

# WITNESSES FOR DOG FIGHT

## Verdict On Air Crash

1938

The District Coroner (Mr. G. R. Williams) to-day found that Sergeant-Pilot Ralph Dunstan Pomeroy was killed on June 14 following a dog fight between two R.A.A.F. Hawker Demon machines, which, he was satisfied, were fighting at an altitude much lower than that allowed by the regulations.

"A great deal of contradictory evidence has been given," said Mr. Williams. "I do not consider, however, that any culpable negligence was shown by either pilot.

"I am of the opinion that in the excitement of the aerobatics the pilot's eyes were fixed on the opposing plane, and not on the ground."

"Evidently realising that he was very close to the ground," said Mr. Williams, "the deceased attempted to attain flying height, but, unfortunately, he either had not the time or misjudged the tree line, and crashed into the tree."

"One cannot help but feel amazed at the tenacity to life shown by the observer, Purdy, and I think everyone will wish that his recovery will be complete, especially as it appears that he may have escaped with very minor, if any, injuries."

"The evidence discloses that the terrible burns he received to his face were due to his attempt to rescue his pilot from the flaming wreckage."

The Coroner also paid a tribute to the courage of the witness Mills, who suffered burns to his hands in attempting to extinguish Purdy's blazing clothes and in restraining him from again attempting to rescue Pomeroy.

The Coroner found that Pomeroy died from the effects of burns accidentally received when his Hawker Demon crashed into a tree, fell to the ground and became ignited, whilst taking part in air combat practice with another Demon, piloted by Harry Allen Durant, in pursuance of their duties as members of the R.A.A.F.

As a rider, he added that in his opinion the aircraft being flown by Pomeroy was in good flying order.

Hewitt said that he was president of a court of inquiry dealing with the accident which was held in the open air on June 15 and 16 on the scene of the crash.

Referring to various civilian witnesses who gave evidence at the inquiry, Hewitt said: "They appeared to have no idea of judging height at all. The surrounding trees appeared to confuse them. At one moment a plane would come over at a thousand feet, and they would say the height was 200 feet. It was ridiculous."

He added that he had always found Hawker Demons satisfactory in every respect.

### Sense Of Altitude

Hewitt said he was an expert in judging the height of planes. At the time of the crash he was six miles away.

Flying-Officer Durant: Do you consider it feasible, or possible, for a pilot engaged in air combat with another identical aircraft to force his opponent into the ground?—Not unless he is fired bullets.

Would it be correct to say that such an object was contrary to the tactics required in air-fighting practice?—Quite contrary.

Hewitt said it would be possible for a pilot momentarily to become unaware of his position in relation to the ground when his head was down in the cockpit while making a steep climb.

had experience in air-combat practice and agreed that it was not easy for a pilot to lose his sense of altitude.

### Possible, But Improbable

Sergeant Forde: Do you say it is impossible for a daredevil pilot to put an opponent down without bullets?—If he went mad and tried to ram him.

Forget the madness for a moment.

—If one tried at me I would think he was quite mad, and would clear out. A lot of things are possible. These are impossible from our point of view, in view of our regulations.

Don't worry about the regulations. I don't know your regulations but I do know those of another arm of the service, and how often they are broken. Do you still say it would not be possible for one man to force another to the ground?—All things are possible. It would be possible, but most improbable.

### Continuous Attacks

Aircraftsman Hallam Chesney

He reported the accident to the duty pilot in my presence."

### Dive From 800ft.

Mr. Badham: What was the lowest altitude of the plane that crashed before it took its fatal dive?—800 feet.

Hewitt said that both machines were always well clear of the trees. He estimated that they were never

...separately...  
...at any time.  
...admitted having made a...  
...ment to Constable Newton, in...  
...one sentence read: "I am of the...  
...opinion that it was unsafe to con-...  
...tinue the attack."  
...Flying-Officer Durant: Were you...  
...under the impression that the word-...  
...not unsafe" were in it?—Yes.  
...Flying-Officer Durant repeated, at...  
...evidence, the statement which he had...  
...made to Constable Newton, and which...  
...Newton read when the inquest com-...  
...menced yesterday.  
...To Sergeant Forde, he said that his...  
...rank was precisely the same now as...  
...it was on June 14.  
...Sergeant T. D. Forde appeared to assist...  
...the Coroner (Mr. G. R. Williams) Mr. L...  
...A. Badham, instructor...  
...Walter Crown, School...  
...Defence Department.