

AIR CADET KILLED

Crashes Into Live Wires

PLANE AFIRE

MELBOURNE, Tuesday.

Air Cadet Thomas John Laws (21) was killed instantly when a Wapiti plane, striking high tension wires in taking off from Point Cook at 10 a.m. today crashed into flames.

Flight Lieut. W. G. Rae, pilot, escaped with facial injuries. Laws, a Brisbane boy, joined the training school at Point Cook last January. The machine was one of the training flight used at Point Cook.

It had just taken off when the engine cut out and the pilot could not avoid the wires which were some little distance from the aerodrome.

An investigation was held immediately by the Air Accidents Investigation Committee.

The plane had just flown low over the roofs of the buildings of the flying school when it struck the high tension wires. One of these wires was dragged 40 yards and broken but the other two remained intact.

Between them the wires carry 22,000 volts but it is doubtful whether contact with them caused the fire which enveloped the plane so soon as it struck the ground because the automatic switches in the sub-station would immediately cut off the current.

Third This Year

The impact of the plane with the wires catapulted Rae out of the machine, but Laws apparently was held securely by his safety belt. He was killed instantly when the plane struck the ground.

The plane fell beside the road at the point where the road passes the flying school. The terrific noise of the crash brought most of the personnel of the school rushing to the scene, but by the time they arrived the flames were too fierce to permit them to approach closely.

Grappling irons were obtained and Law's body was dragged from the fuselage in time to prevent incineration. This is the third fatal crash in which Wapitis have been involved this year.

8.35 WA PAPER

AIR CADET KILLED

CRASH AT POINT COOK

Plane Strikes High-Tension Wires.

MELBOURNE, Aug. 13.—When a Wapiti aeroplane, crashed through two high-tension wires carrying a current of 22,000 volts and burst into flames beside the Point Cook aerodrome this morning, Thomas John Laws (21), of Brisbane, a Royal Australian Air Force cadet, was killed, and Flight-Lieutenant Gordon Rae, instructor, received facial injuries and shock. He was admitted to the General Repatriation Hospital, Caulfield, for observation. Flight-Lieutenant Rae is the only member of the Royal Australian Air Force who is a member of the "Caterpillar Club"—an organisation composed of airmen who have saved their lives by jumping with parachutes from crashing aeroplanes. In 1930 he saved his life by jumping with a parachute from a crashing machine in which he had been practising aerobatics at Point Cook.

The Wapiti plane took off about 10.10 a.m. today. Air Cadet Laws was at the controls and Flight-Lieutenant Rae was in the back seat. They intended to fly to Werribee. Soon after the plane was in the air the engine stalled. Both occupants must have realised that a crash was inevitable, because the machine was so close to the wires that it was impossible to turn. There was a blue flash as the machine struck the wires and then it swooped across the road and crashed through a wire fence with great force.

Air Force officials are convinced that Air Cadet Laws, who was strapped into the pilot's seat, was killed when the machine struck the ground and that he did not die by burning. Flight-Lieutenant Rae, who was also strapped in, was hurled to the ground.

The first person to reach the burning aeroplane was Mr. R. Berry, farmer. He found Flight-Lieutenant Rae lying about 20 yards from the machine. "Go and get Laws," Rae muttered. "He needs you more than I do." Pilots and aircraftmen were already running to the burning machine, but before they reached it it had been reduced to a mass of cinders and twisted metal.

The Air Accidents Investigation Committee, which was at Laverton, examined the wreckage soon after the crash. The charred wreckage was cleared within less than an hour of the crash and it was dropped into the sea. Air Cadet Laws had received training for seven months and at Christmas would have been promoted to the rank of Pilot Officer.

A KEEN PUPIL.

BRISBANE, Aug. 13.—The late Thomas John Laws was the second son of Mr. T. J. Laws, headmaster of the Kenmore State school and a former prominent Rugby Union referee, and of Mrs. Laws, who reside in Taringa. He was nearly 21 years of age and for many years had been intensely keen on aviation. He soon distinguished himself after receiving an appointment at Point Cook and in the June examinations came first in aerobatics and first in flying. While living in Brisbane he was outstanding in amateur boxing circles and held all metropolitan championships in the nine stone division.

14.8.35 WEST AUSTRALIAN

AIR FORCE CRASH.

Instructor a West Australian.

