

Mercy Planes ^{SJA} Forced Down ²⁶⁻⁴⁶

BRISBANE, Saturday.—Patients in an RAAF ambulance plane, which was forced down by fog near Longreach, had to be carried a mile on litters because of mud.

The worst fog in years forced two planes to turn back after leaving for the south with men from northern battle areas.

One made a forced landing near the racecourse, and the second circled the town for an hour, but could not be seen.

When finally it was guided to the landing-ground, nine attempts were made before the machine made a perfect three-point landing.

Sisters of medical air evacuation units were the first to step from the aircraft. They worked with the staff at Longreach Hospital until all the patients were made comfortable.

SUN (SYDNEY) 2.6.45

R.A.A.F. MERCY PLANES FORCED DOWN BY FOG

LONGREACH, Friday.—Lost in a "pea soup" fog, two R.A.A.F. mercy planes loaded with sick and wounded from northern battle areas made dramatic forced landings here early to-day.

The planes were taking the men to a southern base when they were forced to turn back to Longreach.

They arrived back over the town about 1.45 a.m. and groped for a landing ground in the worst fog for many years.

One plane made a forced landing near the Longreach racecourse as the second circled low over the town.

The fog was so thick that the plane could not be seen from the ground, while there was a complete black-out from the plane.

After an hour wireless contact

was made with the helpless aircraft from the ground, operators locating the plane by the sound of its engines.

The plane was finally guided to a landing ground, and after nine attempts a perfect three-point landing was made on the runway.

First to step out were two cheerful sisters of the Medical Air Evacuation Unit.

Because of the mud cars could not be taken close to the landing places and patients had to be carried in litters for a mile.

At the Longreach Hospital the Air Force sisters refused to leave their patients and worked with the hospital staff until all were comfortable.

THE COURIER-MAIL 3
SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 1945

Calm In Air Crisis



Sister Mainie Budd (left) and Sister Joan Rodwell, members of a medical air evacuation unit, photographed at Sister Rodwell's home in Yeronga last night. They arrived in Brisbane yesterday after the plane in which they were bringing sick and wounded from northern

ORDEAL OF PATIENTS IN MERCY PLANE CRASH

Sisters Tired But Cheery

T IRED, but cheerful after their ordeal, the two sisters on the mercy plane, which landed at Longreach on Friday, modestly refused to regard their part in the incident as other than routine.

Sister Mainie Budd said in Brisbane last night that the plane crews had done a magnificent job in landing the patients without a fatality.

"Our part in the story was routine, prosaic, and not particularly exciting," she said. "The patients remained calm all the time the plane was circling through the fog."

"We made them all fasten their safety belts as soon as we were over Longreach, and then we only had to wait and hope for the best."

"Most of the patients in our plane were asleep. Those who were awake were reassured when we told them there was no danger."

Thought Crash Near

"Only one air force patient gave us a few uneasy moments," she continued. "He had been a pilot himself, and on our last circle of the drome he called me over and said, 'Sister that's the ninth time I've seen the Southern Cross go by I tell you we're going to crash.'"

"I told him to be quiet, and not to let any of the other patients know how badly things were going. But when we made our perfect landing on the drome, I heard several relieved sighs from many of the 'sleeping' patients."

Sister Joan Rodwell, of Bradley Street, Yeronga, disclaimed any heroism in their handling of the patients on the mercy plane.

"We only did what the nurses in the Air Evacuation Unit are doing every day in Borneo and New Guinea. But just because we happened to be on the mainland it's called news," she said.

The sisters have had less than 10 hours' sleep in three days since they began the evacuation.

BRISBANE PAPER

SOME patients in an R.A.A.F. mercy plane which crashed in heavy fog near Longreach on Friday were knocked unconscious by the impact and several are now stretcher cases.

These men and patients in another mercy plane, which made a perfect landing at Longreach aerodrome, after nine attempts, arrived in Brisbane by air yesterday.

An Army captain in the first plane was flung out of the door. An engine was thrown about 80 yards from the crashed plane.

Nine walking patients, most of them with skin diseases, an orderly, and a crew of three, were in the aircraft. They sat for more than an hour in the fog and dark listening to the motor of the second plane circling overhead.

Although badly shaken and injured, they cheered when they heard the second plane land safely.

Both planes were evacuating sick and wounded from northern battle

areas to a southern base when they encountered bad weather.

They were within 100 miles of Brisbane when they were forced to turn back in the worst fog for many years. They arrived over Longreach at 1.45 a.m. and groped for the landing ground.

"The first thing I remember was somebody shouting to us to get out of the plane quickly," said one of the patients in the crashed plane yesterday.

"Then the pilot called out for us to run for cover, as he thought the plane would go up in flames."

"Not many of us ran. Some hobbled out of the plane and helped the others. Then we sat for more than two hours in the dark, shivering, and waiting for the ambulance to arrive from the town."

