

FLYING OFFICER KILLED.

CRASH AT CANBERRA.

Evidence at Inquest.

Canberra, May 10. Features of the inquiry held at the Canberra Hospital to-day by Mr. John Gale, District Coroner, into the circumstances of the death of Flying Officer Francis Charles Ewen, aged 27 years, who was killed in the aeroplane disaster yesterday, were the statements of expert witnesses of the Royal Air Force that deceased was turning his machine into formation for the Royal salute when the accident occurred, and that he had been two hours constantly circling in the air, the effect of which was held to make a pilot sleepy.

Mr. Gale, doyen of Australian coroners, who is 97 years of age, in returning a finding of accidental death, said:—"Neither I nor anyone else could arrive at any other conclusion but that this was one of those inexplicable events that cannot be accounted for even by experts, as the deceased was alone in his machine, and was unconscious after the fall, so that he held his secret, even if he himself knew how the mishap had occurred. No one is to blame for the tragedy, as the evidence shows that there was no apparent defect in the machine, which had been recently overhauled and judged in fit condition."

Dr. A. J. W. Malcolm, temporary medical officer at Canberra Hospital, describing the injuries to deceased, said:—"On his admission he was unconscious, suffering from shock, compound fractures of right and left humeri, fractured femur, two fractures of left tibia, lacerated arms and ankles, severe chest injuries and fractured ribs. He died at 7 o'clock last night, death being due to shock following injuries."

Constable G. W. Robinson, of Sydney, said:—"At 25 minutes past 3 yesterday afternoon I was on traffic duty north-east of Parliament House. I noticed about 15 aeroplanes flying over No. 4 camp, one of which suddenly appeared to get out of control. It nose-dived straight down and crashed to earth outside Parliament House. I borrowed a motor car, and at the scene of the accident found the deceased lying on the ground, out of the wrecked machine. In my opinion, the machine nose-dived 500 to 600 feet."

Arthur Poole Lawrence, Director of Medical Services in the R.A.A.F., corroborated Dr. Malcolm's evidence regarding the cause of death.

Machine Overhauled and Examined.

Flight-Lieutenant Ellis Charles Wackett said:—"I was on the review ground, and saw the deceased's machine leave its formation, and it disappeared from my view, about 50 feet from the ground. Though the deceased need not necessarily have crashed when I saw him disappear, he was falling steeply. The machine had been overhauled immediately before its flight, and I examined it on the site of the accident, and again this morning, to ascertain if the controls showed any defects. I found nothing wrong that could not have been caused by the crash. The deceased was a qualified pilot of most sober habits, and physically very fit."

Sydney James Moir, a flying officer of No. 3 Squadron, R.A.A.F., said:—"I was following behind, and slightly above, deceased's aeroplane at a height of a little above 1,000 feet. We were turning into squadron formation to give the Royal salute, when deceased's machine suddenly left the formation and dived to earth. If his aeroplane had stalled, he had at that height ample time to bring it safely to earth."

Howard Bowden Fletcher, another flying officer of No. 3 Squadron, said:—"I was flying in the same formation as the deceased. I noticed him leave the formation in a stalling turn, which was continued in a further half turn to the ground. The formation in which our machines were associated had just completed a turn, and it appeared that deceased stalled in so doing. By that expression I do not mean that his engine stalled. Engines do not stall, but it is a question of losing flying speed. In ordinary circumstances, however, deceased had ample time to pull out of it. He had been two hours continuously in the air, and

Gift Machines Reconditioned.

The Coroner: Is it true that that particular aeroplane, or that any of the aeroplanes, had been rebuilt from old machines that had served in the war?

Witness: That I cannot say, but all the machines have been reconditioned, and they are periodically overhauled.

The Coroner then returned a finding of accidental death, no blame being attachable to anyone.

Fifth Mishap at Canberra.

The crash was the fifth mishap which has occurred since the airmen entered camp at Canberra some days ago. The others, fortunately, have been only slight, consisting chiefly of forced landings. This morning the pilot of a "Seagull" machine was forced to land at the aerodrome, and, on reaching the ground, the machine tilted, and one wing struck the earth and was greatly damaged. Repairs to the machine were impracticable, and it was not used afterwards.

Attempt to Open Parachute.

Canberra, May 10. There are indications that Ewen made an effort to save himself by parachuting to earth. Among the wreckage of the machine was found a parachute, which had been unstrapped. The fact that the machine was flying so low might have been responsible for Ewen's failure to make a leap in his parachute in time to save himself from falling with the machine.

Royal Sympathy.

Canberra, May 10. His Excellency the Governor-General (Lord Stonehaven) has received the following cable from his Majesty the King:—"I am grieved to hear of the death of Flying Officer Ewen from the result of to-day's accident. I deeply sympathise with his family in their sorrow, and also with the members of the Royal Australian Air Force in the loss of a comrade. —(Signed) George R.I."

The Minister for Defence (Senator Sir William Glasgow) received to-day the following message from the Duke and Duchess of York:—"The Duchess and I have heard with deep regret of the terrible accident resulting in the death of Flying Officer Ewen. We ask you to offer our heartfelt sympathy to his family in their bereavement."

From the Governor-General came the following:—"Lady Stonehaven and I desire to express to the relatives of the late Flying Officer Ewen our deepest sympathy in their sad loss."

