

Harris, William Ward

Age: 22

Nationality: American

Rank: Pilot Officer

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Navigator

Service No: J/1466

Birth: 16 April 1920
Edgerton, Ohio, USA

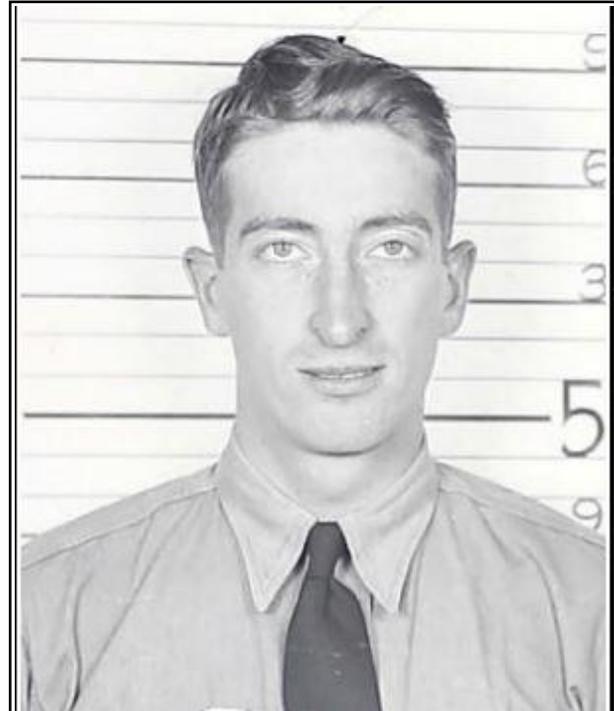
Home Town: Milwaukee, WI, USA

Death: 16 December 1942

Crash of Avro Anson N9560
West of Nanoose Bay, BC

Burial: Holy Cross Cemetery, Milwaukee, WI, USA

Others: P/O Percival Frederick Biggs, WAG, RCAF;
Sgt. Andrew Joseph Doherty, Navigator, RNZAF;
P/O David Jack Robertson, Pilot, RCAF;
P/O James Roderick Vosburgh, WAG, RCAF.



Biography

William Ward Harris, an American citizen, enlisted in the RCAF in Summerside P.E.I. at the end of 1941. His younger brother James, was already training as a pilot and William hoped to do the same. His interviewers found him acceptable despite his very limited civilian experience as a Bell Boy and recommended him for pilot training.

William was in Initial Training from January to March 1942. During this time, he was judged to be nervous, unstable and very poorly coordinated; unsuitable to be a pilot. He was keen, intelligent and displayed excellent service spirit and wanted to re-muster as an Air Gunner.

Following the Initial Training. William took the Observer Course from March to June, Bombing and Gunnery from June to July, Advanced Observer from August to October and Navigation Reconnaissance from October to November. He was consistently found to be hard working and his attitude and conduct were both good. He earned his Air Observer's badge and his commission in September 1942.

William was transferred to No. 32 OTU in Patricia Bay on 4 December 1942. Less than two weeks later, he was killed when the Avro Anson he was navigating crashed into trees West of Nanoose Bay, BC

William's body was returned to Milwaukee, WI, USA, where he was buried with full military honours provided by the US Army. The buglers, colour bearers, and firing squad were supplied by the Milwaukee County Firing Squad. Representatives of Patricia Bay and personnel from the US Army Corps attended. William's casket was draped with a Union Jack, which, following tradition, was folded and handed to his mother.

William was born to Orlo Ward Harris and Mary Elizabeth (Belle) Bailey on 16 April 1920. He had 2 younger brothers, James, who was a flying Instructor at Uplands, Ontario, Canada, and survived the war, and Orlo Ward. He had two younger sisters, Mary and Ruth.



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Details of Crash

Avro Anson N9560 was transferred to Western Air Command in September 1941. On 16 December 1942 it took off at 9:30 am, on reconnaissance exercises, with a crew of five:

P/O Percival Frederick Biggs	J/21175	RCAF	WAG
Sgt. Andrew Joseph Doherty	414549	RNZAF	Navigator
P/O William Ward Harris	J/14661	RCAF	Navigator
P/O David Jack Robertson	J/13019	RCAF	Pilot
P/O James Roderick Vosburgh	J/20163	RCAF	WAG

The route of the flight was Patricia Bay to Cassidy, to Powell River, to Jervis Inlet and back to Patricia Bay. Signal section received a wireless transmission “go” five minutes after take-off, which was the last message from the aircraft. The aircraft never returned to base.

