

PILOT'S FEAT.

LANDS TWO PLANES

Interlocked in Collision.

WAGGA, Sunday.

When two large R.A.A.F. reconnaissance planes collided in mid-air near Junee to-day, the trainee-pilot of the top machine landed his plane, with the other locked to it, and stepped from the wreckage unhurt.

Two trainees were in each plane. Three of them parachuted and landed safely, though one was slightly hurt.

By his coolness and resource the pilot who remained at the controls, Aircraftman L. G. Fuller, saved the Commonwealth about £40,000 because, though both planes were considerably damaged, they can be repaired.

The other trainees were I. M. Sinclair, J. Hewson (who was slightly injured), and H. G. Fraser. All the men were from the Wagga Air Training School.

Witnesses said that the planes were flying at only 1,000 feet when they collided. Their wings interlocked and the machines went into a slow spiral. It was a low altitude for safe "bailing out," but the three parachutes opened promptly.

Fuller landed the machines locked together pick-a-back fashion in T. Murphy's property, four miles south-west of Brocklesby. A propeller of the top machine had apparently embedded itself in an engine housing of the bottom plane. On landing, the cabin of the bottom machine was smashed, and its propeller dug into the earth.

The two aircraft were on a reconnaissance flight, and collided at about 10.30 a.m., 50 miles from the aerodrome.

Fuller said later that he decided to try to bring the planes down in a forced landing to save them from destruction.

Air officials who inspected the damaged machines described his feat as one of the most astounding in the history of aviation.

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

30.9.40

Mid-Air Crash: Pilot Lands Locked Planes

An R.A.A.F. pilot yesterday made a successful landing at Brocklesby, near Corowa, with his plane jammed on top of another R.A.A.F. machine.

R.A.A.F. officers cannot recall such a feat in the history of aviation.

The machines had collided in mid-air 1000ft. above Brocklesby, and became locked firmly together.

The pilot and observer of the bottom machine, and the observer of the top machine, bailed out and descended safely by parachute.

DAILY TELEGRAPH (SYDNEY)
30.9.40

Pilot L. G. Fuller, who eventually landed the two planes still locked together, jumped from the cockpit of the top machine after gliding to a landing.

He said he felt only slightly jarred.

Pilot J. Hewston, who had been in charge of the other machine, was taken to Albury District Hospital, but his condition is satisfactory.

Hewston's observer, J. N. Frazer, and the observer in Fuller's plane, I. N. Sinclair, escaped unscathed.

N4876
L9162

Glass Showers Street

The two planes were from a training school nearby.

They were flying at about 1000 feet.

Residents of Brocklesby thought the machines were engaged in a make-believe dogfight when they saw them swooping towards each other.

The collision occurred directly over Brocklesby, and broken glass from the machines dropped into the main street.

Hewston's injuries—fractured ribs and a bruised back—were received when the collision occurred, the cockpit of his machine being crashed in.

Residents expected to see the planes crash headlong to the ground.

Instead, they locked together, and, after swerving for a few seconds, returned to an even keel.

Immediately the other three men had jumped from the machines, Fuller began to pilot the locked planes to earth.

"Luckiest Flier"

He brought them down on to a clear paddock, Mr. T. Murphy's property, two miles from Brocklesby.

He had just left the cockpit when residents who had rushed to the paddock by car reached the scene.

Both machines were damaged. The propeller of Fuller's plane had driven into the engine, and as the lower plane landed its propellers were driven into the earth.

Fuller said that after he decided to make a landing he endeavored to loosen the undercarriage of his plane, but was unable to do so.

"I suppose I must consider myself one of the luckiest fliers ever," he said.

"Just A Chance"

"When the others bailed out I thought there was just a chance to save both planes, and I decided to have a go."

An eyewitness, who is a returned oldier, said: "It was the most astounding thing I have ever seen, and I have watched some pretty wild dog-

PRIDE OF R.A.A.F.

