



# SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



## **Larkhill**

**George GIPPS      30<sup>th</sup> January, 1914**

### **Flying Disaster**

#### **Two Aviators Come Down on Salisbury Plain**

A fatal aviation accident occurred on the flying ground at Larkhill on Monday evening. Mr Gipps, a Farnborough pilot, and Mr F Merriam, of Brooklands, were flying together in a monoplane with dual controls when their machine side-slipped and crashed into the ground. The fall was only a distance of about forty feet, and the aeroplane was little damaged. Mr Gipps was in a critical condition, and he died shortly after admission to Bulford Camp Hospital. Mr Merriam sustained a broken jaw, and is suffering considerable from shock. He was conveyed to a hotel at Amesbury.

The inquest was opened at Bulford Military Hospital by Mr F H Trethowan, Coroner for South Wilts, on Wednesday.

Captain Robert Basil Fielden, of Cornwall Gardens, SW, said he was guardian to Mr Gipps, who was twenty years of age, and resided at Sycamore House, Farnborough.

David Tod, pupil at the Bristol Aviation School, Salisbury Plain, described the accident. He watched Mr Gipps and Mr Merriam ascend on a fifty horse power Bristol monoplane, which had dual control. They sat side by side, each taking charge of one end of the control. He considered the monoplane quite safe. It started in the direction of Fargo Wood, gradually rising to a height of about 100 feet. A left-hand sweeping turn brought it back towards the sheds at a height of thirty to forty feet, and here there was a very sharp left-hand turn. The machine lost speed, the left wing dropped, and immediately the monoplane dived, nose downwards, to the ground. In his opinion a side-slip caused the fall. Had the machine been higher the accident might have been avoided. When the monoplane came to the ground he saw Mr Merriam jump out, run a few yards, and then fall on his face. Mr Gipps was huddled up in the machine, groaning. He was removed to the office and died ten minutes afterwards.

Mr Henri Julierot, manager of the Bristol School on Salisbury Plain, described Mr Merriam as an experienced airman, and a perfect flyer, who had instructed over one hundred people without the slightest mishap. He had instructed at Brooklands and was used to all types of machines. Mr Gipps had gained an Aero Club certificate on a Bristol bi-plane, but had made up his mind to continue flying with a view to joining the Naval Flying Corps. He saw the latter part of the flight by Mr Gipps and Mr Merriam, and agreed with Mr Tod as to the details of the accident, which he considered due to an error of judgment. The machine stood practically still before its fall. A nervous slip on the footbar might have accounted for the sharp turning described by Mr Tod. After the accident he asked Mr Merriam how it occurred, and he replied, "I can't tell. Everything was going very steadily. It all came of a sudden. I think he must have interfered with my control."

Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Ford, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, gave evidence to the effect that death was caused by hemorrhage of the brain.

The Coroner said that Mr Merriam was not in a condition to give evidence at present. The statement which he made after the accident was not evidence in law. There was always the possibility after a serious accident that a man did not entirely know what he was saying.

The jury expressed a desire to hear Mr Merriam's evidence, and the inquest was adjourned for a month.

Subsequently - Mar 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914 (following the inquest into Allen and Burroughs)

After a few minutes break the same jury resumed the inquiry into the circumstances of the death of Mr George Lancelot Gipps, a young aviator, who lost his life while flying at Larkhill on January 27th. He was flying in a dual-control machine with Mr F W Merriam when the accident occurred. Mr Gipps was killed and Mr Merriam sustained severe injuries which prevented his attendance at the Coroner's court at an earlier date.

Mr Frederick Warren Merriam, of 80, Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey, said he was an instructor at the Bristol Flying School, Larkhill, and on Jan 27th made a flight with the deceased. Before ascending witness instructed Mr Gipps to follow his movements with the control and not to work against him. After being in the air a few minutes witness found the deceased holding the controls very tightly, and he shouted to him not to hold them so tightly. Deceased could not have heard the words because the control still remained very tight indeed. The machine gradually turned to the left, but witness could not turn as he wanted because the rudder was tight. He thought deceased, in trying to get the rudder over, must have released his foot from the bar. Witness switched off the engine so as to slacken speed and the machine dived. He tried everything in his power to the very last to stop this dive, but could do nothing. The cause of the accident was the deceased holding the controls too tightly, and then releasing the rudder bar. He did not think the deceased would have been killed if he had not held on so tightly.

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

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Wrecked monoplane in which Mr G. L. Gipps was killed at Lark Hill Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 1914

*(Photo courtesy of [Paul Townsend](#))*

# ACCIDENTS INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE OF THE ROYAL AERO CLUB

## REPORT No. 20

***Report on the fatal accident to Mr George Lancelot Gipps, when flying as a passenger with Mr Frederick Warren Merriam at Larkhill, Salisbury Plain, on Monday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914, at about 4.45 p.m.***

Brief Description of the Accident – Mr Frederick Warren Merriam was flying a Bristol monoplane fitted with a 50 h.p. Gnome engine at Larkhill, Salisbury Plain, on Monday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914, at about 4.45 p.m., with Mr George Lancelot Gipps as passenger for an instructional flight. The flight had lasted about five minutes, during which time a circuit had been made at a height of about 80 ft. In making a noticeably flat left-handed turn, the aircraft suddenly banked steeply and, making a quarter-turn, nose dived to the ground from a height of about 50 ft. The pilot, Mr Merriam, was injured, but the passenger, Mr Gipps, was killed.

Mr George Lancelot Gipps was granted his Aviator's Certificate No. 513, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1913, by the Royal Aero Club.

Report – The Committee sat on Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1914, and received the report of the Club's representative, who visited the scene of the accident within a short time of its occurrence. Evidence was also given by eye-witnesses of the accident and by Mr F. W. Merriam, who was piloting the aircraft at the time of the accident. From the consideration of the evidence, the Committee regards the following facts as clearly established:-

1. The aircraft was built in May, 1912, and completely reconstructed in September, 1913.
2. The pilot and passenger were sitting side by side, and the flight was being made for instructional purposes.
3. The wind at the time of the accident was about 8 to 12 m.p.h.
4. The aircraft was fitted with a dual control giving equal power of control to both pilot and passenger, and without means for disconnecting the passenger's control.
5. Neither the pilot nor the passenger was strapped in, and they were not wearing helmets.
6. The aircraft was not fitted with an engine revolution indicator, air speed meter or banking indicator.
7. The pilot was under the impression that the passenger was resisting his control.
8. The controls were found to be intact after the accident.

Opinion – The Committee is of opinion that the accident was due primarily to ruddering violently when the aircraft was unbanked, causing it to sideslip outwards, lose way and nose dive. The over-ruddering was due to the action of the passenger in first resisting the control of the pilot and then suddenly yielding.

Recommendation – The Committee recommends that in all dual controlled machines used for instructional purposes, means should be provided whereby the instructor can instantly disconnect the passenger's control.

(Flight, May 15, 1914)

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George Lancelot Gipps, who was born on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1893 at London, was buried on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1914, aged 20 years, in Parish of Farnborough, Southampton, Surrey.



**George Lancelot Gipps**

*(Certificate 513 Issued 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1913 Great Britain, Royal Aero Club Aviators' Certificates)*



**Frederick Warren Merriam** (born 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1881 London)

*(Aviator's Certificate # 179 issued 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1912, Great Britain, Royal Aero Club Aviators' Certificates)*