There were six aircraft in total authorized to carry out the exercise and all the pilots and crew were briefed prior to the flight as follows:

“Instructed to map read along the coast between each target until they reached Parksville. From that point the navigators were to initiate courses until the square search was completed and Blubber Bay was found. Instructions were to map read from Blubber Bay to Stillwater. On the final leg from Stillwater to base, the instructions were to fly on a course as directed by the navigator.”

Blubber Bay is on Texada Island, Stillwater is on the North shore of Jervis Inlet.

The crew were specifically warned not to fly in or above clouds and were cautioned regarding the heights of land in this area. Instructions were to fly at about 1,000 ft. and not to fly below 500 ft. with the exception of the leg from Stillwater to base, which was to be flown at 500 ft.

In addition, the wireless operators were told to maintain contact with base at least once an hour and to return to base immediately if contact was lost. The other five aircraft were unable to complete the reconnaissance due to bad weather conditions at Cassidy and returned as instructed.

Pilot/Officer Robertson had flown this course before. His total flying time to this date was:

de Havilland Tiger Moth	82:25 hrs
Airspeed Oxford	7:05 hrs
Avro Anson	146:50 hrs
Handley Page Hampden	4:55 hrs

He had been with No. 32 OTU as a staff pilot for almost a month. His Flight Commander remarked on his flying ability as follows:

“He was very inexperienced with a poor background. He was posted to this Flight as a Staff Pilot after having been rejected from the Hampden Operational Training Course for poor airmanship.”

The Flight Commander did, however, state that Robertson’s flying ability on the Anson was found to be satisfactory.

He also gave the opinion that, in general, pilots sent to Patricia Bay were of limited experience and lacked the ability to cope with the flying conditions peculiar to the location. There had been complaints from time to time on the calibre of pilots arriving at Patricia Bay and these had been noted at other Courts of Inquiry.

A search for the crashed aircraft was undertaken for several days following its disappearance, including one made by Anson R3431, which flew into the sea North of Salt Spring Island while searching.

In March 1943, two civilians out cougar hunting, Fred and Duncan Craig, found a large aircraft in heavy bush near Craig’s Crossing in the Nanaimo District. Patricia Bay station received the following communication:

PROVINCIAL POLICE NANAIMO ADVISE RECEIVING REPORT FROM TWO BUSHMEN WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN LARGE AIRCRAFT IN DENSE THICKET OF SMALL TREES LOCATED APPROXIMATELY FOUR MILES WEST OF NANOOSE BAY VANCOUVER ISLAND BC EXTENT OF DAMAGE UNKNOWN BUT AIRCRAFT DESCRIBED AS BEING ALMOST INTACT AND TO HAVE MADE BELLY LANDING THE BUSHMEN'S REASON FOR NOT EXAMINING AIRCRAFT WAS THAT THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD GET INTO TROUBLE IF THEY DISTURBED ANYTHING PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF POLICE (.) 32 O T U PERSONNEL DETAILED TO PROCEED TO SCENE WITH PROVINCIAL POLICE MORNING 29TH FOR INVESTIGATION (.) AIRCRAFT PRESUMED TO BE ANSON 9560 WHICH WAS MISSING DECEMBER 16TH/42 WITH CREW OF FIVE ABOARD (.) FURTHER DETAILS WILL BE TRANSMITTED BY SIGNAL AFTERNOON 29TH

With the assistance of the Craigs a search party located the site and confirmed that it was indeed N9560. The members of the party identified and recovered the bodies of the five airmen.

A letter was sent to the Governor General of Canada containing a recommendation from the Provincial Police, strongly supported by Western Air Command, that the two civilians, who had devoted two days to assisting in the recovery, should be compensated for their time and effort with a payment each of \$10.

From the
Victoria
Times
Colonist
March 30
1943.

NANAIMO, March 29 (CP) — Bodies of five members of crew of an R.A.F. medium bombing plane which had been missing since December on a navigational flight up the east coast of Vancouver Island were lying in undertaking parlors here tonight following discovery of the wreckage of the craft in a dense clump of trees seven miles inland and about fifteen miles north of Nanaimo on Sunday.

The wreckage was found by Duncan and Fred Craig of Craig's Crossing, who were hunting cougars. The bodies of the airmen were inside the cabin. Last week a portion of the tail elevator was found in a tree about four miles off the main highway in Nanoose district.

A bulldozer, borrowed from a logging company, was utilized to break trail to the scene of the crash.