"Aerodynamically, it sounds impossible," said Captain Ron Adair, a flying-boat pilot, discussing the wonderful landing by the R.A.A.F. pupil pilot L. G. Fuller, on two planes which had become locked together in a mid-air collision over Brocklesbury, near Albury, yesterday.

"It was a remarkable thing in the first place, and was even more remarkable because of the fact that a pupil pilot did the trick," added Captain Adair, who has nearly 12,000 flying hours, having started flying 25 years ago with the A.F.C. in Palestine.

"It's the kind of thing that will be talked about for years by pilots all over the world—and just not believed by a lot of them," continued Captain Adair. "The young pilot showed great skill and coolness."

"It seems almost anything can happen in the air. The history of flying is full of miracles."

Veteran Sydney pilots who flew in the last war said to-day that there had never been an incident in aviation remotely approaching Fuller's extraordinary feat.

What Planes Can Do

Captain Adair said that in the last war the pilot and observer of a plane were shot. The plane turned upside down and then the tail was blown off, but the plane continued flying for miles.

Eleven years ago Captain Adair was flying an Avro Avian near Bowen, Queensland, when an eagle flew into the propeller, breaking it. The complete engine immediately fell off and the plane slid backwards until Captain Adair righted it 100 feet up and landed safely.

The Short Mayo composite in England consists of a flying boat and land plane, which take off locked together, but they do not land together, like the two planes did at Brocklesby.

Delayed Bailing Out

It was revealed to-day that two members of the R.A.A.F. planes' crews who baled out yesterday, stayed in the planes for a full minute after the collision while Fuller was trying to land, before they parachuted to safety.

The two planes were on a reconnaissance flight from the service flying school at Forrest Hill, near Wagga, to Corowa and Narrandera, and were flying over Brocklesby, very close together when they suddenly collided and locked about 1000 feet up.

It seemed that the planes would go into a spin, but Fuller righted them, and headed out in what appeared to be a fairly even glide south-west of the town, landing five miles from where the collision occurred.

SUN (SYDNEY) 30-9-40

PLANE LANDING



Aircraftman L. G. Fuller, of the Wagga Air Training School who on Sunday safely landed two R.A.A.F. reconnaissance planes which had become locked together after a collision in mid-air near Juneec.

1-10-40 SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ↑

FREAK LANDING OF PLANES.

Air Board Inquiry.

WORLD INTEREST.

An Air Board inquiry will be held into the freak collision on Sunday between two R.A.A.F. reconnaissance planes, which locked together at 1,000 feet and were landed pick-a-back fashion by the amazing skill of Pupil-pilot L. G. Fuller.

The two occupants of each plane will attend the inquiry. The Air Board will determine why the two aircraft were so close to each other while on a reconnaissance exercise, and which pilot was in error.

An Air Force officer, who examined the locked planes after the landing, said yesterday that they could not have been more skilfully joined together on the ground with a hoist. During the five miles' glide to the ground after the collision the centre of gravity of the two machines must have been nearly perfect.

