

AVRO ANSONS.

GOOD QUALITIES OUTLINED.

Evidence at Inquiry on Fatal Crash.

Wing-Commander D. E. L. Wilson, of the R.A.A.F., told the Air Force Court of Inquiry yesterday that the Avro Anson type of aircraft had been found to be exceedingly good for the navigation reconnaissance work at sea for which they were used by the R.A.A.F. There had never been an engine failure during any of the work at sea.

Pilot-Officer L. G. Harness and Pilot-Officer M. L. Hickson, two of the four men killed in the crash of the Avro Anson bomber A4-32, at Riverstone on April 28, into which the Court is inquiring, were, he said, two people who had achieved good results in their training course. They seemed to be extraordinarily keen, and, so far as his knowledge went, they were good and safe pilots.

After hearing evidence from nine more witnesses the Court, which is presided over by Judge Piper, adjourned until a date to be fixed.

Avro Ansons, said witness, were a relatively easy type of twin-engined aircraft to fly, their flying qualities being very similar to single-engined types.

POSSIBLE CAUSE.

Asked if he could suggest any possible theories to account for the crash, Wing-Commander Wilson said he thought it possible that one of the engines had "cut out" and that the pilot had then throttled back both engines, putting the nose of the machine down. At the same time, or a fraction of a second later, he had probably wound back the elevator trimming tab to a position where the machine would not be too nose-heavy. With some of the party, he would then be concerned with getting the petrol in the inner tanks turned on and would not be so concerned with the outside world. He might have got someone to change over the petrol tanks for him. He might then have put on his engine at a height of 500 feet or less. At that time he would realise he was getting close to the ground and he would probably put his engine on suddenly. The fact of the engines coming on suddenly with the elevator tabs in that position would make the nose come up. The pilot would correct that with the control stick, which would account for the nose coming to the normal position. He might have realised then that pressure on the stick was not enough to prevent the nose coming up, and he might have wound the elevator tab forward. That would have caused a very quick downward movement and it could have been sufficiently severe temporarily to jolt him forward and make it impossible for him to control his machine. Every member of the crew might have been thrown forward, helping to make the nose go down.

OTHER THEORIES.

The elevator trimming tab gear, which had been found embedded in the mud after the crash, might have become altered after the crash. He thought that was possible but not probable. If the aircraft had dived at 500 feet and the petrol then came on it would possibly be exceeding the safe maximum flying speed of 192 miles an hour, and a structural failure of some control surface might have taken place, but the difficulty about that theory was to account for the position in which the trimming tab indicator had been found. It was probable that the tab had been turned too far forward and turned too quickly.

A third theory was that the pilot, who would be on a fairly hard seat, might have risen to make himself more comfortable and struck the rudder adjustment tab with his head. Pilot Harness was a few inches taller than the normal man. Such a movement would push the rudder control into a forward position, and the nose of the aircraft would go down.

"I have done that myself," said Wing-Commander Wilson, "and have 'cracked' my head. I have never been knocked unconscious, but I have felt it for some time afterwards." "We are advancing theories," he added, "that may lay some stigma, however slight, on the crew, who are not here to answer for themselves, and therefore I want particularly to emphasise this last theory."

CHANGING OF PETROL TANKS.

Judge Piper: Assuming that the cause of the crash was the running out of petrol in the outer tanks after two hours and 40 minutes in the air, that would be about 25 minutes beyond the 2½ hours at which the change-over from the outer to the inner tanks should have been made. Can you say from your knowledge of this pilot if he would be likely to leave it as long as that?—I feel that it would be unlikely that Harness and Hickson would have allowed the petrol to run out. The instruction to change before that time was imposed on this particular course, but normally the change-over would not be made till the first tanks had run out.

If I come to the conclusion that he ran out of petrol, I cannot avoid the conclusion that he did not carry out his instructions?—That is so.

Would it be a proper summing-up to say that it was not an absolute instruction, but an opinion given for safe flying?—It was a definite instruction given by me for that course. It was not put on paper, but was given verbally by me to the personnel when I had them paraded before the flight was commenced.

23.6.39: SYDNEY MORNING
HERALD

1939 CAUSE OF ANSON CRASH UNKNOWN

WINDSOR, Tuesday.—A verdict of accidental death was returned by the coroner, Mr. Johnston, today at the inquest on four airmen who were killed at Riverstone on April 28.

They were victims of an Avro-Anson bomber crash.

The coroner said the evidence did not show what caused the crash.

The victims were:—

Pilot Officers Maxwell Hickson and Lloyd Harness and Aircraftsmen Raymond Knight and Harrie Clarke.

Flight-Lieutenant Holswich in evidence said the bomber had been on a navigation flight.

It was only three or four minutes from the aerodrome when it crashed.