

2/33 Bn Sep 43

PROCEEDINGS AND REPORT OF COURT OF INQUIRY

Assembled by direction of Brig. F. O. CHILTON DSO Comd 18 Aust Inf Bde

Concerning accident involving death and injuries to personnel
of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn and 2/33 and 158 Aust Gen Tpt Coys.

PRESIDENT : Capt G. S. REICHENBACH AALC Att 7 Aust Div

MEMBERS : Capt R. A. PRIOL HQ 25 Aust Inf Bde

Lieut D. REA HQ 18 Aust Inf Bde

WITNESSES : Capt R. J. S. SEDDON

Cpl F. R. WOOD

Cpl S. J. LOBIE

Cpl K. F. MURPHY

Cpl A. F. O'BRIEN

Lieut G. A. S. MART

Col H. J. HAWTHORNE

Maj K. F. CROZIER

WO 1 W. J. PALMISANO

WO 1 L. PICKERING

Capt C. N. B. PEACH

Pte H. L. DAVIES

Lieut R. F. SULZBACHER

Cpl E. E. VARNEY

Pte M. G. GELDARD

Lieut C. R. REID

Cpl A. F. HARTLEY

M H Photo

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[Signature]
21.12.43

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 2/33 Aust Inf Bn were marshalled at 7 Aust Div Marshalling Area for emplaning of tps. Among these were eighteen 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 2/33 and 158 Gen Tpt Coys. These trucks were in the area ear-marked for Marshalling for DURANDS Aerodrome. Photographs annexed to first 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 US 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 & 3 squarely and crashed. These trees are on the downward slope of a small ridge which is shown on Field Sketch marked '0' and is shown as well in the above photos.

Immediately following the crash 2 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 the 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 admitted to hospital and present indications are that most of these will recover. In addition all eleven 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 USA 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, the 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 2/5 AGH and arrangements made by the hospital 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
QX33350	"	NIXON	J.A.	2/33 " " "
NX 18491	"	WORKMAN	R.J.	2/33 " " "
QX 34862	"	SHIELS	R.A.	2/33 " " "
VX 113110	"	McFADZEAN	R.E.	3/33 " " "
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 " " "
QX 7355	"	McGROW	J	2/33 " " "
VX 122632	"	McLEOD	O.K.	2/33 " " "
NX58770	"	HUGHES	E.L.B.	2/33 " " "
VX8615	Cpl	SNOW	S.A.	2/33 " " "
NX15257	A/Cpl	WESTON	W.F.	2/33 " " "
N 256189	Dr	TARANTO	J.V.	158 Aust Gen Tpt
SX 18057	Pte	MILDWATERS	G.J.	2/33 Aust Inf Bn
SX 17640	Pte	MILLER	K.A.G.	2/33 " " "
NX 8932	L/Cpl	PEARSON	R.W.M.	2/33 " " "
VX 91436	Pte	McGARVEY	M	2/33 " " "
DX47747	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 " " "
QX32523	Pte	McGREGOR	D	2/33 " " "
QX 3854	"	SMITH	F.R.	2/33 " " "
SX 18963	O"	LONG	A.C.	2/33 " " "
NX 37094	"	THOMPSON X	J.C.	2/33 " " "

X 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 in question are missing :-

<u>No</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>			<u>Unit</u>		
V-11997	Capt	FERGUSON	J.B.	2/33	Aust	Inf	Bn
WX13761	Pte	WARD	C.L.	2/33	"	"	"
SX17902	"	DONALD	R	2/33	"	"	"
NX95991	"	McDONALD	G	2/33	"	"	"
SX27397	"	REID	R.M.	2/33	"	"	"
NX50797	"	SPEAR	J.S.	2/33	"	"	"
NX2755	"	DARLING	A.W.	2/33	"	"	"
NX97110	"	WHITTLE	I.E.	2/33	"	"	"
NX88068	"	QUINN	J.D.	2/33	"	"	"
QX3124	"	SIMMONS	G.C.	2/33	"	"	"
VX87009	"	FIELDER	W.W.	2/33	"	"	"
NX147063	"	WEBSTER	C.J.	2/33	"	"	"
NX37382	"	SLADE	B.H.	2/33	"	"	"