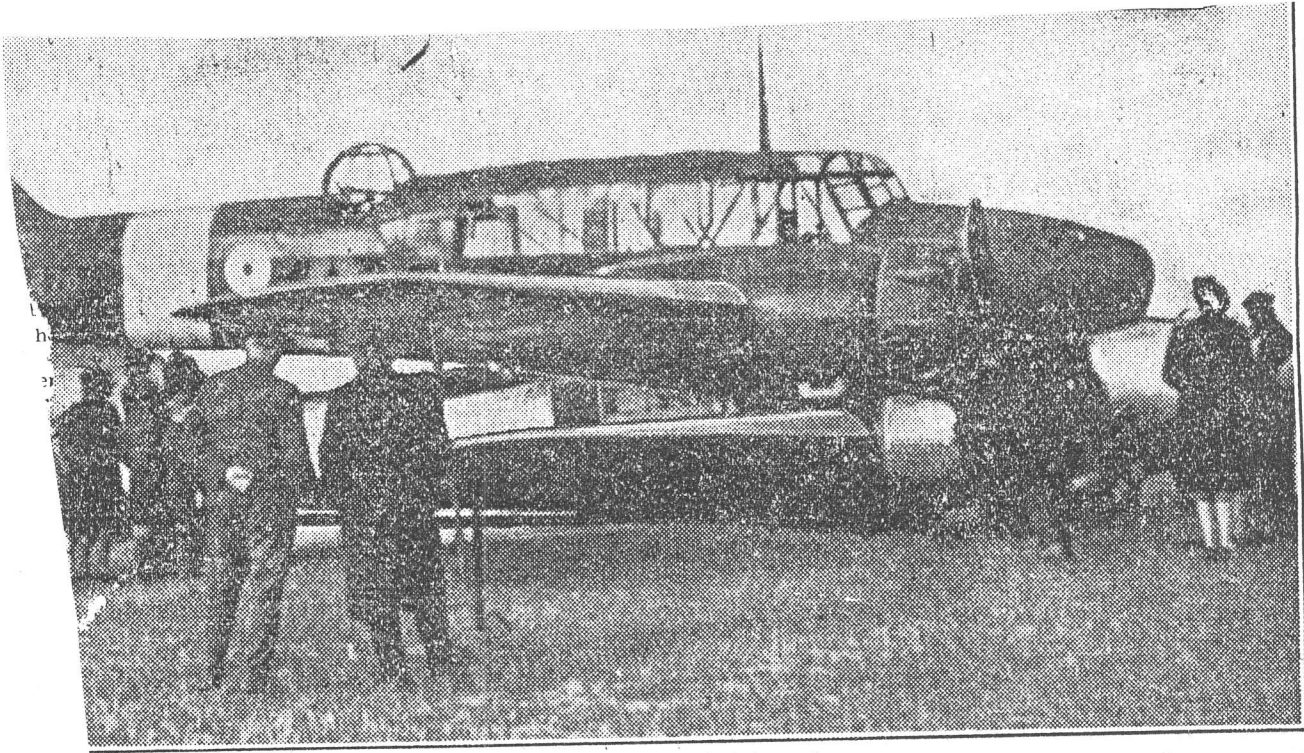
A description of the extraordinary landing was featured in the news bulletins of most of the oversea broadcasting stations, including the B.B.C., and stations at San Francisco, Manila, and Java. It was pointed out that the incident had no parallel in the history

OTHER AVIATION FREAKS.

It was agreed that it earned a place beside such authenticated freak events as the pilot who fell out of his machine and back into it again during a loop; the fighter plane which returned to its own aerodrome during the Great War and made a perfect landing without its pilot, who mysteriously disappeared and was never heard of again; and the trainer plane which became transfixed on a church spire in England, causing the church officer to call the fire brigade to rescue the pilot with an extension ladder.

Mr. W. E. Hart, holder of Australia's number one pilot's certificate and British flying licence No. 199, who made his first flight at Penrith in 1911, said that Fuller's feat was the most amazing incident in aviation during the last 30 years. After the collision, Mr. Hart said, the two planes apparently became a dual machine, and Fuller had enough courage to take advantage of the situation and make the landing. "I would never have believed it possible," he added.

(Picture of pilot on page 12.)



UNIQUE LANDING. This is how two R.A.A.F. planes landed at Brocklesby, near Corowa, on Sunday. Colliding 1000ft. up, the machines became locked together, and were piloted to earth. Occupants escaped.

DAILY TELEGRAPH (SYDNEY) 1.10.60

Inquiry Into Freak Mishap

An Air Board Court of Inquiry will investigate the collision of two Avro-Anson bombers over Brocklesby, near Corowa, on Sunday.

The machines which locked together were landed pick-a-back fashion by Leading Aircraftsman L. G. Fuller.

At present neither officers of the Air Board staff nor those controlling the station from which the machine was flown can explain why the two machines should have been so close.

Fuller's feat in landing both aircraft is praised by R.A.A.F. officials.

"How the machines maintained the centre of gravity is a miracle," an official said yesterday.

"Had that not happened, no power on earth could have controlled them."