Flight-Lieutenant Gordon Rae, the Royal Australian Air Force instructor, who was slightly injured in the aeroplane crash at Point Cook aerodrome on Tuesday, is the son of Mrs. W. J. Rae, of Harper-street, South Perth, and a nephew of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor (Sir James Mitchell). Air Force Cadet Thomas John Laws (21), of Brisbane, was killed in the crash when a Wapiti machine struck some high-tension wires near the aerodrome. Flight-Lieutenant Rae, who is now 30 years of age, has been in the Royal Australian Air Force for seven years, having joined as a cadet in 1928. At present he is an instructor at Point Cook and has been in charge of the Wapiti machines since early this year.

8.35

AS-15 August 13 1935, Air Cadet Thomas John Laws killed at Point Cook (hit high-tension wires) ; Flight Lieutenant Gordon Rae (instructor) injured

Plane Hits Wires and Crashes in Flames

KILLED



AIR-CADET T. J. LAWS, who was burned to death.

OFFICER IS INJURED

With a great blaze of sparks as it struck three high tension wires carrying 22,000 volts, a Wapiti plane bounded 20 yards before it crashed and burst into flames at Point Cooke to-day.

ONE man was killed, and another, who was thrown from the machine before it crashed, was seriously injured.

The victims were:—

Air-Cadet T. J. Laws, stationed at Point Cooke. Fatally burned.

Flight-Lieutenant G. Rae. Severe shock, body injuries. Admitted to Air Force Hospital.

Rae was accompanying Laws on an instruction flight, and the machine evidently encountered engine trouble half a mile from the aerodrome, and a forced landing was decided upon.

Gliding down into a field behind the Point Cooke barracks, the plane skimmed with its under-carriage the main wires carrying power to the Werribee sub-station.

INJURED



FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT RAE, who was injured.

(A recent "Star" photograph.)

Trapped in Plane

With a violent crackling as thousands of huge sparks were hurled high into the air, it nosed over and went on to crash a few feet from a wire fence on the opposite side of the road.

Rae dropped clear of the machine a few moments before it struck, but Laws was trapped in the plane, which burst into flames immediately it hit the ground.

From all parts of the aerodrome men rushed to the fiercely burning wreck, but there was nothing that could be done for their comrades, and all that remained of the plane a few minutes after the crash was the twisted, fire-blackened engine and a few ashes.

Rae was rushed by ambulance to the hospital at the drome, and the Air Force authorities ordered the immediate removal of the wreckage.

A woman eye-witness missed death by a few yards when the high-tension wires fell into her yard.

"Terrific Crash"

Mrs. D. J. Graves, wife of a flight-sergeant at Point Cooke, had been chopping wood in her yard, and was walking into the house when the machine struck.

"I heard a terrific crash, and, not knowing where it had come from, I ran to the front of the house," she said later.

"Afterwards, when I returned to the yard, I saw one of the wires lying right alongside the woodheap where I had been standing.

"I was told later by the linesmen that, had I not moved when I did, I would have been killed."

Wreckage Removed

Called from Laverton, the air accidents investigation committee promptly viewed the remains of the plane, and, having determined the cause of the crash, consented to the wreckage being dumped in the sea.

For the preservation of their moral, all cadets were afterwards sent aloft, and life at Point Cooke went on in normal routine.

Wing-Commander De La Rue, in an official report of the disaster, said later:—"Air-Cadet T. J. Laws, and Flight-Lieutenant G. Rae had just taken off in a Wapiti machine when their engine cut out, and they were obliged to decide upon a forced landing.

"In normal circumstances this would not have been attended by serious consequences, but unfortunately the high tension wires were in their way, and their machine struck them.

"Laws was killed outright, as far as we know, and Rae was thrown from the machine and afterwards picked up unconscious."

Previous Escape

Flight-Lieutenant Rae, who is a married man, has been an instructor for four years at Point Cooke, and is the only member in Australia of the Caterpillar Club, that exclusive organisation restricted to aviators who have been compelled to make a parachute landing.

Five years ago he leaped from a new Bristol Bulldog plane at Point Cooke, when it crashed during acrobatics.

Renewed agitation for the removal of the overhead wires and the finding of an underground location for them is expected as a result of to-day's disaster.

Although the removal of the wires has been urged in the past, nothing has been done on the score of cost.

BRISBANE, To-day.

Senior-Cadet Thomas John Laws was well-known here.

He left home at Mt. Cootha road, Taringa, only this year, to join up at Pt. Cooke. He is a son of T. J. Laws, former well-known football referee, and was selected as one of two cadets out of 2,000 applicants from all over the Commonwealth.

His brother is a well-known wireless operator, and in that capacity accompanied the Chapman expedition which went to the centre of the Continent two years ago.