

AWM 54

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Report & Evidence

at Court of Inquiry on accident involving  
death & injuries to personnel of 2/33 Aust  
Infantry Bn 2/33 & 158 Aust. General Transport  
Companies, when a loaded Bomber (U.S. Liberator)  
crashed into marshalling area of A.I.F. Troops  
in vicinity of Jacksons Aerodrome at Port  
Moresby - 7 September 1943.  
59 Dead & 92 injured Australians; and  
crew of 11 Americans

War HQ 18 AUST INF BDE.

This record came from  
HQ 7 AUST DIV.  
Sep 43.

S U B J E C T. Provisional Classification No. **1013**

ACCIDENT INVOLVING DEATH AND INJURIES TO PERSONNEL OF  
2/33 AUST INF BN.

1. A Court of Inquiry consisting of the undermentioned Officers:-

- |            |         |                  |                                 |
|------------|---------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| President. | Captain | G.S. REICHENBACH | Legal Officer<br>HQ 7 AUST DIV. |
| Member.    | Captain | R.A. PRIOL       | HQ 25 AUST INF BDE.             |
| Member.    | Lieut   | D. REA           | HQ 18 AUST INF BDE.             |

will assemble at such times and places as may be fixed by the President to inquire into and report upon the circumstances of an air-craft accident at Jackson's aerodrome on the morning of 7 Sep 43, involving the death and disappearance of and injuries to members of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn.

2. In addition to any other matters which appear to be relevant and which should be brought to the knowledge of the Convening Officer, the Court will inquire into and report upon the following matters.

- (a) The whole of the circumstances connected with the accident and the casualties resulting therefrom.
- (b) The identity of all members dead, missing or injured.
- (c) The cause or causes of the death, disappearance of and injuries to such members and the general nature of the injuries.
- (d) Whether such members were on duty or otherwise and the nature of any duty.
- (e) Whether any and what neglect, misconduct, carelessness or failure to observe any act, regulation, order or instruction on the part of the members dead, missing or injured, <sup>or any other person or persons</sup> caused contributed to the death, disappearance or injuries or aggravated the injuries.
- (f) Whether the members dead, missing or injured were enlisted or appointed for or employed on active service outside Australia or otherwise.

3. The Court will obtain and attach to the proceedings:-

- (a) Signed statements from the injured members (where possible) and such other persons as are able to give information with full particulars of the time, date, place and circumstances.
- (b) A.A.F. Dll completed as required by GRO A392/43 para 24.

4. The report and proceedings of the Court will be sent to the Convening Officer in triplicate as soon as possible.

5. I certify that the signatures of the same do not permit  
to be taken as an *ipse dixit* and a President  
*J. Hillton*

Brigadier  
COMD 18 AUST INF BDE

REPORT OF COURT OF INQUIRY ON ACCIDENT INVOLVING DEATH AND INJURIES  
TO PERSONNEL OF 2/33 AUST INF BN AND 2/33 and 158 Aust Gen Tpt COYS

Description of Accident

1. On the morning of 7 Sep 43 a number of trucks containing personnel of the 2/33 Aust Inf Bn were marshalled at 7 Aust Div Marshalling Area for emplaning of tps. Among these were 18 trucks marked with emplaning serial Nos M132 to M149 incl, containing personnel of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn. The drivers of the trucks were members of the 2/33 and 158 Gen Tpt Coys. These trucks were in the area earmarked for Marshalling for DURANDS Aerodrome. Photographs annexed to 1st copy of these proceedings and marked '1' and '2' give a general idea of this Marshalling Area. The trucks had been marshalled in this area preparatory to moving to Assembly area for emplaning on DURANDS Drome. The emplaning was part of an operational move by 25 Aust Inf Bde to an operational area.

At approx 0420 hrs on 7 Sep 43 a Liberator Bomber with eleven personnel of U.S. Army Air Force took off from JACKSONS Aerodrome. The Bomber was loaded with four 500 lb Bombs and 2800 gallons of petrol. The plane was noticed by several personnel in the Marshalling Area to be flying very low when suddenly the port wing apparently tipped one of the branches of a tree marked 2 on photo No 2 then hit tree Nos 4 and 3 squarely and crashed. These trees are on the downward slope of a small ridge which is shown on Field Sketch marked O and is shown as well on the above photos. Immediately following the crash two loud explosions occurred and parts of the plane flew in all directions.

