

Skyhawk 870

N13-155051



Photo: John Bartels

Brief aircraft history (courtesy [ADF Serials](#)):

- Delivered to RAN 08/71.
- Unloaded from HMAS Sydney onto RAN Lighter AWL 304 at Jervis Bay 11/08/71 then by road transport to Nowra.
- Was one of the aircraft that made up VF 805s Checkmates aerobatic team in the '70s.
- With VF805 13/05/74.
- 17/7/75, collided with '872' recovered to Nowra with Hydraulics failure. The hook took the arrestor gear and the nose gear collapsed.
- Aircraft repaired. With VF805 21/10/76.
- Crashed 23/01/79, due to turbine failure/ engine fire 24Km south-east of Braidwood, NSW.

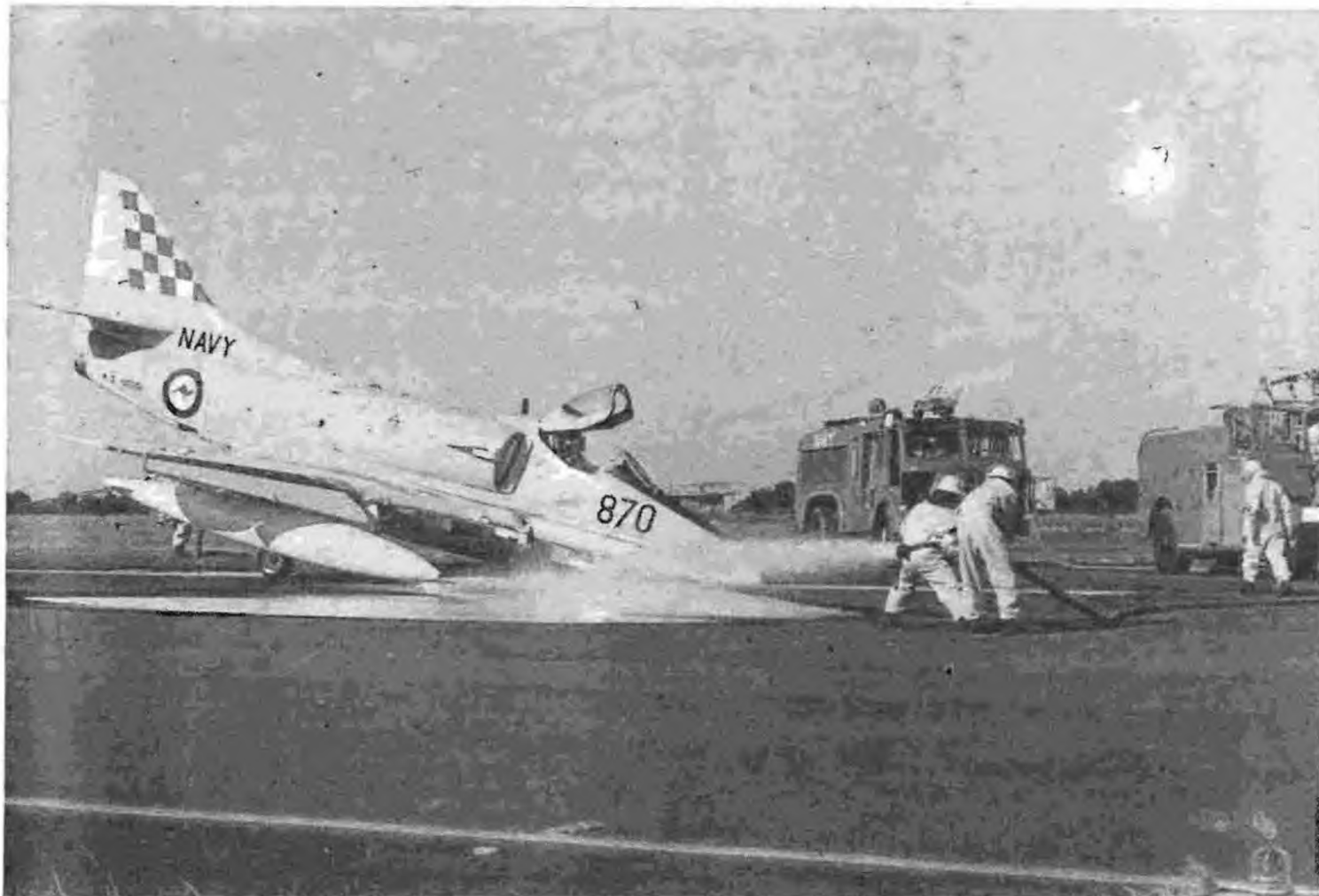
Other Incidents of note:

