

## Inquiry starts into helicopter tragedy

C.T. August 29, 1969



THE two pilots who were in the crash. On the left is Mr. Bailey, and on the right, Staff Sgt. Cull.—Army picture.

**A MILITARY board of inquiry this week carried out its investigation into the cause of the helicopter tragedy at Christchurch Regatta on Saturday. The investigation began almost immediately after the mid-air collision and on Tuesday the board opened its proceedings with detailed eye witness reports.**

The following day the board questioned the maintenance crew and was given technical evidence about the condition of the two helicopters. The proceedings have now been adjourned until after the inquest on the dead pilot, which has been fixed for September 26. The inquest was opened and adjourned until this date by county coroner Mr. H. P. Roe on Tuesday.

The pilot was Graham Victor (Bill) Bailey, aged 31, of Shakespeare Road, Stratford Sub Castle, Salisbury, a civilian pilot instructor at the Middle Wallop Army camp, headquarters of the "Blue Eagles" display team.

He died in the burning wreckage of his Sioux helicopter when it bounced off a roof and fell on its side after colliding 300 feet up with another helicopter in the team. The other pilot, Staff Sergeant Michael Cull (35) of Married Quarters, Middle Wallop, Wiltshire, escaped with minor injuries when his helicopter hit the ground 50 yards away.

Three people were slightly injured by flying debris which also caused minor damage to the other two helicopters.

The pilots of these two, Capt. Michael Perry and Sgt. Peter Morrish, immediately landed in the field next to the Priory School and ran to the scene of the crash. Also there was Staff Sgt. Ian Jarvis, the flight artificer in charge of the ground crew, Red Cross workers and some of the regatta crowd but no one could do anything to help Mr. Bailey.

The crash was seen by thousands of people at the regatta. They had just watched the second of two displays given by the Blue Eagles over land on the opposite side of the river. The helicopters, which had passed within 12 feet of each other during the show, lined up for their final "bow" to the waving crowd, flew towards Hengistbury Head and regrouped into a fairly tight diamond formation.

The team, in this formation, passed over part of the crowd on its way back to Middle Wallop. The two collided almost immediately after passing the crowd. Mr. Bailey's aircraft fell first—onto the roof of two terraced houses in Whitehall. Witnesses said it was beginning to break up as it fell.

Staff Sgt. Cull apparently still had some control and was able to place his machine on to a pair of trees to break its fall.

As it landed on the garden wall of the house at the corner of Whitehall and Princess Avenue, he jumped clear and ran down the road. He was picked up immediately by the regatta's Red Cross ambulance. He was taken to Boscombe Hospital and released the same evening after treatment for facial injuries. He was later discovered to have a fractured rib.

The three others injured by flying debris from the helicopters were not detained at Boscombe Hospital. They were Barrie Baucia, of Harman House, Kent Street, Southampton; Alan Light, of Kingsclere Avenue, Western, Southampton, and Bertram Smith, of West Winterslow, Salisbury.

The Red Cross first aid post at the regatta, manned by volunteers from the Hants 9 and the Hants 196 detachments, of Christchurch, treated a number of people in the crowd for shock after the crash.



This picture shows the helicopter which burned out within a few feet of Nos. 6 and 7, Whitehall, after damaging their roofs.

There was a very loud bang, and flames shot across the sky. Then something fell in flames off the edge of the roof into the garden. I ran to the front of the house as the ceiling came in," she told the CT.

Her father, Mr. Wilfred Morris, rushed to the back of the house and opened the door, only to be met by a huge sheet of flame. The helicopter, he said, was burning on its side about three feet away.

"I couldn't see if there was anyone in the wreckage because of the flames. By the time the fire brigade got to the helicopter, it was practically burnt out."

The dead man was later found on one of the aircraft's fuel tanks, which had split open. The other fuel tank had been exploded away on impact, and finished up further down the garden. It was the fact that the helicopter was on its side that stopped the first tank from being exploded away from it.

The roof of Mr. Morris's house, and that of the next house in the terrace, 6, Whitehall, were severely damaged by the helicopter, which landed on a motor cycle in the garden of No. 6.

Mr. Edward Grant, of 6, Whitehall, didn't see the helicopter as it hit his house. He was in the front lounge of the house and saw the second helicopter as it came down across the road.

