

Driver 'out' before crash



Mr. Middlemo

The driver of a Flinders Street tram which hit another tram at Swanston Street yesterday, injuring 31 people, was knocked semi-conscious two blocks before the collision.

The driver, Mr. John Middlemo, 57, said last night: "I struck my head at Exhibition Street and the next thing I remember is being pulled out of my cab at Swanston Street."

The Flinders - Swanston streets intersection was thrown into chaos when Mr. Middlemo's westbound tram hit the side of a northbound Swanston Street tram at 12.45 p.m.

Speaking at his East Doncaster home, Mr. Middlemo said a sports car suddenly swerved in front of his tram into Exhibition Street.

"It gave me a shock. I jumped up, hit my head and that's all I remember until after the crash."

Eight ambulance units took the 31 injured to four city hospitals. All except Peter Williams, 24, of Alma Street, St. Kilda, had been discharged last night. Williams suffered head injuries. His condition was described as satisfactory.

The chairman of the Tramways Board (Mr. R. J. H. Risson) who described the accident as the worst he had seen in 40 years, has appointed a five-man committee of inquiry.

Mr. Risson said an examination had shown the trams' brakes were sound.

Cuts, bruises

Mr. Middlemo, who is suffering from cuts to the face and body will appear before the inquiry today.

"This is the first time I've been involved in a serious accident in 23 years of driving," he said. "I'm not looking forward to this inquiry—I don't want to go back to the 'bag' as a conductor."

Mr. Middlemo said he had been ill for some weeks with a stomach upset and dysentery.

He thought the shock he received when the sports car swerved in front of his tram added to his illness caused him to nearly pass out.

"Nervy"

"A lot of people don't realise what a nervy business being a trammie is," he said. "When you've got 21 tons of tram in your hands and cars go swerving around you, you're bound to get a few shocks."

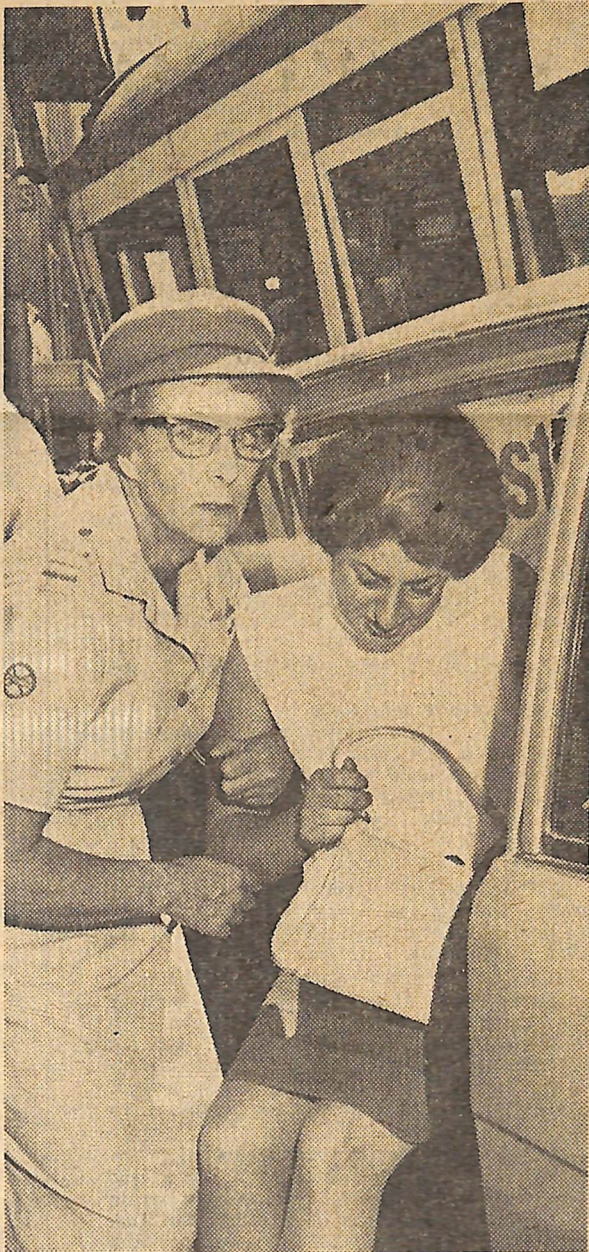
The collision knocked the Swanston Street tram from the rails. It struck the side of a car on the western end of the intersection. The driver, Mrs. G. Thompson, of Black Street, Middle Brighton, was not injured.

Passengers in the Swanston Street tram were thrown to the floor. Some were hurled on to the road and others were struck by a shower of glass fragments and splinters of wood.

The accident turned the intersection into chaos as the only policeman on duty tried to deal with the traffic and people swarming around the derailed trams.

Mr. Paul Serafe, of North Carlton, a taxi driver, who was at the intersection when the collision occurred, said he went to the passengers' aid.

A young woman had a large piece of glass embedded in her arm, others were covered in blood and limped off as the two trams came to rest after the collision.



ABOVE: Mrs. Glenys Thompson, of Middle Brighton, is assisted from her damaged car by Red Cross worker, Mrs. K. D. Fairley. Mrs. Thompson escaped injury when her car was wedged against the northbound tram.

BELOW: The scene from the first floor of Young and Jackson's Hotel soon after the accident at the corner of Swanston and Flinders streets, yesterday, showing the city crowds and the heavily-damaged trams.