Experts who saw the machines yesterday estimate the damage at about £2000.

Each machine is valued at £8000.

A ABOUT 10 o'clock on the morning of September 29, 1940, people near the small town of Brocklesbury, in the Riverine, were astonished to see two R.A.A.F. twin-engined Anson aircraft coming in to land, locked together in pick-a-back fashion after a mid-air collision. (6 JAN '63)

They were still more astonished when only one man climbed out — from the cabin of the top machine—and announced that he had brought off the landing alone. The other three crew members had bailed out safely some time before.

Only one member of the crews, the pilot of the lower aircraft, was hurt in the spectacular collision, and his injuries were only slight.

The two aircraft were mainly intact.

The Ansons were on what began as a normal training flight from No. 2 Service Flying Training School, Forest Hill, near Wagga, and ended in an exploit that astonished a world accustomed to amazing wartime exploits.

Their crews were all leading aircraftmen, with G. Fuller piloting one Anson and I. M. Sinclair as his observer, and the other being piloted by J. Hewson, with H. G. Fraser as observer.

About 10 a.m., flying on the same course, one apparently attempted to overtake the other without sufficient vertical clearance at a height of about 1000 feet and they collided with a noise of tearing metal and fabric.

The port propeller of the machine piloted by Fuller bit deeply into the port engine cowling of the lower machine, piloted by Hewson; the bottom of the fuselage of Fuller's aircraft interlocked solidly with the cabin roof of the other Anson.

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THE two aircraft went into a slow spiral dive, with the upper Anson perched slightly diagonally along the lower one,

By JUSTIN ARTHUR

with its port tail plane resting on top of the lower aircraft's tail assembly.

In the lower aircraft, Hewson and Fraser bailed out safely, although Hewson, slightly injured when the cabin roof was crushed in, had some difficulty in getting clear and did well to escape.

He might not have been able to do so in time if Fuller had not stayed at his controls.

Sinclair, Fuller's observer, also bailed out safely.

Meanwhile, Fuller, alone in the two locked-together Ansons, reviewed his situation. He found that he still had power from his star-

board engine, and that ailerons, elevators and rudder all responded enough to give him some control of both aircraft.

He then began a five-mile glide, which ended on a property four miles southwest of Brocklesbury.

Skilfully judging height and speed, he managed to set the two machines down on the fuselage of the lower aircraft, which had its wheels retracted.

Fuller's astonishing feat

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AVIATION experts agreed the feat had earned its place in history, beside such freak events as the case of the pilot who fell out of his aircraft during a loop, only to fall back into the cockpit as it dived.

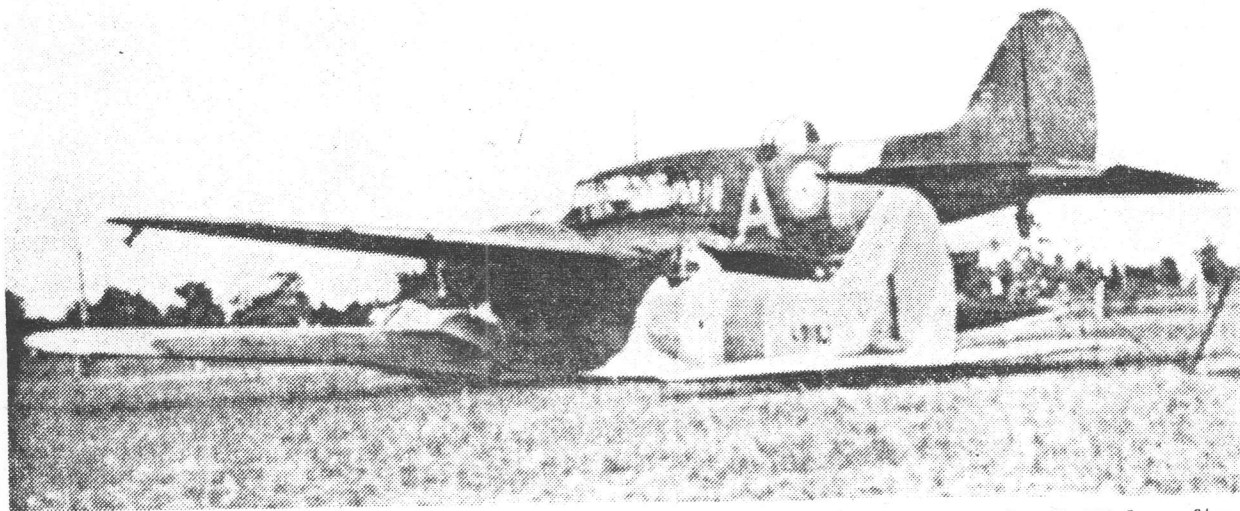
Then there was the case of the World War I fighter plane which returned, pilotless, to its own airfield for a perfect landing. The pilot was never heard of again.

