

Courier-Mail (Brisbane, Qld. : 1933 - 1954), Thursday 1 July 1943, page 4

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## ARCHERFIELD CRASH:

### AIR FORCE TELLS INQUIRY RESULT

RESULT of the Royal Australian Air Force's own inquiry into the Douglas crash at Archerfield on March 27 was revealed in the Coroner's Court yesterday.

The inquest on the 23 victims of

the crash was resumed by the duty Coroner (Mr. J. J. Leahy, S.M.). Air-Commodore John Hamilton Summers, R.A.A.P., said that, with two other officers, he conducted a court of inquiry, instigated by the Air Ministry, into certain circumstances that had led to the crash. The court examined 59 witnesses, and its findings and recommendations had been submitted to the Minister. The court had formed the opinion that error of judgment and poor technique on the pilot's part caused the crash.

Reasonable Precautions Evidence given at the inquiry revealed that the plane hit a tree about 150 yards from where it crashed. It struck a limb of a tree with the left wing, continued on in the same position, struck two large trees, and burst into flames. The left wing hit a tall tree first, and then hit the ground and a tree at once. It was proved to the satisfaction of the court of inquiry that the machine was not overloaded, that all reasonable precaution had been taken, and that the flight was properly organised. On the morning of the crash the weather at Archerfield aerodrome was clear except for a few

[fog patches in the west, thick enough only to cause the boundary lights to appear hazy. The plane took off with its headlights on. It seemed to take off normally, after the usual precautions had been taken, and was last seen flying normally and disappearing in the fog at the southern end of the aerodrome. Nothing more was heard of it until the crash was reported. It was located at the southern end of the aerodrome facing to the west a few minutes after the take-off. Orders Followed Inquiry, with two possible exceptions, showed that up to the moment of the crash the motors were running normally. The Court was unable to ascertain whether there were any machine failures or defects to cause the accident. Nor was there any reason to believe that the accident resulted from carelessness or failure to maintain the aircraft in accordance with regulations. From the time the plane left Townsville there was evidence to show orders had been followed. Because of the deaths of the crew and the destruction of the plane, there was no evidence, oral or written, to show that the order for maintenance had not been followed.

### HAD TO ACT QUICKLY

Air Commodore Summers said that the court of inquiry formed the opinion that the pilot on entering the fog was faced with an unexpected situation, and found it necessary to change from visual to instrument flying in a fraction of a moment. He would also be disconcerted by the reflection of his headlights by the fog. There was no reason for the pilot to turn, as his course was to Sydney. All he had to do was to fly straight ahead and break through the fog. Replying to the Coroner, Air Commodore Summers said that it was not dangerous to turn to the right if the aircraft had sufficient altitude. If it had not sufficient altitude it was more dangerous to turn to the right than to the left. The two W.A.A.P's on

board the plane were , unauthorised pas? : ?

sengers. They had been permitted to board the plane by the pilot and crew, who were all R.A.A.P. To Sergeant J. Denning, Air Com'modore Summers said that he examined the scene of the crash, and found that approximately 150 yards from where the plane hit the ground it went through the top branches of a tall tree and cut off two limbs about three inches in diameter. As those wings were cut by a hollow metal envelope travelling at approximately 150 miles an hour, it would give the effect of explosions,, which could easily be taken for backfire. The pilot was regarded as a sound pilot, with more than 1300 flying hours. When the inquiry was resumed. Sergeant Denning explained that he had not produced R.A.A.P. evidence at the previous inquiry because it was not available. The police tried to get evidence from the R.A.A.P., but it was refused, probably for security reasons.

Inspection System Squadron-Leader William Dobson Richmond, engineer officer, gave evidence about the system by which R.A.A.P. aircraft are maintained. He said that a daily inspection of an aircraft was. good for 24 hours. There was no definite record of the work done on the plane that night. It might have been destroyed. He had not spoken to any one who had worked on the machine the night before it crashed. He could offer no opinion as to the probable cause of the smash. Frederick John Todd, adjutant supply officer, said that on the night of March 26, a few minutes after 8 o'clock, Flying Officer Arnold asked for accommodation for his crew, and also a meal. Arnold said, 'We would have been up earlier, but have been working on the plane.' ? He ascertained later that Arnold was the captain of the plane which crashed. To the best of his knowledge he thought they were to take off at 5 a.m. next day. He did not know what test, if any, was given to the plane before it left Archerfield on the morning of the crash. The inquest was adjourned until 10 a.m. to-day.