

# THREE DEAD IN BOMBER DIVE

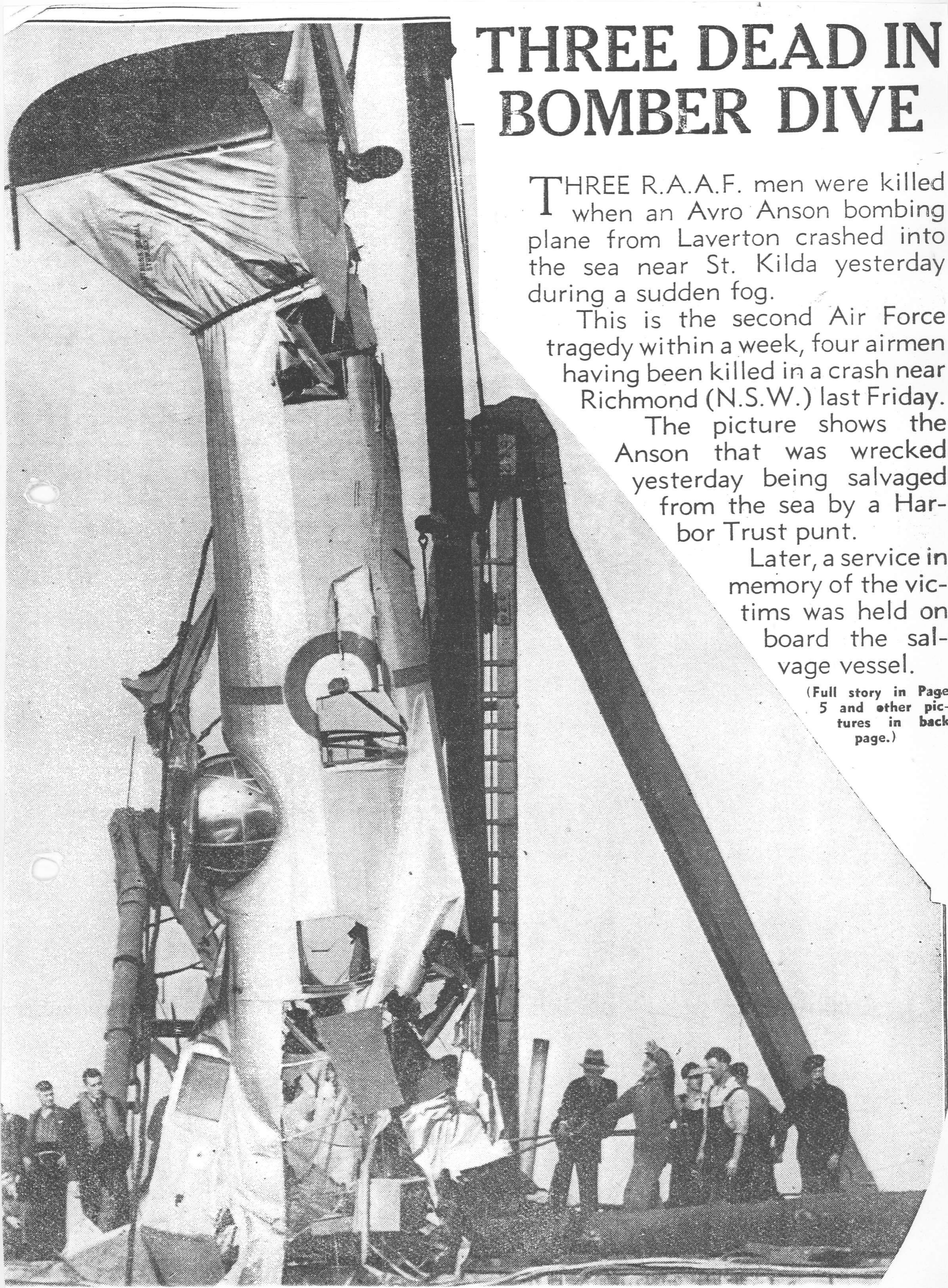
THREE R.A.A.F. men were killed when an Avro Anson bombing plane from Laverton crashed into the sea near St. Kilda yesterday during a sudden fog.

This is the second Air Force tragedy within a week, four airmen having been killed in a crash near Richmond (N.S.W.) last Friday.

