

# Donald, Thomas Brown

**Age:** 36

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Corporal

**Unit:** No. 122

**Occupation:** Aero-engine  
Mechanic

**Service No:** R/58159

**Birth:** 27 November 1905  
New Westminster, BC, Canada

**Home Town:** New Westminster, BC, Canada

**Death:** 21 July 1942  
  
Crash of Grumman Goose 917  
Near Yakutat, Alaska, USA

**Burial:** Anchorage, Alaska, USA

**Others:** AC1 J. MacIntosh (crew)



## **Biography**

Thomas Donald was a good mechanic. He had seven good years working as an auto mechanic, when, by 1935, the work servicing cars for civilians started to dry up. After five years of only occasional work as a mechanic and filling in with lesser tasks, he applied to the RCAF in June 1940 to put his skills to work on aeroplane engines. He planned to return to his job after the duration.

At 6 ft and 152 lbs, he was described as a wiry type. His general appearance was thought good and he was judged suitable for an Air Engine Mechanic (AEM).

Thomas progressed steadily through the training and tests, starting as standard AEM and working his way through levels 'C' and 'B' to reach level 'A' in early October 1941. His training was in Brandon, Manitoba and Calgary, Alberta.

When he joined the service, at age 35, Thomas was a married man with two sons and three daughters aged from seven to 15. In August 1941, he applied for a transfer to a Western station to be nearer his family, who were in New Westminster. He had to wait until his training was complete and in mid October 1941 was transferred to Patricia Bay. He was recommended to Patricia Bay as a *“good all-round fitter and trouble shooter specializing in carburetors and ignition systems of Anson aircraft. Should be kept employed at his trade to gain experience”*.

In March 1942 Thomas was put forward for promotion to Corporal with the recommendation of being a good worker, tradesman and seaplane crewman. He had also passed all the tests of a NCO with creditable marks.

On 21 July 1942 Thomas Donald was one of seven men on Grumman Goose 917 on a routine flight from Yakutat, Alaska, USA to Anchorage, Alaska, USA, when it crashed near the Bering Glacier. He was he was the only man killed in the crash.

Thomas was born on 27 November 1905 to John Donald and Mar Grey Brown. He had three brothers and three sisters. He married his wife, May, on 7 December 1924.



ON ACTIVE SERVICE

Aug 26/41

C. C. Maintenance Sqdn.  
# 3 S.F.S.

Dear Sir.

Please consider this my application for a transfer to a west coast station, Juice Beach, Sea Island or Patricia Bay.

Due to the responsibility of caring for 5 children my wife has been in ill health for some time, I have been advised that if it were possible for me to be transferred <sup>to</sup> home I could assist her at this time.

Should a Doctor's certificate be necessary that could be arranged.

Any consideration given this application would be deeply appreciated

L. A. C. Donald T. D.

Your respectful servant  
L. A. C. Donald T. D. R 3-157

## Details of Crash

On 21 July 1942, Grumman Goose 917 out of Patricia Bay was reported missing with seven men aboard. It was later erroneously reported to have landed safely in Cordova, Alaska, USA. The plane had, in fact, crashed into the bush near the Bering Glacier in bad weather, killing one man and injuring two others. The four men who were mobile left to find aid and during this effort one of them was drowned trying to cross a glacial stream. These men were spotted by a U.S. plane that dropped a note describing their location at Yakutaga, Alaska, emergency field. Four Alaskan civilians set out on a 30 mile trek to search for the survivors. They found three men close to the crash site, whom they guided back to Yakutaga. On July 27<sup>th</sup> Patricia Bay received news that survivors had been found and F/L G. D. Preston flew to Yakutaga in Goose 940 to search for the other two survivors. The four Alaskan civilians joined with F/L Preston to search for the wreck. The crash site was found on August 6<sup>th</sup> and the remaining men brought out. The men on the plane were:

F/O P.M. Gault; Sgt. F.M. Bailey; Sgt. R.J. Powers, who broke a leg; AC1 W.E.Naylor; AC1 T.S. Silburian, who fractured a leg; AC1 J. MacIntosh who drowned; Cpl. T.B. Donald killed in the crash.

The following is an extract from a letter which was sent to the Governor General of Canada from the Minister of National Defence of Air.

