

# Desbiens, Joseph Georges Hector

**Age:** 33

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Flying Officer

**Unit:** No. 120 B/R RCAF

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** C1572

**Birth:** 12 September 1906  
Hull, P.Q., Canada

**Home Town:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada

**Death:** 14 Aug 1940

Seymour Narrows, Discovery Passage, BC  
Crash of Northrop Delta 670

**Burial:** Named on Imperial War Graves monument in Ottawa.

**Others:** F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon; S/L Richard Campbell Procter;  
Cptn. John Henry Bourne; Cpl. Robert George Brown.



## Biography

Joseph Georges Desbiens, a Quebecois fluent in French and English, enlisted in the RCAF on 9 May 1927 as an Aircraftsman Second Class at Camp Borden, Ontario. At this time his trade was a Fitter, Aero Engines. Joseph took a pilot's course in May 1931 and was transferred to Vancouver in June 1931 when he re-mustered as a pilot. He took a course in aerial photography including maintenance of photographic equipment and was recommended for an Armaments Instructor Course. In the recommendation he was described as *“very keen on armament work and has had considerable experience as a bombing pilot in the Air Armament and Bombing School.”* Joseph was promoted to Flight Sergeant on 17 July 1937, and appointed Pilot Officer with a promotion to temporary Flying Officer on 15 November 1939. He was piloting Northrop Delta 670 when it crashed into Seymour Narrows.

Joseph was born 12 September 1906, in Hull, P.Q., to Joseph Athelade and Marie Leontine Desbiens. He had two older sisters, and Berthe, who died in 1914, and Marie Laurette. A third sister, Francoise, was born 1912. Joseph Georges's mother died in 1913 and his father remarried. Two half brothers and one half sister were then born; Joseph, Elzean and Lucette. Joseph Georges married Jean Veronica Genereux in Belleville, Ontario, on 5 July 1930. They had two daughters, Marie Paulette Francoise, and Jacqueline Marie.

## Details of Crash



On 14 August, 1940, Northrop Delta 670 was en route from Alliford Bay and Bella Bella on a routine flight back to Patricia Bay on Vancouver Island. Around 3 o'clock the plane diverted to take a closer look at a vessel in Discovery Passage, East of Vancouver Island. According to the account in the Victoria Daily Times, a witness described the crash:

*The plane made a big circle over the yacht as if inspecting it. Then it made a second circle at a lower altitude. After this, it headed south again; it hadn't gone more than 1,000 feet when it seemed to dive right into the ocean. It struck with a terrific crash and spray flew up 60 feet.*

The plane had crashed in an area of dangerous currents near Seymour Narrows and the notorious Ripple Rock, which was blasted in 1958.

On the plane were four other men:

F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon (32) RCAF  
S/L Richard Campbell Procter (29) RCAF  
Cptn. John Henry Bourne (55) RCOC seconded to RCAF  
Cpl. Robert George Brown (26) RCAF

The first advice of the crash was received from the police.

F/O Mahon, F/L Jacobi and Capt. D'Easum (M.D.) took off in Grumman Goose 924 to search the area, remaining overnight on York Island. F/L Jacobi reported that the site of the wreck had been located in approximately 90 ft of water. Only one pontoon was recovered.

These were Patricia 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 Imperial War Graves Monument in Ottawa, Ontario.

