

Brown, Robert George

Age: 26

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: Corporal

Unit: 120 B/R RCAF

Occupation: Aero Engine
Mechanic

Service No: 12029A

Birth: 28 September 1913
Regina,
Saskatchewan,
Canada

Home Town: Vancouver, BC,
Canada



Death: 14 Aug 1940
Crash of Northrop Delta 670
Seymour Narrows, Discovery Passage, BC Canada

Burial: Named on Imperial War Graves monument in Ottawa.

Others: Cptn. John Henry Bourne; F/O Joseph Georges Hector Desbiens; F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon; S/L Richard Campbell Procter.

Biography

In 1936 Robert George Brown applied to the RCAF when he was 23, hoping to enlist immediately as a Mechanic. He had attended night school at Balfour Technical College, Regina, from 1931 to 1933 studying motor mechanics. He was enlisted 17 December 1936 as an AC2 into No. 20 B Squadron where he was a Graded Standard Fitter. He was discharged 26 October 1937 and re-enlisted in the RCAF auxiliary on 7 January 1938. He was rated as of very good character and of superior trade proficiency. On 7 September 1939, Robert enlisted as a corporal in No. 120 BR squadron, Patricia Bay, BC, as an Aero Engine Mechanic.

Eleven months later, Robert was the youngest of the men killed in the crash of Northrop Delta 670

Robert was born 28th September 1913 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. His parents, David and Mary Brown, had emigrated to Canada from Edinburgh, Scotland in 1911, bringing with them four children; Norman, b. 1898, Albert, b. 1902, Jessie, b. 1907, and David, b. 1909. Robert was the first of their children to be born in Canada and was followed by Roderick in 1915 and Jack in 1916. Norman, the oldest, was killed on active service in France 22 August 1917. Robert married Nora Kathleen Finlay on 4 October 1939. They had no children at the time of his death.

Robert was educated at Houltain Regina Public School from 1920 to 1928. Like many Canadian boys, he enjoyed playing baseball and hockey. In civilian life, he was employed as a clerk.

Details of Crash



On 10 August 1941, the Commanding Officer of No. 120 squadron was asked to supply a Delta Aircraft for transportation to Alliford Bay and back. F/O Desbiens was detailed to take the trip. The flight was attempted, but had to be abandoned when the weather deteriorated, and postponed until the following day. The aircraft reached Alliford Bay and made the return trip on August 14th.

The aircraft was carrying five men:

Cptn. John Henry Bourne	Passenger	RCOC seconded to RCAF
Cpl. Robert George Brown	AEM	
F/O Joseph Georges Hector Desbiens	Pilot	
F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon	Passenger	
S/L Richard Campbell Procter	Passenger	

Captain Bourne and S/L Procter were on an annual inspection of explosives at all bases and F/L Gordon was carrying out an audit of accounts prior to the arrival of the Inspector-General.

The Delta reached Bella Bella from Alliford Bay for refuelling and took off again at 1:34 pm, heading to Patricia Bay.

On 9 August 1940, a message had been received at Western Air Command Headquarters from the Commanding Officer Pacific Coast requesting that an aircraft be detailed to keep the ‘Southern Cross’, a yacht anchored at that time at Vancouver, under surveillance when it departed for Campbell River. This had been done on August 13th, however, S/L Proctor was aware of the arrangements prior to leaving for Alliford Bay and when, on the return flight, a vessel that appeared to be the “Southern Cross” was seen in the vicinity of Seymour Narrows, the Delta circled it to confirm identification.

There were several witnesses to the resulting accident, both on the “Southern Cross” and on a nearby Japanese fishing boat, the “Arashiko”. At about 3:00 pm the aircraft descended and made 1½ right hand circuits round the yacht, decreasing altitude from 1500 feet to 100 feet, and then headed towards Campbell River. There was a burst of power and the aircraft dropped straight down, with no faltering or nose dive, striking the water with the starboard wing, bounced, and struck the water again sending up 60 feet of spray. The tail rose up and the aircraft turned over and sank, leaving the pontoons floating on the surface.

The “Southern Cross” sounded an alarm and the Japanese fishing boat headed towards the floating pontoons. One pontoon sank but they roped the other one and the Commander on the “Southern Cross” asked them to take it aboard and carry it to Vancouver. En route for Vancouver they were stopped by the police and directed to take the pontoon to Campbell River, which they did.

According to the witnesses, it was a bright, sunny day with strong gusts of wind.

The Duty Air Staff Officer in Victoria received a message at 3:45 that an aircraft had crashed at Seymour Narrows, where it was estimated Delta 670 should be, given the time it left Bella Bella. At 5:45 a report was received that a pontoon model 75 serial #4298 had been picked up by a fishing boat. It was confirmed that the pontoon belonged to Delta 670.

Subsequent examination of the pontoon indicated that the aircraft landed port wing down, the port pontoon failed and struck the starboard pontoon causing severe damage.

