

# New disaster theory doesn't advance our understanding

- Letters to the editor

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6877411/new-disaster-theory-doesnt-advance-our-understanding/>

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The story recounted on page 15 on August 13 that Sir Harold White said he was told by Corby Tritton on the day of the Canberra aircraft accident in 1940 is inconsistent with Tritton's own testimony.

In 1977 I interviewed Tritton who had reportedly gone to the crash scene as soon as the Prime Minister heard the news. Tritton told me he did not get to the site before the bodies were removed. My book *Ten Journeys to Cameron's Farm: An Australian Tragedy* (ANU Press 2015) fully documents the catastrophe, its background and aftermath, the coronial inquest, RAAF investigations, and Justice Lowe's air court of inquiry. Official archives and log-books were supplemented by diaries and interviews with air force and public service contemporaries, ministerial private secretaries, families and friends of the victims, and eye-witnesses including firemen who recovered the bodies.

None of the credible evidence supports a conclusion that James Fairbairn was controlling the aircraft when it crashed.

That is not to absolve Fairbairn of all responsibility. There are good reasons to believe he was a distracting presence alongside the pilot Bob Hitchcock in the dual control Hudson when it came in to land. But what those who knew Fairbairn well were unanimous about was that he could not, and would not have attempted to, bring the aircraft in himself. The story that his body was found in the pilot's seat is inconsistent with multiple eye-witness accounts. Sadly it has caused unnecessary distress to family members while failing to advance our understanding of a tragic event.

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