

MOLESWORTH  
MILITARY  
C-47 PLANE



CRASH



**HISTORIC  
EVENT  
SERIES**

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# **MOLESWORTH MILITARY C-47 CRASH**

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## **CONTRIBUTORS**

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# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION

**Name:** C-47 Crash  
**Registration:** VH-CCF  
**Model:** C-47 Dakota Skytrain  
**Crashed:** Thursday 9 March 1944  
**Casualties:** All 17 on board survived

A C-47 Dakota Skytrain crash landed at Molesworth on 9 March 1944 during a heavy and extremely cold storm. All 17 passengers and crew survived the landing, on a flat area opposite and west of the pub.



Late afternoon on 9 March 1944, an American USAAF military C-47 transport plane operated in Australia by the 'A.N.A.' (Australian National Airline) crashed at Molesworth. On board were 14 passengers and three crew, which included a pilot and wireless operator. The crash occurred after the plane developed carburettor problems caused by icing which restricted fuel to the two engines. It was reported that the pilot was been flying blind for around half an hour due to the heavy rain.

Captain Dunn's first landing attempt was unsuccessful, though his second was successful, landing in a clearing he spotted after his first failed attempt. While the plane was damaged, all passengers, which included both American and Australian military personnel, survived. The three crew were Australians and the pilot was from Melbourne.



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION

During the landing a wing hit a tree which sheered of a six foot section. The plane then swung around and a section of the other wing was sliced off by a second tree and the tail was damaged by a third. The plane continued sliding sideways on the wet ground, coming to a stop at the base of a hill. The fuselage was lodged partially over a fence. The three crew members remained at their post during the emergency landing and all passengers were instructed to lay on the floor during the landing.

The radio operator continued to transmit during the attempted landing and reported to Essendon Airport the successful crash landing as soon as they were on the ground. A U.S. military road transport was immediately dispatched to recover the crew and passengers and return them to Melbourne.





# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION



Inside a C-47

Two of the passengers were R.A.A.F. (Royal Australian Air Force) journalists and another was a nurse from America. The passengers later praised the pilot and co-pilot for the successful landing.

A military article later refuted that two wings had been damaged, stating instead that 'only one wing was damaged'. This comment was inline with standard war-time military

disclosure, which always tried to minimize reports of damage to military hardware.

Later in the 1980s an American visitor who visited Molesworth and the site of the crash, declared that he was the pilot Captain L. Dunn and that it was him who landed the plane. He expressed amazement during the trip that he even thought about crash landing in the clearing. (Darwin Army News, 12 March 1944).

An excellent research site for more information on military crashes in Australia can be found below:

### **Peter Dunn's Australia at war "Crash List"**

<https://www.ozatwar.com/ozcrashes.htm>

*Peter thanks Rick Hanning for his assistance in obtaining details of this crash for his website.*



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Their mother rode her bike down to the crash site and took photographs of the crashed plane before the military cleaned up the site.**

Courtesy Images of Yarck & District and Ray and Dot Linton





**VH-CCF sitting on a military runway leading up to the crash at Molesworth**



**C-47 Dakota VH-CCF, in USAAF markings, crashed at Molesworth in Victoria between Yarck and Yea on the 9th March 1944. The pilot was ANA Capt. L. Dunn. It crashed from engine failure into trees opposite the Hotel and township. Both wings were torn off, and the crew of 3 and the 14 passengers were uninjured.**

Courtesy: [www.fold3.com/spotlight/31400/c47\\_vhccf](http://www.fold3.com/spotlight/31400/c47_vhccf)



## NEWSPAPERS

### **PILOT'S SKILL SAVES ALL HIS PASSENGERS**

**MELBOURNE.** — Passengers had amazing escapes when a plane was forced down under difficult conditions at Molesworth, near Seymour, late on Thursday.

They paid tributes to the remarkable skill and coolness of the pilot, Captain L. Dunn, of Australian National Airways.

With both wings gone, the tail smashed, and with rain falling, Dunn landed what was left of the machine.

Not one of the 17 on board sustained as much as a scratch or bruise.

The 14 passengers were Australian and United States service personnel, and included an American nurse.

After leaving Essendon heavy weather was encountered, and for about half an hour the pilot was flying blind.

#### **WING TORN OFF**

Carburettor trouble developed, and the flow of petrol was stopped.

This occurred over thickly timbered country, and it seemed that a crash was inevitable.

Dunn, however, stuck to the controls, and made an unsuccessful attempt to land on a small clearing. He kept the nose of the machine up, and spotted a patch of clear ground in a paddock.

One of the wings was torn off by a tree, and later the other wing went.

As the plane was approaching the clearing it struck a fence, and the tail was shattered.

When the landing was made, the passengers were on the floor of the cabin, but the pilot was still at the controls, and his wireless operator was sending messages back to the aerodrome.

Barrier Miner Newspaper  
Saturday the 11th of March 1944



## NEWSPAPERS

### 17 MISS DEATH IN PLANE

**MELBOURNE, Friday.**—  
Seventeen people in an American Army transport plane escaped without a bruise in a forced landing in a paddock at Molesworth, 90 miles from Melbourne, yesterday.

The wing tips of the plane were torn off when the pilot tried to steer the fast-taxing machine between two tree stumps.