"We could hear the other plane circling above us, and it helped keep our minds off things."

13 Unlucky Number

"A few of the boys chatted together, and it wasn't until then we realised that counting the crew, there had been 13 in our plane," he continued.

"We all decided that if we had known that before we would have made someone walk from the last stop."

"When we heard the motor of the other plane making a landing we all gave a cheer. After that most of us fell asleep near the plane. We didn't know where we were, but we hoped they would find us as soon as it got light."

"Actually the relief came along only an hour after we heard the other plane land. The trucks were unable to come right into where we were sitting and lying, so many of the patients were taken a few miles to the road on stretchers."

Were Tired Out

Another patient said: "I don't think many of us could tell what happened before we hit the ground. We had been travelling since 5 a.m. the previous morning, and were tired out. For a while we looked out of the windows, but there was nothing to see but fog, so we settled down to sleep."

"At one stage we came across a clear space in the fog, and did see the landing lights in the distance, but they vanished as we approached."

"Most of us knew that things were bad, but, feeling sick and tired, we also knew our worrying wouldn't bring the plane down."

"Just before we hit the ground I remember looking out of the window and wondering how far we were from the good old earth. A moment later I knew—and it was a bit of a shock."

"I was unconscious after that. I can't tell how I got out of the plane or how long we lay waiting for the ambulance to find us."

No Sign Of Panic

Passengers from the second mercy plane, which made a perfect three-point landing on the Longreach runway, said there was no panic among the patients.

Two sisters of the Medical Air Evacuation Unit were in this plane, and they encouraged the patients, cautioning them to keep their safety belts fastened.

One patient said that the plane

Coolness Praised

Crew of the crashed plane was Squadron Leader K. S. Brown, Flight Lieut. W. Ford, and Flight Lieut. J. Curtis. The other plane was manned by Squadron Leader R. G. Cornfoot, and Flight Lieuts. J. Hewston and C. Carter.

Squadron Leader Cornfoot, commander of the squadron concerned, last night praised Squadron Leader

A65-62



109

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TELEPHONES:
CENTRAL 970 OR F 0202.

DEPARTMENT OF AIR,

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS:
"AIRFORCE MELBOURNE."

224292

MELBOURNE, C.1.

IN REPLY QUOTE... 32/18/339

NOV 23 1945

Director General,
Department of Civil Aviation,
"Almora House",
522 Little Collins Street,
MELBOURNE.

ACCIDENT TO DAKOTA A65-62 AT
LONGREACH ON 1st JUNE, 1945

Reference is made to your memorandum 15373 dated 19th September, 1945, concerning the above accident.

2. An examination of the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry regarding this accident reveals that it was due to the pilot attempting to land at a fog-bound aerodrome which had insufficient blind landing facilities available. The aircraft concerned was engaged on a flight from CLONCURRENCY to ARCHERFIELD, but after 2½ hours flying a front was encountered; this fact and reports of a deterioration of the weather at ARCHERFIELD and along the coast forced the pilot alter course for an alternate aerodrome. CHARLEVILLE was selected, as a report from Aeradio there indicated that the weather was then clear. However, within 30 minutes of estimated time of arrival, the pilot was advised that fog was approaching. He decided to continue, but on arrival over the aerodrome, he found that it was closed and landing was impossible. After circling several times he checked his fuel and set course for LONGREACH where clear weather had been reported by Aeradio. Ten minutes before estimated time of arrival he learned that this aerodrome was also closed by fog. By this time fuel was becoming short, so the pilot was forced to attempt a landing. This was attempted by using the beacon and radio compass to line up on the runway.

DANS
30/11

.../2.

3. The circumstances surrounding the compilation of the route forecast issued to the pilot have been investigated by the Director of Meteorological Services who advises that the situation on the night in question was a difficult one from a forecasting point of view and that there was little evidence available to indicate that the fog would become so widespread. Evidence obtained indicates that fog such as this is very unusual at LONGREACH.

4. It is considered that recurrence of this type of accident might be avoided by the installation of "FIDO" equipment for the dispersal of fog at a limited number of fog exits. It is realised that the cost of this equipment would prohibit its use at airfields such as CLONCURRY.

5. The accidents referred to may have been averted if blind approach equipment had been installed at this aerodrome. This is something requiring urgent and co-ordinated investigation in relation to all important airfields in Australia.

6. On this occasion installation of Ground Indicating Flares placed in the vicinity of the runway may have enabled the pilot to make a safe landing. These flares have recently been introduced into the R.A.F. as aid to flying control. They are used to indicate the runway in use to a pilot wishing to land in conditions of poor visibility. At the present moment a supply of these flares is on the way from the United Kingdom. It is intended to carry out trials when these arrive, with a view to obtaining further supplies.