The picture shows the Anson that was wrecked yesterday being salvaged from the sea by a Harbor Trust punt.

Later, a service in memory of the victims was held on board the salvage vessel.

(Full story in Page 5 and other pictures in back page.)



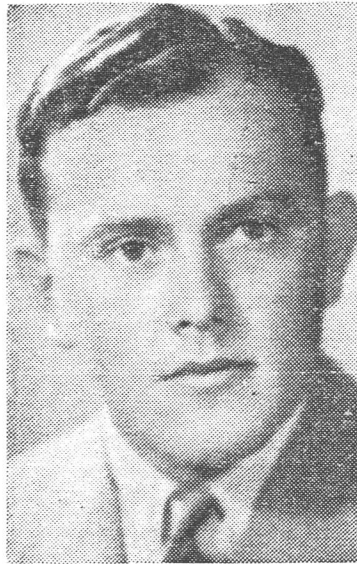
# SECOND AIR FORCE LOSS IN FIVE DAYS: SEVEN DEAD

WHEN an Avro Anson bombing plane from Laverton crashed into the Bay about a mile south of Gellibrand Light at 9.55 a.m. yesterday, three Royal Australian Air Force men were killed. They were:—

Pilot Officer R. J. I. Davis, 24, single, of Cooper Street, Nedlands, West Australia.

Corporal Gordon Peake, observer, 28, married, of Agg Street, Newport, Victoria.

Aircraftman J. W. Quinn, 20, single, of Newcastle New South Wales.



AIRCRAFTMAN J. W. QUINN

With another Avro Anson, the bomber left Laverton soon after 9 a.m., but lost formation. It is believed the pilot dived in an effort to get out of the dense fog. Visibility was only about a mile.

SEVEN R.A.A.F. men have been killed in two Avro Anson crashes within five days. Last Friday four were killed when a plane was wrecked near Riverstone, New South Wales.

The body of a man, later identified as that of Corporal Peake, was found entangled in the wreckage of the plane by members of a fishing party on the launch Greta who saw the plane crash and went to give aid. Aircraftman Quinn's body was recovered early in the afternoon.

The crew of the R.A.A.F. salvage launch which began working on the wrecked bomber about noon suspended operations at dusk without having recovered the body of Pilot Officer Davis, although his helmet and goggles were found by Diver Persson on the seabed.

## Crash—Explosion

AN aircraftman, stripped of his clothes, dived into the cold water to fix grappling irons to the sunken machine, which was hauled to the surface by a Harbor Trust barge.

Mr. Joseph Maxwell, captain of the Greta, said he saw the bomber travelling overhead at a height of about 100ft. Suddenly it seemed as though the pilot was attempting to turn. Without warning the plane crashed into the calm sea. There was a loud explosion.

When the Greta arrived at the scene wreckage was scattered over the water.

## Disappeared In Fog

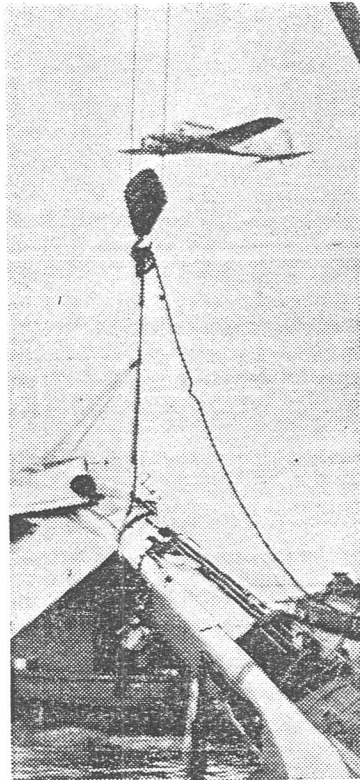
THE lessee of the St. Kilda pier kiosk (Mr. Payne) said that at 9.40 a.m. he saw the bomber coming out of dense fog from the direction of Elwood. Flying at about 500ft., it seemed to be making towards Middle Park, but after passing the pier it swung to the west in a half-circle and was lost in the fog.

Soon after 10 a.m. men on the motor launch Edina, which had left at 9.30 a.m. on a fishing trip, returned to the pier and told Mr. Payne that a plane had crashed and that its wings were still on the surface and its tail in the air.

