

AERIAL DERBY CRASH

DRAMATIC EPISODE.

AIR FORCE PILOT INJURED

Collision with Electric Main.

MELBOURNE, May 27.—While flying in the Aerial Derby held by the Australian Aero Club at Essendon on Saturday, Flight-Lieutenant G. Wells, of the Royal Australian Air Force crashed on to the side of the Bulla-road, receiving injuries and wrecking his aeroplane. Flight-Lieutenant Wells, who was flying the only Air Force machine which took part in the Aero Club's display, was in charge of the most powerful machine in the race, and it was widely expected that he would win the race, which was over 40 miles, and was flown in four laps. The accident occurred about half a mile from the last turn on the course, while the aeroplane was flying a straight course along the Bulla-road.

Mr. L. M. Mason, of Derby-street, Moonee Ponds, who was one of the first to reach the wrecked machine, saw the accident. "I was sitting in my car on the Bulla-road, about a quarter of a mile from the place where the crash occurred watching the race," he said. "I saw the Air Force machine and the machine flown by Captain Matthews turn round the polygon at the corner of the course together, and fly extremely rapidly down the road. They were close together and appeared to be diving slightly as they moved away from me. At the time they could not have been travelling at less than 120 miles an hour. When they approached the electricity transmission line they were slightly to the west side of the road. I saw the Air Force machine rise slightly as though to pass over the line, and then dip again. Apparently the pilot misjudged his distance from the line, for as he dived one wing struck the line, and a series of brilliant flashes occurred along the transmission line on each side of the aeroplane. I saw the left wing appear suddenly to sag down and crack. The aeroplane spun over on its side and then dived nose first into the road. In falling it narrowly missed two boys on bicycles who were standing near by. I started my car and drove to the wrecked machine. Another car arrived just as I got there and its occupants assisted me to get Flight-Lieutenant Wells out of the wreckage.

"The aeroplane had been carried by its great speed more than 100 yards from the point where it struck the transmission line, and had fallen on to a wire fence bounding the road. The bottom of the cockpit in which Flight-Lieutenant Wells was sitting appeared to have struck the wire of this fence, and I believe that this fact saved his life, as the nose and the tail of the aeroplane fell away on each side of the fence, breaking the machine's back in such a way that instead of crushing the pilot, the cockpit opened out and made the work of releasing him comparatively easy. The pilot was badly injured about the left side of the face and head, where he was apparently thrown against the instrument board in the cockpit with the force of the impact with the ground, but he was able to stand with our assistance, and he was placed in a motor car and driven straight to the hospital."

Captain Matthews, who witnessed the accident from his aeroplane, said that he was flying level with Flight-Lieut. Wells, and that both aeroplanes were travelling at about 150 miles an hour.

It was fortunate that the portion of the transmission line struck by the aeroplane was not a live conductor. The main Yallourn line consists of two circuits, each composed of three conductors bearing a current at a pressure of about 120,000 volts. These conductors are carried on steel towers varying in height from about 50ft. to 80ft. Along the top of the tower line runs a stout cable which serves the double purpose of acting as a protective earthed conductor and also as a strengthening member between the towers. It was this earthed wire that the aeroplane struck. The force of the impact broke it through, and the ends fell down on to the live wires beneath. A recoil in the line caused the earth conductor to break at another point about 200 yards further along. The main transmission conductors were immediately short circuited, but the protective switches opened and isolated the line.

Fortunately, in falling the earth conductor wires fell across only one of the two circuits, and it was possible to maintain the service from Yallourn over the other circuit with an interruption in supply of only a few seconds. The damaged line was repaired late on Saturday night.

Flight-Lieut. Wells, who is married, and who lives at Point Cook, was admitted to the Melbourne Hospital suffering from a lacerated eye, severe facial injuries, and shock. It is feared that he may lose an eye. The wreckage of the aeroplane was collected by a tender and conveyed to Point Cook.

It is expected that an inquiry into the accident will be begun this week by the Air Accidents Investigation Board.

AI 11 Racing DH-9 crash at Bulla Road, North Essendon, Flight-Lieutenant G Wells MC 30
July 1927

MONDAY, MAY 28, 1928

RACING PLANE CRASHES INTO HIGH TENSION WIRES

Air Force Machine Competing In Aerial Derby Is Wrecked: Pilot Hurt

SPEEDING AT 150 MILES AN HOUR

STRIKING a high-tension wire near Bulla-road, North Essendon, while racing in the Aerial Derby on Saturday afternoon, an Air Force machine, piloted by Flight-Lieut. G. Wells, M.C., crashed into a fence at the side of the road. He received severe face and head injuries. It was stated last night Wells had lost the sight of one eye, and was likely to lose the sight of the other.

THE plane was wrecked. One wing was torn off by the transmission wires, which fused with a tremendous flash. The machine turned over in the air, hit a wire fence, and after turning over again, almost buried itself on the paddock boundary.

THE crash occurred about a mile and a half from the aerodrome, near the end of the second 10-miles lap. Captain Matthews, piloting a DH4 machine, was flying even with Lieut. Wells. At the end of the first lap the planes were averaging 109 miles an hour.

Mr. M. G. Pope, a Beam wireless official, was driving along Bulla-road when Wells crashed. He said the plane was flying very low, and rose suddenly to avoid a tree. It dipped again, and one wing caught the top wire of the transmission line to Williamstown. There was a flash, lasting several seconds, and the plane hit the ground with terrific force as the wings crumpled.

Pilot Caught by Leg

It seemed to bounce for about 10 yards, tearing the fence down when it struck the ground again. Lieut. Wells was thrown almost clear, but was caught by one leg. The engine crashed through the plane to the ground, and the propeller snapped off.

The plane did not catch fire, and Citizen Air Force trainees were rushed from the aerodrome to assist. Lieut. Wells was helped out by motorists, and taken to

Melbourne Hospital. He was admitted with a crushed forehead, and an operation was performed on Saturday night.

Keen Interest in Race

Interest was keen in the race between Captain Matthews's DH4, with a 360 h.p. Rolls-Royce Eagle Eight engine, and Lieut. Wells's DH9A, with an American-Liberty 400 h.p. Both machines were off scratch in the Derby, the other planes having almost a lap lead.

The planes crossed the aerodrome boundary averaging 100 miles an hour. At the turn before the accident Lieut. Wells was leading from Capt. Matthews by a second. Both were flying low.

"We were neck and neck when Wells crashed," said Capt. Matthews. "I was doing about 150 miles an hour, and he was flying a little lower. I saw his undercarriage hit the high tension wires and saw a terrific flash. Then he crashed."

Might Have Been Electrocuted

"I believe but for the insulation provided by the rubber wheels of the undercarriage, he would have been electrocuted."

"Lieut. Wells had been warned about the wires, and had flown round the course previously. I asked him before we left the drome if he was satisfied he knew the course, and he said he was. I believe either trees hid his view, or he forgot the wires in the excitement. He was flying a perfect race."

Flight-Lieut. Wells is flying instructor at Point Cooke. He won the Military Cross during the war, when he served with the A.I.F. and Royal Air Force.

