

# AEROPLANE CRASHES.

## MISHAP AT ROCKBANK.

### PILOT'S WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

#### Machine Totally Wrecked.

While the Adelaide express conveying their Excellencies the Governor-General (Lord Stonehaven) and Lady Stonehaven, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Bruce) was passing through Rockbank, 18 miles from Melbourne, the passengers, who were watching the manoeuvres of four aeroplanes from the Royal Australian Air Force depot at Point Cook, were horrified to see one of the machines — a single-seater SE5A biplane, piloted by Flying-officer T. A. Swinburne — suddenly tilt earthwards. Crashing into a ploughed field owned by Mr. T. G. Misen, a farmer, it was completely wrecked. By wonderful good fortune Flying-officer Swinburne escaped practically uninjured. Striking the ground with terrific force, the aeroplane turned over once, and the speed at which it was travelling doubled the machine in two. Flying-officer Swinburne was surrounded by the wreckage of the aeroplane. Rapidly he unfastened the heavy belt by which he was strapped in the cockpit, and crawled away. Eye witnesses expressed amazement that the pilot had not been killed instantly.

At about 9 o'clock, as the express steamed into the Melton station, 24 miles from Melbourne, the four Air Force aeroplanes approached from Point Cook, flying in perfect formation. As the aeroplanes on Tuesday afternoon escorted their Excellencies Lord and Lady Forster on the first stage of their homeward journey, so were Lord and Lady Stonehaven greeted by an aerial escort as they completed the last stage of their trip from Great Britain. There was a suggestion of impudence in the way in which the speedy SE5A "scouters" toved, as it were, with the express train which rushed through the patchwork of green pastures and brown ploughed fields at 30 miles an hour. One moment the four machines, flying at extremely low altitudes, were level with the train. The next minute the machines were turning a mile behind the train. Shortly after 9 o'clock, just as Rockbank was passed, the four aeroplanes manoeuvred swiftly overhead, and then swooped down until they seemed almost to touch the tops of trees flanking the railway line. Suddenly one of the aeroplanes, which was then flying at an altitude estimated by eye witnesses to be between 100 and 200 feet, nose-dived to earth and "crumpled up." Apparently the crew on the two engines of the express saw the pilot crawl from beneath the wreckage, for the speed of the train was not reduced. It would appear that nobody on the train had the presence of mind to pull the communication cord. The train was travelling at about 40 miles an hour at the time, and the scene of the accident was soon far behind.

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The machine, which was travelling in an easterly direction almost parallel with the railway line, struck the ground with terrific force. An examination of the spot showed that about 20 yards from the final resting place of the wreckage, a deep hole had been torn in the earth. Six yards farther on was another, and a deeper hole. The aeroplane eventually came to rest about 14 yards from the second hole. The fuselage was resting, right side up, flat on the ground, and facing the opposite direction from which it came. The wings and engine were doubled back on top of the fuselage, and the landing wheels had been wrenched from their position, and thrown on to the right wings. The cockpit was completely buried beneath the wreckage. How the pilot escaped death, or at least serious injury, is a mystery which may not even be solved at the official Air Force inquiry. It is also regarded as remarkable that the petrol tank did not ignite. Though the rear portion of the aeroplane was undamaged, the front was a mass of twisted engine parts with the oil tank, petrol tank, radiator, and engine, mixed almost inextricably. The blades of the propeller were broken cleanly at the base. Wooden stays surrounding the cockpit were smashed as if they had been matches. One of the landing wheels was hopelessly buckled; the other, strangely enough, was untouched. At 11 o'clock Air Force mechanics arrived from Point Cook, and began, with back saws and hammers, to sort out the wreckage. Meanwhile Flying-officer Swinburne, who suffered only from minor abrasions and shock, had been conveyed by motor-car to Mr. Misen's farmhouse.

#### Pilot's Fortitude.

The other three machines were piloted by Flight Lieutenant Mustard, Flying-officer Bladen, and Sergeant Denny respectively. When they became aware of their companion's misfortune, they at once descended and hurried to his assistance. To their relief, he waved a cheery greeting, and with something of the old "carry on" spirit of the war days told his fellow pilots "not to mess up the show, but to continue their escort of the train." Those who reached the scene shortly after the accident could not find adequate words to express their admiration of the courage and fortitude of the airman.