Mr. Payne then telephoned to the Civil Aviation Department.

## Solemn Last Rites

THE R.A.A.F. Southampton flying-boat, commanded by Flight-Lieut. Garing, immediately took off from Pt. Cook and landed about 10.45 near the scene of the crash. Flight-Lieut. Garing was carried by speed boat to the Par-



WHILE wreckage of the R.A.A.F. Avro Anson bomber was being raised from the Bay yesterday, another Avro Anson circled low over the scene.

R.A.A.F. men, police and onlookers in a dozen boats surrounding the crash scene stood bareheaded as the priest knelt beside Quinn's body in prayer.

## Noted Rugby Back

AIRCRAFTMAN QUINN was a leading Victorian Rugby Union back, and had represented the State several times. His performances in the interstate matches in Sydney last year were so good that he was considered probable for selection in the Australian side to tour England this year.

He was the son of Mr. J. K. Quinn, former secretary of Newcastle Rugby League football club, and had represented New South Wales in Rugby League and Australian rules football while at school. His first State selection was in Victoria. He was captain



Pilot Officer R. J. I. Davis

2.5.39

# ONLY ONE BODY YET FOUND

## Race Against Storm To Save Wreck

MELBOURNE, Tuesday.

Three Air Force men were killed when an Avro Anson bomber nose-dived into Port Phillip Bay during a heavy fog about 9.55 a.m. to-day.

One body was found floating in a tangle of wreckage on the surface and the others are believed to be still in the nose of the plane, which is half submerged.

The dead are:—Pilot-Officer R. J. I. Davis (24), single, of Cooper-street, Nedlands (W.A.), Corporal Gordon Peake (28), married, of Newport (N.S.W.), Aircraftsman J. W. Quinn (20), single, of Newcastle (N.S.W.).

Squads of Air Force men in speedboats are striving desperately to salvage the wreck before a threatening storm breaks and washes it away.

To-day's crash make the toll of Air Force dead 23 in 12 months. Of 18 crashes, 11 were of Ansons, and their total of dead, 15.

The bomber, with another machine from No. 21 Squadron, had left the Laverton Air Force Station earlier to-day on a wireless training exercise.

They became separated in fog over Port Phillip and the other machine returned alone to Laverton.

Just before the bomber came down into the sea, it was seen flying very low and slowly above the beach from Elwood toward Middle Park, as if the pilot had lost his bearings in the fog.

Mr. Joseph Maxwell, captain of the fishing-launch, Greta, was taking a fishing party out to the South Channel, when he saw an Avro Anson marked A4-11 flying low overhead.

"It was travelling about 100ft. up," he said, "and it appeared to me as though the pilot tried to make a right-hand turn."

The machine nose-dived suddenly and hit the water, flinging a column of spray high into the air.

"There was a tremendous explosion like the crash of a heavy gun. I suppose the engines must have blown up.

"We were only about a quarter of a mile away and three miles west of St. Kilda. I called to the fishing launch Parvager, which was nearby, and we both made for the spot. When we got there wreckage was scattered over 100 yards of the surface of the sea.

### Sinking Hull

"The body of a man was lying in a tangle of wreckage. He had suffered terrible injuries and was dead.

"The body was identified later as that of Pilot-Officer Davis, who graduated only last December. His body was lifted on the foredeck of the

A high-powered salvage launch came out from Point Cooke and at once an aircraftsman stripped off his clothes and dived naked into the ice-cold sea to try and get out the other two bodies, which are thought to be in the nose.

After two plunges, he came to the surface and asked for grappling-irons. These were lowered, and he plunged in again, trying to fix them to the hull.

A crowd of spectators gathered on St. Kilda Pier to watch the salvage operations, but could see nothing because of the fog.

Melbourne Harbor Trust has been asked to send out salvaging gear and an experienced diver.

### Official Report

An official statement issued by the Defence Department at 1 p.m. said:—

"At 9.30 this morning two Anson aircraft of No. 21 Squadron left Laverton for formation and radio-telephony practice.

"Later, the aircraft experienced severe fog conditions, and broke up formation. One of the machines returned safely to Laverton.

"Following a report that a fisherman had observed the wreckage of an aircraft in the bay, an air search was made, and the second Anson was discovered in the water."

