

70. B

31st March 1937 - 10 a.m.

AT ST. MARTINS HOSPITAL, BRISBANE

SNR SGT KIDDELL - to examine the witness

MR. F.T. CROSS - on behalf of Airlines of Australia Ltd

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JOHN SEYMOUR PROUD, on oath states...

I am a single man, a mining engineer by profession, and at present a patient in St Martins Hospl Ann Street Brisbane.

My home address is 29 Lucinda Avenue, Wahroonga New South Wales.

I remember Friday 19th February 1937. At about 10 a.m. on that date I boarded an aeroplane at Rockhampton en route to Brisbane, and arrived at Archerfield Aerodrome Brisbane at about 12. 40 p.m. the same day. I booked in Sydney about 2 days <sup>before</sup> I left and that included a through passage to Rockhampton and back to Sydney. I booked on the 11th and the passage was for the 15th. I was due to return on the 19th February.

When I arrived at Archerfield I was told there was no room on the 'plane for me, as my name did not appear on the booking list. I made further inquiries there and insisted on travelling on that plane which was due to leave Archerfield at 1 p.m. Eventually I was allowed a seat on the plane. My seat was No. 1 and was situated on the front left hand side

WITNESS LOOKS AT EX. <sup>3</sup> PHOTO OF SEATS OF PLANE AND MARKS WITH AN "O" THE SEAT HE OCCUPIED IN THE PLANE.

By my watch it was 1 o'clock when I boarded the plane.

When I boarded the plane there were some people already on board the plane but I could not say who they were, possibly Westray was one of them. The pilots were not aboard then. While I was sitting in my seat I heard pilot Boyden sorting out the mail and putting it in different compartments and a few minutes after that two of them

came in, Boyden



Boyden first and then Shepherd.

At that time I did not know Boyden or Shepherd. I had flown before with Boyden, just the once - I flew up with him, and possibly I flew with him once before. I flew up with him on the 15th on the trip to Queensland.

*OK* The pilots appeared to me to <sup>be</sup> in perfect health and sobriety. I noticed that Shepherd carried a little bakelite flask on his shoulder.

Pilot Boyden looked just the same then as when he flew up with me from Sydney.

*+* *OK* I think Boyden was a bit worried. He spoke to a ~~shortish~~ <sup>tallish</sup> chap in a brown suit before he left. I don't know who it was - he was a young man. I was not listening to their conversation but from the tone of it I gathered he was a bit perturbed. He mentioned something about the water being pretty bad down around Lismore way. I don't know what he meant.

Shepherd appeared perfectly normal.

I did not hear any other conversation, regarding the weather.  
BY CORONER... I did not hear any conversation regarding the route.

SGT KIDDELL.. I did not have the remotest idea what route the plane was going to take.

I could not say which pilot took the controls. I could see Shepherd through the little door but I could not see Boyden. From what I could see I could not say who took the controls. I could have seen who was at the controls but I did not do so. I did not know any of the other passengers at the time - they were all strangers to me.

At that time I could not say which seats they occupied.

After the pilots got in the plane moved off.

As soon as it got its elevation I looked at my watch and it was 5 past 1. We were then in the air and setting the course south.

The 'plane moved off quite normally. I had travelled that same journey by plane previously.



The plane rose then as it had done on previous occasions. The Stinson gives one no impression of rising. I would say the plane rose to a normal height - I would say it rose to a height of 1500 feet. The plane had not travelled far before it reached that elevation. I could not say how far but there was nothing extraordinary about the performance.

SEN# SGT KIDDELL READS FROM STATEMENT OF CHARLES BONHAM REGARDING THE ELEVATION OF THE PLANE..

WITNESS SAYS... I offer no comment on that statement.

CORONER... He is viewing it from the ground and you are <sup>it</sup> viewing/ from the air.

WITNESS... The weather was alright when we moved off except that the ceiling was about 3000 feet there and we seemed to be hung about midway between the clouds and the ground.

Coming ~~down~~ from Rockhampton it was quite clear ~~ixxwx~~ and coming to Brisbane the cloud bank became increasingly apparent and that was the condition when we left.

