

6 DEAD IN R.A.A.F. CRASH

Rescuers Beaten Back As Training Aircraft Burns

An R.A.A.F. pilot and five Empire Air Scheme observer trainees were killed near No. 1 Air Observers' School, Cootamundra, yesterday.

Their "flying schoolroom" plane caught fire after landing in a paddock, 300 yards west of the town.

One of the six occupants was dragged from the blazing plane but died later. His rescuers were unable to remove any of the others from the blazing wreck.

Over In Five Minutes

Those killed were:—

Pilot-Officer James Frederick Hearne (20), Hornsby.

Leading Aircraftsman John Duff Cameron (26), Innisfail, Queensland.

Leading Aircraftsman Ernest Arthur Piercy (29), Lismore.

Leading Aircraftsman James Clifford Stanley (24), Geelong.

Leading Aircraftsman Robert Montgomery (26), Sydney.

Leading Aircraftsman John Head (25), who came from Fiji to enlist.

Head, the only one of the six who was rescued alive from the plane, was admitted to Cootamundra District Hospital in a critical condition, and died some hours later.

All the men were attached to No. 1 Air Observers' School, which has been built on the site of the old Cootamundra aerodrome, about half a mile from the town.

This is the school's only fatal accident.

The machine was a twin-engined Dragon Rapide, used for the observer instructional course.

At present, the cause of the accident is a mystery.

Eyewitnesses said that the machine appeared to glide to a perfect landing in an unoccupied estate on the outskirts of Cootamundra.

Many who fought the fire were

shocked to find the blazing wreck of an aeroplane in its midst.

"The whole thing was over in five minutes," said Mr. Cyril McGuinness, who pulled one of the bodies from the wreck.



Pilot-Officer James Hearne the machine in a Frederick Hearne normal position.

"I saw the machine come gliding over, but didn't take much notice of it. Gliding aeroplanes are pretty common here these days.

"It flattened out over a paddock in front of me, and I just stopped to watch it land.

"It landed perfectly. When it had run a little way it threw up a great cloud of dust.

"Through the dust I could still see

the machine in a normal position.

"Suddenly I noticed black smoke mingling with the dust, and I realised something was wrong. I rushed over. It was only 200 yards from where I was standing.

"When I got nearer, I could see flames licking along the cabin.

"When I got to the plane's door, the flames had spread right over it.

Wrenched Off Door

"Two or three others came along, and we wrenched the door off. We caught one man by the leg and dragged him clear.

"That was all we could do. The flames roared up. The heat became unbearable. We could only stand there and watch the machine burn."

Bert Harrison, greenkeeper at Cootamundra Golf Club, situated a few hundred yards from the scene of the crash, said he saw the plane flying near the clubhouse.

"It was flying normally at about 250 feet about 500 yards from me," he said last night.

"It suddenly dropped like a stone. I heard a dull explosion, and then saw smoke.

"I ran as fast as I could, but when I reached the brow of the hill, a few hundred yards away, the plane was blazing fiercely."

George Gillies, laborer, of Cootamun-

Bathurst and educated at St. Stanislaus' College.

He was well known in Parkes, where his father, Mr. Frederick Hearne, dentist, practised for over 10 years.

He was single and had one brother, who is still at school.

Pilot-Officer Hearne was last seen by his parents a fortnight ago, when he stayed, on leave, at their home in Pacific Highway, Hornsby.

Mr. Hearne, who was in the 1st A.I.F., said last night that it had been his son's lifelong ambition to be an airman.

He had applied for entry into the R.A.A.F. some months before the war.

Mr. Hearne left by train late last night for Cootamundra.

The funeral will probably take place at Bathurst.

Leading Aircraftsman Piercy, 29, single, was the son of Mr. H. Piercy.

R.A.A.F. CRASH.

SIX MEN KILLED.

Plane Bursts Into Flames.

MELBOURNE, Monday.

Six members of the Royal Australian Air Force lost their lives when a training plane crashed this morning near No. 1 Air Observers' School at Cootamundra, New South Wales.

The plane burst into flames when it hit the ground.

Rescuers dragged one man from the blazing wreckage, but the heat was so great that they then had to retire.

The rescued man later died in the Cootamundra Hospital.

The victims were:—

PILOT-OFFICER JAMES FREDERICK HEARNE, 20, formerly of Hornsby, New South Wales.

LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN JOHN DUFF CAMERON, 26, formerly of Innisfail, Queensland.

LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN ROBERT MONTGOMERY, 26, formerly of Sydney and Walcha, New South Wales.

LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN ERNEST ARTHUR FIERCY, 30, formerly of Lismore, New South Wales.

LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN JAMES CLIFFORD STANLEY, 24, formerly of Geelong, Victoria.

LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN JOHN HEAD, 25, formerly of Sydney and Fiji.

The Air Department announced to-day that the machine was a multi-engined aircraft and was engaged in training exercises about two miles south-west of Cootamundra aerodrome when the crash occurred.

Mr. Bert Harrison, a greenkeeper at the Cootamundra Golf Club, said he saw the plane near the clubhouse.

"It was flying normally at about 250 feet, about 500 yards from me," Mr. Harrison said. "Suddenly, it dropped like a stone. I heard a dull explosion and then saw smoke.

"I ran as fast as I could, but when I reached the brow of a hill a few hundred yards away, the plane was blazing fiercely."

Mr. George Gillies, of Cootamundra, a labourer, who was driving a horse and cart on the road a few hundred yards away, said he saw the plane drop suddenly. It appeared to bounce once and then burst into flames.

Messrs. Jim Christian, Frank Moore, C. Langdon, and Arthur McGuinness, were the first to reach the plane. McGuinness and Moore dragged Head from the wreck, but the heat was too great for further rescues.

OFFICIAL RECORDS.

Official records of the victims of the crash are:—

Pilot-Officer Hearne joined the service as an air cadet in January. He received his early instruction at Archerfield Elementary Flying Training School, and gained his "wings" at Point Cook. He was posted to Cootamundra Air Observers' School in July for flying duties.

Leading Aircraftman Cameron, who was educated at Queensland State schools and Newington College, Sydney, enlisted in the R.A.A.F. as a photographer on May 31.

Leading Aircraftman Piercy was educated at Nambour Rural School and Toowoomba Grammar School. He was employed by the Bank of New South Wales for several years, and later became manager and partner of a real estate and finance company.

Leading Aircraftman Stanley, who was educated at the Christian Brothers' College, at Warrnambool, and at Geelong College, entered Bradfield Park Initial Training School as an air crew trainee on June 24, and was transferred to Cootamundra on completing the course.

Leading Aircraftman Montgomery, whose father lives in Brighton (England), migrated to Australia after being educated at Edinburgh (Scotland). He joined the R.A.A.F.

KILLED IN R.A.A.F. CRASH.



PILOT-OFFICER J. F. HEARNE, 20, who was killed when the plane he was flying crashed and burst into flames at Cootamundra yesterday. He was the son of Mr. F. Hearne, of Hornsby. Five others were killed in the crash.

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