Several witnesses gave evidence that one of the engines on the Bomber was on fire prior to the crash but the Court is of the opinion that what they saw was a flame from a super-charger.

Reference to photos which are attached to the first copy of the proceedings and marked 3 to 11 incl will show the parts of the plane scattered in various directions. In addition to this petrol, was sprayed over a large area and extensive fires occurred. Five trucks Nos M145 to M149 incl caught fire and were hit by the flying wreckage of the aeroplane.

Four of these are also shown in the photos, the remaining one having been towed away. Personnel in these five trucks were either killed outright or injured. The total number of Australian personnel killed outright was

15. In addition 44 have since died of injuries. 92 were injured and

*Note: numbers have the same reference on photos as on sketch plan*

admitted to hospital and present indications are that <sup>most of</sup> these will recover. In addition all 11 members of the crew of the Liberator were killed. The crash immediately detonated three of the bombs, two distinct explosions taking place and the fourth bomb not exploding. Immediately after the crash and explosion attempts were made to get near the immediate vicinity of the crash to extricate injured and dead but it was impossible to do so owing to the fierce blaze. A number of injured with their clothes and eqpt on fire got through the blaze themselves and were given what assistance and first aid that was possible in that area. Capt SEDDON took prompt steps to call medical assistance and ambulances, a large number of both of which was on the spot in a very short time.

All injured were immediately taken either to the 2/5 AGH or the 2/9 AGH with exception of 2 men who were taken to 2/5 Aust Fd Amb and 2 men who were taken to a U.S.A. Hospital, the latter not being in a fit condition to be moved.

Prompt action was also taken by Capt SEDDON to obtain fire-fighting eqpt which was on the scene in a short time.

Ammunition continued to explode and the fierce blaze continued for a period of about one hour and at the earliest moment having due regard to considerations of reasonable safety remaining bodies, all of whom were dead, and the majority of whom were mutilated and charred so as to render recognition impossible, were extricated from the trucks and the area immediately surrounding them and placed in another truck.

All possible steps were taken to find any evidence to enable recognition of the bodies. The best count of bodies, possible under the circumstances, was made on the spot. Eleven men were extricated early in the morning but it was not possible to extricate a further five owing to the continuance of fires, until later on in the morning. All these bodies were sent to the 2/9 AGH and arrangements made by the hospital ~~for~~ for an accurate count of the mutilated bodies. All possible attempts were made to gather further information which might lead to the identification of any of the bodies.

IDENTITY OF MEMBERS DEAD, INJURED AND MISSING.

