

Blakely, Robert Abbot

Age: 20

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: AC1

Unit: No. 13 OTU

Occupation: Wireless Operator

Service No: R85323

Birth: 3 May 1921
Canora, Sask., Canada

Hometown: Kamsack, Saskatchewan
Canada



Death: 15 December 1941

Crash of Supermarine Stranraer 927
Entrance to Nanoose Bay, BC, Canada

Burial: Riverview Cemetery, Kamsack, Sask.

Others: AC1 Robert William Adams (crew); Sgt. Gordon Herbert Andrews (co-pilot); F/L Donald Clark MacDougall (pilot); Sgt. Russell Tremaine Mitchell (crew); LAC William Denis Riley (crew); P/ O Richard Wood (crew); Sgt. John Cunningham Gunn (passenger).

Biography

Robert Blakely first applied to join the RCAF in Ottawa as soon as he graduated from high school. He must have been unsuccessful as he reports the result as 'nil'. Determined to qualify, he entered the Dominion Youth Training School the following fall to train in telegraphy. While waiting he filled his time working in a hardware store. He completed the course able to send and receive in Morse Code at 22 words/minute.

On 30 January 1941, armed with this additional qualification, Robert applied again to the RCAF in Kamsack, Saskatchewan, and this time was successful in being recommended as a wireless trainee. He was described as being of '*good type*' and neat in appearance. He passed the trade test for wireless operator and was sent to wireless school in Montreal.

On 20 October 1941, Robert was transferred to No. 13 OT in Patricia Bay. He was one of the crew on Supermarine Stranraer 927 when it attempted to land in Nanoose Bay on the afternoon of 15 December 1941 and sank in the heavy seas. Along with seven other young men, three more of whom were only twenty years old, he was trapped in the hull and drowned.

Robert was born May 3, 1921, in Canora, Saskatchewan, to George Austin Blakely and Vinnie Lee. He reports his father as deceased on his enlistment form but elsewhere his father is reported to be living in Winnipeg. His mother had remarried and her name surname was Jones. He had one sister.

Die in B.C. Plane Crash



A.C.1 R. A. BLAKELY

KAMSACK.— A.C.1 Robert Albert Blakely, son of Mrs. K. G. Jones of Kamsack, lost his life when a R.C.A.F. Stranraer flying boat crashed in Nanoose Bay, near Nanaimo, B.C., last Monday. There were eight in the plane when it crashed and the bodies were not recovered until Friday night. The late Aircraftsman Blakely was the wireless operator aboard the plane.

Aircraftsman Blakely was born at Canora, Sask., May 3, 1921. He received his early education in Canora and moved to Kamsack in 1935, where he lived up to the time of his enlistment. In January, 1941, he attended the Technical School in Regina and then enlisted with the R.C.A.F. as

a wireless operator. He trained at Toronto and Montreal and was stationed at Victoria in September, 1941, later moving to Patricia Bay.

Surviving are his mother; his father, George Blakely, believed to be in Winnipeg; and a sister, Mrs. W. R. Young of Kamsack.

STRASBOURG.— Sgt. Russell T. Mitchell, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Mitchell of Strasbourg was the other southern Saskatchewan man killed in crash of the Stranraer flying boat in Nanoose Bay, B.C., while on an operational flight last Monday.

Born at Strasbourg 20 years ago Russell obtained his education in the public and high schools here. He took a prominent part in all activities of the student body, was one of the original members of the school band and the hockey team. He also took an interest in amateur dramatics, was frequently seen in plays and was always a great favorite. After graduating in 1939 Russell was employed in McBride's store until his enlistment in the R.C.A.F. He started training at Brandon in March, 1941, and took flying courses at Regina, Lethbridge, High River and Calgary. He received his wings as a sergeant-pilot on October 14 at No. 3 Flying School in Calgary. Since that time he has been taking an advanced course in navigation with the Coastal Patrol at Patricia Bay.

Sergeant Mitchell is survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Mitchell and one brother, Keith, all of Strasbourg.