"I saw the pilot run from this helicopter. I went out and caught hold of him and brought him into the front garden, where he collapsed on the path. The ambulance arrived almost immediately and took him away."

He went back to the house and discovered the flaming wreckage of the other helicopter. Afterwards he found the remains of the motor cycle he had bought his 16-year-old son Timothy only that day.

The owner of the house in whose garden the other helicopter fell. Mr. Sam Brown, was returning home from a walk with his wife and their visitors when the crash happened.

He rushed towards his home and saw the helicopter on his garden wall. "There were bits everywhere, all over the garden. I saw it a few moments after the pilot got out. He had a very lucky escape."

### *Mayor launches appeal to help family*

THE Mayor of Christchurch, Mr. Hubert Bourke, on Tuesday launched an appeal to help the widow of the dead pilot, Mrs. Tina Bailey, and her six-years-old son.

He and members of the appeal committee, Ald. Ken Smith, Ald. James Bell and Coun. Maurice Lynk, regatta secretary, went to Pontins on Wednesday evening to appeal for donations from the holidaymakers who saw the crash. They collected £31.

Sister Linda Caines, the nursing superintendent in charge of the post, paid tribute to the work of the volunteers. "They worked wonderfully," she said.

The ambulance was off from the quay immediately, with cadets and Red Cross workers, to the scene of the crash, arriving in Whitehall as the second aircraft came down.

Quick thinking by Mr. Bob Jarvis, who was operating the public address system, helped to stop the panic among the crowd. "This is a police announcement. Everybody stay in the enclosure," he shouted over the Tannoy.

The police commended him later for this announcement. Said Mr. Jarvis later: "Everyone was upset about the accident. It was a question of trying to stop the panic. I said it was a police announcement to create a greater impact and stop people leaving the quay and getting in the way of the fire engines and ambulances."

As the first helicopter (Mr. Bailey's) came down, it was apparently already breaking up, said Staff Sgt. Jarvis. Miss Susan Morris (22) of 6, Whitehall, was in the back bedroom of her home when the aircraft fell on to the roof.

"It all happened so quickly, I was so frightened.

The fund launched by the Mayor, called the "Mayor's Helicopter Disaster Appeal" is open until September 8, and donations should be sent to the Mayor's Parlour, Town Hall, Christchurch. All contributions will be acknowledged.

Said the Mayor: "There must be many people, both from the borough and outside, who saw the display and I feel sure that many people would like to have the opportunity of showing their sympathy."

The Mayor, with the two aldermen and Coun. Lynk and Mr. S. G. Trowbridge, Christchurch Regatta committee chairman, will be attending the funeral this morning (Friday) at Over Wallop Parish Church. A wreath has also been sent on behalf of the borough.

Mr. Bailey will be buried with full military honours at Tidworth Military Cemetery afterwards.

The Mayor has sent messages of sympathy to the widow and to the CO of Army Aviation Headquarters, Middle Wallop. No words, he said, could express fully the horror and concern at the "unfortunate, tragic incident."

## BACK IN ACTION

THE Blue Eagles, after missing only one show — at Lydd, Kent, this weekend — will be back again in action next Wednesday, when they will give a display at the Mid-Somerset Show.

There will be four helicopters in the team to complete the remaining 14 engagements of the Blue Eagles for this year.

A new member of the team has been brought from Germany to replace for a time Staff Sgt. Michael Cull, who has a broken rib and facial injuries.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

The display team was formed in April this year and has to date completed 60 demonstrations at about 30 shows.

Mr. Bailey, the coach for the team, worked for Bristows Ltd., the company which had the contract for basic pilot training at Middle Wallop.

## CRASH DAMAGE: WHO WILL PAY?

The Ministry of Defence on Monday gave the go-ahead to owners of property damaged by the crash to put repairs in hand, although it has still not been decided whether the bills will be the responsibility of the Ministry or of the regatta's insurers.

The regatta committee insured against public liability in the event of an accident during the display to the tune of £250,000— a Ministry of Defence regulation. One of the tasks of the Board of Inquiry at Middle Wallop is to decide whether the damage is the Ministry's liability or the insurers. If the display had finished, the Ministry is likely to be responsible

---

## HELICOPTERS "COULD HAVE CRASHED ON CROWD" INQUEST JURY TOLD Pilot Died by "misadventure"

C.T. October 3, 1969

CRITICISM of the flying over the crowd of the army's Blue Eagles helicopter display team Christchurch Regatta in August was made at an inquest in Christchurch on Friday into the death of one of the pilots who died after his helicopter was in a mid-air collision with another helicopter flown by a member of the four-man team.