The following personnel died as a result of injuries received:-

<u>No.</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name.</u>	<u>Unit.</u>
NX 89776	Pte	GAMBRILL	A.W. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
QX 33350	"	NIXON	J.A. 2/33 " " "
NX 18491	"	WORKMAN	R.J. 2/33 " " "
QX 34862	"	SHIELS	R.A. 2/33 " " "
VX 113110	"	McFADZEAN	R.E. 2/33 " " "
SX 18977	"	SWIFT	D.V. 2/33 " " "
VX 80414	"	HINWOOD	H. 2/33 " " "
VX 77454	"	WILSON	J. 2/33 " " "
NX 97042	"	SMITH	W. 2/33 " " "
NX 141881	"	SMITH	C.H.B. 2/33 " " "
NX 32179	"	COOK	L.J. 2/33 " " "
DX 21	"	MACKRILL	J. 2/33 " " "
NX 36851	"	HICKEY	J.T. 2/33 " " "
NX 39846	"	SMALLEY	E.J. 2/33 " " "
N 199319	Dr	KEARINES	V.W. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
NX 80187	Pte	DEVENPORT	R.L. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
NX 50334	"	STANTON	B. 2/33 " " "
NX 95056	"	MYERS	A.C. 2/33 " " "
NX 37163	A/Cpl	KEYS	M.V. 2/33 " " "
VX 68750	Pte	ROBERTS	P. 2/33 " " "
SX 17755	L/Cpl	LEWIS	F.W. 2/33 " " "
NX 81833	Pte	RICE	H.J. 2/33 " " "
VX 122632	"	McLEOD	O.K. 2/33 " " "
QX 7355	"	McGROW	J. 2/33 " " "
NX 58770	"	HUGHES	E.L.B. 2/33 " " "
VX 8615	Cpl	SNOW	S.A. 2/33 " " "
NXX 15257	A/Cpl	WESTON	W.F. 2/33 " " "
N 256189	Dr	TARANTO	J.V. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
SX 18057	Pte	MILDWATERS	C.J. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
SX 17640	"	MILLER	K.A.G. 2/33 " " "
NX 8932	L/Cpl	PEARSON	R.W.M. 2/33 " " "
VX 91436	Pte	McGARVEY	M 2/33 " " "
NX 47747	L/Cpl	WARD	R 2/33 " " "
NX 46658	Pte	O'REGAN	F.T. 2/33 " " "
NX 96055	"	PRESTON	H.R. 2/33 " " "
VX 90974	"	RICHARDSON	J.R. 2/33 " " "
SX 2149	"	BREAKWELL	A.L. 2/33 " " "
DX 116	"	STEW	A.W. 2/33 " " "
SX 28936	"	HARVEY	D.J. 2/33 " " "
NX 80121	"	BRESSINGTON	F.R. 2/33 " " "
VX 78975	"	BIRD	R.F. 2/33 " " "
QX 1585	WO 11	REINKE	J.R. 2/33 " " "
QX 32523	Pte	McGREGOR	D 2/33 " " "
QX 3354	"	SMITH	F.R. 2/33 " " "
SX 18963	"	LONG	A.C. 2/33 " " "
NX 37094	"	THOMPSON*	J.C. 2/33 " " "

\* The Court has been informed since the taking of evidence that NX37094 Pte THOMPSON J.C. has died.

The following personnel, all of whom were on the scene of the accident at the time inquestion are missing :-

VX 11997	Capt	FERGUSON	J.B. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
WX 13761	Pte	WARD	C.L. 2/33 " " "
SX17902	"	DONALD	R. 2/33 " " "
NX95991	"	McDONALD	C. 2/33 " " "
SX27897	"	REID	R.M. 2/33 " " "
NX50797	"	SPEAR	J.S. 2/33 " " "
NX 2755	"	DARLING	A.W. 2/33 " " "
NX 97110	"	WHITTLE	I.E. 2/33 " " "
NX 88068	"	QUINN	J.D. 2/33 " " "
QX 3124	"	SIMMONDS	G.C. 2/33 " " "
VX 87009	"	FIELDER	W.W. 2/33 " " "
NX 147063	"	WEBSTER	C.J. 2/33 " " "
NX 37382	"	SLADE	B.H. 2/33 " " "

The following personnel, in addition to those who died, were injured  
as a result of the accident :-