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

NX5087	Cpl	ROSE	N.J.	2/33	Aust	Inf	Bn
QX3525	Pte	BATTS	C.S.	2/33	"	"	"
NX54083	Sgt	MACKAY	W.W.	2/33	"	"	"
NX137997	Pte	VILLA	G	2/33	"	"	"
VX90997	Pte	ROBINSON	H.D.	2/33	"	"	"
MX33021	L/Cpl	STEELE	A.A.	2/33	"	"	"
NX52095	Cpl	PRICE	E.A.	2/33	"	"	"
NX346042	Pte	MORAN	H.E.	2/33	"	"	"
NX31802	"	CAFE	E.W.K.	2/33	"	"	"
NX99208	"	DANIEL	M.B.	2/33	"	"	"
SX11237	Lieut	BUTROSE	I.K.	2/33	"	"	"
QX34036	Pte	SMITH	C.W.	2/33	"	"	"
NX45423	"	WENHAM	S.G.	2/33	"	"	"
NX6251	"	POCOCK	A.F.	2/33	"	"	"
NX34090	Lieut	McTAGGART	F.H.	2/33	"	"	"
NX12925	Capt	MITCHELL	D.A.	2/33	"	"	"
NX28925	Lieut	SADGROVE	H.C.	2/33	"	"	"
QX3873	Pte z	CONDON	J.	2/33	"	"	"
NX8233 z	Pte	WHITMEE	P.W.	2/33	"	"	"
VX90771	"	CLARKE	C.J.	2/33	"	"	"
NX79625	"	PRESTON	J.	2/33	"	"	"
QX4667	Sgt	CLEARY	C.M.	2/33	"	"	"
NX169474	Pte	McCROME	A.G.E.	2/333	"	"	"
NX96806	Pte	HANCOCK	D.A.	2/33	"	"	"
NX99188	"	McGHIE	G	2/33	"	"	"
NX86395	Cpl	TURNBULL	D.A.	2/33	"	"	"
SX2006	Pte	DUNSTAN	E	2/33	"	"	"
NX85178	"	STUBBS	W.J.	2/33	"	"	"
NX97234	"	BURNETT	C.R.	2/33	"	"	"
NX28758	"	WHITE	K.J.	2/33	"	"	"
QX33214	"	TIDBURY	A.L.	2/33	"	"	"
NX91676	"	WATSON	D.L.	2/33	"	"	"
NX97021	"	OBERG	F.T.	2/33	"	"	"
NX96759	"	WRIGHT	W.G.	2/33	"	"	"
NX98150	"	EVANS	F.T.	2/33	"	"	"
NX43723	"	JOHNSTON	H.T.	2/33	"	"	"
NX86167	"	BYRNES	C.J.	2/33	"	"	"
NX97625	"	SHADE	T	2/33	"	"	"
QX36625	"	FINGLAS	B	2/33	"	"	"
SX17465	"	MILLS	P.H.	2/33	"	"	"
NX54152	"	BUSKELL	N.A.	2/33	"	"	"
NX86126	"	TUMETH	F.G.	2/33	"	"	"
NX19921	"	FERNLEY	H.L.	2/33	Aust	Gen	Tpt
VX80717	"	MARSHALL	D.J.	2/33	Aust	Inf	Bn

<u>No</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Unit</u>
NX92691	Pte	FURNANCE	A 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
VX109882	"	DURIE	F.L. 2/33 " " "
NX3005	"	SHALLGROSS	J 2/33 " " "
NX37326	Cpl	DRANE A.E.A.	A.E.A. 2/33 " " "
NX146015	Pte	HARLEY	W.S. 2/33 " " "
NX97206	"	TRIPP	J.C. 2/33 " " "
NX81163	"	COLLINS	M.W. 2/33 " " "
QX3154	"	HORTON	M.F. 2/33 " " "
SX18075	"	HALFORD	W 2/33 " " "
NX89628	"	BYRON	J.D. 2/33 " " "
NX33644	"	FEWINGS	E.R. 2/33 " " "
NX100776	"	GARNON	F 2/33 " " "
VX125069	"	LILLEY	W.J. 2/33 " " "
QX38693	"	GARRETT	A 2/33 " " "
NX37325	"	CRAWFORD	N.H. 2/33 " " "
SX17638	"	LITHGOW	W.L. 2/33 " " "
NX99084	"	RALSTON	R.F. 2/33 " " "
VX113123	"	CALLANDER	D.A. 2/33 " " "
NX80827	Cpl	HAMILTON	H 2/33 " " "
SX1616	Pte	MUNRO	A.R. 2/33 " " "
VX91283	"	DONOHUE	H 2/33 " " "
NX92130	"	ALEXANDER	W.T. 2/33 " " "
QX24856	L/Cpl	LEWIS	N.E. 2/33 " " "
SX18013	Pte	LING	J.N. 2/33 " " "
NX32267	"	TURNBULL	L.W. 2/33 " " "
QX38521	"	MORGAN	M 2/33 " " "
NX150539	Dr	DONOVAN	E.R. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
QX2252	Cpl	TINNING	W 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
QX29674	Pte	JOSEPH	J.W.A. 2/33 " " "
NX44673	"	MacMURRAY	C.F. 2/33 " " "
VX124806	"	McDERMOTT	J 2/33 " " "
QX29660	"	STUTZ	E.J. 2/33 " " "
NX44040	"	WARING	A.H. 2/33 " " "
NX55437	"	MUSGRAVE	W.A. 2/33 " " "
NX55295	"	ELLIS	F.C. 2/33 " " "
QX38173	"	SWAYN	F.C. 2/33 " " "
NX41651	"	GORMAN	C.H. 2/33 " " "
VX2929	Sgt	BECK	J.T. 2/33 " " "
NX8104	"	CROOKS	W 2/33 " " "
NX45067	A/Cpl	LAING	J.J. 2/33 " " "
SX2307	S/Sgt	HENSCHKE	K.A. 2/33 " " "
NX26936	Pte	GILWEY	A 2/33 " " "
NX122155	"	BULL	C.R. 2/33 " " "
N256180	Dr	SILKMAN	J.A. 158 Aust Gen Tpt
NX97019	Pte	BAILEY	W.E. 2/33 Aust Inf Bn
NX80932	"	TINSON	C.J. 2/33 " " "
NX89529	"	LAWSON	F.P. 2/33 " " "
NX55916	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 casualties.

As to the missing personnel the Court makes the following comments

in connection with three members shown in the list of deaths :-

(a) NX39846 Pte SMALLEY E.J. of 2/33 Aust Inf Bn, was identified at 2/5 AGH 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 AGH on 7 Sep 43 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 2/5 AGH as unidentified but was subsequently identified at 2/5 AGH 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 Maj. 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 2/5 AGH 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 US Army, the Court is of the opinion that only unidentifiable fragments of limbs were taken by the Americans to make up the eleventh 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 eleventh 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 ^{had} 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 JACKSONS Arome. 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 ^{remain} always/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 everyone who was able to do so did what they could to assist the
injured. Considerable presence of mind and initiative on the part
of the members present no doubt contributed largely to minimising
injuries and saving lives.

.....PRESIDENT

.....) MEMBERS

.....)