Another training aircraft impaled itself on a church spire and remained there in balance until firemen brought an extension ladder to rescue the pilot.

Sixteen days after Fuller's landing, a Melbourne morning newspaper reported that he had been punished but, at the same time recommended for a decoration.

The Minister for Air, then Mr. Arthur Fadden, said the pilot had not been punished solely because he had given an interview to the Press.

In March, 1942, No. 2 Service Flying Training School, from which the two Ansons had flown, was disbanded. Its training activities were taken over by other flying schools in the Riverine.



TWO Avro Ansons which landed safely in a paddock near Brocklesbury, New South Wales, after becoming interlocked in flight.

SCOOPED!

By ROBERT COLEMAN



by an appendix

3 1971

realise, of course — especially if you watch oldtime Hollywoodies on TV — that every last, young or old, secretly of the Great Scoop that neday come his way.

ere a tear, if you will, for the ed, first year cadet reporter untry newspaper who had land in his lap — a story made headlines and radio all around the world — and he was in hospital.

more than 30 years ago, agony of it haunts me still. Sunday, September 29, 1940, was in the Middle East, Britain being blitzed and all around soldiers, sailors and airmen ning for overseas service.

just 18 at the in Albury Dis- hospital minus a removed appen-

ward y with a flurry ed skirts and A young man d in the bed- mine and blue- d him.

ollow standing p me was tall ndsome. The ps on his cap e was an air ee. happened?" I



Pick-a-back landing . . . the two Avro Ansons grounded in a paddock and put back into service.

"Bit of a prang," he said. "Two aircraft col- lided."
"No, Only this one." "On the ground, were they?"
"No. About a thou- sand feet up."
"You all baled out then?"
"No, I landed them! Just like that! He said it as if it were the sort of thing he did every day. Slowly I got from him the outline of an occur- rence that was — and as far as I know, still is without parallel in the history of aviation."

The two aircraft had collided in mid air, one coming to rest on the top of the other, but other three crewmen parachuted to safety, but this young trainee pilot, fearing the planes might crash on the township below him, flew the crazily-coupled machines to a safe landing.

The engines of his own aircraft — the top one — were out of ac- tion. But he still had rudder control and the motors of the bottom aircraft, over which he had no control, were still running.

He literally rode the bottom plane to the ground.

A first-year cadet re- porter on a country daily doesn't usually get to cover anything much more exciting than meetings of the CWA and Red Cross or a lo- cal football match.

I could see I had the makings of a world story. In these days of national awards in jour- nalism, one like this, properly handled, could win the top prize.

But, beg as I might, the sister in charge would not let me out of bed to get to a phone.

All I could do was to ask her to ring my paper, the Border Morn- ing Mail, which I pre- sume she did when she found time.

Anyway, whether it was through my efforts or not, the Mail got the story, with pictures. The story of the Brocklesby (NSW) pick-a-back landing is worth retelling. It still stands as one of the greatest feats of air- manship Australia has known.

The planes were both Avro Ansons — cumber- some twin engine low- wing monoplanes with a perspex gun turret pro- truding above the fuse- lage.

Nicknamed Aggies, by the air forces of Bri- tain, Australia and Can- ada, as trainers for fu- ture bomber crews.