No	Rank	Name	Unit
NX	5087	Cpl ROSE	N.J. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
QX	2525	Pte BATTS	C.S. 2/33 " " "
NX	54083	Sgt MACKAY	W.W. 2/33 " " "
NX	137997	Pte VILLA	C 2/33 " " "
VX	90997	" ROBINSON	H.D. 2/33 " " "
NX	33021	L/Cpl STEELE	A.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	52095	Cpl PRICE	E.A. 2/33 " " "
NXM	346042	Pte MORAN	H.E. 2/33 " " "
NX	31802	" CAFE	E.W.K. 2/33 " " "
NX	99208	" DANIEL	M.B. 2/33 " " "
SX	11227	Lieut BUTTROSE	I.K. 2/33 " " "
QX	34036	Pte SMITH	C.W. 2/33 " " "
NX	45423	" WENHAM	S.G. 2/33 " " "
NX	6251	" POCOCK	A.F. 2/33 " " "
NX	34090	Lieut McTAGGART	F.M. 2/33 " " "
NX	12925	Capt MITCHELL	D.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	28925	Lieut SADGROVE	H.C. 2/33 " " "
QX	3873	Pte CONDON	J. 2/33 " " "
NX	8233	" WHITMEE	P.W. 2/33 " " "
VX	90771	" CLARKE	C.J. 2/33 " " "
NX	79625	" PRESTON	J. 2/33 " " "
QX	4667	Sgt CLAREY	C.M. 2/33 " " "
NX	169474	Pte McCRONE	A.G.E. 2/33 " " "
NX	96806	" HANCOCK	D.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	99188	" McGHIE	G. 2/33 " " "
NX	86395	Cpl TURNBULL	D.A. 2/33 " " "
SX	2006	Pte DUNSTAN	E. 2/33 " " "
NX	85178	" STUBBS	W.J. 2/33 " " "
NX	97234	" BURNETT	C.R. 2/33 " " "
NX	28758	" WHITE	K.J. 2/33 " " "
QX	33214	" TIDBURY	A.L. 2/33 " " "
NX	91676	" WATSON	D.L. 2/33 " " "
NX	97021	" OBERG	F.T. 2/33 " " "
NX	96759	" WRIGHT	W.G. 2/33 " " "
NX	98150	" EVANS	F.T. 2/33 " " "
NX	43723	" JOHNSTON	H.T. 2/33 " " "
NX	86167	" BYRNES	C.J. 2/33 " " "
NX	97625	" SHADE	T. 2/33 " " "
QX	36625	" FINGLAS	B 2/33 " " "
SX	17465	" MILLS	P.H. 2/33 " " "
NX	54152	" BUSKELL	N.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	86126	" TUMETH	F.G. 2/33 " " "
NX	19921	" FERNLEY	H.L. 2/33 Aust Gen Tpt
VX	80717	" MARSHALL	D.J. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
NX	92691	" FERNANCE	A 2/33 " " "
VX	109882	" DURIE	F.L. 2/33 " " "
NX	3005	" SHALLCROSS	J. 2/33 " " "
NX	37326	Cpl DRANE	A.E.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	146015	Pte HARLEY	W.S. 2/33 " " "
NX	97206	" TRIPP	J.C. 2/33 " " "
NX	81163	" COLLINS	M.W. 2/33 " " "
QX	3154	" HORTON	M.F. 2/33 " " "
SX	18075	" HAEFORD	W 2/33 " " "
NX	89628	" BYRON	J.D. 2/33 " " "
NX	33644	" FEWINGS	E.R. 2/33 " " "
NX	100776	" GARNON	F 2/33 " " "
VX	125069	" LILLEY	W.J. 2/33 " " "
QX	38693	" GARRETT	A 2/33 " " "
NX	37325	" CRAWFORD	N.H. 2/33 " " "
SX	17638	" LITHGOW	W.L. 2/33 " " "
NX	99084	" RALSTON	R.F. 2/33 " " "
VX	113123	" CALLANDER	D.A. 2/33 " " "
NX	80827	Cpl HAMILTON	H.E 2/33 " " "
SX	1616	Pte MUNRO	A.R. 2/33 " " "
VX	91283	" DONOHUE	H 2/33 " " "
NX	92130	" ALEXANDER	W.T. 2/33 " " "

No	Rank	Name	Unit
X 24856	L/Cpl	LEWIS	N.E. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
SX 18013	Pte	LING	J.N. 2/33 " " "
NX 32267	"	TURNBULL	L.W. 2/33 " " "
QX 38521	"	MORGAN	M 2/33 " " "
NX 150539	Dr	DONOVAN	E.R. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
QX 2252	Cpl	TINNING	W 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
QX 29674	Pte	JOSEPH	J.W.A. 2/33 " " "
NX 44673	"	MacMURRAY	C.F. 2/33 " " "
VX 124806	"	McDERMOTT	J 2/33 " " "
QX 29660	"	STUTZ	E.J. 2/33 " " "
NX 44040	"	WARING	A.H. 2/33 " " "
NX 55437	"	MUSGRAVE	W.A. 2/33 " " "
NX 55295	"	ELLIS	F.C. 2/33 " " "
QX 38173	"	SWAIN	F.C. 2/33 " " "
NX 41651	"	GORMAN	C.H. 2/33 " " "
VX 2929	Sgt	BECK	J.T. 2/33 " " "
NX 8104	"	CROOKS	W 2/33 " " "
NX 45067	A/Cpl	LAING	J.J. 2/33 " " "
SX 2307	S/Sgt	HENSCHKE	K.A. 2/33 " " "
NX 26936	Pte	GILWEY	A 2/33 " " "
NX 122155	"	BULL	C.R. 2/33 " " "
N 256180	Dr	SILKMAN	J.A. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
NX 97019	Pte	BAILEY	W.E. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
NX 80932	"	TINSON	G.J. 2/33 " " "
NX 89529	"	LAWSON	F.P. 2/33 " " "
NX 55916	Dr	SMALL	S.J. 2/33 Aust Gen Tpt