## HEAVIEST FOG

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### Sinking Hull

"The body of a man was lying in a tangle of wreckage. He had suffered terrible injuries and was dead.

"The body was identified later as that of Pilot-Officer Davis, who graduated only last December. His body was lifted on the foredeck of the Greta and covered with a canvas sheet.

"The smashed hull of the wrecked bomber was then lying half-submerged and quickly filling with water. To prevent it from sinking, the Parvager's crew passed a line round the tail and made it fast to the bow of their vessel.

"A few minutes later the hull filled with water and the nose sank."

### Flying-boat To Aid

Meanwhile, Mr. William Dennis, who had arrived in the fishing launch Diana, headed back to St. Kilda, and from there telephoned the Civil Ambulance. News of the tragedy was flashed to Pt. Cook and a Southampton flying-boat commanded by Flight-Lieutenant Garing went out and landed about 10.45 a.m. on the sea where the bomber had crashed.

A R.A.A.F. speedboat then rushed up and put Garing aboard the Parvager, where he questioned witnesses and examined the body of Pilot Officer Davis.

While the flying-boat's radio was telling Pt. Cook what had happened, Garing, in the cabin of the Parvager, began an informal preliminary inquiry. R.A.A.F. planes, called up by radio, droned overhead on observation duty.

Soon another launch came out

A high-powered salvage launch came out from Point Cooke and at once an aircraftsman stripped off his clothes and, shivering, waded into the ice-cold sea to try and get out the other two bodies, which are thought to be in the nose.

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## HEAVIEST FOG

MELBOURNE, Tuesday.

Air services were interrupted to-day by the heaviest fog of the year. It lay deep over the hills and coastal areas, reduced visibility in the bay to about a mile, and lowered the ceiling at Essendon airport to 3000ft.

Radio instructions brought the A.N.A. Douglas airliners from Sydney and Hobart safely in to land within a few minutes of each other at Essendon.

Ansett Airways' morning plane from Hamilton was nearly over Essendon when her captain was told by radio to return to Ballarat and land his passengers there. They were brought to Melbourne by car.

## STAR FOOTBALLER

Aircraftsman J. W. Quinn, killed in the Anson crash to-day, was a son of Mr. J. K. Quinn, ex-secretary of South Newcastle Rugby League Football Club. He represented N.S.W. schools in League and Australian Rules, and played with the Victorian State Rugby Union team last year.

~~THE STAR~~  
SYDNEY PAPER

An open finding was recorded by the Coroner (Mr Tingate, P.M.) today at the inquest on three R.A.A.F. men who were killed when an Avro Anson bomber crashed into the bay on May 2.

A suggestion that the pilot might have mistaken the fog he encountered for a cloud, and struck the water in turning down to clear it, was made in evidence by Squadron-Leader Patrick George Heffernan, commanding No. 1 Squadron, Laverton.

"Presumably, as he was coming down through the fog, he increased his rate of turn," added Heffernan. "He may have got momentarily out of control."

The Coroner (Mr Tingate, P.M.) closely questioned Flight-Sergeant Peter Ochiltree Lavarack, of Laverton, about the likely behavior of a plane in fog.

"If they were flying at say 2000 feet and encountered fog, they would naturally go down to see how far it extended," said Lavarack. "In any case they would certainly turn back, as they were doing."

The inquest was on:

Pilot Officer Ronald John Irwin Davis, 24, single, of Cooper Street, Nedlands, Western Australia.

Corporal Gordon Peake, 28, married, of Agg Street, Newport, and

Aircraftman John William Quinn, 20, single, of Newcastle, New South Wales.

## 216 HOURS FLYING

Squadron-Leader Dermot Anthony Connelly, officer-in-charge of No. 21 squadron, said records showed Pilot-Officer Davis joined the Royal Australian Air Force on January 17, 1938, graduated on December 16 the same year, and had done 216 hours of flying time. He was considered a good pilot.

Norman Charles Bolger and William Gordon Tuffrey, aircraftmen of No. 21 squadron, Laverton, gave evidence of their inspection of the Avro Anson. Bolger said he found the rigging in satisfactory condition. He considered the machine airworthy. Tuffrey said he found the engines in good condition.

