

Hodge, Roy Alexander

Age: 25

Nationality: New Zealand

Rank: Flight/Sergeant

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Wireless Operator/
Gunner

Service No: 413756(RNZAF)

Birth: 16 June 1918
Wellington, New Zealand

Home Town: Tauranga, New Zealand



Death: 17 March 1944
Crash of Douglas C-47 Dakota FL650,
Vanished during night Navigation Exercises

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial.

Burial: F/S Roy Hodge, W/O, RNZAF; P/O John Murphy,
Navigator, RAFVR; Sgt. Douglas Oliver, Pilot, RAFVR.

Biography

In March 1944 New Zealander Roy Hodge's Canadian wife was expecting their first child when she heard, for the second time, that he was missing and presumed dead. Nine months earlier, in July 1943, she had been told he was missing after a bombing raid in Europe.

Roy was a wireless operator with 149th East India Squadron, based in England, when he left on his 17th bombing mission on 3 July 1943. He was one of a crew of eight in a Short Stirling bomber. They had crossed the coast at about 14,000 ft and were on



track to their destination when they were detected by German radar and pursued by a Messerschmitt 110 piloted by 21 year old Oberleutnant Schnauer. At 1:01 am local time, the German hit the bomber from a distance of about 150 ft, his second victory of the night. A fire started in the port wing, spreading through the fuselage and when the pilot called for the crew to abandon the

aircraft, Roy suffered painful burns while going to collect his parachute. The aircraft was still under control but losing altitude as Roy reached the escape hatch, just behind the navigator. The pilot then lost control and the aircraft started spinning. Roy was bruised and briefly knocked unconscious before he was thrown out, parachuted down, and sprained his ankle as he landed heavily in a wheat field. He was a few miles south east of Diest, in the north east of Belgium. The aircraft had crashed in the next field and he heard the tanks of fuel and ammunition exploding as it burned out.

Oberleutnant Schnauer was the most successful night fighter of WWII and this was his 19th victory out of 121. Roy Hodge and John James Needham, the bomb aimer, an American serving in the RCAF, were the only survivors of the crash. John Needham was captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war in various prisoner of war camps.

Roy Hodge was found by a Belgian, Louis Pieraerts, who proved friendly and took him to a farm, where his wounds were treated and he was put in touch with a network that took care of him, and kept him hidden, until the end of July, when he came under the care of the Belgian "Comète" Resistance. Roy was provided with false documents and hidden at various locations through Belgium and France for another month until he joined a group of allied servicemen being escorted over the Pyrenees into Spain. This

was the 57th of such crossings with the Comète line. He left Gibraltar on October 4th and landed in Whitchurch, England, the following day.

It was Air Force policy that airmen who had been rescued from Europe should not be sent back there, and Roy Hodge was sent to Patricia Bay in BC, Canada, where he became an Instructor.

On 17 March 1944, Roy Hodge was not supposed to be flying. When the wireless operator on Douglas Dakota FL650 proved to have drunk too much to be allowed in the aircraft, Roy stepped in. Tragically, the aircraft, which was on night navigation exercises, failed to return to base and this time there was no happy ending; Roy, along with two other crew, disappeared in the waters of Alert Bay, BC.

Roy Hodge was born 16 June 1918, in Wellington New Zealand, to Peter Frankland Hodge and Ella Clark. He was the fifth of seven children, having three older brothers and three sisters; one older and two younger. He joined the RNZAF in 1939.

In 1942, Roy was training in Paulson, Manitoba, Canada, where he received his Wireless Operator badge on February 15th and his Air Gunner badge on March 16th. On March 14th he married Germaine Marcelle Adam of St. Boniface, Manitoba. They had one daughter Sandra, born five months after his death. Sandra had two children; Gerry Watson who died in 2010 and George Watson. Germaine never talked of her husband or the war years to her grandchildren.

Grandson George Watson only recently learned the full story of his Grandfather's war and his New Zealand connections.



George Watson, grandson of Roy Hodge at "Lost Airmen of the Empire" memorial

Details of Crash

On 17 March 1944, at 7:40 pm Douglas C-47 Dakota FL650 took off from Patricia Bay on night navigational exercises, with a crew of 3:

F/S	Roy Hodge	W/O	RNZAF
P/O	John Murphy	Navigator	RAFVR
Sgt	Douglas Oliver	Pilot	RAFVR

Ten Dakotas were taking part in the exercise and at 5:30 pm the crews were briefed by S/L Geoffrey Thomas. They were to fly at 10,000 feet until they entered cloud, when they were to fix their position, and, estimating a speed of 40 mph, calculate what time the cloud would be over base. They were to adjust their route to make this their latest ETA.

The route they were given, known as 'K route' was base to Nanaimo, climbing to 10,000 feet; to sea position 40° 07' N 137° 45' W; to Tofino; across Vancouver Island to base. The pilots were to return to base immediately should they encounter more than 'light' icing or lose W/T contact for more than 45 minutes.

S/L Thomas could not comment on the ability of Sergeant Oliver as a pilot, but expressed the opinion that No. 3 Transport Course had not shown sufficient discipline to be trusted to obey orders implicitly. He had asked for the course to be extended to amend this, but the request was denied.

At 1:30 am on March 18th, three of the Dakotas had been out W/T contact for some time, causing some concern. Two of the aircraft returned by 3:00 am, at which time the weather had shut in unexpectedly, and the aircraft were diverted to Sea Island. The fuel left in the tanks of these two Dakotas suggested that FL650 could fly until 8:40 am.

The other nine Dakotas all returned to base and could shed no light on what had happened to FL650. One wireless operator had picked up a message that he thought was from the missing aircraft, reporting that it was returning to base.

The last contact with the aircraft was at 9:58 pm on March 17th. Weather conditions on March 18th prevented a search on that day but over the next few days, 65 aircraft flew a total of 208 hours searching for FL650 and its crew. The search was unsuccessful and the airmen were posted as missing, believed killed.

According to Aviation Safety Network, later, two oxygen cylinders of the type used by this aircraft were recovered in the Pearse Island Group, near Telegraph

Cove, Northern Vancouver Island. These were the only possible trace of this aircraft to be found.

The airmen were all commemorated on the Ottawa War Memorial.



