

The fatal collision between two Royal Australian Air Force planes at Point Cook on December 9 was found by the City Coroner (Mr Tingate, P.M.) today to have been accidental. He said that the evidence of "blind spots" in a pilot's range of vision, offered as an explanation of the collision, was the most feasible.

*reclunder 9/12/36*

Air-Sergeant Robert Frederick Somerville, 34, of the Flying School at Point Cook, received injuries in the crash from which he died in the Caulfield Military Hospital at 9 p.m. the same day, after an operation.

Squadron-Leader F. M. Bladin, commanding officer of the Flying School, said that after having heard the evidence he concluded that the planes were approaching each other head-on when each turned at right angles to its course to land, and the planes collided.

He explained that when two planes were approaching head-on each pilot would have difficulty in seeing the other plane as only the front of the fuselage and the edges of the wings would be visible.

The difficulty would be increased if one plane was slightly above the other, and "blind spots" would be created.

As the machines would bank as they turned it would remain difficult for either pilot to see the other until the moment of impact.

**Instructor's Evidence**

Flight Lieutenant Charles Douglas Cobby, instructor at the Pt. Cook Flying School, said that he was flying an Avro plane west, well clear of the southern boundary of the aerodrome.

"Opposite the centre line of the hangars I turned north and made a reasonably long approach to the aerodrome to land," he said.

"As I approached the hangars I saw I was going to land further up the drome

than I intended, and I began to sideslip to the right.

"Just as I began to sideslip I noticed a Moth plane on approximately my port beam, and almost instantaneously the planes collided. My machine then crashed to earth, and I lost consciousness.

"There are blind spots in all aircraft in certain conditions. If Sergeant Somerville were slightly above or below me he could have been out of my vision," said Flight-Lieutenant Candy.

To the Coroner: I sideslipped purposefully, but only to lose height. I looked to see if there were any other craft that might interfere with my landing. I did not go off my direct line of flight. I could not say whether the Moth was going up or down.

**"Locked Together In Air"**

Flight-Lieut. Jerrold Robert Fleming said that Somerville was testing a Moth plane when the crash occurred. Somerville was a capable and reliable instructor.

Fleming said that he was at the edge of the drome when he heard a noise like a clap of thunder. He looked up to see two machines locked together about 80 feet from the ground.

"The machines appeared to be about to fall on me and I ran clear," he said.

"One of the machines slightly damaged the machine I was about to enter."

Air-Cadet Walter Bruce Skinner said visibility was good at the time of the crash.

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A7-31