

# Brooks, Ernest Ross

**Age:** 28

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Pilot/Officer

**Unit:** No. 120 squadron

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** R/78894

**Birth:** 2 November 1913  
Orillia, Ontario, Canada

**Home Town:** Belleville, Ontario, Canada

**Death:** 6 July 1942

Crash of Lockheed Hudson 765  
St. Luke's General Hospital, Bellingham, WA, USA

**Burial:** Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Others:** P/O R.B. MacLachlan (pilot); V.A. Utting (Radio operator).



## **Biography**

Ernest Brooks was restless and unsettled as a boy, finding it difficult to persist at anything. In high school, he jumped from the commercial course to the technical course and eventually back into the Junior Matriculation stream. He finally completed his matriculation, except for English, when he was 21, two years older than average. He was no more settled after leaving school. At first he worked as a clerk a few days a week, then he went out West to work on the harvest and, on his way home lost all the money he had made in a crap game. Rather than return to face his mother he stopped off in Sudbury, where his brother lived, and worked for a year or so in a butcher store. He left this job to become a letter carrier for the post office, which apparently appealed to him because he had eight or nine weeks vacation a year. He then took a trip to Mexico and took some flying lessons for the thrill of it.

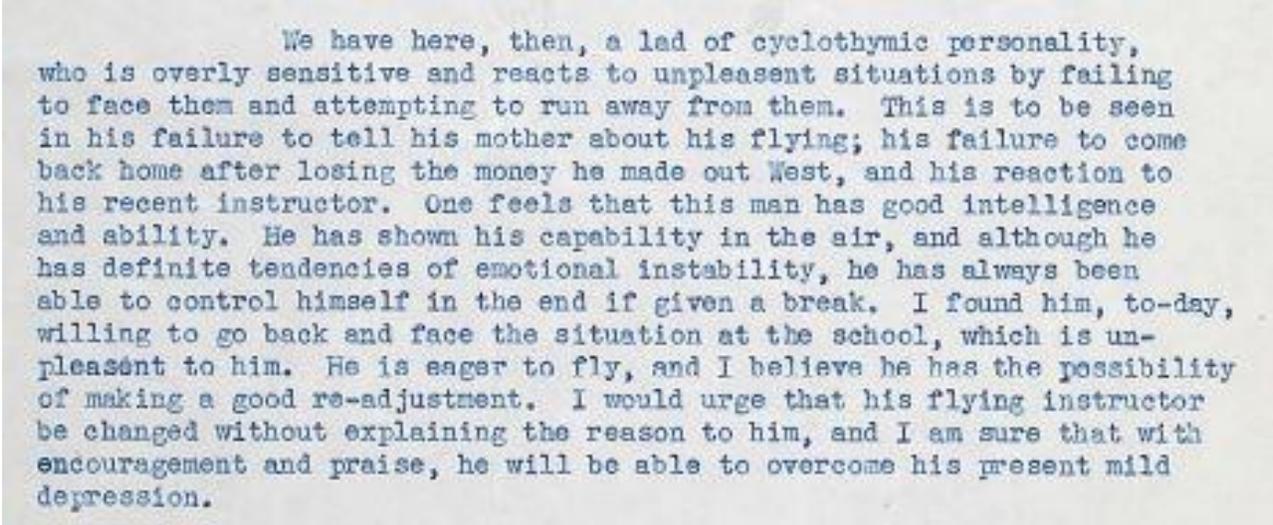
Ernest joined the RCAF in June 1940 partly for adventure, but mainly because he was afraid of the criticism he would get if he failed '*to do his bit*'. He wanted to be a pilot but would not tell his mother because of her poor health and her fearfulness on his behalf. He made a reasonably good impression at his interview. He was healthy, clean and neat, keen, quiet and serious and a good prospect for air crew.

At first, Ernest performed well. He passed his initial training and was reported to be tremendously keen to be a pilot. He attended Elementary Flying Training in September/October of 1940 and, although inclined to be careless, showed the ability to be an extremely efficient pilot. His Ground Training Instructor also thought he had the qualities of a good pilot but he needed urging and was labelled '*cocky*'.