Details of Crash

On 15 December 1941, at 1:10 pm, Supermarine Stranraer 927 took off from Patricia Bay seaplane base on a routine patrol. It carried a crew of seven:

AC1 Robert William Adams
Sgt. Gordon Herbert Andrews
AC1 Robert Albert Blakely
F/L Donald Clark MacDougall
Sgt. Russell Tremaine Mitchell
LAC William Denis Riley
P/ O Richard Wood.

F/L MacDougall was first pilot and Sergeant Andrews was second pilot. All the remaining men were described simply as crewmen.

Sgt. John Cunningham Gunn asked the captain if he could join the crew. Despite having been warned previously not to carry unauthorized passengers, F/L MacDougall agreed to take him. There were two authorized passengers; F/L Booth and Mr. Hobbins, who needed transportation to Vancouver.

The aircraft landed successfully at Jericho Beach, where the two legitimate passengers disembarked, and took off again at 1:55 pm. At 2:33 pm, with deteriorating weather conditions, all aircraft from Patricia Bay were instructed to return to base. Stranraer 927 did not respond and made no subsequent contact with base.

Around 3:00 pm, F/L Mac Dougall tried to land at Nanoose Bay, where conditions were poor with strong winds (40 mph) and very rough seas. With no survivors and no radio contact, his reasons for landing are obscure.

According to civilian witness statements, at about 3:00 pm the aircraft circled once and then came in to land. It touched the surface, bounced twice and was struck by two waves about ten feet high. The left wing hit the water and the aircraft turned until it was almost vertical, nose down, and started to sink. Seeing the aircraft in trouble, civilian boatmen tried to reach it, but it sank before they could get there. They were able to pinpoint the location of the wreck when salvage attempts were made later. The witnesses did not think the aircraft had engine difficulties but some reported a 'flash' on the top of a wing as it landed.

It was about 4:00 pm when Patricia Bay were notified of the crash and sent an officer to investigate. No salvage efforts were possible on that day due to the rough seas. Two naval boats dragged the area the following day with no success and the next two days, the 17th and 18th, the weather was again too rough for further dragging.

On Friday the 19th Pacific Salvage dragged area for more than three hours and finally located the aircraft in 30 fathoms of water. The aircraft was raised and towed to shallow water where a diver was able to attach lines to hoist it onto a barge.

On Saturday, the bodies of the crew were removed, brought to shore and identified. They are recorded as having drowned. Only F/L MacDougall was missing. He was assumed to have escaped through the hatch above his seat and, unable to swim in his heavy flying gear, drowned. His body was never found.

The inquiry into the accident, which did not take place until seven months later, concluded that the cause of the accident was a heavy landing in rough water that damaged the left wing, collapsed the nose, and shattered all the windows; speeding the rate at which the aircraft sank. The damage to the aircraft with this, plus five days under water and the effects of the salvage, was severe.

No recommendations were made since it was impossible to determine why the captain chose to land in such challenging conditions.



SEVEN DEAD IN TRAGEDY

Complement of R.C.A.F. Flying Boat Lost When Craft Sinks

NANAIMO, Dec. 16.—The cause of the tragic death of seven men in the big Royal Canadian Air Force plane which dropped out of a storm, hovered above the waters of Nanoose Bay for a few minutes and then disappeared with a side slip into 240 feet of water, still remains unsolved tonight.

The big flying boat, which left Patricia Bay on Monday on a routine patrol in good weather, evidently had engine trouble at 3:20 p.m. while over Nanoose Bay and after circling twice around the angry waters off Maude Island, settled, hopped three times and then hit again, with one wing dipping into the water, slicing the way for the rest of the huge machine to slide to the bottom. The seven passengers, equipped with life belts, probably were unable to free themselves to obtain a chance to swim clear.

Four officers of the air force arrived in Nanaimo from Patricia Bay today and at noon interviewed eyewitnesses of the accident at Lantzville. They were trying to piece together the story of the crash. On

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