7. It was noted that although the above accident occurred approximately one mile from the Control Tower, it was over one hour before an ambulance and stretcher bearers arrived on the scene. The possibilities of serious consequences to such a delay are obvious.


(M.C. LANGSLOW)
SECRETARY



1 101 1092

103

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TELEPHONE: 78.

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AVIATION,

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO THE OPERATOR-IN-CHARGE AND QUOTE

AERADIO STATION,
GOVERNMENT AERODROME,

No. LR45/39

Longreach. Q.

5/6/45.

The Director General,
Dept Civil Aviation,
Melbourne. C.l. Vic.

RECEIVED
11 JUN 1945

REPORT ON FORGED LANDING

OF RAAF AIRCRAFT C47 A65-62 VHCKO.

I was awakened at approximately 0213 local time on morning of the 1st June (1613Z 31st) by the sound of aircraft over the town and upon going outside on the verandah, I noticed that there was a dense fog but it was not too thick at my residence then, I rang the aeradio room and found that Operator W.F. Riley was on duty, he could not talk with me as he said he was very busy trying to get 2 aircraft down. I then returned to the verandah and saw an aircraft pass from over the town with its navigation lights on and go in the direction of the aerodrome, about a minute or so later I heard another aircraft come from over the town and also proceed in the direction of the aerodrome its navigation lights also was just visible. Both aircraft would be approximately 300 to 500 feet high. A minute or so later I heard one aircraft turn off his engines and as I thought go into land, several seconds later there were three reports or noise like a backfire as you generally hear when they touch down and are finishing their run in landing. I waited to hear this aircraft taxi but as it did not, and the other one kept flying around, I started to get dressed. The time I rang the aeradio above was 0215 est (1615Z). Whilst getting dressed I received a ring from the girl on the local exchange who stated "Mr Hagarty is required at the aerodrome urgently" I then proceeded per my car to the aerodrome and arrived there at approx 0238 est (1638Z) Mr Riley the operator on duty was very busy and Mr Seccombe the operator who had ceased duty at midnight was there with a civilian who were both outside listening for the aircraft engines and relaying the information to Mr Riley inside the room who was in constant radio communication with VKRFI. After a few minutes I ascertained that that there had been a crash somewhere north of the station and probably in the racecourse. I immediately telephoned the local Police and advised them that they had better come out as an aircraft had crashed and the other one may also. Several people rang up and I attended to the telephone for some minutes. The ambulances were both out here having been ordered by Mr Riley as there were stretcher cases aboard. The aircraft then in the air was trying to locate the end of the runway 87 deg, and the only way we could get him to it was by listening to his engines and guiding him in by radio, he was sighted several times but on each occasion he was too high and north of the strip. However after many circuits he eventually came in low slightly north of the W end of the 87 deg and then landed at 0327 est (0727Z).

The rotating light beacon was not sighted by me on my way out until I was less than 1/2 mile from the aerodrome. The fog was varying in density in parts and objects were very indistinct at 50 yards on the ground.

The plane that crashed was piloted by Sqdn Leader Brown and its

W.F.
1/6

The plane that landed safely after 1 hour 7 minutes over this drome was VHRFI C47 A65-92 piloted by Sqdn Leader Cornfoot. Both aircraft are from No. 38 Sqdn Archerfield.

After the landing of VHRFI I visited the scene of the crash which was approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile exactly north of Control building in the racecourse

I obtained all the papers, maps, codes etc that were lying about in the aircraft and notified the police I was taking them to lock them up. The only item missing from these was the radio log and F/O Curtis stated later that he had this. His last entry in his log was 2.18 am (1618Z) therefore time of crash was approximately between 2.20 am and 2.25 am local time.

Both these aircraft were bound from Morotai and landed at Biak, Merauke, Gove Cloncurry. They departed Cloncurry at 1000Z (8 p.m. local time) bound for Archerfield direct, they were within an hour of Archerfield when they turned back for Charleville having received bad weather reports and Antares Archerfield R/R. Upon reaching Charleville they found fog and as Longreach was clear then they decided to come on here. The fog closed in here very thickly just before they reached here. See Radio Log for further details. From the logs you will see that there was some delay in getting QAM from Archerfield.

Copies of logs sheets 37 to 46 are attached hereto, these show details from time they left Cloncurry until after landing Longreach.

W. L. Dugarty
.....
Operator in Charge.

101

DIRECTION OF LANDING

POSITION OF CRASH AIRCRAFT

AIRCRAFT HIT TWO GULLIES. CEMENTS REST IN SECOND ONE.

ROUGH SKETCH OF CRASH OF VIKKO TRACED OFF DCA PLAN W 583.

1" = 300 FEET

RACECOURSE OVAL

FENCE

TRACK

NEW AERODROME FENCE

LIGHTS

BOUNDARY FENCE AND LIGHTS

41' RUNWAY

