

# Johnson, Nora

**Age:** 30  
**Nationality:** Canadian  
**Rank:** Corporal  
**Unit:** No. 6 OTU  
**Occupation:** Meteorological  
Observer  
**Service No:** W/307410 RCAF (WD)  
**Birth:** 10 February 1915,  
Regina, SK,  
Canada  
**Home Town:** Victoria, BC,  
Canada



**Death:** 13 July 1945  
  
Consolidated Liberator 11121,  
hit mountain seven miles from  
Bamfield, BC, Canada

**Burial:** Commemorated Ottawa Memorial  
Buried near Bamfield, BC.

**Others:** All RCAF: F/O William Edward Davies, pilot;  
F/O Robert Joseph Martello, 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot; F/O Nicholas  
Maxwell Popovitch, Navigator; WO 1 Victor Gilbert  
Crosson, WAG; F/S Donald William Hope, F/E; F/O  
Harry Alexander Lowe, WO; WO 2 Joseph Bertrand  
Presse, WAG, Sgt Pamela Bennett, Corporal Nora  
Johnson, LAC Margaret Mann, LAC Lloyd Tull, Corporal  
Norman Johnson, LAC Raymond Kitely, Corporal  
William Hrysko.

## **Biography**

In total, 17,038 women served in the RCAF Women's Division between 1941 and 1946. Twenty-eight of these women died during the war and three of those twenty eight served at RCAF Station Comox and were lost in the crash of Consolidated Liberator 11121.

Nora Johnson had been working for nine years as an elementary schoolteacher when she joined the RCAF (WD). She had spent one year at University earning an Associate in Arts and a year at Normal School, training as a teacher. She played the piano and was an enthusiastic sportswoman, active in basketball, softball, badminton and tennis, and also a keen swimmer and rider. Although she had loved all her time teaching, she thought joining the RCAF was an excellent opportunity to branch out and receive training in a new line.

Nora was born, on 10 February 1915, in Regina, one of twin girls, to Edward Charles William Johnson and Alice Mary Cockell. Edward and Alice were both born in England and were married in Bournemouth, Dorset, in 1900. Their first three children, May, William and Rose, were born in England and in 1912 emigrated to Canada with their mother; a year after their father had emigrated. The family lived in Regina, Saskatchewan, where three more children were born; Edward in 1914 and twins Nora and Stella in 1915. Edward was serving at HMCS Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, when Nora died. In 1939, Nora, her parents and her older sisters all moved to Victoria, BC.

Enlisting on 2 September 1942 in Vancouver, Nora made a very favourable impression. She was described as a:

*“very good type, keen sense of responsibility, good wit, excellent NCO material, recommended for standard tradeswoman”*

and as:

*“very alert competent girl – interested in station activities. Is investigating what courses are available to improve her qualifications as a teacher.”*

The trades available for women were limited, and, initially, they earned two-thirds of the salaries paid to their male counterparts. In 1943, this was increased to four-fifths.

Nora was sent to No. 6 Manning Depot in Toronto, Ontario for her initial training course. Notwithstanding her obvious qualities she was given a rather cool appraisal as being just average and a little over cautious. It was suggested she should learn to touch type to be proficient in teletype work. Despite nine years experience as a teacher she was reported as being unsuitable as an instructor.

The trade selected for Nora was a meteorological observer. Her work involved plotting, graphing, keeping records, doing balloon observations and math calculations. She was considered to have “*outstanding mental capacity*”. She served at the RCAF stations in Trenton and Prince Rupert, at No. 5 OTU in Boundary Bay, BC, and finally, from 12 November 1944, at No.6 OTU at Comox. In May 1945, almost three years after she enlisted, Nora was recommended for promotion to Corporal:



Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division  
Badge

*“This airwoman does an exceptionally good job and is extremely deserving of promotion.”*

Two months later, on 13 July 1945, Nora was granted leave which she wanted to spend with her family. In a letter to her parents after her death, the Commanding Officer wrote:

On the afternoon of July 13th, 1945, your daughter was quite anxious to secure air transportation to Victoria in order that her visit at home might be for a longer period of time while on pass. As it has been the policy of this station to assist personnel in every way possible to obtain for them air transportation to their destinations, Nora was notified that a Liberator would be leaving the station for Patricia Bay, B.C., although it would stop off at Port Hardy and Tofino en route, for the purpose of performing Air Force commitments. Your daughter, along with two other members of the Women's Division and one airman from this station, accepted the transportation offered. The aircraft reached Port Hardy and Tofino safely, but after it left Tofino bound towards Patricia Bay, contact with the plane was lost.