It was not raining when we left Brisbane. I thought it would rain at any time but there was actually no rain.

\*There was ~~—~~ wind at Archerfield - there was a strong breeze. There was really nothing extraordinary about the weather when we left-I should say it was satisfactory. After flying for about 20 minutes I had occasion to go to the lavatory, which is back on the starboard side, nearer the tail of the plane.

When I returned I noticed Binstead and Westray.

WITNESS LOOKS AT PHOTO EX 3 AND MARKS THEREON THE POSITIONS OF THE PASSENGERS AS THEY WERE WHEN HE RETURNED FROM THE LAVATORY.... I know where Binstead and Westray were sitting but I am not sure of the two on the right.

I never spoke to either of the passengers then.

I do not know the country over which we were flying at the time but I observed it pretty closely.

To the best of my knowledge we were flying at 1000 feet or under, in relation to the ground.



I noticed a series of farms on the way, the last one terminating with bush ahead of it. The altitude had decreased in relation to the ground. As we got further south the altitude seemed to decrease.

I attributed it to this reason, that at the time I mentioned we were passing through cloud and were then at the bottom of the clouds and I assumed that it was his course to keep just under the cloud bank

The plane was rolling then.

After we passed the last farm house the weather conditions were just a continuance of what we had passed through, and the ground then commenced to rise rapidly and we had to ~~skreak~~ enter the cloud then. It was raining when we entered the cloud. I did not have any idea of the ~~reaka~~ velocity of the wind.

I did not notice the plane drop into an air pocket. The plane was bumping, but not unduly, not enough to warrant putting on the safety strap. I was not perturbed about it.

Immediately he entered the cloud he started to climb.

*gok* By the sound of the engines they <sup>gave the impression they</sup> were pulling hard and the speed slackened. By the sound of the engines they appeared to be normal - they appeared to be doing their utmost.

The plane did not appear to change course but the starboard wing went down and gave the impression that he changed course west - he gave me the impression of banking west, but it was just a bad roll - he did not bank.

I did not look out of the windows much at that point.

I had already got down to a book but the motion of the plane disturbed me and I was not reading much and I was not looking much.

Before that I glanced up and saw Pilot Shepherd and I could see his face turned towards pilot Boyden and he was laughing at the time. As he was not perturbed it did ease me.

*gok* A few moments afterwards I glanced out the window and I saw the tree tops just a few feet below us with the ground sloping steeply on the starboard side, that is looking ~~South~~ <sup>South</sup>.



The thought ~~then~~ flashed through ~~my~~ mind that we were in for trouble here - that we were in for a crash. Next instant we did crash.

I have no vivid recollection of the crash itself beyond that there were three impacts and the last one was the most ~~xt~~ violent - it threw me down to the floor.

I struggled up immediately and spun around and I felt my right leg paralysed. I must have looked forward then and saw the door of the cockpit swinging slightly ajar and I saw ~~Shepherd~~, quite inert, and looking slightly towards Boyden. There was no movement - by that I would say he was quite unconscious ~~and~~ <sup>or</sup> dead.

I could not see Boyden.

*all*  
*JK* The door opens with the hinges on ~~Shepherd's~~ <sup>Boyden's</sup> side.

I looked to the rear of the plane then with the object of making towards the door but I noticed black smoke there, and then the next thought that flashed through my mind was to try the windows.

I did not notice any fire at the forepart of the plane.

I looked through the window and noticed that the port engine was intact on the wing and was in flame.

By CORONER. I saw smoke at the rear and flames at the port engine.

SGT KIDDELL.... I noticed that the ~~second~~ window on the port side had been spring sufficiently from its mountings to insert my hand.

BY CORONER.... I was then on the port side and I had just sufficient room to get my hand under the window and wrench it away.

SGT KIDDELL... I then got out as quickly as I could through that window

BY CORONER... I have no idea of the size of the window, but it appeared to be slightly oblong.

SGT KIDDELL..... When I got through the window I crawled along the wing between the port motor and the plane and I lay



on there for a moment, and then Binstead poked his head out of the same window as I had crawled through.