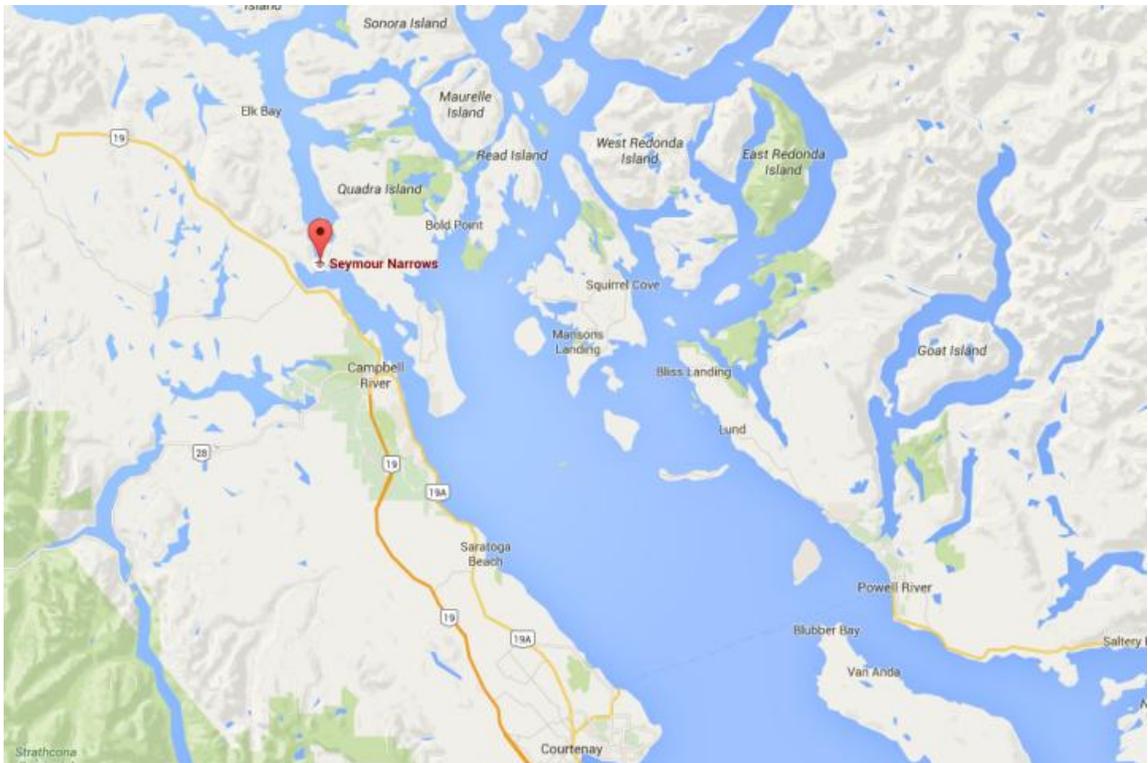
Evidence was given at the accident inquiry on the stalling characteristics of Delta Northrup aircraft.

“The Northrop Delta aircraft on floats without flaps extended stalls at approximately 72 miles per hour. Between 90 mph and 72 mph the deceleration is very rapid. That is to say, after falling below a speed of 90 mph the stalling point is reached very quickly. When below 90 mph, an application of engine power does not produce marked acceleration unless the airscrew is in low pitch. The aircraft will spin from a turn if the speed is dropped near the stalling point, and no decisive airframe warning characteristics are felt during the period immediately before the stall or spin has developed. The aircraft will then flick over from the inner side of the turn, and spin will develop in the opposite direction from the turn. During this period the reactions of the cabin controls are violent. A measure of elevator control remains after rudder and aileron control are lost. As the spin is developing, recovery can be effected by a quick application of full engine power, at the same time putting on bottom rudder and moving the control column forward. At least 500 feet would be lost in the recovery dive. The outstanding characteristics of a spin in a Delta are the violence with which the spin is entered, and the violent reaction of cabin controls. This necessitates the pilot keeping a firm grip of the controls during this manoeuvre.”

Dragging and diving operations took place for a week and nothing was found but two life jackets picked up by fishermen four days after the crash. The strong current of the area and the depth of the water were given as reasons not to pursue the salvage operations. The cause of the accident was recorded as “obscure” and the recommendation of the court of inquiry was that all units flying this aircraft be supplied with all the data available on its characteristics.

The plane had crashed at Seymour Narrows, Discovery Passage, between Quadra Island and Vancouver Island, in an area of dangerous currents near the notorious Ripple Rock, which was blasted in 1958.

These were Pat Bay’s first casualties of the war. The bodies of the five men were never recovered and remain in the waters of Discovery Passage. They are all recorded on the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Ottawa, Ontario.



SEYMOUR NARROWS

Treacherous currents, swirling eddies, and turbulent tide-rips still harass vessels, despite the blasting away in 1958 of the twin peaks of Ripple Rock. Charted in 1792 by Captain George Vancouver, the Narrows has claimed numerous ships and lives and is considered by many seamen the worst hazard to marine navigation on the British Columbia coast.

