

BAD 'PLANE SMASH

RADIO MAN DROWNED

TWO SEVERELY INJURED

HOBART, Wednesday.

During gunnery practice by the Royal Australian Navy at Norfolk Bay today, a seaplane from the Albatross got into a spin and crashed two thousand feet into the sea.

Operator MacGowan was drowned, and Flying-Officer Grant was injured in the back, together with a broken nose, fractured ribs and hand.

Lieut. Elliott sustained a fractured leg and dislocated shoulder.

Both the injured men are in hospital in a serious condition.

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A9-4: Seagull crash at Norfolk Bay, Tasmania, on 10 March 1930. Wireless operator Donald McGowan was killed, and Pilot Officer A E Grant (pilot) and Lieutenant J D Elliot were injured. The aircraft was 'spotting' for HMAS Australia which was bombarding the Isle of Caves. Comments from Lieutenant Commander G R Deverell and Squadron Leader Scriven. Includes pictures of A9-4.

AIR CRASH

TRAGEDY AT MANOEUVRES.

One Killed; Two Injured.

HOBART, March 10.—A wireless operator was killed and two officers were injured when a Seagull amphibian crashed during the execution of naval manoeuvres in Norfolk Bay this morning. The casualties were:—

KILLED.

McGOWAN, Donald, wireless operator, of Parramatta, New South Wales.

INJURED.

ELLIOTT, J. D., Lieutenant, England.—Both bones in right ankle broken and right shoulder dislocated.

GRANT, A. E., pilot officer, of Toowoomba, Queensland.—Injuries to spine, broken nose and broken right hand.

The seaplane carrier Albatross, in company with other units of the Royal Australian Navy, left Hobart on Monday morning for Norfolk Bay, where the warships have been carrying out battle practice. This morning the fleet was carrying out manoeuvres and gunnery practice, and four of the Seagull Amphibians, which are carried aboard the Albatross were exercising aloft.

The 'plane in charge of Pilot-Officer Grant was being used for photographing the bombardment of the Isle of Caves by H.M.A.S. Australia. The atmospheric conditions were very bumpy at the time, and made flying rather difficult. When about a quarter of a mile off the shore, and over the Isle of Caves, the machine was flying at an altitude of about 2,000 feet, and apparently everything was in order.

'Plane Goes Into a Spin.

The machine had just made a turn when it encountered a very bad bump in the air. It went into a spin which the pilot was unable to correct, and dropped to the sea like a stone. Lieutenant Elliott and Pilot-Officer Grant were hurled out of the 'plane before it reached the water, but McGowan, who was in the rear of the machine, taking observations of the bombardment of the island, was trapped in the tail, and carried under the water. His death must have been practically instantaneous. The impact as the 'plane struck the surface was terrific, a huge sheet of water shooting upwards.

As soon as the pilots of the other 'planes realised that a mishap had occurred, they alighted on the water beside the spot where the machine had disappeared.

Rescue of Survivors.

Pilot-Officer Grant and Lieutenant Elliott, though severely injured, had contrived to keep afloat, and the crews of the other 'planes soon got alongside them and lifted them aboard. Flight-Lieutenant Crowther, and Lieutenant-Commander Deverell, rendered particularly able assistance in this connection, one of them diving to help the injured men. The 'plane which had crashed rose to the surface for a time after going down, and then sank to the bottom. The water is about 40 feet deep at this spot.

The destroyer Anzac, which had been lying inside Point Renard during the bombardment of the island, was the first of the warships to arrive on the scene, though several smaller craft were close handy. The injured men were transferred to the destroyer, which set off immediately for Hobart. The engine room staff made every effort to get the best possible speed out of the destroyer, and she averaged 23 knots on the run to Hobart. As soon as she berthed at Princess Wharf the casualties were rushed to the Hobart Public Hospital where a medical examination revealed extensive injuries in both cases, Grant being the more severely hurt.

McGowan's Body Recovered.