*“That on or about the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1942 RCAF Grumman Aircraft No. 917 was operating from RCAF Station Patricia Bay, BC, and due to bad weather conditions crashed near Yakutat in Alaska causing death to a member of the crew and to a passenger and injury to the pilot and wireless operator and to three of its passengers, all of whom are members of the RCAF.*

*That the following four citizens, namely Messrs. Joe Maloy and B.B. Watson both of Yakutaga, Alaska and Messrs. Don George and C.A. MacMiller of Anchorage in Alaska, voluntarily set out in search of the crew and passengers of the said aircraft and, after walking all one night, the next day, and the next night located three of the injured members of the RCAF and guided them to Yakutaga.*

*That furthermore, the said four men, despite their fatigue, set out the next morning in RCAF aircraft No 940 to locate the position of aircraft No. 917 and from the place of landing of aircraft 940 they proceeded to the scene of the crash a few miles from the landing position and brought out the two remaining*

*survivors of aircraft No. 917.*

*That the help and experience of those men in the bush, coupled with their spirit of co-operation proved invaluable to the RCAF in locating the survivors of the wrecked aeroplane No. 917.*

*That while no claim has been made by any of the above mentioned civilians, compensation should be paid on an ex gratia basis.*

*That compensation of \$50.00 to each of the above is deemed to be fair and reasonable to the Air Officer Commanding Western Air Command.”*





# Canadian Fliers Tell Epic Story Of Alaska Crash

By EDWIN JENKINSON

**WITH THE CANADIAN FORCES IN ALASKA (CFP)—** Out of the remote regions of Canada's western coast, the eyes have been turned today to the story of how Flt. Sgt. Frank M. Bailey of Montreal and Flt. Lt. Fred Preston of Ottawa and two other fliers, in a desperate search for a rescue plane down by the coast of Alaska.

It is the story of the crash of an R.C.A.F. plane on a mountainous peak, three and a half miles from the coast of Alaska, on July 25, of an 11-day trek through the Alaskan wilderness by Bailey and two companions and of Bailey's direction of a rescue plane down by Preston to the scene of the crash where two others of the crew were found alive.

The plane crashed into a mountainous peak, 200 miles from the coast of Alaska. Part of the story was told by Bailey in a letter to the editor of the Montreal Star, dated July 25, 1942.

Members of the crew were: Flt. Lt. Fred Preston, pilot; Flt. Sgt. Frank M. Bailey, co-pilot; Flt. Lt. J. P. Donald of New Westminster, B.C.; Sgt. E. MacIntosh of Montreal; Flt. Lt. J. MacIntosh of Montreal; Flt. Lt. T. MacIntosh of Vancouver.

Donald was killed in the crash. MacIntosh was seriously injured in the crash and was brought out by the rescue plane. **GAVE FIRST AID**

After the crash, which occurred in the afternoon, Bailey was the first to make an attempt. Although injured and grumpy himself, he gave first aid to his companions and helped bring them out with artificial respiration. Part of the medal of the crash had to be chopped away to free the plane.

The crew members of the plane were a wide area and the members of the crew were able to find only one box of emergency rations.

Bailey took charge of the party. He sent MacIntosh, who had sustained a fractured jaw, and MacIntosh on patrol in search of some signs of civilization. He told them to leave him a note, paper on their trail so he could follow them at the first opportunity. MacIntosh was placed on improvised stretcher of logs and three and then Bailey put splints on MacIntosh's leg, which had been fractured.

The next day, July 26, it was found that Donald had not sustained serious injury and when he and Roberts saw they could take care of themselves, Bailey set out with MacIntosh to follow the paper trail left by MacIntosh and MacIntosh.

"They were not staying on the mountainside waiting for something to show up, so I figured the wisest move was to get out while we still had the strength," Bailey said.

For two days Bailey and MacIntosh followed the trail through meadows, glacial rocks. Then the paper trail ended. Bailey spotted footprints along the bank of a river and in honor of an earlier flier, MacIntosh, who said MacIntosh had been devoured. MacIntosh was exhausted, being unable to eat even the berries he picked because of the pain in his jaw.

The weary men dragged themselves along a trail through dense woods surrounded by towering mountains with jagged peaks rising hundreds of feet above the valley they hoped would lead them to safety.

Their only weapons were a knife and two sets of broken hands. They also had much game, but their only food was berries, roots, bark and porcupine foot strings.

"I was so hungry that I ate anything I could lay my hands on," said Bailey.

### ATK AT CABIN

On the sixth day of walking the men found an abandoned cabin. Inside there was a supply of provisions and they lost no time preparing a good meal. They also found tobacco and a box of matches.

The next day an airplane-dropped high overhead. The wanderers used the gasoline to light a fire which was spotted by the pilot of the United States craft. The next day another U.S. machine came over and the pilot dropped a message telling the men to stand side by side with their arms outstretched if they were members of the missing Canadian air crew. Rockets were also dropped by parachute, along with a map showing where the cabin was located and telling the men how to get to the nearest settlement, a tiny coast outpost with only a half dozen inhabitants, 20 miles away.