On board were 14 Australian and U.S.A. service personnel, including a U.S. nurse. The pilot, Captain L. Dunn, of Melbourne, and crew of two were from Australian National Airways. The machine was a two-engined American Army transport, operated by A.N.A.

Two R.A.A.F. men on board were journalists—Flight-Lieut. J. C. Waters, former editor-in-chief of The Courier-Mail, and Pilot Officer Malcolm Anderson, formerly of the Melbourne Herald.

#### Hit Tree Stumps

Captain Johnson, the operations superintendent of A.N.A., said today that the plane was heading north from Melbourne when the carburettors started to ice, and the pilot decided that he would have to land. The plane was then flying through heavy rain over thickly-wooded country.

The pilot spotted a clear field, dotted with tree stumps, and brought the plane down. He landed successfully, but was unable to avoid tree stumps as he was taxiing.

Six feet of both wing tips were torn off, and as the machine swung around the tail was also damaged.

After the landing the wireless operator got in touch with Essendon aerodrome, and reported the landing had been made and that the passengers were safe. An American Army transport vehicle was sent to pick them up.

Captain Johnson said that the damage was not extensive, and the plane could be quickly repaired. The pilot had done a fine job in most risky country, and the passengers had expressed tributes to his skill.

#### *None Hurt in Brilliant Forced Landing*

Passengers who had amazing escapes from injury when a plane was forced down in the most difficult conditions at Molesworth, Victoria on Thursday paid tribute the next day to the remarkable skill and coolness of A N A pilot, Captain L. Dunn. With both wings gone and the tail smashed and with rain falling, Dunn landed what was left of the machine and not one of the 17 aboard suffered as much as a scratch or bruise. Carburettor trouble developed over thickly-timbered country and the flow of petrol was stopped. It seemed a crash was inevitable but after an unsuccessful attempt to land in a small clearing, Dunn kept the nose of the plane up and spotted a patch of open ground in a paddock. One of the wings was torn off by a tree and later the other wing went and as the plane was approaching the clearing it struck a fence, the tail being shattered. When the landing was made, the passengers were on the floor of the cabin but the pilot was still at the controls and the wireless operator was sending a message back to the 'drome.

Army News  
Sunday the 12th of March 1944

The Courier-Mail  
Saturday the 11th of March 1944



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## NEWSPAPERS

### **MINOR DAMAGE TO PLANE IN CRASH**

**MELBOURNE, Friday.**

The Civil Aviation Department of Australian National Airways described as grossly inaccurate a report that a passenger plane had landed at Molesworth, near Yea, after both wings had fallen off.

An official stated that only one wing was damaged when the machine hit a tree.

The report had stated that both wings had fallen off and the tail smashed without any of the 17 passengers receiving as much as a scratch.

The Canberra Times  
Saturday the 11th of March 1944

### **AMAZING ESCAPE.**

### **PLANE FORCED DOWN.**

### **LANDS IN PADDOCK.**

**MELBOURNE, March 11.**

Passengers had an amazing escape when a plane was forced down yesterday. Fourteen passengers were Australian and U.S.A. service personnel, and included an American nurse.

After leaving Essendon a plane piloted by Captain L. Dunn, of the Australian National Airways, ran into heavy weather, and for half an hour the pilot was flying blind. Spotting a patch of open ground in a paddock, he brought the plane down. One of the wings was torn off by a tree and a little later the other wing went, but the pilot remained cool and no one was injured.

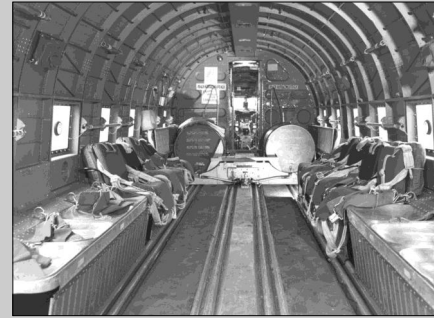
Cairns Post  
Monday the 13th of March 1944



# Dakota Skytrain

Similar to the one that crashed at Molesworth on Thursday 9 March 1944

A C-47 Dakota Skytrain



*The C-47 became known as the "Dak"*

The Douglas AC-47 Dakota Skytrain was a military transport aircraft based on the Douglas DC-3 and used extensively by the allied forces during WWII. At the height of their use, over 90 countries outside of the USA had operational C-47's in use and more than 10,000 were built by Douglas at their Santa Monica, and Long Beach manufacturing plants in California. Manufacturing first started in 1943 and the name Dakota was a modified version of the acronym 'Dacoata' derived from Douglas Aircraft Company Transport Aircraft. Download our factsheet below.

## DOUGLAS C-47 SPECIFICATIONS

<b>CREW:</b>	Three (pilot, co-pilot and radio operator)
<b>CAPACITY:</b>	3 crew and 28 passengers
<b>WINGSPAN:</b>	95 foot 6 inches
<b>LENGTH:</b>	63 foot 9 inches
<b>HEIGHT:</b>	17 feet
<b>CEILING:</b>	26,400 feet
<b>WEIGHT:</b>	34,000 pounds
<b>ENGINES:</b>	Two 1,200 hp Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engines
<b>MAXIMUM SPEED:</b>	224 mp/h
<b>RANGE:</b>	1,600 miles







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