Leading Aircraftman Leonard Graham Full- er, 22, of Sydney, was flying one, with LAC

The aircraft were not badly damaged and later went back into service.

Fuller's courage and skill not only prevented the planes crashing on the town, but saved the Government about 40,000 pounds.

The pick-a-back land- ing, as it was called, put little Brocklesby on the map as news of Fuller's amazing feat was flashed around the world.

Pictures of it appeared on the following year's local calendars

For Fuller, the episode resulted in promotion and punishment. He was made a sergeant and given 14 days CB, which, according to the Air Minister, Mr Pad- den, was not only be- cause he had talked to the press.

Leonard Fuller was educated at Sydney Grammar School. He was a car salesman when he enlisted in 1940.

He served in Britain in 1941 and then in the Middle East.

In 1942 he was grant- ed an immediate award of the Distinguished Flying Medal for his part in an action at Palermo, Sicily.

Later he was promot- ed to Flying Officer.

But the Leonard Full- er story ended tragically in one of those bizarre tricks of fate which sometimes catch up with brave men.

In March, 1944, Pilot Officer Fuller, back from the war, was killed when the bicycle he was riding near Sale aero- drome collided with a bus.

At Brocklesby they still talk about the pick-a-back landing, or, as they call it locally, the Miracle of Brock.

But, so far as I've been able to learn, there is no plaque or mem- orial to the bravery of Leonard Fuller. There should be.

3-7-71

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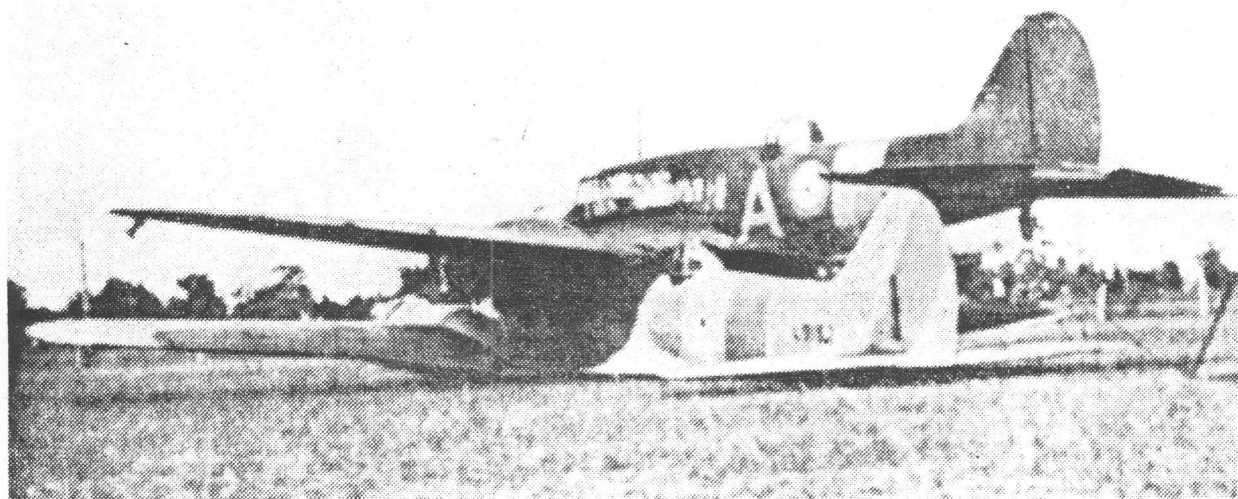
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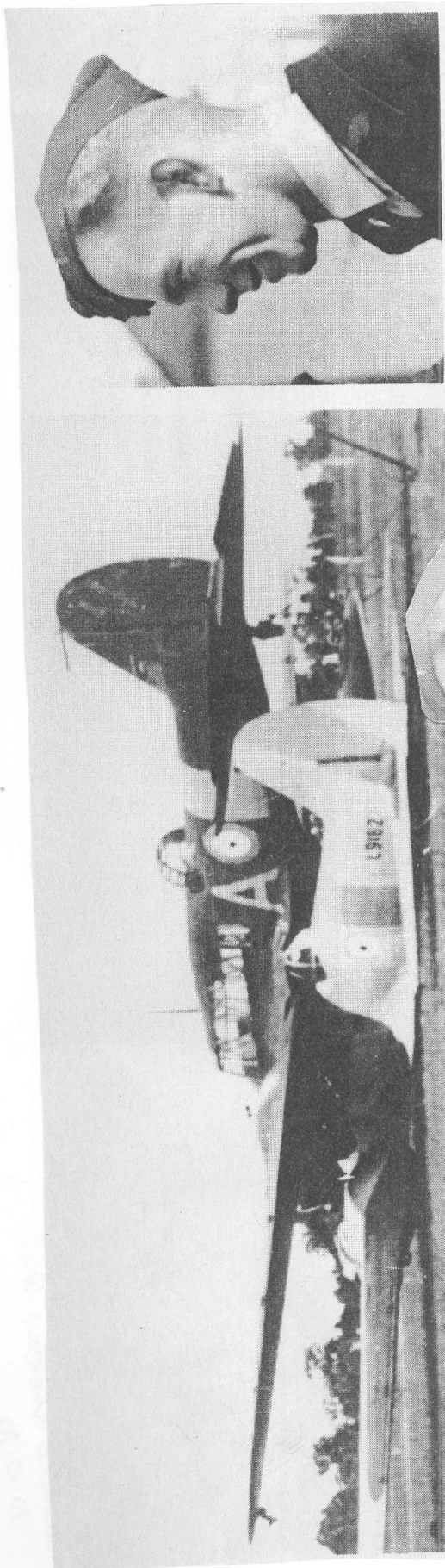
The notation from the R.A.A.F. History Section reads: "By his action, Fuller enabled Hewson, who had been injured in the collision, to escape from the lower aircraft and avoided loss of life and damage in the town of Brocklesbury."