Criticism was made by Pc Ian Trevor Millis, of Heytesbury Road, Southbourne, of the Dorset and Bournemouth Constabulary, who is stationed at Boscombe, who saw the crash while off duty at the Regatta.

He told the jury that in his own personal opinion, the helicopters should not have passed over the crowd—"a collision could have occurred directly over the heads of the crowd with a considerable loss of civilian life resulting."

The jury returned a verdict that the 31-year-old pilot involved— Mr. Graham Victor (Bill) Bailey, of Shakespeare Road, Stratford-Sub-Castle, Salisbury — died by misadventure.

Opening the resumed inquest, the coroner, Mr. H. P. Roe, told the jury that there was no doubt that the two helicopters had collided in the air. The helicopters team, which finished its second display at about 8.10 pm, was flying off in a diamond formation. The leader, flying in the northerly position, was giving the instructions. Two other helicopters, flying on the east and the west of the leader were slightly higher and the man at the back "in the box" as it was described, was flying still higher.

## DROP

The coroner said that from the evidence of a bystander it appeared that the machine in the box— flown by Sgt. Michael Cull, who was injured in the crash— appeared to drop and in dropping the tips of the rotors touched those of Mr. Bailey's aircraft. One of the rotors was broken and both aircraft went into a lot of vibration and out of control, eventually crashing.

Sgt. Cull, of the Army Air Corps of Middle Wallop, said he had been a member of the Blue Eagles' team since it was formed. The team normally consisted of five helicopters and he always flew as number five, and when the team flew in diamond formation he always flew in the "box".

He told the jury that at the end of the second display the team was in extended line facing the crowd, then they flew at a low level to the south to get into formation. He kept station by forming on the leader. He could see the machines to the west and east and they appeared to be in normal position.

Sgt. Cull said that the height of the machines was staggered to avoid the downrush from the rotors of the aircraft in front. "I was about six feet above the helicopters to the east and west."

"After getting into formation," he continued, "I heard a violent bang followed by a violent yaw and dive to the right by my aircraft.

"My aircraft began to vibrate severely and I got the impression that I was spinning to the right. Because of the vibration I could not see clearly beneath me. I took certain action which slowed the spin and reduced the vibration, and I could then see I was about 100 feet above the ground and heading for a group of houses. I saw an open garden and dived towards it swaying violently to reduce speed and I avoided the houses in front of me."

After landing he got out of his aircraft which was on fire and noticed an orange glow to his left, ran into the road and tripped over something. He was going back to his aircraft when he was restrained.

## 'IT'S ME'

"During the descent the leader, Captain Michael Perry, said over the radio: "I heard a bang did anyone else hear it?" I think I replied: 'It's me'. I did not know my colleague had gone down.

"My impression was that I had been hit by Mr. Bailey's aircraft, but during the descent I thought I must have had a tail rotor failure." He said that the spin to the right and the yaw were symptoms of this.

He said that he had been flying for four and a half years and had a total of 1,300 hours flying time: 1,100 had been on Sioux helicopters. Two hundred hours flying time had been with the Blue Eagles team. He had never had an accident before.

Mr. A. Brunner, counsel for the Regatta Committee, asked Sgt. Cull if the departure was part of the display: "No, we had finished with the display and were on our way home." he replied.

A member of the jury asked how many civilian pilots were in the team, and Sgt. Cull said that Mr. Bailey had been the only one. He was also the team's coach and had been in the team last year—"he was mad keen to be in the team this year," he said.

Sgt. Cull, answering another jurymen, said that he had been informed there was no engine failure with his helicopter.

Pc Millis told the jury that he was standing near the bandstand to watch the display. After it had finished the helicopters passed directly over the heads of the crowd at a height of about 300 feet, heading in a northerly direction.

As they passed over him they were in line abreast and just beginning to move into the diamond formation. "About 100 yards past me the rear-most pilot appeared to have engine trouble in so much as the note of the engine faltered and the helicopter dropped about four-six feet.

