

SERIES OF CRASHES.

*Squadron Leader
Charles Lord*
Demon Planes.
in charge

NINTH MISHAP.

Open Inquiry Demanded.

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In yesterday's accident a machine crashed on to Avoca Beach reserve at Gosford. The machine was wrecked, but the occupants, a pilot and a wireless operator, escaped with minor injuries.

Eight of the accidents occurred to machines of the squadron of nine machines which took part in a practice flight from Laverton to Brisbane by way of Charleville.

The Federal Government has already appointed a committee of senior Air Force officers to make an immediate investigation, in camera, into the series of accidents, but demands for a public inquiry will be made by members of the House of Representatives to-day.

If the committee should find any technical defects, it will advise the Minister for Defence (Mr. Thorby) immediately, and all the Hawker Demons will then be grounded. Mr. Thorby said in Canberra yesterday, however, that information that he had received so far indicated that there was nothing wrong with the type of machine.

Mr. T. D. Leech, chairman of the Aeronautical Engineering Branch of the Institute of Engineers, who took part in the inquiries into the series of DH86 crashes, stated last night that there appeared to be something fundamentally wrong with the machines in use in Australia, and suggested the appointment of a special board, with Mr. H. E. Wimperis, director of scientific research attached to the British Air Ministry, as chairman, to inquire into the cause of the accidents.

METEOROLOGICAL FLIGHT.

The plane which crashed yesterday was on a meteorological survey flight from Richmond aerodrome.

The pilot, J. S. Burgess, 26, suffered abrasions to the face and legs, a severe wound on the mouth, and shock; and the wireless operator, Allan Charles Lord, 21, suffered contusions to the legs and shock.

The plane left Richmond at 8 a.m., and about an hour later it was seen circling over Avoca Beach at an altitude of about 8000 feet. The attention of residents in the area was attracted to the plane by an intermittent spluttering noise from the engine.

Suddenly the engine stopped, and the plane hurtled nose downwards towards the beach reserve. It missed a group of tall pine trees by a few feet, flattened out slightly as it neared the ground, and then struck the ground with great force, the wheels and engine making simultaneous contact with the ground.

The wings and undercarriage were torn from the fuselage by the impact, and the engine was partly buried in the soft earth.

Lord was hurled more than 20 feet away, and was stunned. Burgess scrambled out of the wreckage and went to his companion's aid.

COW STRUCK BY WING.

The plane had narrowly missed killing a cow which had been grazing on the reserve. A wing struck the animal on the head, breaking off a horn.

The postmaster at Avoca Beach was in-

LIST OF MISHAPS.

Of the nine mishaps to Hawker Demon machines recently, eight occurred during the training flight of the R.A.A.F. squadron from Laverton aerodrome, Victoria, to Queensland and back. *Charles Lord in charge*

The mishaps were as follows:—
November 21: Brake jammed while landing at Cootamundra; plane tilted, but no damage caused.

November 21: Same machine damaged through brake seizing while landing at Canberra.

November 29: Forced landing near Bourke. Nobody injured.

December 3: Machine tipped on nose while taking-off at Archerfield Aerodrome, Brisbane; propeller broken.

December 3: Engine trouble developed in a machine while on manoeuvres, compelling squadron to return to Archerfield.

December 5: Pilot-Officer Jack Frederick Fallon incinerated and Mechanic Fitzgerald injured, in crash near Cootamundra.

December 6: Second crash near Cootamundra; pilot and observer-mechanic injured.

December 6: Machine, landing at Cootamundra, broke a wheel and came to rest on a wing.

December 7: Pilot and wireless operator of meteorological observation plane crashed at Avoca; both injured.

SPECIAL BOARD SUGGESTED.

MR. H. E. WIMPERIS AS
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Mr. T. D. Leech, who is a lecturer in civil engineering at the Sydney University and an outstanding authority on aeronautics, when asked to express an opinion on the accidents to the Hawker-Demons, said that something more than a departmental inquiry was needed if the real cause of the accidents was to be discovered.

"SOMETHING WRONG."

