



SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



Larkhill

Alexander HEWETSON 18th July, 1913

Another Flying Disaster

Another aviation fatality has been added to the list of disasters on Salisbury Plain, by the accident that occurred to Major Hewetson, who, while flying at Larkhill early yesterday (Thursday) morning, dropped to earth and was instantaneously killed. A sad feature of the case is that the Major, who was in the Indian Army, and was learning flying during a stay in this country on leave, had completed his course of instruction at the Bristol School, and it was while performing the test that would have secured him his pilot's certificate, that he came to grief. The mishap is attributed to an error of judgement in taking too sharp a turn in the air, and the machine, coming to a stop, fell suddenly. So great was the impact that the petrol tank burst, and the aeroplane was instantly ablaze, and it was with some difficulty that the unfortunate officer, already dead, was extricated from the burning wreckage.

The inquest was held at Bulford Camp Hospital last (Thursday) evening by the South Wilts Coroner (Mr F. H. Trethowan).

Evidence of identification was given by Second-Lieutenant Archer, of the Royal Field Artillery, stationed at Bulford Camp, a nephew, who stated that his uncle was 44 years of age.

Walter Hugh Garnett, a pupil at the Bristol School, stated that just before six that morning he went out on the monoplane on which Major Hewetson subsequently came to grief. It was examined before he went out, and his flight was successful. He had no difficulty with it except that the engine missed once or twice, but when he came down that was put right. Major Hewetson went out on it about half-an-hour afterwards, and successfully made a short trip. He then went up again, towards Fargo. He made a fairly wide turn and then, when over a valley, turned very sharply and "banked," but apparently he could not recover, and the machine dived and went down straight. As a pupil the Major flew very well, and had been flying by himself for some time.

Mr Julierot, one of the managers of the school, said Major Hewetson had been a pupil for about two months and would have finished his course of instruction that day. He considered it quite safe to trust him with the machine, because he had been out on it for a long time. The weather was favourable and twenty-two flights had been made. Immediately after the accident he went up himself, over the spot where the mishap occurred to see if there was anything wrong with the air, but there was nothing wrong.

Asked by the Coroner whether the Major's age – forty four – was rather late in life to take on aviation, Mr Julierot said he had come to the conclusion that it was not advisable for a man of that age to take it on at all. You have come to that conclusion since the accident? Yes, I wondered whether it was, but now I am pretty sure, because of the experience I have had in other countries.

Continuing, the witness said that he would like to point out that the machines were tested before every flight by the pilots, and this machine had been entirely overhauled. Describing what happened just before the accident, witness said the second turn of the monoplane was so sharp that it would have almost have turned on its own length. There was no particular reason for attempting a sharp turn, and in his own opinion it was an error of judgment. The turn was sharper than an experienced man would attempt, but probably a more experienced man would have been able to recover. He went to the spot immediately after the accident. As soon as the monoplane touched the ground it was smashed to atoms, the petrol tank burst and the wreckage was all in flames. They could see that the Major was dead, and there was reason to believe he was dead before the fire.

Questioned as to whether the monoplane was as safe as other types of machine, the witness replied in the affirmative, and added that such a mistake as was made would bring any machine down. As soon as the machine lost headway it must fall.

A juryman asked whether the machine was out on Sunday night, because a monoplane then passed overhead, and he saw the propeller stop when the machine was in the air. He thought that was a defect.

The witness explained that that would not be a defect, but the propeller would be stopped in order to land. The propeller did not stop just before the accident but the machine came down with the engine full on.

Second-Lieut. Archer questioned the witness as to whether, after the monoplane had been overhauled, the control lever was in exactly the same place as it was before, and, in reply, Mr Julierot said he believed it was, but added that he did not think it would make any difference if it were not.

Mr Garnett, recalled, and questioned by Mr Archer, said he did not notice any difference in the position of the control lever.

Cecil Howard Pixton, pilot at the Bristol School, agreed with the previous witness as to what caused the fall. Collyns Pizey, joint manager of the Bristol School, gave evidence that the position of the control lever was not altered during the repairs.

Naval-Surgeon Hitch, a pupil at the school, said he was flying that morning, and he thought the weather was very nice. He saw the accident, and immediately went to the spot and saw the Major pulled from the burning mechanism. He came to the conclusion that death was instantaneous, and was due to the fall.

The Coroner, in summing up, said the occurrence was one of those sad events of which, happily, there had not been many on the Plain. The jury would not have much difficulty in determining the cause of death, but if they found that there had been any culpable negligence attaching to anyone they would say so. He thought they would agree that the persons whose duty it was to overhaul and inspect these machines before they were taken out for flying should be most careful, but there was nothing in the evidence to show that there had been any negligence in this case.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death."

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