"The blades of his rotor shattered. The helicopters fell quickly. I did not see the impact with the ground as my view was masked by houses.

Det. Con. Malcolm Swarbrick of the Bournemouth and Dorset Constabulary, who lives at Heath Wood Road, Winton, also watching the display near the bandstand, said the helicopters flew over the crowd at about 50 feet in a northerly direction.

"I turned to watch them go, they were about 200 yards away when the two helicopters which I can best describe as being closest to the Priory Church, were very close together.

"There was a loud crack and a large piece of rotor blade fell off the helicopter furthest away from the Priory. It started to fall with bits of metal breaking away as it fell: this helicopter went down behind the row of houses in Whitehall. The other helicopter came down slower and to the right. I was unable to see where it had crashed. There was a pillar of black smoke coming from behind the houses.

With Pc Whitehouse I ran to Whitehall and in the front of number eight one of the pilots was lying. He had facial injuries and was being attended to by some first-aiders.

"I went into number eight and made my way to the back. There was a military policeman already there and some civilians. It was not possible to get to the helicopter due to the flames. I was able to see that the pilot was still in the cockpit but there was nothing we could do to get to him," he continued.

He said that with the military policeman he cleared the house of people and then he went into the house next door to ascertain there was no one injured. The only occupant of the house—number nine—was in the front garden.

Mr. Philip Tuck, of Rutland Road, Christchurch, watching the display near the bandstand, saw the helicopters pass over the heads of the crowd, noticed the heights were staggered but thought that the leading one was the highest.

## CHOPPING

"As they passed over my head, I thought there was something wrong with the engine of the one furthest away from the Priory. I cannot give any explanation as to what was wrong, but as I am very mechanically minded I thought it was engine trouble. I also thought the rotor blades of the aircraft were making a more distinct chopping noise than the other three.

"I did not think they were close enough to touch, then I heard a bang as if something had broken, and the one furthest away from the Priory—flown by Mr. Bailey—shuddered and seemed to lose speed. Then it seemed the rear one caught up with it." he commented.

Mr. Tuck said that Mr. Bailey's aircraft turned and swung round and the rear rotor hit the back of the aircraft coming up behind. "I saw the back of the helicopter break and hang down at an angle. I don't know if anything fell." He thought that the bang he heard was the breaking of the rotors not the back firing of the engine, he added.

Pc Dennis Read, of Highcliffe, who was standing in the car park off Sopers Lane, saw a pall of smoke in the direction of the quay and at the same time received a radio message that a helicopter had crashed. He ran to the gardens at the rear of Whitehall and saw the helicopter lying practically upside down with the front of the machine facing the rear of the house. It was burning fiercely with an intense heat, he said.

"At the front of the helicopter I saw a pilot lying partly underneath and to the side of the wreckage. He was not pinioned by any part of the aircraft. From the condition of the pilot it was apparent he was dead with his feet towards the rear of the house.

"Military personnel shouted that the second fuel tank had yet to explode and so no attempt was made to move the body until after the fire brigade had arrived.

He said that he helped to keep the garden clear of people until after he heard an explosion which he assumed was the second fuel tank. Later he saw the wreckage of the other helicopter. 40 yards away, at the junction of Whitehall and Princess Avenue.

## EXPERIENCED

Mr. Bailey's log showed that he had flown a total of 2,268 hours— 2077.5 on solo flying. He had experience of flying Whirlwind and Wessex helicopters and his flying time classified him as an experienced pilot.

Captain Peter Harold Kennett, of REME, stationed at Middle Wallop, who was the engineering officer in charge of the technical investigation into the crash, said that the main cause of the accident was that the main rotor blades of the helicopters touched while in flight, Mr. Bailey's aircraft lost one to two feet of the main rotor blade tip—this caused the aircraft to be in uncontrollable condition.

The helicopter flown by Sgt. Cull suffered a lesser degree of damage, losing a little bit of the tip. This helicopter was put down in very limited control by the pilot, he added.

The coroner said that Mr. Bailey's death had been caused by "multiple injuries and burns as a result of the helicopter of which he was the pilot colliding with or being hit by another helicopter while in flight.

Mr. B. D. Walker, representing the Ministry of Defence, expressed his sympathy to Mr. Bailey's widow, and Mr. Brunner added: "The death was all the more tragic after the brilliant display which must have pleased thousands of people."