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AIR TRAGEDY

Plane Crashes During Review

PILOT DIES IN HOSPITAL

Tragedy again clouded a day of celebration and rejoicing—a day that of all others should have passed free of blemish.

During the Royal review on Monday afternoon, Flying Officer Francis Charles Ewen, piloting a small one man plane, known as a Scout Experimenter, lost control and crashed to earth.

Horrified spectators, hurrying to the scene of the disaster, found Ewen still alive, but terribly injured, in the debris of the wrecked plane.

The tragedy occurred at about 3.20 p.m., and the scene was the small hill fronting Parliament House, about three-quarters of a mile distant, and quite close to the Y.W.C.A. marquee. A number of people were in the immediate vicinity at the time, and as the machine came hurtling earthwards, they scattered in panic. The crash was tremendous. A cloud of dust and a sheet of bluish flame rose in the air. The machine was a total wreck. Ewen was quickly carried to the Telopea Park School emergency hospital, and afterwards to the Canberra Hospital, but there was no hope for his recovery, and he died at about 7 o'clock in the evening.

AT THE CORONER'S INQUEST

An inquest was held on Tuesday afternoon at the Canberra Hospital by the District Coroner (Mr. John Gale).

Dr. R. J. W. Malcolm, temporary medical officer, said that when brought to the hospital, Ewen was conscious, but suffering severely from shock. There were compound fractures of the right and left arms and left thigh, the ribs were fractured, and there was a large wound on the chest and lacerated wounds on other parts of the body. His death, which occurred at 7 o'clock, was due to shock, following his injuries.

Arthur Poole Lawrence, Director of Medical Services, R.A.A.F., gave a similar opinion as to the cause of death.

PLANE IN GOOD ORDER.

Flight Lieut. Ellis Charles Wackett, R.A.A.F., said that from the review ground he saw Ewen's machine leave the formation and fall steeply before it disappeared from his view. He afterwards examined the wreckage of the plane to ascertain if there were defects in the controls, but there was nothing to show that the disaster was due to a defect. There might have been several reasons for the crash, but he could not say what was the cause. The machine was in perfect order, and had been thoroughly overhauled about a week ago. Ewen was a qualified pilot, a strong man, and of sober habits.

UP 1,000 FEET.

Flying Officer Sidney James Moir, No. 3 Squadron, R.A.A.F., said that he was flying slightly above Ewen at an altitude of just over 1000 feet. They were turning into squadron formation to give the salute. Ewen's plane left the formation suddenly and fell to earth. He had no idea of the cause of the accident. If Ewen had had engine trouble he had ample room in which to right his machine.

Flying Officer Howard Bowden Fletcher, also of No. 3 Squadron, said that he had noticed Ewen's machine leave the formation in a stalling turn, which was continued in a further half turn to the ground. Ewen's formation had just completed a turn, and it appeared that he stalled in doing so. Under ordinary circumstances he had every chance to pull out. Ewen had been in the air for about two hours, and after that length of time in the air a pilot was apt to grow tired.

The Coroner: Is it true that that particular machine, or any of the planes, were rebuilt from those used in the Great War?

Witness: That I could not say. They have all been rebuilt, and they are overhauled regularly.

THE VERDICT.

The Coroner said that he could arrive at no other conclusion than that the fall was one of those inexplicable things that happened, and could never be accounted for, even by experts. In this case the victim, through shock from his injuries, had been unable to reveal the cause of the accident, and had died taking the secret within. He found that death was due to the aeroplane accidentally nose-diving, and that nobody was to blame for its occurrence.

Flying Officer Ewen, who was 28 years of age, was a New Zealander, and had graduated at Point Cook. He was formerly a student at the R.M.C. Duntroon.

MILITARY FUNERAL.

Full military honors attended the dead airman's funeral on Wednesday morning in the old cemetery of the Church of St. John the Baptist. High overhead three aeroplanes circled the cemetery and wreaths were dropped by the graveside—a final tribute from the dead man's comrades.

Marching with arms reversed, the funeral procession, comprising several hundred men from each arm of the sister services, was headed by the R.A.A.F. Band, which played the Dead March in Saul. Officers of the Citizen Air Force acted as pall-bearers. The service was conducted by the Bishop of Goulburn (Dr. Radford), who was assisted by Canon Ward and the Rev. W. A. Fletcher.

No greater loyalty, said Dr. Radford, could have been displayed than the attendance of so many of the late officer's comrades.

A volley fired over the grave concluded the ceremony. Wreaths were sent by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York, the Prime Minister (Mr. Bruce), the Commonwealth and Dominion Governments, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate and the R.A.A.F.

THE KING'S MESSAGE

The Governor-General (Lord Stonehaven) has received a message from the King expressing sorrow at the tragic crash, and expressing sympathy with the family of the late Flying-Officer Ewen.

The King's message was:—"I am grieved to hear of the death of Flying-Officer Ewen from the result of to-day's accident. I deeply sympathize with his family in their sorrow, and also with the members of the Royal Australian Air Force, in the loss of a comrade." (Signed) George R.I.

DEPARTMENTAL INQUIRY

MELBOURNE, Thursday. The Minister for Defence, Sir T. W. Glasgow, is instituting immediately an inquiry into every aspect of the Royal Australian Air Force. The inquiry will be held departmentally, but it



AT THE SCENE OF THE DISASTER SHORTLY AFTER THE CRASH

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