- **Mid air Collision 17 July 1975.**

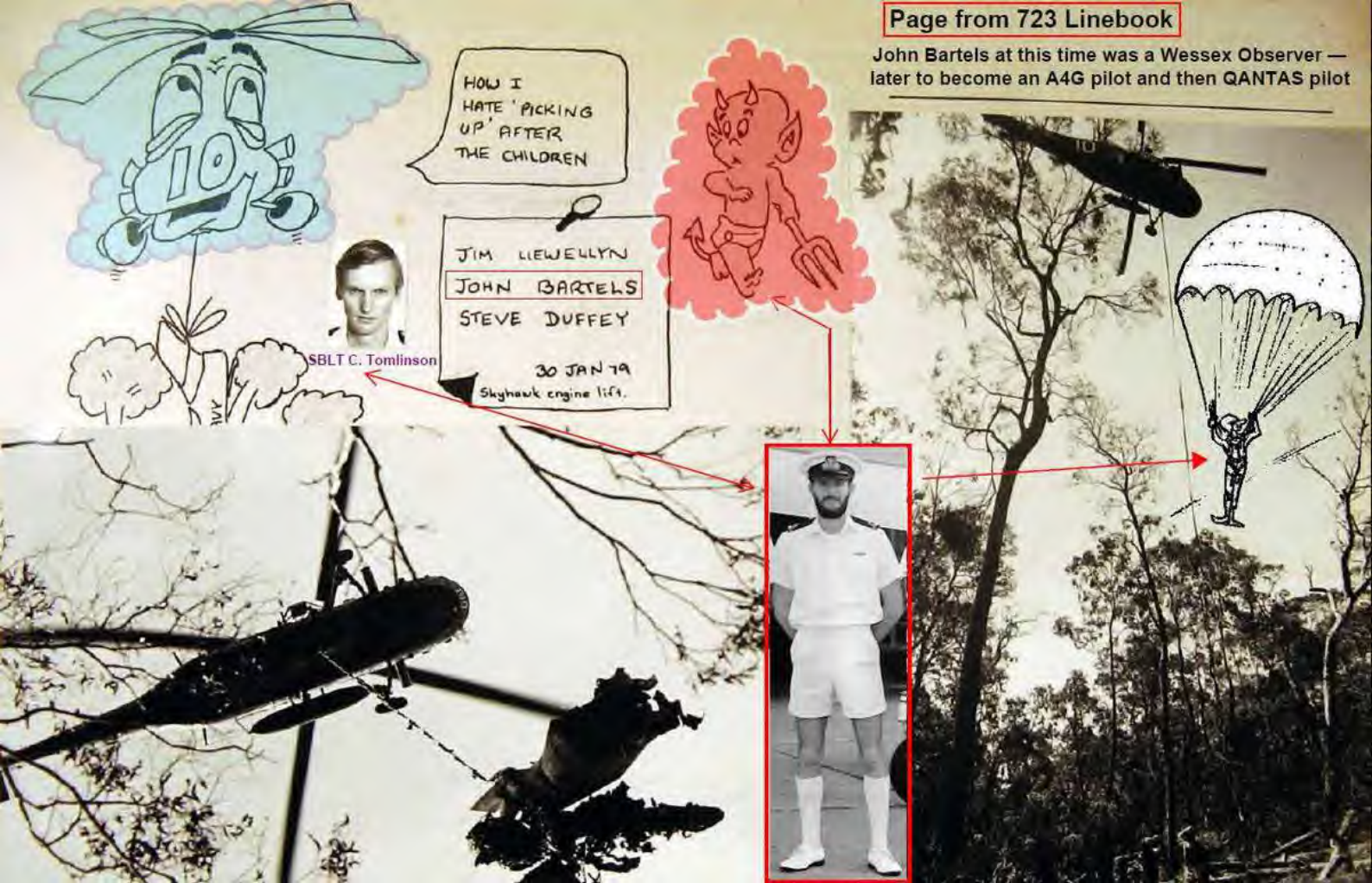


SKYHAWKS IN MID-AIR COLLISION

A Navy pilot was killed when his A4G Skyhawk aircraft crashed after a mid-air collision with another Skyhawk on July 17. The second aircraft, although damaged, landed safely at the Naval Air Station at Nowra, NSW. The pilot was unhurt. The accident occurred over the Navy's Beecroft Head firing range on the northern headland of Jervis Bay, while the aircraft were carrying out practice bombing runs. One aircraft, piloted by Acting Sub-Lieutenant M. K. McCoy, 19, of Morgan, South Australia, crashed on the range. ASLT McCoy who had only recently joined his Squadron, was killed instantly. The second aircraft, piloted by the Commanding Officer of VF805 Squadron, Lieutenant Commander G. S. King, of Nowra, NSW, suffered damage which caused its hydraulic system to fail. The second single engine jet (pictured) returned to Nowra, and landed with the aid of arrester wires. The aircraft's nosewheel collapsed on landing. An inquiry was held into the cause of the accident.



John Bartels at this time was a Wessex Observer — later to become an A4G pilot and then QANTAS pilot



Summary of loss of RAN A-4G 872

by CMDR John Crawley, RAN (Rtd)
RAN FAA Touchdown Magazine 1/98

At about 1030 hrs on 17 July 1975 two A4-G Skyhawk aircraft from VF 805 Squadron — N13-155051 and N13-155055 — collided over the Beecroft Bombing Range. N13-155055 crashed onto the range killing the pilot — a recent addition to the squadron, having only just graduated from the Skyhawk OFS in VC 724 Squadron. The other aircraft, although severely damaged, was skilfully landed back at NAS Nowra by its pilot, VF 805's Commanding Officer (CO).

The following account of the accident has been compiled from the Board of Inquiry's Report and post-report review, interviews with personnel involved at the time, and recollections of the author who was serving as a Weapons Electrical Engineering Officer in VC 724 Squadron at the time.

As is sometimes the case with major accidents, confusion sets in and command and control breaks down in varying degrees. As will be seen, quite a few lessons in accident response were learned in the wash-up of this tragedy. As also will be seen, people on occasions can act with commendable initiative.