In a Press interview, Fuller explained that he had decided to try to land the aircraft in order to save them from total destruction.

Air Force officers who came to inspect them des-



TWO Avro Ansons which landed safely in a paddock near Brocklesbury, New South Wales, after becoming interlocked in flight.



★ THESE two Ansons locked together in mid-air over Wagga Wagga were safely landed by Leonard Fuller, then a RAAF leading aircraftman.

AUSTRALASIAN POST 25-6-47

Australia's most famous mid-air collision occurred at 3000 feet near Wagga Wagga (NSW) in 1940. Both Anson crews survived and the plywood trainers landed safely locked together!

The pilot of the lower Anson as well as the crewman in each, baled out safely. LAC Leonard Fuller, the top pilot, stayed aboard when he found the machines still manoeuvrable through his controls, and gently set them down in a paddock.

Fuller later won a DFM for operations over Sicily. Ironically he died in a bicycle accident at Sale (V) in 1944.

Brocklesby's tribute to a brave pilot of 50 years ago

By SIOBHAN McMAHON, Eastern Riverina Observer

As vintage aeroplanes soared overhead, 400 people gathered in a paddock near Brocklesby on September 29 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the miraculous Avro Anson "piggy back" landing.

On September 29, 1940, the two aeroplanes collided in mid air during a routine training flight from the Forest Hill RAAF Base to Corowa and Narrandera.

One plane was literally locked on top of the other, but the pilot in the top aircraft, Len Fuller, was able to land both planes safely.

The two engines in Fuller's plane cut out at the point of impact, but he used the power from the bottom aircraft to guide the planes through the air.

The engines in the lower plane cut out at 500 feet, but Fuller was able to swing the aeroplanes into a left hand turn, and glide into a paddock on the property Moeraki.

The quick thinking of the four pilots involved in the accident saved the residents of Brocklesby from disaster, as there was a possibility the planes could have crashed into the village.

The freak landing made headlines around the world, and thousands of tourists flocked to Brocklesby to view the planes as they were being dismantled by RAAF officials.