Flight-Sergeant Lavarack said that when he authorised the three men to carry out formation flying and manoeuvres by radio telephony, conditions were suitable for flying. There was no fog at Laverton.

The Avron Anson had been in use for at least two years, and probably more, he said. It had been used for these manoeuvres many times, and on several occasions Davis had taken charge of the plane.

Mr Tingate: Did you give any direc-

tions as to the height at which the manoeuvres should be carried out?

Lavarack: Normally, according to orders, they should be carried out at 2000 feet, if they are able to get up to that height. If, after taking off, they found they were in weather conditions causing them to come down below that height they would come back, as they were doing in any case.

If these airmen ran into fog, would there be any reason for them to descend?—If they ran into fog they would try to turn back from it, and fly where conditions were more satisfactory. They might come down lower to see whether it extended down to the ground. If that were so, they would naturally turn back.

By his instruments a pilot would be able to determine his height within 50 feet, Lavarack continued. The instruments in the Avro Anson would have been checked before the machine left the ground, but it could not be said definitely when the machine was on the ground, whether they were working correctly.

If they were found to be incorrect when the machine took the air, the pilot would return. As Davis had not done so, he assumed that the instruments were working perfectly.

## FLEW INTO FOG

Pilot-Officer Geoffrey Douglas Marshall, of No. 21 squadron, Laverton, said that he took off from Laverton in another Avro Anson to carry out radio telephony and formation exercises with the plane piloted by Davis. They made formation about a mile from the aerodrome, and flew off over the bay in the direction of St. Kilda.

About 10 minutes after they had left the aerodrome he flew into light clouds. At 9.45 a.m. his machine flew into dense fog, and after striking the fog he received a message from Davis to the effect that Davis was going to break formation.

"I did not see the plane piloted by Davis," said Marshall.

## Diver's Story Of Search

Describing how he turned back to Laverton, Marshall said he dropped slightly in making the turn and lost sight of the water. He dropped until he saw the water. He dropped from about 200 feet.

Marshall said he kept to the coast so that he could supplement his idea of the altitude given by the instruments by watching objects on the ground.

Helmer Perssen, deep sea diver, employed by Melbourne Harbor Trust, of Oakleigh Road, Carnegie, described how he descended to the seabed where the plane crashed and searched for the bodies.

On May 2 he recovered Quinn's body in about 25 feet of water about 100 yards from the wreckage. Next day he continued the search and recovered Davis's body about 400 yards east of the point where the crash occurred.

Joseph Maxwell, fisherman, of Shirley Grove, East St. Kilda, said that about 9.50 a.m. he was out in the launch Greta about three miles south-west of St. Kilda Pier.

"I heard the sound of an aeroplane engine in the distance," he said. "I could not see it because of the heavy fog. The visibility was about a quarter of a mile.

"The plane appeared to attempt to make a righthand turn. In banking the wing touched the water, and ripped the right wing off the fuselage. As the plane

## PILOT'S ERROR?

When Squadron-Leader Heffernan entered the box, the Coroner asked him if he could throw any light on the reason for the crash.

"The only thing I can suggest is that the pilot did not pay sufficient regard to his altimeter when he was descending through the fog," said Heffernan.

"An investigation of the wreckage, however, showed that the aircraft did not dive straight into the bay. It went in more or less gradually.

"If the aircraft had dived vertically, the engine would have disintegrated, and the propellers would have been bent and twisted in all directions."

Heffernan continued that the machine had been in service about two years, and was one of a new batch ordered from England.

The Coroner: Is there no possibility of the instruments having been out of order?

Heffernan: No, sir. There is a column on the chart showing that they were inspected.

## "RAN INTO SEA"

In reply to questions, Heffernan said that there was no necessity for the plane in turning to lose height. It was definitely

## NO CAUSE FOUND.

## Inquest on Victims.

MELBOURNE, Thursday.

Evidence at an inquest to-day into the deaths of three Royal Australian Air Force men in an Avro-Anson bomber which crashed into Port Phillip Bay, about two miles south-west of St. Kilda, about 9.40 a.m. on May 2, did not enable the coroner, Mr. Tingate, P.M., to decide what had caused the crash.

One witness said that the plane crashed after its right wing was torn off by impact with the water. This occurred when it dipped while the machine was making a steep righthand turn only a few feet above the surface.