Of these NX55916 Dr SMALL S.J. of 2/33 Aust Gen Tpt Coy, was injured at 1015 hrs on 7 Sep 43 as the result of a further explosion of ammunition.

AAF D lls are attached for all dead and injured.

The Court is of the opinion, after reviewing the evidence and

considering the circumstances, that all these members shown as missing have been buried but not identified. The Court is also of the opinion that the above contains full particulars of all the casualties.

As to the missing personnel the Court makes the following comments in connection with 3 members shown in the list of deaths :-

(a) NX39846 Pte SMALLEY E.J. of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn, was identified at 2/5 A.G.H. and his body was tagged with his number, name and unit, but apparently the tag disappeared during transit and his body was buried as unidentified. Pte SMALLEY died at 2/5 A.G.H. on the 7 Sep as a result of injuries.

(b) SX17640 Pte MILLER K.A.G. of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn was one of the sixteen bodies taken to the 2/5 A.G.H. as unidentified but was subsequently identified at 2/5 A.G.H. from his regimental number remaining on the remnants of a gaiter on one of his legs.

(c) N256189 Dr TARANTO J.V. of 158 Aust Gen Tpt Coy was subsequently identified by Major CROZIER. His was one of the sixteen bodies taken to the hospital as unidentified.

(d) The Court is of the opinion that one of the sixteen bodies taken to

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2/5 A.G.H. as unidentified was that of a member of the American Air Crew. Only ten men were positively identified by the Americans and after considering the evidence of Lieut SULZBACHER of U.S. Army, the Court is of the opinion that only unidentifiable fragments of limbs were taken by the Americans to make up the 11th member of the crew. While Lieut SULZBACHER did not positively give evidence to this effect, only small fragments of limbs were taken to represent the 11th body, and the Court is of the opinion that this is a reasonable conclusion to arrive at, having regard to all the facts and particularly that the number tallies with that of personnel missing from their units. A careful check has been made of all units likely to have any personnel in the Marshalling Area at the relevant time.

#### Cause of Death etc

The principal causes of death were shock and burns. The principal injuries were shock and burns, and wounds caused by flying fragments. All deaths and injuries were caused, either directly or indirectly, as the result of the aeroplane crash.

All members, killed, injured and missing were on duty. Members of the Gen Tpt Coy were on duty driving trucks containing personnel preparatory to emplaning. All other personnel dead, injured or missing were on duty preparatory to their emplaning to proceed to an operational area.

The Court is of the opinion that there was no neglect, misconduct, carelessness or failure to observe any act, regulation, order or instruction on the part of any of the members dead, missing or injured or on the part of any other person or persons

N99319 Dr. KEARINES V.W. and N256180 Dr SILKMAN J.A. were employed on active service in New Guinea and were called up for continuous full time service. All other members dead, missing or injured were enlisted for full time service outside Australia.

#### Trucks

AAF G 4s marked exhibits A to E incl give particulars of damage to the trucks referred to therein. The cause of the damage to the trucks was the aeroplane crash.

