

# Bowler, Kenneth John

**Age:** 19

**Nationality:** British

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 32 OTU

**Occupation:** Navigator

**Service No:** 1315079



**Birth:** 23 April 1923  
Bristol, UK

**Home Town:** Hanham, Gloucestershire, UK

**Death:** 17 December 1942

Crash of Avro Anson R3431  
North East of Saltspring Island, BC

**Burial:** Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC

**Others:** Sgt. N. A. A. Bastick, Pilot, RAFVR; Sgt. A. M. Bellotti,  
2<sup>nd</sup> WAG, RCAF; Sgt. S.J.Conlon, 1<sup>st</sup> WAG, RCAF;  
Sgt. R. A. Maun, 2<sup>nd</sup> Navigator, RAFVR.

# Biography

Kenneth Bowler was born on 23 April 1923 in Bristol, in the south west of England. His parents were William Bowler and Mary Hathaway. He was one of the many RAF personnel sent to Canada for training and at the time of his death, he was with No. 32 Operational Training Unit in Patricia Bay, BC.



Kenneth Bowler, on the left

On 17 December 1942, Kenneth was the 1<sup>st</sup> Navigator on Avro Anson R3431 when it joined a search party for an aircraft which had gone missing the previous day. Within half an hour of take-off the aircraft flew into the sea north east of Saltspring Island, killing all five crew members. Three of the crew sank with the aircraft and their bodies were not recovered. Kenneth's body and that of the pilot were recovered by two fishermen and buried at Royal Oak Burial Park in Victoria BC. He is named on the Hanham, Gloucestershire war memorial.

War Memorial  
Hanham  
Gloucestershire, England



## Details of Crash

Avro Anson R3431 was one of several aircraft detailed to search for Anson N9560, which was reported missing during a reconnaissance exercise on 16 December 1942.

The aircraft carried a crew of five:

Sgt. N. A. A. Bastick	Pilot	RAFVR	English
Sgt. A. M. Bellotti	2 <sup>nd</sup> WAG	RCAF	American
Sgt. K. J. Bowler	1 <sup>st</sup> Navigator	RAFVR	English
Sgt. S.J.Conlon	1 <sup>st</sup> WAG	RCAF	Canadian
Sgt. R. A. Maun	2 <sup>nd</sup> Navigator	RAFVR	English

The Aircraft took off at 9:30 am on 17 December 1942 after sending a W/T “go” at 9:25am. Nothing further was heard until word was received of the crash.

At about 10:00 am, two men fishing off Montague Harbour, Galiano Island, saw the aircraft, about a mile away and flying at about 300 ft., just below the clouds. According to one man, it was slowly descending; the other man thought it remained level. They heard it crash and saw it sink about three minutes after impact. The fishermen recovered two bodies from the water, those of Sgt. Bastick and Sgt. Bowler. The bodies of the other occupants were not located. The medical officer who examined the bodies was of the opinion that they died instantaneously and that their condition indicated that the aircraft struck the water with considerable violence. After first seeing the aircraft the fishermen were occupied with their fishing lines, and neither saw it enter the water. Nor did they notice any change in the sound of the engines during the period.

The crews were all briefed prior to the search. They were given a route: Base – Cassidy – Parksville – Blubber Bay – Powell River - Stillwater – Base; the same route as that given to the missing aircraft. They were told emphatically that they must not, under any circumstances, fly in cloud or at any height below 500 ft. It was repeatedly stressed that it was the pilot’s responsibility to return to base if the weather was unfit or if the wireless operator was unable to maintain W/T contact with base, and they must report position to base every 30 minutes.

The commanding officer stated that similar types of accidents had occurred in the past and that in his opinion contributing factors were: the inferior types of pilots posted for staff duties; the changeable weather in the area with liability to

fog and low cloud; high hills; poor meteorological forecasts; and the lack of navigational aids. The conclusions of the court of inquiry were that a staff pilot on a reconnaissance and search flight encountered bad weather, probably misjudged his height over the calm water surface, and crashed into the sea.

