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## Pilot incapacitation, Boeing 737-436, G-DOCM

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**Micro-summary:** The first officer of this Boeing 737-436 was incapacitated during flight.

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**Event Date:** 1999-01-05 at 1800 UTC

**Investigative Body:** Aircraft Accident Investigation Board (AAIB), United Kingdom

**Investigative Body's Web Site:** <http://www.aaib.dft.gov/uk/>

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## Boeing 737-436, G-DOCM

**AAIB Bulletin No: 5/99 Ref: EW/G99/01/06      Category: 1.1**

**Aircraft Type and Registration:** Boeing 737-436, G-DOCM  
**No & Type of Engines:** 2 CFM56-3C1 turbofan engines  
**Year of Manufacture:** 1992  
**Date & Time (UTC):** 5 January 1999 at 1800 hrs  
**Location:** Approach to London Gatwick Airport  
**Type of Flight:** Public Transport  
**Persons on Board:** Crew - N/A - Passengers - N/A  
**Injuries:** Crew - None - Passengers - None  
**Nature of Damage:** None  
**Commander's Licence:** Airline Transport Pilot's Licence  
**Commander's Age:** N/A  
**Commander's Flying Experience:** N/A  
**Information Source:** Report submitted by the Aircraft Commander

The aircraft was operating the service from Helsinki to London Gatwick with a flight deck crew of two, an experienced Commander handling the aircraft from the left-hand seat and an inexperienced First Officer in the right-hand seat. The departure from Helsinki had been in poor weather demanding a high level of activity on the flight deck but the First Officer had performed satisfactorily, despite having had a poor night's sleep. The subsequent flight was uneventful until the aircraft commenced the descent to Gatwick from FL 270, at which point the Commander called for the Descent Check List. The First Officer removed the check list from its stowage and tried to read it. Although at this stage she looked normal, she was unable to read the check list sensibly and uttered what the Commander described as 'gibberish'. After a few seconds, she suddenly twisted violently in her seat and her body went ridged, causing her to apply a significant amount of rudder, the effect of which was felt by those in the passenger cabin. The Commander immediately disconnected the autopilot and centralised the rudder before calling for assistance from the cabin crew and transmitting a MAYDAY call stating that his First Officer was incapacitated and requesting a priority landing.

On arrival on the flight deck, the cabin crew administered oxygen to the First Officer while attempting to remove her from her seat. Despite her slight build, they had considerable difficulty in removing the now unconscious First Officer from her seat without interfering with the Commander's control of the aircraft, but eventually succeeded in removing her to the forward

galley area where she was placed in the recovery position and given first aid. There was no response to a call to the passengers for a doctor.

Meanwhile, ATC had transferred the aircraft to a standby frequency and commenced a radar vectored approach to Runway 26 at Gatwick. There was some delay in obtaining descent clearance due to the Processed Radar Display System generating a spurious emergency transponder return which indicated the presence of another aircraft in the vicinity of G-DOCM. Technical investigations into the cause of the spurious transponder return indicate that this was an isolated occurrence and is very unlikely to re-occur.

The Commander, who had elected to fly the approach without the assistance of a crew member in the right-hand seat, completed the night landing without incident and shut the aircraft down clear of the runway where it was met by the emergency services including a paramedic. The paramedic boarded the aircraft and tended to the First Officer until an ambulance arrived some 20 minutes after the aircraft landed. The First Officer was then transferred to hospital where she recovered after several hours. Her medical condition is still being assessed.