I assisted to drag him through. He was very difficult to get out, too, because he was a big man and the window was small. I remember I urged him to hurry through as there may have been others inside.

Westray remained inside and we got him through without any trouble - he was a much smaller man than Binstead.

I looked inside the plane through the window and I saw two bodies. I heard two or three groans. There appeared to be one man on the middleseat on the right hand side and there was a man on the rear seat on the right hand side. There were two or three groans and then all was silent. At this time the flames from the engine were getting unbearable.

I did not notice any movement from either of the passengers on the other side of the plane. I could not see if they had any injuries, as the plane was full of flame and smoke. It would have been impossible for either of us to have gone in the plane again - the cabin was full of flame

I then dropped from the wing to the ground, a distance of four or five feet, and Westray assisted me to a point about 25 or 30 feet from the plane. About 5 minutes later Binstead appeared and we simply sat down and watched the plane burn. I noticed the time then was 1. 45 p.m.

BY CORONER... That would be about 5 minutes after I got out of the plane.

SGT KIDDELL... It was raining at that time, not heavily. There was no wind where we were. There was wind overhead - I could see the clouds moving.

I noticed that there were clouds below us in the valley - it was misty there.

I watched the plane burn right out - I suppose it burnt for half an hour altogether. The flames went about 150 feet up. About half an hour afterwards the weather lifted slightly and visibility improved.

I questioned Westray and Binstead on their injuries, if they had any, and Binstead said he had a knock on the side of the head, and Westray had the backs of his hands skinned, the skin was removed by burning, and the ~~back~~ seat of his pants was burnt out, but I don't think he was burnt there as badly as on the hands. The seat of the trousers was hanging down and I could see the lining. I think he would be scowched there. Binstead complained that his legs were not right.

They seemed to have gone numb.

As Binstead appeared to be the most intact of the party I suggested he go for a stroll to the edge of the valley to see if he could see the farmhouse that we had passed over. He went and he came back about an hour or so later, and he said that he did not see the farm house that I spoke of, but that he had seen all sorts of things, such as farms with cattle grazing on them but when he went over to them they turned out to be bushes.

When he came back he seemed to be quite alright and seemed to have got over the shock.

I discoursed with Westray most of that time, over who he was - he told me he had a young wife in Sydney, and it was just a general conversation.

When Binstead came back both Binstead and Westray set about making a fire. Everything was wet, and they eventually succeeded, and this was kept going for the greater part of the night. Heavy rain towards morning put this out and we just waited for morning.

In the meantime Westray and Binstead assisted me back to a position near the plane.

I had already supervised a rough splint for my leg. They were too short. I could not get the long ones that I required and they dug up a piece of metal from the plane and made a sort of a cradle for my leg.

Next morning at about 6.30 Westray was walking about a bit and he said "I see a farm down there with sheep, on it" Binstead told him of his experience of the night before, and that



and that he was wrong, and not to go.

Westray appealed to me but I was not in a position to see.  
BY CORONER. The visibility was good then. It was still misty  
but the weather was lifting.

WITNESS... Then Westray departed, with the understanding  
that now and again he would call out. We heard two or three  
calls and then no more.

BY CORONER.... Before he left he said " I see a farm down  
there. I'll get help." He said " If there's nothing there  
I'll keep on going until I get assistance "

He appeared in his right senses but I don't think he could  
have been convinced. His mind was made up to go. He was  
quite rational.

Shortly afterwards Binstead went down the Valley for water.  
From then on till O'Reilly came we simply sat there and  
waited. We discussed whether I should try to get down  
or part of the way down, but sound in the Valley seemed to be  
muffled and would not carry far.

I sang out every hour or so. I was listening intently  
all the time. I don't suppose I slept four or five hours  
all the time I was there.

The leg pained me at times. I would get settled down and then  
move the position and it would pain.

My ear was attuned to listening.

We both felt quite sure all the time that someone would turn  
up, until O'Reilly turned up.

BY CORONER  
On the day following the crash I heard two planes in the morning  
about 8 o'clock or half past 8. They were behind the range  
and we could not see them. Everything was so saturated  
by the rain that we could not light a fire.

That was on the Saturday.

I heard the mail planes fairly regularly after that, but did  
not see them.