The tourists found it hard to believe that no

one was seriously injured in the accident. Both planes were eventually restored to full working order.

Many past residents of Brocklesby attended the highly successful anniversary celebrations on Saturday.

As the crowd watched from below, a Beechcraft 18 came in to land at exactly the same time and place as Fuller's spectacular landing 50 years ago.

While it was impossible to re-enact an aeroplane piggy back landing, six parachutists attempted their own version of a piggy back touch down.

The guests of honour at the anniversary celebrations were relatives of three of the original pilots.

They were invited to plant trees around the official plaque in memory of the brave airmen.

The chairman of the Brocklesby Historical Committee, Ted Martin, said the success of the day had exceeded all expectations.

"We are very excited here today. The weather is absolutely beautiful, and there is a bigger crowd than we expected," he said.

Mr Martin said the

the day was the fly past and display of vintage aeroplanes.

The Wangaratta Air World Museum provided a Wirraway, which was originally used in World War II, but was later converted for agricultural purposes.

There were also two Tiger Moths on display, which had been used during the war for training Australian pilots. The Tiger Moths were built in Australia, under licence from a British company.

The twin engine Beechcraft 18 was designed in the 1930s. It was originally a charter plane, but during the war years was used by the RAAF for training bomber pilots.

The historical committee was unable to secure an original Avro Anson aeroplane for the occasion.

A comprehensive exhibition of photographs and newspaper articles about the landing was on display at the Brocklesby Hall.



National Party Leader Tim Fisher and the president of Brocklesby Historical Committee, Ted Martin, unveiling the memorial at the 50th anniversary celebrations.

SOUTHERN RIVERINA NEWS

16.10.90

Jack remembers that fateful day...

Jack Felstead has one major claim to fame: he was the sole witness of the actual landing of the two Avro Anson aeroplanes in 1940.

Mr Felstead was carrying out some routine work in a paddock on his uncle's property, Moeraki, when he saw the Siamese planes gliding across the horizon.

"I was just wandering about the paddock at the time, trying to catch a horse. I looked up and saw these two aircraft, and I really thought I was seeing things," he said.

"All I could think was I hope whoever's flying the thing is all right.

Mr Felstead, who was only 16 years old, was also the first person on the scene of the accident.

"When the planes stopped, this fellow jumped out and said 'Thank God for that'.

"I met the pilot, Len Fuller, and we ran all the way up to the house to call his superiors. That's all he was worried about at the time.

"He was very shaken, and it took him a couple of hours to settle down. But he wasn't in too bad shape for the job he had just done."

Mr Felstead said the other three pilots, who all parachuted to safety, landed closer to the village of Brocklesby.

He said one of the pilots was not buckled into his parachute properly, and when he jumped from the plane, he actually fell out of the harness.

"He somehow managed to grab onto the ropes of the chute after he fell. He

broke a couple of ribs when he landed, but that was the only injury in the whole accident."

Mr Felstead said within an hour, hundreds of people began pouring out to the property to look at the two aeroplanes.

"Everyone came tearing out here to see the planes. They came on horseback or whatever. They even brought their dogs to have a look."

He said when the RAAF arrived, a guard was set up at the front gate of the property to prevent any further damage to the two aircraft.

Mr Felstead's uncle, Tom Murphy, had been in Howlong at the time of the accident, and did not arrive home until midnight.

The RAAF guards would not let Mr Murphy back onto his property until Mr Felstead got out of bed, and came down to the gate to identify him.

Mr Felstead said a stunt crew in the USA tried to simulate the miraculous landing.

"But they couldn't pull it off. Their two planes ended up at 90 degrees to each other."

Mr Felstead, who now lives in Lavington, was impressed with the crowd at the 50th anniversary of the miracle landing.

"I thought there would only be 18 or 20 cars here, but it's amazing the number of people who turned up. I've been catching up with old friends all day!"

● **PHOTO: Jack Felstead with one of the aircraft at Brocklesby for the anniversary.**



SOUTHERN RIVERINA NEWS 10.10.90.