The victims were: Pilot-Officer Ronald J. I. Davis, 24, of Nedlands (W.A.); Corporal Gordon Peake, 28, of Newport (Vic.); and Aircraftman John W. Quinn, 20, of Newcastle (N.S.W.).

## EVERYTHING IN ORDER.

Evidence was given by aircraftmen at the R.A.A.F. base, Laverton, that on the morning of the crash they tested the engine and rigging of the plane and found them in order.

Pilot-Officer Geoffrey D. Marshall, of the 21st Squadron, to which Davis was attached, said that, at 9.30 a.m., he left the Laverton base in an Avro-Anson bomber, and was followed a few moments later by Davis, piloting another Avro-Anson.

"We made formation about a mile east, and flew over Port Phillip Bay towards St. Kilda," Marshall said. "I was in radio communication with Davis. We flew into small clouds, and then into a fog at a height of about 1,400 feet. Davis told me by radio that he was going to break formation. I turned left, and did not see his plane again. I flew back to Laverton round the coast. I did not return across the water, as it was very deceptive in the fog. I lost height until I saw the water from about 200 feet. I kept to the coast so that I could supplement the instruments' reading by my observation of the ground. I did not hear from Davis after we broke formation."

## FISHERMAN'S EVIDENCE.

Joseph Maxwell, a licensed fisherman, of St. Kilda, said that his boat was only 300 yards away from the plane when, flying low in the fog, it appeared to be making a righthand turn. Its right wing struck the water, and was torn completely away from the fuselage, which crashed into the water. The body of Peake was found among the wreckage.

Squadron-Leader Heffernan said that damage to the plane indicated that it had not struck the water head on. Had it done so it would have disintegrated. It was one of the original batch of Avro-Anson machines brought from England more than two years ago. He knew of similar planes which had been flown for five years.

Davis might not have seen the water in the fog, witness added. He might have disregarded his altimeter and allowed the machine to get into a steep bank, one of the wings striking the water.

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD  
12.5.39

## INSTRUMENTS LACKING

### Lost Avro-Anson

Since an Avro-Anson bomber crashed into Port Phillip Bay on May 2, an order has been issued by the Royal Australian Air Force prohibiting pilots from flying in Avro-Ansons not equipped with instruments indicating pitch and rate of climb.

That information was given Judge Piper yesterday at the Air Force Court of Inquiry appointed to investigate the loss of the Avro-Anson on May 2 with the loss of the following men:—

Pilot Officer Ronald John Irwin Davis, aged 24 years, of Nedlands (W.A.); Corporal Gordon Peake, aged 28 years, of Agg street, Newport; and Aircraftsman John William Quinn, aged 20 years, of Newcastle (N.S.W.).

Group-Captain H. N. Wrigley and Squadron-Leader A. L. Walters appeared before the Court as assessors; Mr. H. A. Winneke (instructed by the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor) appeared to assist the Court; and Mr. L. P. Goode appeared for the relatives of Davis.

Evidence was given that the machine involved in the crash was not fitted with a Sperry instrument panel. It had no pitch indicator and no rate-of-climb indicator.

Squadron-Leader Walter Stewart Armstrong, acting director of technical services in the R.A.A.F., said that there were at present 82 Avro-Ansons in Australia. An order that all Avro-Ansons should be fitted with Sperry instruments had been issued in March.

To Mr. Goode witness admitted that since the crash there had been a definite prohibition of flying Avro-Ansons not fitted with Sperry instruments.

Mr. Goode.—This order was given as a result of the accident we are investigating?—Yes, I assume so.

There has been a bit of a rush to make the alterations since the crash?—Definitely.

Judge Piper said that he wanted to know whose business it was to report that the particular machine which had crashed had lacked both these instruments.

Squadron-Leader Armstrong.—I don't know. The squadron-commander concerned, I should say.

Judge Piper.—Well, that's what I want to know, and I intend to find out.

Evidence was given by the pilot and members of the crew of an Avro-Anson which accompanied Davis's machine on May 2. Pilot-Officer Geoffrey Douglas Marshall, pilot of the machine, said that there was a tendency for Avro-Ansons to dive when turning.

The hearing was adjourned to 10.30 a.m. to-day.

6-6-39 ARGUS

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