

Gunn, John Cunningham

Age: 35
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: No. 13 OT
Occupation: Air Gunner
Service No: R/86323
Birth: 8 January 1909
Gorebridge, Midlothian,
Scotland
Home Town: Roland, Manitoba, Canada



Death: 15 December 1941
Crash of Supermarine Stranraer 927
Entrance to Nanoose Bay, BC, Canada

Burial: Royal Oak Cemetery, Victoria, BC, Canada

Others: AC1 Robert William Adams (crew); Sgt. Gordon Herbert ;
Andrews (co-pilot); AC1 Robert Albert Blakely (crew);
F/L Donald Clark MacDougall (pilot); Sgt. Russell Tremaine
Mitchell (crew); LAC William Denis Riley (crew);
P/O Richard Wood (crew).

Biography

John Gunn was a farmer, born in Scotland, who emigrated to Canada around 1932 and settled in Manitoba. He attended Agricultural college in Scotland for a year and then worked for his father for about five years. In Manitoba he attended Agricultural College for a further year and worked as a farm manager until he enlisted in the RCAF.

When John enlisted as AC2 on 20 September 1941, he was appraised as nervous in approach, neat in dress, upright in carriage and “...*would make a good air gunner, responsible type*”. His physique was described as ‘medium’ at 5’11”/165lbs. The only skill he claimed as useful to the Air Force was mechanical experience with internal combustion engines. He was promoted steadily to LAC and then to sergeant.

John’s one black mark was on a posting in Calgary when he was given three days confined to barracks for ‘*conduct to the prejudice of good order and Air Force discipline in that he did not stop talking when told to do so*’.

John earned his Air Gunner badge on 8 August 1941 and was regarded as a very capable and well mannered student with plenty of self confidence. He was posted to Western Air Command the following December and to Patricia Bay the next day on December 14th.

On his first full day at Patricia Bay, John was the oldest of eight men in Supermarine Stranraer 927 when it sank in rough seas at Nanoose Bay, Vancouver Island, BC. His body was recovered and he was buried next to a fellow victim; Robert William Adams.

John was born on 8 January 1909 in Gorebridge, Midlothian, Scotland, to James Thomson Gunn and Maggie Greig Cunningham. He had two brothers, James Thomson, and George John. He never married and had no known children.

Details of Crash

On 15 December 1941, at 1:10 pm, Supermarine Stranraer 927 took off from Patricia Bay seaplane base on patrol. It carried a crew of seven:

AC1 Robert William Adams
Sgt. Gordon Herbert Andrews
AC1 Robert Albert Blakely
F/L Donald Clark MacDougall
Sgt. Russell Tremaine Mitchell
LAC William Denis Riley
P/O Richard Wood.

F/L MacDougall was first pilot and Sergeant Andrews was second pilot. All the remaining men were described simply as crewmen.

Sgt. John Cunningham Gunn asked the captain if he could join the crew. Despite having been warned previously not to carry unauthorized passengers, F/L MacDougall agreed to take him. There were two authorized passengers, F/L Booth and Mr. Hobbins, who needed transportation to Vancouver.

The aircraft landed successfully at Jericho Beach, where the two legitimate passengers disembarked, and took off again at 1:55 pm. At 2:33 pm, with deteriorating weather conditions all aircraft from Patricia Bay were instructed to return to base. Stranraer 927 did not respond and made no subsequent contact with base.

Around 3:00 pm, F/L Mac Dougall tried to land at Nanoose Bay, where conditions were poor with strong winds (40 mph) and very rough seas. With no survivors and no radio contact, his reasons for landing are obscure.

According to civilian witness statements, at about 3:00 pm the aircraft circled once and then came in to land. It touched the surface, bounced twice and was struck by two waves about 10 feet high. The left wing hit the water and the aircraft turned until it was almost vertical, nose down, and started to sink. Seeing the aircraft in trouble, civilian boatmen tried to reach it, but it sank before they could get there. They were able to pinpoint the location of the wreck

when salvage attempts were made later. The witnesses did not think the aircraft had engine difficulties but some reported a 'flash' on the top of a wing as it landed.

It was about 4:00 pm when Patricia Bay were notified of the crash, and sent an officer to investigate. No salvage efforts were possible on that day due to the rough seas. Two naval boats dragged the area the following day with no success and the next two days, the 17th and 18th, weather was again too rough for further dragging.

On Friday the 19th Pacific Salvage dragged the area for more than three hours and finally located the aircraft in 30 fathoms of water. Once raised, it was towed to shallow water where a diver was able to attach lines to hoist it onto a barge.

On Saturday, the bodies of the crew were removed, brought to shore, and identified. They are recorded as having drowned. Only F/L MacDougall was missing. He was assumed to have escaped through the hatch above his seat and, unable to swim in his heavy flying gear, drowned. His body was never found.

The inquiry into the accident, which did not take place until seven months later, concluded that the cause of the accident was a heavy landing in rough water that damaged the left wing, collapsed the nose, and shattered all the windows, speeding the rate at which the aircraft sank. The damage to the aircraft with this, plus five days under water and the effects of the salvage, was severe.

No recommendations were made since it was impossible to determine why the captain chose to land in such challenging conditions.



SEVEN DEAD IN TRAGEDY

Complement of R.C.A.F. Flying Boat Lost When Craft Sinks

NANAIMO, Dec. 16.—The cause of the tragic death of seven men in the big Royal Canadian Air Force plane which dropped out of a storm, hovered above the waters of Nanoose Bay for a few minutes and then disappeared with a side slip into 240 feet of water, still remains unsolved tonight.

The big flying boat, which left Patricia Bay on Monday on a routine patrol in good weather, evidently had engine trouble at 3:20 p.m. while over Nanoose Bay and after circling twice around the angry waters off Maude Island, settled, hopped three times and then hit again, with one wing dipping into the water, slicing the way for the rest of the huge machine to slide to the bottom. The seven passengers, equipped with life belts, probably were unable to free themselves to obtain a chance to swim clear.

Four officers of the air force arrived in Nanaimo from Patricia Bay today and at noon interviewed eyewitnesses of the accident at Lantzville. They were trying to piece together the story of the crash. On

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