#### Eye-witnesses' Descriptions.

First to reach the scene were two labourers, W. West, of Kensington, and H. Marlborough, of Garton street, Carlton, who had witnessed the crashing of the aeroplane from a paddock near by. "To us," said Mr. West later, "it appeared as if the aeroplane had become entangled in the telegraph wires. As we ran towards the wrecked machine, we saw the pilot crawl from beneath it and begin to walk round. At that time I thought that another person was buried beneath the wreckage, and was greatly relieved when Flying-officer Swinburne assured us that he had been the only occupant. I was amazed at his calmness. All he seemed to be worrying about was the fate of his "bus." The astonishing thing is that he was not killed. I cannot understand how he succeeded in crawling clear of the wreckage in so short a time.

Mr. Robert Peacock, farmer, who lives near the scene of the accident, and in whose motor-car Flying-officer Swinburne was conveyed to Mr. Misen's farmhouse, said: "Flying-officer Swinburne's machine seemed to be very close behind one of the others. Suddenly the aeroplane dived straight downwards. I was quickly on the scene, and I cannot conceive how the pilot escaped."

#### Executing a "Half Roll."

Interviewed at Mr. Misen's farmhouse after the accident, Flying-officer Swinburne bore few signs of his nerve-racking experience beyond a bandage around his head. He acknowledged with a smile congratulations on his marvellous escape, but declined to describe exactly how the machine had become out of control.

"I was executing a 'half roll' at the time," he said. "I know exactly what caused the accident, but I am afraid that under Air Force regulations I am not allowed to tell you. My first thought when the aeroplane crashed was to get clear of the wreckage quickly, owing to the possibility of fire. I was naturally very dazed, but otherwise unharmed. The 'reaction' on my head was nothing," he added with a smile, "but I expect that I shall be able to find a few brains tonight."

A2-32 Crash at Rockbank of SE-5 piloted by Pilot Officer T A Swinburne, uninjured, in sight of train carrying Prime Minister Bruce October 1925

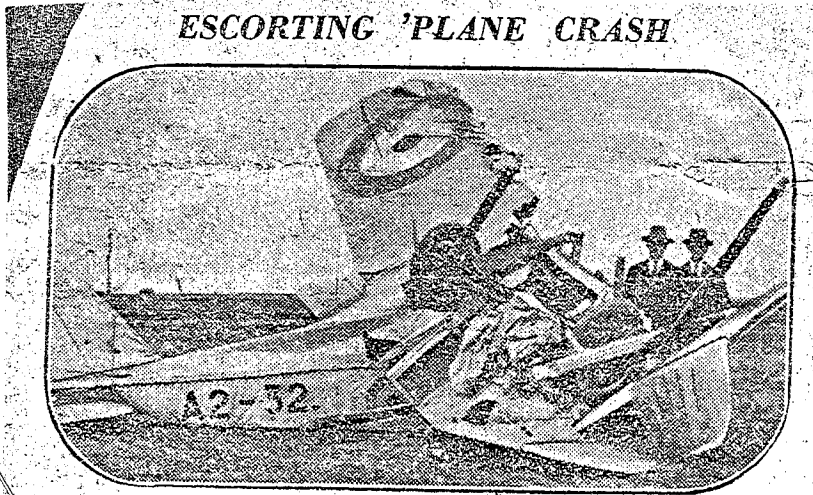
## WELCOMING AEROPLANE FALLS.



Flying-officer T. A. Swinburne had a narrow escape from death when the machine in which he was flying to welcome Lord Stonehaven crashed to the earth at Rockbank. The machine was badly damaged, but Mr. Swinburne escaped with minor injuries.

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## ESCORTING 'PLANE CRASH



The aeroplane, piloted by Flying Officer Swinburne, which crashed near Rockbank while taking part in the aerial welcome to Lord Stonehaven. The pilot escaped with slight injuries.