

Air Crash Rescue Party Toiled in Rain and Darkness

PERTH, Tuesday. — Steep hills and muddy conditions hampered the search for the R.A.A.F. Dakota which crashed about six miles south-east of Pearce R.A.A.F. base last night.

Although the crash was known at 7.25 p.m. it was not until five hours later that the first survivor was removed from the wreckage and brought to Pearce.

The four crew members were killed but three others — two ground crew and a civilian — escaped with minor injuries.

KILLED.

Flying Officer W. J. Bowden, single, captain of the aircraft, of Wilcox Avenue, Tuart Hill, W.A.

Flight-Sergeant Peter Frederick Davis, 26, co-pilot, of Manningford Road, Elizabeth, S.A., formerly of Elwood, Vic.

Flying Officer E. G. White, navigator, of Coronation Street, Petersham, New South Wales, and

Flight-Lieutenant A. J. Cook, 37, signaller, of Burrupa Avenue, North Glenelg, S.A.

INJURED.

Leading Aircraftman William Miles, 31, engine fitter, of Harvey Road, Elizabeth, S.A.

Aircraftman Robert Anthony Lieper, fitter, of Brown Avenue, Nedlands, W.A., and

Mr. Neil Alan McBain, 20, of the Department of Supply, who lives in Eaton Road, Somerton Park, Adelaide.

Flight Sergeant Davis was married four months ago and was posted from Victoria in recent weeks.

Flight Lieutenant Cook was married and had two children aged 10 and 12.

Thrown Out

The three survivors were all in the tail section of the fuselage and two of them were thrown out on impact.

One crawled back into the wreckage to release the third man who was still strapped in his seat.

The four crew members were apparently killed as the plane ploughed into a hill.

A farmer who guided the first party to the wreck said the aircraft went up in a ball of flame when it hit the hillside, lighting up the valley below.

Mud up to a foot deep stopped even four-wheel drive vehicles and when an R.A.A.F. wagon became bogged with two casualties

a Land Rover went ahead with the other casualty.

At the scene of the crash wreckage was strewn over an area 150 yards long and about 25 yards wide.

Hit Trees

The aircraft, which had just set course for Edinburgh in South Australia, lopped off trees for about 100 yards before the port main plane apparently fell off and the fuselage smashed into a tree.

The fuselage was split in half and the front was found telescoped and mangled about 10 yards away.

A fierce fire had swept through the wreckage and the starboard main plane was a mass of fused metal when the rescue party reached the scene.

Two gullies at the base of the hill made the country impassable to vehicles and the rescue team slogged uphill over thick scrub and rocks.

The stretcher bearers bringing the injured out found the country even worse as they slowly inched

the injured men over rough ground.

Six men were needed on each stretcher to bring them down the hill and as one man tired another took his place.

Two of the injured men were placed in an R.A.A.F. four-wheel-drive vehicle and the other was carried another quarter of a mile to a Land Rover.

The air force truck became bogged soon after starting and the Landrover went ahead to Pearce.

Four pressmen were among those who took part in the search for the wreckage, and two of them later carried stretchers from a stranded vehicle near the crash.

The search started soon after the crash was reported and off-duty men from the base fanned out in their own cars through the hills trying to find the wreckage.

More than 40 R.A.A.F. men took part in the search and a party stayed throughout the night guarding the wreckage.

Experts were flown from Canberra last night to inspect the wreckage.

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