Ernest passed on to Intermediate Flying Training in November where he began to unravel. He did not like his Instructor and became paranoid, convinced that he was being picked on. He was sullen, lackadaisical and reached a state where he dreaded going to the hangars. When Ernest graduated from EFT a picture of the class was printed in the paper and his mother saw it and discovered he was flying. She reacted badly, writing constantly to him about her worries. He wanted to go home for a couple of days to reassure her but was denied leave even though the weather was too poor for flying. He resented this and went Absent Without Leave for two days and earned a reprimand and loss of pay. Ernest's worry about his mother, whom he supported financially, and her opinion of him added to his distress.

On 18 December 1940, the medical officer reported to the Medical Selection Board that Ernest was suffering from depression and should be referred to a psychiatrist for incipient schizophrenia.

The psychiatrists' conclusions were in part a condemnation of the service's handling of the young men in their care:



We have here, then, a lad of cyclothymic personality, who is overly sensitive and reacts to unpleasant situations by failing to face them and attempting to run away from them. This is to be seen in his failure to tell his mother about his flying; his failure to come back home after losing the money he made out West, and his reaction to his recent instructor. One feels that this man has good intelligence and ability. He has shown his capability in the air, and although he has definite tendencies of emotional instability, he has always been able to control himself in the end if given a break. I found him, to-day, willing to go back and face the situation at the school, which is unpleasant to him. He is eager to fly, and I believe he has the possibility of making a good re-adjustment. I would urge that his flying instructor be changed without explaining the reason to him, and I am sure that with encouragement and praise, he will be able to overcome his present mild depression.

These recommendations were probably followed since Ernest did return to Flying school and earned his pilot's wings in March 1941. His overall assessments in April 1941 was '*character very good, trade superior*' and in February 1942 '*character very good, trade excellent*'.

In September 1941, worries about his mother surfaced again. She was apparently in poor health from a heart condition, a brother who had been living with her had enlisted and the only daughter was to be married. Ernest felt he should be close to her and applied for a transfer to Mountain View, Ontario, close to Belleville. He was granted this transfer and was at Mountain View until his transfer to Patricia Bay in February 1942. He must have done well there as he was granted a commission in May 1942.

On 6 July 1942, Ernest was second pilot on Lockheed Hudson 765 when, at about 4:00 pm, it crashed and burned at Bellingham Army Air Field in Washington, USA. Two men died in the fire. Ernest received third degree burns to most of his body and died in hospital at 10:30 pm.

Ernest was the youngest of a family of four sons and one daughter of Richard James Brooks and Mabel Elizabeth Holditch. He was born in Orillia on 2 November 1913. His father was a baptist minister and died of cardiac failure in 1931.



## Details of Crash

On 6 July 1942, Lockheed Hudson 765 was carrying a crew of 7 men:

LAC L.A. Beatty	Crewman
P/O E.R. Brooks	Second pilot
Sgt./Pilot D.P. MacLean	Passenger
P/O R.B. MacLachlan	First pilot
LAC C.R. Merredew	Crewman
P/O J.C. Olson	Passenger
Sgt. V.A. Utting	Radio operator

The plane took off at about 4:00 pm from Bellingham Army Airfield, returning to Patricia Bay. It swerved on the runway and the pilot failed to correct the drift immediately. When it became obvious that he could not correct the swerve, he persisted in his attempt to take off. To avoid hitting a building, he forced the aircraft into the air before a safe flying speed was attained and stalled the aircraft at a height of approximately 50 feet, from which recovery was impossible. The aircraft crashed and burst into flame. Bellingham fire fighting apparatus was rushed to the scene.

P/O MacLachlan, and Sgt Utting died in the accident, P/O Brooks died later as a result of his injuries. The other four men were seriously injured.

The court of inquiry following the crash recommended that it be impressed on all pilots that if swerve develops during take-off that cannot be corrected, they should throttle back and come to a stop on the runway and not try to continue with the take-off. The cause of the crash was pilot error.



Lockheed Hudson Aircraft