"There is certainly something fundamentally wrong with the Hawker-Demons in Australia," he said. "In my opinion, the search for the cause must go further than any suggestion of slackness on the part of the pilots of the planes. The Hawker-Demon as a type is an excellent machine. In some quarters it is suggested that the machine is unsuited to Australian conditions, and a consideration such as this must be viewed very carefully."

"In my opinion, the series of accidents calls for the appointment of a special board of inquiry, comprising members of the Air Accidents Committee and members of the public with aeronautical qualifications who could ask questions and speak openly and candidly without any peculiar restrictions.

"As chairman of the board I would suggest Mr. H. E. Wimperis, who is in Australia and is probably the most qualified person in the Empire to discover the cause, if it should be some mechanical failing.

"He was for some years a member of the British Air Accidents Inquiry Board, and, in addition, his books on the combustion engine are accepted as standard works by British universities.

COMPREHENSIVE INQUIRY.

"It may be that such an inquiry, if comprehensive, would discover whether any plane designed in America or Europe specifically for Australian conditions was completely satisfactory from the point of view of service operation in the Commonwealth. Whatever the situation happens to be, it would seem essential that the projected inquiry into these accidents should determine to what extent the Hawker-Demon machines, or for that matter all other machines in the Air Force are suited to our conditions.

"In a flight such as that of the Laverton squadron we might expect a couple of engines to give trouble, but eight successive cases of engine trouble in about as many days suggest that there is some grave fault somewhere.

"The committee of inquiry, I suggest, should be empowered to reopen any previous inquiry into accidents to Hawker-Demons and, for that matter, to any other type of military plane."

"HUSH" POLICY FEARED.

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Allegations that the Federal Ministry intended to follow a "hush hush" policy in its inquiry into the cause of frequent crashes of Hawker Demon R.A.A.F. planes were made by a number of members of the Federal Parliament to-day.

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The plane had narrowly missed killing a cow which had been grazing on the reserve. A wing struck the animal on the head, breaking off a horn.

The postmaster at Avoca Beach was informed of the accident, and called a doctor, the police, and an ambulance, and the two airmen received medical treatment.

Eye-witnesses said that it was remarkable that the airmen escaped death. Miss K. Dunstan, who was among the first to detect the plane's plight, made strenuous efforts to indicate a suitable landing area close to her property. Either the airmen failed to see her signals, or the machine at that time was out of control.

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(Continued on next page.)

AIR CRASHES

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after the Minister for Defence (Mr. Thorby) had announced in the House of Representatives that a special inquiry would be held in camera.

Strong representations for an open inquiry are likely to be made by both Government and Opposition members when the House meets to-morrow.

Immediately business began to-day, Mr. Thorby was questioned.

He replied that apart from investigation of individual accidents by the Air Accidents Investigation Committee, special investigations would be made by Group Captain W. H. Anderson, Wing Commander E. C. Wackett, and Wing Commander A. W. Murphy. No more competent committee could be appointed, he declared.

The leader of the Opposition (Mr. Curtin): Until the report is available, will you order the suspension of all flights by Hawker Demons?

Mr. Thorby: I cannot give that assurance off hand, but the suggestion will be seriously considered.

Mr. Beasley: Could not an inquiry be held by experts outside the Air Force?

"NOTHING WILL BE HIDDEN."

Mr. Thorby: Nothing will be done to prevent a full inquiry. Nothing will be hidden.

The Minister asked for notice when Mr. J. Lawson asked whether he would give instructions that in future inquiries must be of such a character that they would yield positive results. "In a number of accidents in the last 12 months," Mr. Lawson said, "the Air Board has been unable to assign definite causes."

In a statement on the accidents which befell members of the Bomber Squadron which recently flew to Charleville, Mr. Thorby said that he had felt deep concern. Nevertheless, he added, the pilots were all qualified to undertake a cross-country flight in charge of experienced squadron and flight commanders. Such a flight was the only way in which junior pilots could gain navigation experience.

Discussing later the suggestion that the inquiry should be open, Mr. Thorby said that the committee would study mechanical features of the Demon type of plane, and would inquire into the capacity of pilots and mechanics. It would work fast, and would only be handicapped if it were necessary to conduct its investigations in public. He expected that he would receive its report within a week.

Apart from this investigation, he added, the public interest would be protected by the Air Accidents Investigation Committee's inquiries into individual accidents, and the coroner's inquiries in the case of the fatal crashes.

