

## 18 DIE AS DC3 CRASHES AFTER TAKE-OFF IN WA. SOME MAIL RECOVERED



Operating the Perth-Carnarvon leg of the MacRobertson Miller Perth-Darwin regular service, the Douglas DC3 VH-MME *Fitzroy* crashed immediately after take-off from Guildford (Perth) Airport on at 02:14 on 2 July 1949. Captain William G Norman, First Officer Henry J Vassie, Supernumerary Captain Eric G Langford, Hostess Sylvia J Seymour and all 14 passengers were killed.

The early morning departure time was to enable the twice-weekly service to reach Darwin in a single day via Carnarvon, Port Hedland, Derby and Wyndham. The purpose was to connect with the Qantas Sydney to London service being operated by Lockheed Constellations.

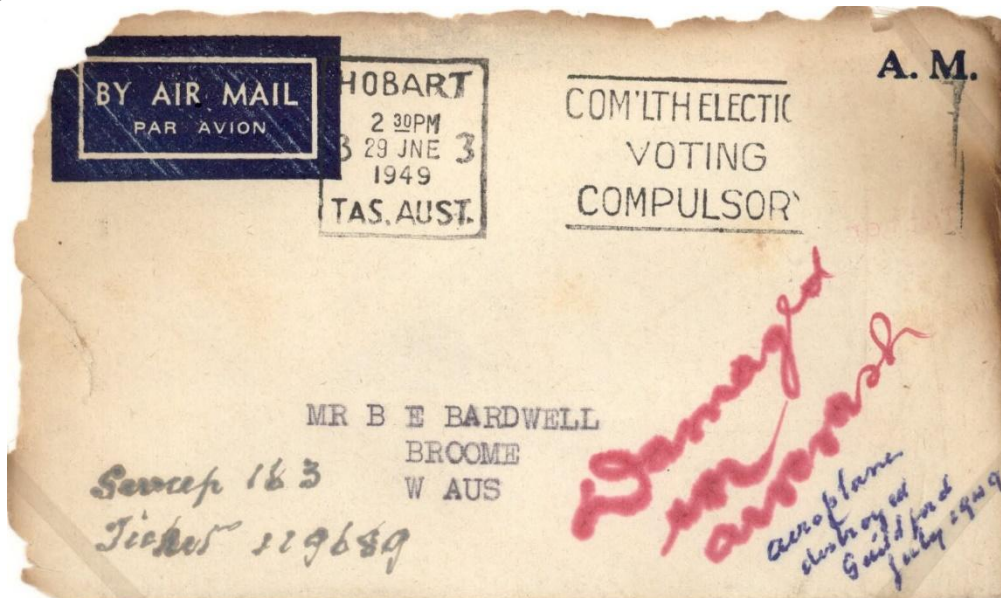
The loading of the DC3, and distribution, was critical. In addition to passenger's luggage there was a consignment of 2,800 lbs of freight which was distributed between the rear luggage locker and the first two rows of seats on the port side. When Senior Despatch Officer Mason examined the load sheet, he found the aircraft to be overloaded. Captain Norman instructed that 2 bags of freight and a parcel weighing 102 lbs be removed from between the passenger seats.

The initial take-off phase was normal, the DC3 passed the end of the runway at about 50 feet and started its climb out, retracting the undercarriage. In the control tower Aerodrome Control Officer Dyson heard a sudden high-pitched surge of power, and the landing light beams flick over as though the port wing had dropped. VH-MME then appeared to stall at about 500 feet, then dive steeply, turning through 180 degrees as though in a spin. This was followed by an explosion and a sheet of flame when the aircraft hit the ground.

The crash occurred less than one mile from the end of the runway and the aerodrome fire truck was on the scene within minutes. But nothing could be done. It took an hour to put out the flames.

An Air Court of Inquiry commenced on 12 December and concluded 8 days later. Mr Justice Wolff in his summary of the findings stated that VH-MME had crashed after take-off as a result of a stall *which took the aircraft out of the control of the operating crew*. Its tail-heavy condition was *a possible contributing factor in the stall and in preventing the crew from righting the plane*. The cause of the stall is *not established by the evidence*.

## The Mail



Cancelled **HOBART 230PM 29 JNE 1949 TAS. AUST** and bearing manuscript notations:  
*Damaged in aircrash and aeroplane destroyed Guildford July 1949*

**This is the only surviving item of mail recorded**

Harry Jones, occupant of a cabin adjacent the crash site, being woken by the crash, ran out and opened the door to the rear compartment of the tail section. He succeeded in dragging out two mail bags and few parcels of freight

A total of 1,951 items of mail were salvaged from the 4,161 items on board. No cachets were applied.