

Canberra jet pilot killed

Five die as secret business venture ends in tragedy

Anthony William Hammett, the Canberra owner-pilot of the executive jet which crashed near Kingaroy, north-west of Brisbane, on Thursday night was a former army brigadier and helicopter pilot who served in Vietnam.

A family spokesman said yesterday Mr Hammett had been a member of the Australian Army staff in Canberra until his retirement five years ago.

Mr Hammett and four other men, property developer James Brady, 50, of St Marys, corporate solicitor David Charles Ferrier, 46, of Turrumurra, accountant Peter Weir, 53, of Blacktown, and Australian Technical Association consultant Kenneth Gerard Newton, 59, of Gympie.

The lone survivor, James John Della-Vadona of Narellan, NSW, is in the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

Police said Dr Della-Vadona, 41, a Sydney veterinarian, was in a stable condition with burns to 20 per cent of his body.

The six men were on board the Beech 90 Kingair jet when it went down shortly after takeoff about 11pm Thursday night.

The aircraft was on a flight from Cairns to Camden, near Sydney, when it crashed about a kilometre from the northern end of Wondai airstrip.

Air-safety investigators were sifting through the debris yesterday to try to establish the cause of the crash.

Mr Hammett, of Griffith, was awarded the Order of Australia for his role as the commanding officer of the sixth battalion which helped in Darwin after Cyclone Tracy. He was widely known to Canberra's flying community as a consultant for the Civil Aviation Authority.

In 1960 he represented Australia in the pentathlon at the Rome Olympic Games and was a founder of pentathlon competitions in Canberra.

He is survived by his wife, Lyn, and their

two teenage children, James and Melissa.

Meanwhile, a man who helped the sole survivor of the crash has refused to be labelled a hero.

Grazier Rayham Francis, 66, from Mur-

gon, near where the accident took place, had been a passenger in the plane but alighted at Wondai where the plane refuelled before the accident. The plane crashed just after taking off again, about a kilometre from the northern end of the strip.

Mr Francis was first to the scene of the crash and found the sole survivor, Mr Della-Vadona, lying beside the inferno.

"I'm no hero. I didn't pull him out," Mr Francis said last night. "He was thrown clear of the plane, I don't know how. His trousers were on fire and he was trying to take them off so I helped him.

"I don't want anything to make me look like a hero — I did just what any other person would have done."

Mr Francis was still upset about the crash last night, and his voice shook as he told of the five who died.

Four of the five were executives investigating a multi-agricultural proposal in northern Queensland.

Mr Francis has served as a United Graziers' Association councillor for 13 years.

He said the group was to launch a proposal for a multi-agricultural complex near Cairns.

"That's all I can say about it," he said.

The latest deaths take to 26 the number of people killed in air crashes in Queensland this year.

A Bureau of Air Safety Investigation spokesman said the bureau had recorded eight fatal air accidents in Queensland so far this year, all involving privately-owned or charter aircraft.

Australia's last major commercial airline crash occurred on September 22, 1966, when an Ansett Viscount plane crashed near Winton, in Queensland's central west, killing 23 people.



Wreckage of the executive jet which crashed near Kingaroy on Thursday night, killing five.

The Wondai crash, 29km north of Kingaroy, is Queensland's worst since May 11 this year when a Kingair jet carrying a local government delegation crashed near Mareeba, killing all 11 people aboard, including the mayor of Cairns, Keith Goodwin.

It came only four days after another crash in which two people were killed during cattle mustering in far west Queensland.

In that accident a Cessna 180, operated by the North Australian Pastoral Company based in Brisbane, burst into flames when it

awan, just north of Ipswich, killing its pilot.

On June 16, two men died when a Cessna 177 went down near Longreach in Queensland's central west and on June 24, a Cessna 172 crashed near Cooyar, near Dalby, killing one man.

A glider pilot was killed on July 15 when his Brasov glider went down near Donnington air park in North Queensland, the spokesman said.

went down about 110km from Boulia. The bureau spokesman said the eight fatal crashes so far this year included one glider.

This year's string of air accidents began on March 16 when an unregistered gyrocopter crashed on a private air strip just north of Brisbane.

On March 23, a Cessna 210 crashed killing two people at Mount Margaret Station in western Queensland.

This was followed 34 days later by the Mareeba air tragedy and eight days later on

May 19 a Bellanca went down near Toogoolawah, just north of Ipswich, killing its pilot.