EXPERTS PUZZLED.

HAWKER DEMONS' RECORD.

(BY OUR AVIATION CORRESPONDENT.)

Regular R.A.A.F. pilots and Citizen Air Force pilots interviewed yesterday could offer no explanation of the series of Hawker Demon crashes, and were frankly puzzled by the accidents. One said that there had been "a fair amount of trouble with engine seizures, chiefly around the pump."

The consensus of opinion was that the Hawker Demon is a little tricky to fly, is quite stable in the air, and lands very nicely, even if a little fast. In other words, it is a normal aeroplane. Emphasis was laid on the general reliability of the Rolls Royce Kestrel V engine.

Apparently there are two classes of Hawker Demon aircraft in use at Air Force stations. For instance, No. 22 Squadron, at Richmond, is equipped with de-rated Hawker Demons (fitted with engines with the boost cut down), which cruise at 135 miles an hour. No. 3 Squadron is equipped with fully boosted engines, with a cruising speed of 145 miles an hour. The top speed of Hawker Demons is 193 miles an hour at 13,000 feet. The various pilots interviewed were of opinion that the type is very satisfactory for aerobatics and dive bombing.

Hawker Demons have been in use by the R.A.A.F. for about three years, but they are dated about seven years old in England. Small modifications have, from time to time, been sent to Australia by the Air Ministry, and

It must be frankly admitted, however, that engine temperatures, even in British air-cooled engines, have been a source of worry to Australian pilots. In a number of civil aircraft it has been found, for example, that the oil tanks of air-cooled engines have been too small, with a resulting alarming increase in temperature. By fitting a larger tank into the leading edge of a low-winged monoplane and fitting it with additional breathers, the temperature has been kept down.

MAINTENANCE SATISFACTORY.

Both regular R.A.A.F. pilots and Citizen Air Force pilots express satisfaction with maintenance at Air Force stations. A Citizen Air Force pilot said last night, "There is good engine service at Richmond. A fitter and rigger are assigned to every machine. The Hawker Demons are thoroughly checked before taking off, and are again checked on landing."

It is considered by officers of the Air Force that if the pilots of the machines, which were involved in the fatal crash near Cootamundra and the accident at Avoca, had been fortunate enough to be over suitable landing terrain when their aircraft got into difficulties safe landings might have been made. It was singularly unfortunate that both machines should have had to land on extremely rough ground. It was even more unfortunate that the tanks of the machine which crashed near Cootamundra should have been brimming full of fuel after the refilling of the tanks at the Cootamundra Aerodrome just before the fatal accident.

The R.A.A.F. system of training is regarded in most quarters as highly satisfactory, but activities have been hampered by a lack of resources which has involved a restriction to a certain number of flying hours a year. The number of dual hours have been greatly increased since the war, and the men are now well trained before being sent solo, in addition to being carefully selected.

Air Force training and commercial training have to be undertaken separately and seriously, and both involve considerable time. High-spirited flying must be encouraged in an Air Force pilot, who, in the event of aerial combat, must know how to throw his machine about in the air.

MR. H. E. WIMPERIS'S VIEW.

MELBOURNE, Tuesday.

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Mr. Wimperis added that young Australians were definitely air-minded, and he hoped that they would produce an Australian-built machine worthy of guarding the Commonwealth.

RUSH ON R.A.A.F.

Many Apply; Few Chosen.

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Applicants for flying training courses in the 12 months ended October 31 consisted of 1500 for cadetships, and 6000 for positions as airmen. Senator Foll, representing the Minister for Defence, said in the Senate to-day, in reply to Senator Brown (Lab., Qld.) that from these 707 had been accepted—123 as cadets and 584 as airmen. The number of men in the R.A.A.F. at present, he added, aggregated 2158, made up of 167 officers, 70 cadets, and 1921 airmen.

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The first Hawker Demons to arrive in Australia had a tendency to swing on landing, and the trouble was traced to the tail wheel, and by fitting a rubber band to the wheel this was overcome. The machines have a controllable radiator which it is possible to push into, or pull out of, the slip stream by the manipulation of a wheel. A centigrade thermometer is connected with the radiator, which records the temperature.

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