Shortly after departure from Tofino the Liberator flew into a mountain, killing all 14 occupants. The bodies of the three women passengers could not be identified, but presumably it was possible to recognize which of the severely mutilated bodies were women as two group graves were dug close by the wreckage; one for the 11 men and one for the three women.

*Plaque from Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial, Ottawa, Ontario*



## Details of Crash

On Friday, 13 July 1945, F/O William Edward Davies took off from Patricia Bay station at 08:51 on a standard exercise. He was flying Consolidated B-24 Liberator 11121 with a crew of six; all members of RCAF No. 11 Squadron in Patricia Bay:

F/O Robert Joseph Martello	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pilot
F/O Nicholas Maxwell Popovitch	Navigator
WO 1 Victor Gilbert Crosson	WAG
F/S Donald William Hope	F/E
F/O Harry Alexander Lowe	WO
WO 2 Joseph Bertrand Presse	WAG

Davies had flown this exercise once as second pilot but this was his first time as first pilot. He was a qualified first pilot both day and night on Liberators. He had been trained at USAAF Field, Smyrna, Tennessee, had been with No. 11 squadron about a year, and was fully confident for instrument flight. The second pilot and remaining crew members were also fully qualified.

The exercise was an ordinary cross country flight used to familiarize pilots with the aerodromes in the immediate area, as well as giving Navigators a chance to familiarize themselves with the coast of Vancouver Island. The route was from Patricia Bay to Comox, via Abbotsford and Boundary Bay, followed by Comox to Tofino via Port Hardy, and ending with Tofino to Patricia Bay. Before leaving Patricia Bay the pilot filed a flight plan to Comox. There were no passengers on this leg of the trip.

At Comox, three passengers were approved for the flight: Sergeant Pamela Bennett, Corporal Nora Johnson and LAC Margaret Mann. A fourth passenger, LAC Lloyd Tull, was reported to have boarded the flight just prior to take off. Before leaving Comox the pilot filed the flight plan to Tofino.

At Tofino it was arranged that three more passengers would be taken on board: Corporal Norman Johnson, LAC Raymond Kitely and Corporal William Hrysko. The weather report at Tofino showed extensive fog banks to the south and west. The aircraft took off at 4:43 pm and the pilot planned to be at 10,000 feet at Ucluelet, which indicated that he planned to cross the island at high altitude rather than follow the coast where the fog lay. At 4:46 pm the aircraft made

contact reporting to be at 49°05N 125°45 W, still, after 13 minutes, within the vicinity of Tofino airfield.

This was the last contact made with 11121 and when it failed to arrive at Patricia Bay at its ETA, search procedures were instigated.

The wreckage of the aircraft was found four days later on 17 July 1945, about seven miles east south east of Bamfield, BC. It took ground searchers four days to reach the crash site where they confirmed there were no survivors.

At the inquiry into the crash, F/O W.G. Skerik, Air Search Rescue Officer at Tofino, gave the following information:

*“I was on the first rescue party to reach the crash of Liberator 11121. The position of same was 48°48N, 124°58.30W. I estimated the track of Liberator 11121 prior to the crash to be 77°T.*

*I identified the body of Cpl. N.M Johnson by a wallet on his clothing, Cpl. Hrysko by his wallet, F/O Martello by his wallet, F/O Popovitch by his identity bracelet, F/O Davies by a belt buckle, initial ‘D’ and by a ring initialled ‘W.E.D.’, and an RCAF watch serial No. 1165702, F/S Hope by his identity discs. Seven bodies were found which could not be identified, one of which was definitely a woman and one probably a woman. The other five were definitely identified as men.*

*I searched the slope for about 300 yards below the point of impact for evidence of anyone jumping etc. But nothing was found.”*

Due to the difficulty in locating the crash site the bodies could not be brought out for burial and two graves were dug by the wreckage, one for men and one for women. The chaplain accompanying the search party conducted a funeral service and crosses were erected over the graves. Coinciding as closely as possible with the funeral service, a memorial service was held at Patricia Bay in front of a Station Liberator, conducted by the Station Chaplain and attended by all available officers and airmen of No. 11 Squadron.

In 1982, airmen from Comox Base erected a more permanent cairn and bronze plaque, which were dedicated in an official ceremony in 1983.

The conclusion of the inquiry into the crash blames the pilot, in that, contrary to orders, he flew into cloud instead of finding a route through the breaks in the overcast to reach his planned altitude. While in the cloud he flew into the side of a mountain ESE of Bamfield. The Tofino Base was also found at fault for allowing the pilot to take off for Patricia Bay in the weather conditions that afternoon.



