

# Parachute Jump In Air Crash

Pilot-Officer Ronald Webber made a parachute landing before an R.A.A.F. plane crashed in Megalong Valley, Blue Mountains, yesterday.

It was the first time he had made a parachute jump.

Webber landed on a tree a mile from where the plane crashed, and was not hurt.

The plane crashed and caught fire at the foot of a 1400ft. cliff in the valley.

Webber was flying over New South Wales mountain country for the first time, and had neither maps nor radio assistance.

He said the plane carried radio equipment, but because he was flying solo there was no one to operate it.

## Snowing Heavily

After the crash, Webber said:—

"We were keeping good formation until we came near the mountains.

"Because the flight leader's machine was the only one with a radio operator, our instructions were to stick close to him and on no account to fly through or above cloud."

"We were doing our best to keep together and under the cloud base when we found ourselves in a steep valley.

"Our leader, Flying-Officer Black, signalled a turn. The cloud was coming down around us. It was snowing heavily, and the wings were covered with snow.

"I followed the leader through the turn. He seemed to make a very tight one, and I presumed we were going to head back.

"The other two machines came out of the turn slightly ahead of me, and I lost them. They vanished into a bank of snow, sleet, and rain.

## Had No Maps

"I hadn't any idea where I was. It was the first time I had flown over this part of New South Wales, and I hadn't any maps.

"I circled the valley. There were tall cliffs above me on both sides. The tops of these cliffs were lost in the cloud. I was not very high over the trees.

"I then climbed steeply. I hoped to get height and fly towards the coast until I could get some sort of bearings.

"I hadn't climbed far when the left wing went down and I realised the machine was going into a spin.

"I tried to pull her out. The air speed indicator was showing 280 miles per hour. It would have taken at least 100 feet to straighten the bus, and I didn't have it.

"So I bailed out. I had a hard time getting out of the cockpit, but once my head and shoulders were clear the windstream caught my coat and lifted me clear.

"It was a rather peculiar feeling at first. Just floating in wet, soft cloud. Now and then snow blew into my face.

## Landed In Tree

"Suddenly I came through the cloud. There was no sign of the machine, but I saw the other two planes circling above. I hoped they had seen me.

"I realised I must land in timbered country, so I had a look for the nearest farm.

"I landed in the top of a tree. The parachute caught, and I was left hanging about 14 feet from the ground.

"I climbed down the tree and walked about two miles to a farmhouse. From there I rang Richmond."

The machine is a wreck.

The other machines in the formation returned to Cootamundra.

Webber joined the R.A.A.F. in February. He completed his elementary training at Archerfield (Queensland) before transferring to Point Cook (Victoria) for his intermediary course.

DAILY TELEGRAPH (SYDNEY)

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## R.A.A.F. PLANE CRASHES.

### PILOT LANDS BY PARACHUTE.

### Accident in Cloud.

When an R.A.A.F. plane went into a 280-miles-an-hour dive over the rugged Megalong Valley, in thick cloud, yesterday, Pilot L. G. Webber, who was the only occupant, saved himself by using his parachute.

He came down on the branch of a tree about 14 feet from the ground, unbuckled the harness of the parachute, climbed down the trunk, and walked to a farmhouse, from which he calmly reported the crash.

The pilotless plane continued its dive to the ground, and buried itself in the side of a ridge about two miles from Mr. W. Ward's farm.

Three planes set out from Laverton (Vic.) for a new Air Force training area yesterday morning, and they encountered no unusual flying conditions until over the Blue Mountains. As Webber was not carrying a wireless operator, he had been instructed before leaving Laverton to keep the flight-leader, Flying-Officer Black, in sight and not to fly through any cloud.

### PILOT'S STORY.

"When we reached the Blue Mountains we ran into snow, sleet, and heavy cloud," said Webber last night. "I momentarily lost sight of the flight-leader, and then caught a glimpse of him again. I thought I saw him signal me to make a turn, and I started to follow him around. I then lost him again. Now and again I could see the tops of the ridges. I realised the risk of colliding with either of the two other machines in the flight. I had no map of the area.

"I made a couple of circuits and then suddenly saw a ridge ahead. I was well below its top. I pulled the stick back and started to climb, but after a few seconds the machine went into a spin and then into a dive. The cloud was very thick. All the time there was in my mind the risk of colliding with my friends, so when the machine was in the dive I jumped.

"When I jumped the machine was at about 1,000 feet. When I fell through the cloud it was not pleasant not knowing where I was going, but after a while I broke through into clear air."

Mr. O. H. Walford, of Katoomba, who was working in a gravel quarry near Narrow Neck Road at the time of the crash, said that he first heard the engines of three planes. A few minutes later he heard a loud crash in the valley. Two machines then started to circle overhead in the cloud, but he could not see them. After about 10 minutes they flew away.

### WRECKAGE OVER HALF A MILE.

The wreckage of the crashed plane was scattered over an area of half a mile. The propeller was buried deep in the earth and the engine was severely damaged.

An Air Force salvage unit, under the command of Wing-Commander Seekamp, reached the scene of the crash in the afternoon. When a tender, with a number of aircraftmen, arrived early last night, Webber volunteered to lead them to the scene of the crash with torches. He was very calm after the experience, but was worried because a machine had been destroyed.

The crash took place about four miles north-west of the place where Roderick Julius, 33 (son of Sir George Julius), and Clarence Stumbles, 32, were killed when on their way to Orange to an air pageant.

(Picture of Crash, Page 12.)

# PLANE CRASH IN MEGALONG VALLEY.



The wreckage of the R.A.A.F. plane which crashed after the pilot, Pilot-Officer L. G. Webber, had abandoned it while flying over the Megalong Valley, Blue Mountains, in bad weather yesterday. The pilot made a safe descent by parachute.

*SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 2.10.40*

## CONSERVING OUR PLANES.

There are some features about the latest R.A.A.F. accident in regard to which the public might justifiably feel some disquiet. Three planes set out from Laverton, Victoria, for a new training area, and their course took them over the Blue Mountains, whose deep ravines and changeable weather make them one of the most forbidding areas in Australia for aviation. Yet the pilot of one of the planes had no wireless operator and no map of this particular region. The instructions given him in order to compensate for these deficiencies—to keep the flight-leader in sight and not fly through cloud—served the purpose well enough until they reached the mountains, when it became almost impossible to fly anywhere except through cloud. The inevitable result was that he did lose sight of his leader, and subsequently, when he got into difficulties and the plane went into a spin, he “baled out.”

Although he landed safely, the valuable plane he was flying was completely wrecked. No one doubts that accidents are unavoidable in Air Force training, especially under conditions of stress attending a rapid expansion of activities in war-time, but this accident appears to be one that might have been avoided. That a pilot should set out inadequately equipped for a long flight over some particularly hazardous country suggests laxity somewhere or a miscarriage of administration. At present hundreds of young men are prevented from beginning their R.A.A.F. training because of the shortage of planes. To preserve those we have is, therefore, of the utmost importance. Not only the training of men for Empire service has to be considered, but also the defence needs of Australia itself, and the public will expect the authorities to take adequate precautions against the repetition of such an accident as that in the Megalong Valley.