#### General

The Court gave careful consideration to the choice of the site of the Marshalling Area and made an extensive reconnaissance of other



areas which might have been considered suitable as a site for the Marshalling Area. The Court inspected other sites which had been considered by Capt SEDDON and other officers before the area in question was chosen. In the Court's opinion the only areas inspected which might have been more suitable as a marshalling area were either already in occupation of troops, or were being used as dumps which had already been well established. Having regard to the numerous considerations which had to be borne in mind in the choice of such an area, the Court is of the opinion, looking at the matter in retrospect and being wise after the event in the light of the accident, that the only drawback to the area chosen is that it is in the direct line of flight of aircraft taking off from Jackson's Drome. The Court is, however, of the opinion that this fact could not reasonably be expected to be taken into consideration in the light of other factors. Firstly very large numbers of aeroplanes take off daily from the above drome without mishap. Secondly the Marshalling Area is approximately half a mile from the extreme end of the runway. Thirdly, the area is approximately 25 feet lower than the edge of the runway. Photo No.12 shows the view from the end of the runway looking toward the Marshalling Area.

The Court endeavoured to obtain some explanation as to the cause of the crash but is of the opinion that it will always remain a mystery. There is however, evidence that it was unlikely to be the result of engine failure. The pilot had considerable experience and there is no evidence of any neglect on his part.

At the time of the crash there was not the slightest degree of panic and every one who was able to do so, did what they could to assist the injured. Considerable presence of mind and initiative on the part of members present no doubt contributed largely to minimising injuries and saving lives.

*W. J. C. ...* .....PRESIDENT  
*...* .....MEMBERS  
*...*

20 Sep 43



Sumner

SX1741 Capt Reginald John Seddon HQ 18 Aust Inf Bde being duly sworn gives the following evidence :-

On 30 Aug as the result of instructions received from 7 Aust Div I established Control Quarters Marshalling Area at PORT MORESBY 1" to 1 Mile Ref 944377. The only written instructions I received were contained in Div Admin Order No 5 a copy of which is annexed and marked 'A'. On 23 Aug I had carried out a reconnaissance and chose the Marshalling Area and Drome Assembly Areas.

The matters I took into consideration in choosing the Marshalling Area were as follows :-

- (a) Sufficient dispersal for up to 100 trucks on a site convenient to all units of the Div and with good roads to all Dromes.
- (b) Wet weather standing.
- (c) A position was required so as not overduely to interfere with main roads.
- (d) A position was desirable in which two way traffic was available; i.e. from units to area and from area to drome.
- (e) Reasonable proximity to all 3 dromes. It was anticipated that 5 dromes might be used and the area chosen had suitable access to all of them.
- (f) It was also desirable to have an area in which separate dispersal areas were available in which convoys could be marshalled before proceeding to each drome.
- (g) Consideration was also given to laying signal lines from units to marshalling area and from marshalling area to drome assembly area.

I took about 1½ days on the reconnaissance and covered a very large area. The site chosen was the only one which was eminently suitable. The Bde Comd inspected the site on or about 30 Aug and approved of it. In choosing the drome assembly areas I had in mind considerations of convenience in getting there from marshalling area. This consideration was also borne in mind in choosing the marshalling area.

The drome assembly areas were inspected by Air Transport Control Officer (Capt Lonie N.G.F.). Capt Lonie accompanied me in choosing the sites.

As preparatory measures I organised the following :-

- (a) Traffic control with 2 secs of N.G.F. Provost and local assistance with 7 Div Provost.
- (b) Road making to fulfill above considerations. This was handled by 2/4 Fd Coy RAE.
- (c) Flood lighting of marshalling area.
- (d) R.A.P.

I had in mind the fact that 5 ambulances of 18 Bde were at close call. All organisation and all facilities had been completed prior to the first emplaning which took place on the morning of the 5 Sep 43. All liason with 5 Air Force of U.S. Army was done by N.G. Force which passed the information on to me. The following planes took off on the days set opposite them

5 Sep	11
6 Sep	68

On the morning of 7 Sep 43 prior to the crash taking place which I think was approx 0415, 18 trucks had been assembled and had moved off to Wards Drome Assembly area, and 18 trucks were on the Durand's Marshalling area, which was at PORT MORESBY 1" to 1 Mile Ref 945378.

The 18 trucks were as follows :-

Serial Nos M132 - M 149 incl ~~per appx H 7 Div C.O. No 5~~. All of these contained personnel of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn and each truck having a driver from Transport Coy N.G.F. ~~Attached hereto and marked 'B' is relevant extract from said appx H.~~

There were also less than 17 trucks in the Jackson's Marshalling Area which was at PORT MORESBY 1" to 1 Mile Ref 946377.