Our plane was pointing south east and these planes appeared  
to be north-easterly from us - that is where the sound



appeared to come from.

We had fires going every day for about 4 days.

It cleared up and we got the fires going again but we burnt all the available timber around there and it took too much out of us to get any more to keep them going,

On the Thursday a plane appeared almost overhead about 2 o'clock or 2.30 and came back again. Visibility was quite good and I thought he would see where the trees had been burnt. Unfortunately the day before we had just used our last match.

Nothing else happened then till O'Reilly turned up.

O'Reilly came on to us about 4 o'clock.

He said "I heard your voice about three miles away", and pointing to a hill he said "away over there".

He said he came round the ridges. He was just a few hundred yards away <sup>we first heard him</sup> when. Binstead said he heard his voice about a mile away before that.

O'Reilly was very agitated.

He unpacked his bag and made us a cup of tea and I then said "Well, look, its 4.30 now and you <sup>had</sup> better make your way down, and make the most of the hour of daylight left".

He got up and went almost immediately.

He left with the statement that he would have 50 men and the Doctor up first thing in the morning.

They duly came along and carried us down.

I heard O'Reilly say "If I'd only known I could have been here six days ago".

If Binstead had gone away I certainly could not have carried on.

We did not go near the coast on the journey, not to my knowledge/ We certainly did not go over Currumbin.

I have formed an opinion as to the cause of the disaster/

I think it was due to an error in judgment on the part of one or other of the pilots, in this respect, that there came a time when he had to enter that cloud, and from the time he entered he was climbing all the time to get over that range



It seems fairly definite that if he had made that decision earlier we would have cleared that range. I am not sure that the bad weather affected his climbing. I would not like to say that that was the cause of the loss of elevation, and furthermore, in the weather prevailing I should say it would be sound flying to give the mountains a wider berth, to have a greater margin of elevation.

BY CORONER...There is an instrument in the plane to show the height he was flying, which would be subject to barometric ~~conditions~~ pressure. No questions by Mr Cross.

BY CORONER..... When I got off the wing I fell straight down on my feet. I think that is when I pushed the bone through the skin. That caused the compound fracture and also the contusion. The Doctor said it was probably a fracture at first.

I had nothing to eat during that period.

Water was the main thing.

That flask held about a quart and a half. We had about a gallon of water each during the whole of that time.

We had no undue desire for food, not after the second or third day.

I felt the cold. On a fine day when in the sun I became very hot and when out of the sun I got very cold.

*OK* I was <sup>weakening</sup> ~~weaker~~ physically.

In my case the privation ~~and~~ suffering was intensified by the pain in my leg.

I think the way O'Reilly and the Stevens brothers organised that rescue party in such a short time was remarkable.

They had to cut a path right through and everything went without a hitch. It was certainly an amazing exhibition of organization.

There is no doubt that I will be able to put my foot to the ground.

*OK* I was not aware of any <sup>nervous</sup> ~~feverish~~ reaction during the whole of the time.



BY CORONER...

When I was out at the office at the Aerodrome I heard some conversation about picking up some passengers at Lismore. They rang up the office in Brisbane while I was there. Pilot Boyden was there.

When they said I had not booked they said the plane was a full plane.

I told them I insisted on going and shortly afterwards I was told I could get a seat.

I heard someone say that four passengers were to be picked up at Lismore. I don't know who said that but I think it was said in the presence of the pilot. I had that opinion anyway. Yes, it was said in the presence of the pilot ~~afk~~ in the office. It was when they were ringing up the Brisbane office in connection with my seat, and then one of the officials came to me and said I could get aboard and I assumed that one of the pilots would leave the plane at Lismore and a passenger could take the extra pilot's seat. That created in my mind the opinion that they were going to Lismore. Every time I have travelled on that route I have travelled through Lismore. That is the only way I have down to Sydney, by that route.

*John L. Proud.*

TAKEN and SWORN before me  
 at *St. Martins Hospital*  
 at the Coroner's Court, Brisbane,  
 this.....*thirty first*.....day  
 of.....*March*.....19*37*

*W. Kealey*  
 CORONER