The article completes a trilogy of *Touchdown* articles on formation flying, accidents etc, the other two being *Formation Flying* (2/97) and *How Close is too Close?* (4/97).

Overview of accident

The sortie during which the aircraft collided was a training exercise conducted by the then RAN's front-line fighter squadron VF 805. *Delta* flight, consisted of two sections, a lead section of three aircraft and an additional section of two aircraft. It was briefed to carry out low-level navigation with a simulated strike on fleet units and divisional bombing on Beecroft Range.

The initial portion of the exercise went as briefed and, as also briefed, the second aircraft section detached after the strike on the fleet units leaving the lead section of three aircraft to proceed onto the range for the divisional bombing practice.

During the first dive the CO, in N 13-155051 (aircraft side number 870), felt a severe bump just prior to weapon release and subsequently experienced severe control problems. The pilot was eventually able to overcome the problems and recovered the aircraft to NAS Nowra via an arrested landing. During the landing roll-out the nose gear collapsed. The pilot was shaken but not injured.

The bump felt by the pilot in Skyhawk

870 was caused by Skyhawk N13-155055 (872) striking the rear lower fuselage of 870; Skyhawk 872 continued in its dive and crashed on the range. There was no evidence of an attempted ejection or recovery action. Indeed the evidence suggested that the pilot was probably incapacitated during the collision.

Aircrew aspects

Skyhawk N13-155055 (872). The pilot of 872 completed his Skyhawk OFS on 1 July 1975 and transferred to VF 805 six days later. He had accumulated a total of 397 hrs, including 132 hrs on A-4G Skyhawks.

Although the accident flight was not his first sortie with his new squadron, it did combine all of the most demanding facets of attack flying including low-level navigation, tactical formation flying, bogey evasion and divisional attacks. This was also the first time that the pilot had worn a cold weather immersion suit. Although wearing of this suit was not considered to restrict a pilot's movements or ability to satisfactorily perform the sortie task(s), it did require increased effort, particularly while manoeuvring, causing an increased loss of energy through body heat.

Skyhawk N13-155051 (870). The pilot of 870 was the Commanding Officer of VF 805, a very experienced jet fighter pilot