At approx 0415 hrs on 7 Sep 43 ( I am uncertain of the time) I was in the Control Tent at the marshalling area. I heard a plane approaching from direction of Jackson's Airfield with the normal sound of aircraft taking off. Within a few seconds I heard a tremendous crash, and sound of bursting bombs and from where I was sitting in the tent I saw a great ball of fire over part of the area occupied by 18 trucks on Durand's Marshalling Area. I immediately took up the phone and called 18 Bde for ambulances, then 21 and 25 Bde for their ambulances. I then phoned Div Tps and ordered operator to call up all units under their comd to send all available ambulances to marshalling area. I also rang 2/4 Fd Amb and requested that they send all M.Os. and ambulances to marshalling area. I then called 18 Bde Duty Officer to send up all unit ~~RMOs~~ and to advise Bde Comd. I then rang N.G.F. and requested them to send Bomb Disposal Squad, High Pressure Water Carts and Fire Fighting Eqpt and Air Force personnel with asbestos suits. I arranged between phone calls for all undamaged trucks in Durand's Dispersal Area to be driven out and put in Jackson's Dispersal Area. I then called through amplifier and loud speaker apparatus for all perfectly fit men to proceed immediately to scene of fire to assist injured personnel to safety area outside Control Tent.

Hot tea was immediately made available to the injured personnel. By this time ambulances were arriving. This was I estimate within 10 minutes of the crash. Ambulances were ordered immediately to proceed to nearest hospital with the injured. The hospitals had been contacted by C.O. of 2/4 Fd Amb. The R.A.P orderly was doing everything in his power to relieve the injured all of whom appeared to be suffering from burns and shock. I did not notice any injuries from bomb fragmentation. I rang emplaning officer at Jackson's Assembly Area to contact ambulances at the drome with orders to proceed immediately to marshalling area. I understand that a number had already moved. I estimate that it took about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour to remove all the injured. A 3 ton truck with personnel was detailed to pick up all known dead. I rang Maj Whiting DADMS regarding disposal of dead and was subsequently instructed to move them to 2/5 AGH morgue.

After all arrangements regarding injured and dead had been fully completed I ordered a muster of all personnel from Durand's trucks. All personnel from Jackson's drome were ordered back to their trucks and 2 ambulances were detailed to remain in the area. The reorganisation of emplaning was then proceeded with. All sound trucks and uninjured personnel were then sent away for emplaning. This included 11 out of the 18 trucks at Durand's marshalling area. All personnel who were not required to remain back on account of injuries were emplaned.

I am of the opinion that everything possible was done for injured personnel and that they were evacuated to hospitals at the earliest possible moment.

The area was picketed by provosts until all fires had been extinguished.

Bombs and explosives were removed and salvage collected.

An exhaustive check was made to pick up any clues as to identification of soldiers and of aircraft crew. A thorough search was also made over a wide area to ensure that no personnel had wandered away but nobody was found to have done so.

All marshalling areas have now been moved to positions which I estimate to be outside a 5 degree angle from line of take off. This area is not as suitable as the other areas owing to the fact that the new area cannot be as conveniently divided up. In addition it is a smaller area and immediately adjoining an area occupied by a unit.

At no time was there the slightest sign of panic amongst the men and their whole behaviour was that of thoroughly disciplined troops.

All men cooperated to the fullest degree in doing whatever could be done for the injured and generally in the general reorganisation for emplaning. While assisting the injured the men were continually in danger from fire and from the ammunition.

*J. S. Seaton Capt.*  
.....  
Jx. 1741.

His evidence is read over to the witness.

