

## QANTAS FATAL CRASH IN 1927 MARS RECORD



Wreckage of DH9C G-AUED after crash at Tambo QLD

The first fatality for QANTAS, after five years of operations, occurred at 0930 on 24 March 1927. A telegram from the Postmaster at Tambo to the Postmaster-General at Brisbane read:

*Aerial mail from Charleville passed over town at 9.30 and appeared to be in difficulties, just clearing the trees on the Barcoo River. When within 100 yards of the landing ground the 'plane took a nose dive to earth and crashed. It was carrying two passengers and the pilot. One passenger and the pilot were killed and the other passenger was seriously injured.*

In fact Allan D Davidson, who was making his first flight as pilot on this part of the run, died within five minutes of the crash, and one passenger, Mr A W N Bell, of Winton, died within half-an-hour of the accident, while the second passenger, Mr W R Donaldson, of Camooweal, was seriously injured. Both his arms were broken, and he was badly knocked about. He was taken to the Tambo hospital where he died at 1400.

The DH9C G-AUED was bound from Charleville to Tambo, its first stop, with the contract aerial mail. The Charleville mechanic, George Herriman, made his usual thorough detailed inspection of the aircraft that morning, and handed Pilot Davidson his clearance ticket, passing the aircraft as in perfect order. The petrol and oil tanks were full, and, after the usual test of the engines, the pilot made a textbook take off at 0600 and circled one and a-half times over the town to gain elevation. To the idea of the residents, he was flying at a much lower altitude than the practice of Pilot Moody.

The scheduled time from Charleville to Tambo was 1 hour 25 minutes. The aircraft approached the landing ground at 0930, two hours later than scheduled. Davidson had landed at some point as evidenced by the black mud on his shoes and on the tail skid. Whether this was because he was lost and needed to orientate himself, or due to a mechanical issue, could not be established. All that is known is that the aircraft spent 35 minutes on the ground. The consensus was that Davidson had landed in the vicinity of Oakwood.

Various reliable witnesses stated that the aircraft was about half a mile to the west of its usual course and approached the landing ground at a height of about 300 feet over the Barcoo river. They further state the engine stopped and the aircraft immediately nose-dived to the ground a few hundred yards

from the landing ground. It was clear the aircraft had stalled due to the pilot not maintaining sufficient airspeed, and it was flying at a low altitude giving no opportunity for the pilot to recover.

The pilot was an experienced aviator, having been trained at Point Cook school, and afterwards employed there for about three years as an instructor. He had been over the route on three occasions with other pilots in order to familiarise himself with the mail run, but the flight on 24 March was the first occasion on which he had been in charge of the aircraft on that route. On the down trip on Monday 21 March, Davidson had landed at Barcaldine instead of Blackall.

The newly-formed Aircraft Accident Investigation Committee (AAIC) made a flying start by holding its first meeting at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne on 25 May 1927. *AAIC Report number 1* covered this accident to DH.9C G-AUED on 24 March 1927. The Report stated that this was the first fatal accident suffered by Qantas; the aircraft stalled at a low height on final approach and its three occupants were killed on impact.

The fuselage and engine were so badly damaged that the aircraft was written off as a total loss.

### **The Mail**

The mail route was from Charleville to Cloncurry via Tambo, Blackall, Longreach, Winton and McKinlay, and had been operating without major incident since 1922. In fact, the previous month in the February 1927 *QANTAS Gazette*, Hudson Fysh had written:

*Total company mileage all without injuries to personnel or passengers – 449,008.*

Whilst the Tambo Postmaster was one of the first persons at the scene of the crash, his main concern was for the occupants, and every effort was made to save the second passenger. When everything possible had been done, the mail from Charleville was recovered from the badly damaged fuselage, and taken to Tambo Post Office. Fortunately the aircraft did not catch fire after the crash and the mail was undamaged.

Whether the mail was held for the next northbound flight on 31 March is not recorded. **The author not seen a cover which can be attributed to this incident.**



QANTAS DH9C G-AUED



Bill and Edna Bell at Crash Site of DH9C G-AUED, Tambo QLD March 1927: *Tambo Telegraph Museum*

#### References:

- Aircraft Accident Investigation Committee: *Report No. 1: Accident to DH.9C G-AUED at Tambo QLD on 24 March 1927*, Melbourne, 1927
- Fysh, Hudson: *Qantas Rising*, Angus & Robertson, London, 1965, pp195, 275, 280, 285
- Job, Macarthur: *Air Crash: The Story of How Australia's Airways Were Made Safe, Vol 1*, Aerospace Publications, Weston Creek, ACT, 1991, p20
- Keper, J L: *Aircraft Accident Investigation at Aeronautical Research Laboratory, the First 50 Years*, Department of Defence, Defence Science and Technology Organisation Aeronautical Research Laboratory, AR-007-134, General Document 37, DSTO, Fisherman's Bend, Victoria, 1993
- Nierinck, Henri L: *Courrier Recupere: Recovered Mail, Vol 1 1910-1936*, Self-published, Ostend, Belgium, 1992, p141
- Parnell, Neville & Boughton, Trevor: *Flypast, A Record of Aviation in Australia*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra ACT 2601, 1988, pp43, 47
- Brisbane Courier*: 25Mar
- Longreach Leader*: 25Mar