

Hemphill, Samuel

Age: 20

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: LAC

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Electrician

Service No: J/142563

Birth: 12 October 1923
Edmonton, AB,
Canada

Home Town: Edmonton, AB,
Canada



Death: 12 April 1944

Crash of Beechcraft Expeditor HB124,
Whidbey Island, WA, USA

Burial: Beechmount Cemetery
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Burial: F/L Victor Ruocco, Pilot; P/O George Walls, Navigator;
Mr. J. L. Blenkiron, factory representative.

Biography

Samuel Hemphill was a wiry 5' 4" Scot with bad teeth. His parents were both born in Glasgow, Scotland and married in Paisley, Scotland. Their children were all born in Canada.

Samuel earned his Grade VIII at Edmonton Public School and continued his schooling at Edmonton Technical College where he chose woodwork and electricity as his optional studies. He was the oldest son, and, after earning 70 credits toward Grade XII, he was compelled to leave school in June 1939, due to his family's economic circumstances. The principal was certain that Samuel, whom he described as 'of good character and above average intelligence', would have completed Grade XII the following year, had he been able.

After leaving school, Samuel worked as a telegraph boy and checker until November 1941, when, just turned 18, he joined the RCAF. He was accepted as a General Tradesman, had further training in electrical work at St. Thomas, Ontario, and became an electrician.

In September 1943, when he was with No. 149 squadron in Alaska, Samuel applied for aircrew, specifically for Observer. In the remarks of the subordinate officer he is rated as '*a very industrious airman, considered good material for aircrew*'. The education officer commented '*good material for aircrew, quick and alert, readily absorbs instructions*'. By January 1944, his application had reached the C/O, who recommended him for Observer.

Samuel was transferred from No. 149 squadron to No. 32 OTU Patricia Bay in March 1944.

On 12 April 1944, Samuel took a ride in Beechcraft Expeditor HB124. He is listed on the flight as a 'passenger'. He had not yet begun training as an Observer but probably jumped at the chance of a flight with reputedly the best pilot at Patricia Bay. The aircraft was flying a civilian passenger to Sand Point, Seattle, WA. It crashed on Whidbey Island killing all four occupants.

Samuel Hemphill was born on 12 October 1923 to Samuel Hemphill, a fireman, and Margaret Wilson. He had two younger brothers, Charles, 19 in 1944 and at No. 2 Wireless School, RCAF Calgary, and David, nine years of age in 1944. He also had sisters Agnes, two years older, and Jean, four years younger. He was not married.

Details of Crash

The flight of Beechcraft Expeditor HB124, on 12 April 1944, was arranged to transport Mr. J. L. Blenkiron, a factory representative of the Douglas Aircraft Company, to Sand Point, Seattle, Washington, in order to obtain aircraft spare parts. At the time No. 32 OTU was being converted to Douglas C-47 Dakota aircraft and Blenkiron was sent to Patricia Bay to ensure the conversion went smoothly. The Expeditor carried three other men:

F/L Victor Ruocco	Pilot
P/O George Walls	Navigator
LAC Samuel Hemphill	A second passenger.

F/L Ruocco was an experienced and exceptionally capable pilot and flying instructor. He was also a qualified radio range instructor.

The aircraft took off from Patricia Bay station at 2:00 pm and the estimated time for the flight was 50 minutes. At about 3:00pm, civilian witnesses at Langley, Whidbey Island, WA, saw the aircraft crash to the ground, explode and burn. Evidence suggests that the aircraft went out of control in, or above, the overcast since it came into sight in a dive of from 30° to 45° and recovered level flight at a low altitude. Due to either a high speed stall, or to it clipping the top of trees, the aircraft rolled about its longitudinal axis and crashed, more or less inverted, in a densely wooded area of 75 ft fir trees. All of the occupants were killed instantaneously and the aircraft was totally destroyed. Weather conditions at Sand Point, Bellingham, and Patricia Bay permitted contact flying for the entire flight and any local, unfavourable weather could have been avoided. There was no radio contact during the flight.

When the site of the crash was examined it appeared that the aircraft had plunged vertically into the ground. Only one tree was clipped off and the wreckage was scattered about as if a great explosion had occurred. One body was recovered from 15 ft up in a tree. It was impossible to find any part of the aircraft that would give any indication as to the cause of the crash. The crash site was near the U.S. Naval Air Station and after the bodies were recovered it was left to the discretion of the U.S. Naval authorities to decide what to do with the remains.



Beechcraft Expeditor