VX19976 Cpl Frederick Robert Wood of 1 Aust Corps Provost Coy attached 7 Aust Div Marshalling Area being duly sworn gives the following evidence :-

On morning of 7 Sep 43 I was standing together with Cpl Lobie at the head of a convoy of 18 trucks waiting to move from the marshalling area to the Aerodrome for the purpose of emplaning. I am not sure of the hour but it was before dawn. A mist was just coming up. I was facing towards Jackson's drome when I noticed the plane come into view over the trees. I could not say what type of plane it was. The plane was on fire. The fire appeared to be coming from the front of the engines and blowing back on to the cabin. The landing lights were on and I noticed one wheel was down. From the angle at which I was looking I could not see the other wheel. As I watched the plane I noticed the Starboard <sup>wing</sup> suddenly dip and the plane hit a tree on the forward slope of the next ridge. As the plane hit the tree the tail tilted upwards. I saw that the plane would definitely hit the ridge on which the trucks were standing at a distance of approx 110 yds from where I was standing. I said to Cpl Lobie "Look out" and I dived for cover. The trucks were parked close up to each other. The distance between trucks would be about five yds. I did not actually see the plane hit the ridge but I heard one big explosion. After the explosion I moved down the line of trucks and helped to evacuate the wounded. I noticed that some trucks at the end of the line were on fire.

*... Dead ... life ...  
... in his hands ...*

His evidence is read over to the witness.

Q9730 Cpl Stanley James Lobie 5 Aust Div Provost Coy attached 7 Aust Div marshalling area being duly sworn gives the following evidence:-

On morning of 7 Sep 43 I was standing together with Cpl Wood at the head of a convoy of 18 trucks waiting to move from the marshalling area to the aerodrome for the purpose of emplaning. The time was approx 0445 hrs. I heard an aeroplane and looked towards Jackson's drome. I saw an outline of a plane with navigation lights on passing over the next ridge. I could not say what type of plane it was or at what height it was flying. There was a slight mist at the time. I turned towards Cpl Wood to speak to him and thus had my back to the plane. Almost immediately Cpl Wood said "Look out". He ran and I ran in the same direction as he did. While I was running I heard two almost simultaneous explosions and I took cover. The explosions were very loud and the whole area was lit up. As soon as the sound of the explosions died down Cpl Wood and I moved down the line of trucks to a position as close as possible to the fire and helped to evacuate the wounded. I saw three trucks on fire.

..... S. Lobie Cpl.  
99730

His evidence is read over to the witness

VX109055 Cpl Kevin Francis Murphy of 3 Aust Div Provost Coy attached to 7 Aust Div Marshalling Area being duly sworn gives the following evidence :-

On morning of 7 Sep 45 I was on convoy duty. At approx 0430 hrs convoy was halted at the top end of Jackson's drome facing the drome. I was at the rear end of the convoy which consisted of 18 vehicles. I heard the noise of a plane overhead and noticed there was a fire in the cowling of an engine on the port side. I also noticed that a red navigation light was on. The plane appeared to be at a height of about 35 feet. The weather was fairly clear. I thought the plane was a Liberator. Shortly after the plane passed over I heard two almost simultaneous explosions in the direction of the marshalling area. I saw a glow in the sky. The convoy then moved on to Ward's drome. The marshalling area would be approx half a mile in a south easterly direction from where the convoy was halted.

*K. F. Murphy, Cpl.*  
*VX 109055*

His evidence is read over to the witness.



VX108706 Cpl Angus Frederick O'Brien of 3 Aust Div Provost Coy attached to 7 Aust Div Marshalling Area being duly sworn gives the following evidence :-

On morning of 7 Sep 43 I was on convoy duty. At approx 0430 hrs convoy was halted at the top end of Jackson's drome facing the drome. I was at the head of the convoy which consisted of 18 vehicles. I heard the roar of the motors of a plane coming up the strip. I looked down the strip but could not at first see any plane. After a few seconds I noticed a fire which outlined the plane engine coming towards me. The fire appeared to be in the cowling of the engine. I glanced back along the convoy and when I looked again the plane was passing overhead. I noticed that it was a Liberator and that the fire was in an engine on the port side of the plane. I estimate that the height of the plane was approx. 30 feet. The breeze from the plane blew the hats off some of the men in the truck. The convoy started to move off and had travelled about 50 yds when I heard the sound of two almost simultaneous explosions come from the direction of the marshalling area. I looked back and noticed a glow in the sky.

*A. O'Brien Cpl.....*  
*VX108706.*

His evidence is read over to the witness.