

PLANE NOSE DIVES AND BURSTS INTO FLAMES

MARCH 8, 1929

Officer, Strapped In Seat, Is Burnt To Death

PILOT INJURED IN RESCUE EFFORTS

WANGARATTA, Thursday.—Leaving Richmond aerodrome this morning, a Cirrus Moth aeroplane belonging to the Royal Australian Air Force crashed at Wangaratta this afternoon. The plane was heading for Point Cooke. The passenger was killed, and the pilot seriously injured.

THE victims were:

KILLED

FLYING OFFICER HERBERT WARLAND, of Lockhart-street, Caulfield.

INJURED

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT THOMAS ANTHONY SWINBOURNE, of Rosehill-avenue, Caulfield. Badly burnt on hands and head; severe shock.

NORMAN MCGUFFIE, carrier, received word to take petrol to the landing ground in an isolated paddock about six miles from Wangaratta. He delivered the petrol, and was returning to Wangaratta when he was horrified to see the plane in flames.

Turning his car round, McGuffie proceeded slowly in the direction of the crash. Dense clouds of smoke rising from the grass, which was fired by the plane, obscured his view. Driving through the smoke, McGuffie came across Flight-Lieutenant Swinbourne, who said: "Poor Jack is burnt to death in the plane."

McGuffie drove Swinbourne to Wangaratta Hospital.

Wing Torn Off

INTERVIEWED, Flight-Lieutenant Swinbourne said he had trouble in rising in the rough ground. The road had to be crossed, and in trying to clear the fence, he turned a little to the left, with the result that a wing of his machine was torn off.

The plane nose-dived, and as soon as it hit the ground burst into flames. Flight-Lieutenant Swinbourne crawled out and got free of the wreckage.

Flying Officer Herbert Warland, the mechanic, was strapped into the machine and kept saying: "I am strapped in and cannot get out."

Futile Rescue Efforts.

SEVERAL times Lieut Swinbourne tried to rescue his comrade, only to be badly burned each time.

Constables Jeffers and Sparks were early on the scene. Constable Jeffers said: "When we arrived, the plane was still burning. The mechanic was strapped into the machine in a half-sitting, half-lying position. All his clothes were burnt off him, and he was but a heap of charred flesh."

Both men are believed to be married.

The Defence Department was notified of the crash, and two officers were despatched this evening to the scene.

Under instructions from the Air Force authorities, Senior Constable Vincent has detailed Constable Sparks to guard the plane until the officers arrive.

It is a peculiar coincidence that Lieutenant Swinbourne and Constable Sparks were schoolmates.

The plane is a mass of twisted iron as it lies across a fence, with one wing 20 yards away among a mass of branches torn from a tree. It is lying in the opposite direction from which it was flying, and the road is scarred by the propellers where they struck the earth before the plane crashed.

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Flying Officer Warland was a returned soldier. He served with the 39th Battalion A.I.F. from 1916 to 1919.

Flight Lieutenant Swinbourne also joined the Air Force on its formation, in 1921, as a clerk, and about the same time as Warland was appointed to a commission in the stores and accounting branch. About 1924 he learnt to fly, and was transferred to the general duties branch on November 29, 1923.

He specialised as signal officer, went to England in November, 1925, and returned in January last year. Since then he has been employed at headquarters as signal officer.

Air Accidents Committee To Investigate

The chairman of the Air Accidents Investigation Committee (Professor Payne) left Melbourne immediately on receipt of news of the crash yesterday, and was due at Wangaratta late last night. He will prepare a report on the accident. The inquest will be held today.

A7-19 Cirrus Moth: crash near Wangaratta en route from Richmond NSW to Point Cook (spelt Point Cooke): Flying Officer Herbert Warland of Caulfield killed, Flight-Lieutenant Thomas Anthony Swinburne of Caulfield badly burnt on hands and head, witness Norman McGuffie, reports form Constables Jeffers and Sparks, comment from Chief of Air Staff Air Commodore R Williams, investigation by Professor Payne, chairman of Air Accidents Investigation Committee.

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Air Chief Expresses Regret

Regret at the tragedy was expressed by the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Commodore R. Wil-

liams), last night. He said Flight Lieutenant Swinbourne was a competent pilot. Both men had gone to Sydney by Moth plane on Monday on duty, and had been returning to Point Cook.

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FATAL AIR CRASH.

MACHINE HITS TREE.

Passenger Incinerated.

MELBOURNE, March 7.—A fatal aeroplane accident occurred near Wangaratta this afternoon when an Air Force Moth machine, piloted by Flight-Lieutenant Thomas Anthony Swinbourne, with Flying-Officer Herbert Warland as passenger, struck a tree and was destroyed. Swinbourne jumped clear, but his companion, who was unable to free himself, died when the machine burst into flames.

The airmen landed at Wangandary, five miles north-west of Wangaratta on their way from Richmond (N.S.W.) to Point Cooke. They decided to re-fuel. The petrol was supplied by Mr. Norman McGuffie, of Wangaratta, and at 2.30 p.m. Mr. McGuffie left the airmen preparing to resume their flight. He watched the aeroplane take off from a distance. He saw it bump along the uneven surface of the ground, and after swerving sharply to escape colliding with a fence it rose about 12 feet. The right wing hit a tree and instantly snapped off. The machine nose-dived and burst into flames. Swinbourne, who was able to get clear, could render no assistance to his unfortunate companion. McGuffie rushed back to the scene, but the two men could do nothing as the plane was a mass of flames, and they were compelled to witness glimpses of the young airman being burnt to death. When the fire was out the charred remains of the victim were gathered together, placed in a coffin, and taken to the Wangaratta morgue. Swinbourne, who was burnt about the arms and body, was taken to hospital. His condition is satisfactory.

Flying-Officer Warland was a married man, aged 34 years, and lived at Caulfield. He was attached to the stores and accounting branch at Air Force headquarters in Melbourne. Flight-Lieutenant Swinbourne is also a married man, and he also lives at Caulfield. He is secretary to the Air Accidents Investigation Board. The airmen were returning to Melbourne after having attended to departmental business in Sydney.

WEST AUSTRALIAN 8.3.29

AEROPLANE CRASH.

Official Investigation.

MELBOURNE, March 8.—Air Force officials went to Wangaratta to-day to investigate the accident to a Moth 'plane yesterday in which Flying-Officer Herbert Warland lost his life. Flight-Lieut. Swinburne, who is in the Wangaratta Hospital suffering from injuries received when he tried to rescue his companion from the burning 'plane, is much improved. Warland, who was strapped in his seat, was burned to death.

Air-Commodore Williams (Chief of the Air Board) said to-day that the ground where the 'plane had landed to refuel had been examined by experts, who had considered that it was a suitable landing ground for Moth 'planes, but not for other types of machines. Moth machines had landed and taken off there without mishap, but it was not intended to keep the area as a permanent landing ground.

Flying-Officer Warland's remains were brought to Melbourne to-day. They will be buried at St. Kilda to-morrow and there will be full Air Force honours. An official inquiry will be held into the fatality.

WEST AUSTRALIAN 9.3.29