The Albatross and the destroyer Success were the next units of the squadron to arrive at the scene of the crash, and operations were immediately commenced with a view to raising the sunken machine. The petrol rising from the burst tank made diving impracticable, and a line was passed around one of the wings in an endeavour to raise the 'plane by this means, but the wing broke away. Eventually another line was made fast to the main structure of the 'plane and it was hoisted up on to the deck of the Albatross. The body of McGowan was discovered up in the tail in a reclining position. McGowan had been sitting in the rear cockpit of the machine and he must have been caught in the structure as the 'plane hurtled seawards. It is stated that the actual shell which exploded shortly before the mishap was spotted and marked on the chart McGowan was keeping and which was recovered from the wreckage of the 'plane.

The engine of the amphibian was almost undamaged by the crash and mechanics were immediately set to work taking the engine to pieces before the corrosion caused by salt water took effect on the aluminium alloy of which a large part of the mechanism is constructed.

The Official View.

Squadron Leader Scriven, who is the chief Air Force officer aboard the Albatross was unable to account for the crash of the machine, when interviewed aboard the flagship Australia. He stated that the engine was in perfect order and the controls were apparently working correctly. The crash was definitely not due to engine failure. Pilot Officer Grant was a capable pilot of considerable experience.

The body of McGowan will be buried with full naval honours to-morrow afternoon at Hobart. A naval court of inquiry will sit at Hobart probably next week to investigate the accident.

Lieut. Elliott's condition is fair. There is every hope that Pilot-Officer Grant will survive his injuries, but the extent of the injury to his back has not yet been ascertained.

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AERIAL TRAGEDIES.

Fatal Crash at Hobart.

HOBART, March 21.—According to evidence given to-day by flying officers at the inquest on the death of Donald McGowan, wireless operator, who was killed when a Seagull amphibian attached to H.M.A.S. Albatross crashed in Norfolk Bay during naval manoeuvres on Wednesday last, the crash was due to the pilot's having turned the machine at too low a flying speed, and to the plane's encountering a bad bump as it turned.

Lieutenant Commander G. R. Deverell, observer of H.M.A.S. Albatross, said that he was flying a Seagull amphibian over Norfolk Bay on Wednesday morning to photograph the fall of shot during bombardment practice by the Australia off the Isle of Caves. Seaplane A94, piloted by Pilot Officer Grant and carrying Lieutenant Elliott as observer and Leading Telegraphist McGowan as wireless operator, was flying in the vicinity for the same purpose. Witness instructed Grant to fly at 2,500ft. About 10.30 a.m., witness saw seaplane A94 spinning vertically down to the sea. He watched her in the hope that the pilot would be able to pull her out of the spin, but she crashed into the sea about a quarter of a mile from the beach. He immediately signalled the Australia to cease firing, and as soon as the signal was answered his machine alighted near the wreckage of the other machine, which was floating with the port wing tip and the rudder awash. The two officers were clinging to the wreckage, but there was no sign of McGowan. They managed to haul Pilot Officer Grant into their craft, but could not get Lieutenant Elliott, who was in the water for a few minutes until boats arrived from H.M.A.S. Anzac.

Squadron-Leader Scriven said that in his opinion the accident was caused by the plane's receiving a bump when turning at a low speed.

The inquest was adjourned to a date to be fixed, as the remaining witnesses will be the injured officers, Grant and Elliott. The condition of both the surviving victims had improved slightly this morning, although it was definitely established that Grant had received a spinal injury.

Pilot's Health Questioned.

MELBOURNE, March 21.—At an inquest to-day concerning the death of Gerrard Raymond Neville (20), air mechanic, and Frederick William Ward (24), mechanic and pilot, who were killed in an aeroplane crash near the Essendon aerodrome on March 13, a theory was advanced that Ward, who was piloting the plane, collapsed in mid-air. It was alleged that about an hour before the flight Ward was suffering from a malarial attack, and a story of Ward's apparent collapse in a restaurant last year was told by a witness.

The Coroner (Mr. Grant) adjourned the inquest to enable Ward's pilot's certificate to be examined. He also wanted as a witness a doctor, who examined Ward before he commenced his aerial training.

Evidence was given that Ward's real name was Hammond, and that he had been adopted at the age of four years by people named Ward.