MacIntosh and MacIntosh were flown to a Canadian base by an R.C.A.F. machine, while Bailey joined the crew at the rescue plane flown by Preston.

Preston made a skilled "all-weather" landing with his airplane at a glacier now crisscrossed with ice caves, many the size of mountain loobers. From there the rescue party had to make its way through dense forest to the spot where Donald and Roberts had been left. They reached there just as the two were about to break camp and an "somehow"—they had no idea just where.

### BURIED AT SCENE

The party buried Donald where the plane had crashed and then carried Donald and Roberts on their backs up the rugged mountainside. Preston got his ship away successfully, but not with out several close calls.

As he told about the crash, Bailey recalled that he is a lone flier after the crash with a 25 lb. "I never thought we'd get out," he said.

He recalled, too, that on the long walk through the woods he had seen a glacier with several huge boulders scattered in the ice. He was certain they were MacIntosh's bones.

Mrs. Bailey had given birth to a son two days before her husband left on the ill-fated trip. She had a serious relapse when she learned he was missing, but recovered quickly when he walked into her ward after his return, still showing the heavy growth of beard he had acquired during his starving adventure.

BAILEY OF THE CANADIAN FORCES AND "MONTANA AND STAFF" TABLE OF THE RESCUE

## RESCUES PLANE CREW

# George Medal Given Former City Flyer; Alaska Crash Hero

Flt. Sgt. Franklin M. Bailey, former Vancouver man, hero of an 11-day trek through Alaska while after an R.C.A.F. plane with a crew of seven crashed into a glacier-covered mountainside last July, has been awarded the George Medal.

Born in eastern Canada, Flt. Sgt. Bailey came to Vancouver as a child and received his early education at Central Grammar School. He later moved to Montreal with his parents, where he

made his home. A chemist, with the R.C.A.F., he was assigned for a time to the R. C. mail.

### PLANE HITS MOUNTAIN.

On a commercial flight from a west coast base, the plane ran into Greer Bay and crashed into the mountainside, 200 miles from the base, instantly killing Cpl. J. D. Donald of New Westminster, and seriously injuring five others.

Flt. Sgt. Bailey, who escaped with minor injuries, administered first aid to his friends in a short time. Flt. Lt. T. MacIntosh, well-known city alder, and Flt. Lt. J. P. Donald, set out to find help. MacIntosh lost his life attempting to cross a river, and MacIntosh was located by Flt. Sgt. Bailey and Flt. Lt. MacIntosh when they started signal fires with 20 lbs.

The three R.C.A.F. men then trekked through the wilderness for eight days with weary supplies. On the ninth day they were aided by a U. S. army plane and the last day were rescued by a U. S. navy plane.

### LED SEARCH PARTY.

Arriving at civilization, with the two companions, Flt. Sgt. Bailey immediately led a search party back to the wreckage to bring in Sgt. H. Roberts and Flt. Lt. Donald, who were seriously injured in the accident.

His work completed, Flt. Sgt. Bailey returned immediately to duty with the R.C.A.F.

Flt. Sgt. Bailey's wife and a two-year-old daughter were at 415 West Second. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry (Mrs. Bailey) Francis Baileys, are living in Montreal.



FLY. SGT. BAILEY.

Contemporary newspaper cuttings make no mention of the Alaskans involved in the rescue

Cape Yakataga Alaska.

March 2, 1943. -

To. Royal Canadian Air Force. Ottawa.

Your File, 1100-9-17Y. 2 (D of P) (P. 1)

We thank you for your letter of appreciation, and cheque for \$50.00.

P.A. Xero copy appears necessary - name of C. 266 Pennington

We would like to say a word in defense, and recommendation of S. D. Preston Sgt. Id. RCAF. in rescuing the survivors of your plane crash up last July, the fog had settled against the mountain that morning, and the moment it lifted enough to see under it, the plane left and landed on a small Glacier lake one and a half miles from the wreck. and they got the people immediately. But could not leave for some time, as the fog had closed down again.

'Bert Ruff', a famous Alaskan pilot, was waiting at the same time for better visibility, his address is Anchorage Alaska, care Morrison - Kondisor

Every thing was done that was humanly possible, by many willing people, and I'm sure they will be willing to attest it, but they are not available at this time, as this place is shut down now. We hope the thoughtless remarks by a very credible person (we know him) will not damage the character of a very fine, and able man. we are respectfully yours.

B. B. Watson  
John S. Carson



E. M. Watson Postmaster  
Joe Meloy