with towed, self-launch and motor glider ratings. He had logged 2,500 glider flight hours, including 35 hours in the previous three months. On 22 April, 26 and 27 May and 7 July 2023, he had carried out four local flights with the glider registered OE-5751 from Gailtal aerodrome (Austria) for a total time of 23 h.

The pilot also held a Private Pilot Licence for aeroplanes (PPL (A)) obtained in 1993 with an experience of around 900 flight hours.

According to the manager of the association hosting the pilots at Gap, the pilot had already flown out of Gap aerodrome in 2022 over a roughly two-week period. In previous years he had been in the habit of flying at Sainte-Croix sur Verdon (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence).

2.4 Witnesses to accident

Hikers indicated that throughout the afternoon they had observed gliders flying overhead the ridges making their characteristic whistling noise. At the time of the accident, they reported having perceived a louder whistling noise than those previously heard, followed by a noise which made them think that there had been an accident. On continuing along their path, they perceived the glider wreckage above their position. They were not able to call the emergency services as they had no telephone network. They considered that their distance from the wreckage was too great and that it was better to quickly descend into the valley to call the emergency services. It was another hour before they had a telephone network and they immediately called the gendarmerie.

Note: the rescue helicopter arrived at around 18:30 on the accident site whose position had been estimated based on the last position transmitted by the glider's FLARM on the OGN.

2.5 Medical aspects

Pathological examinations revealed the existence of a context that could have favoured the onset of incapacitating cardiac rhythm disorders.

3 CONCLUSIONS

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

Scenario

After a two and a half hour local flight in the mountains east of Gap-Tallard aerodrome, the glider quickly lost altitude and collided with the side of the mountain. The examination of the glider wreckage did not find any technical element that could explain this sudden drop.

The pathological examinations carried out on the pilot revealed a context that could have favoured the onset of cardiac rhythm disorders without being able to provide any evidence to support with certainty the hypothesis of an in-flight malaise.

As the conditions of the day were difficult with a lot of turbulence, it cannot be excluded that an aerological phenomenon caused the pilot to lose control of the glider.

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