

# O'Brien, Martin Joseph Patrick

**Age:** 22

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 32 OTU

**Occupation:** Wireless Operator/  
Air Gunner

**Service No:** R/6296

**Birth:** 29 July 1909  
Sydney, NS, Canada



**Home Town:** Sydney, NS, Canada

**Death:** 29 May 1942  
Crash of Bristol Beaufort N1026  
In Sea near Sidney, BC, Canada

**Burial:** St. Theresa's Cemetery, Sydney, N.S., Canada

**Others:** F/S G. Hall (WAG); Sgt. D. MacColl (WAG);  
Stanley Howard Stillwell (RAF) Pilot

# Biography

Martin O'Brien wanted to be a writer. His favourite subjects at school were English and History, his least favourite was Mathematics. After school he tried hard to improve his writing skills by personal study and enjoyed meeting new people and making a study of characters. His application to join the RCAF is carefully and neatly filled in with an attention to detail and completeness.

Martin was the sixth child, of a family of ten born to Martin Joseph O'Brien and Anne Mary Healey, Newfoundlanders whose families originated in Ireland. The family was settled in Sydney, Nova Scotia when Martin was born, and was still there when he died. He attended school in Sydney, staying at Sydney Academy until he completed grade 11, when he was 16. He played hockey for the Sydney Junior Aces, who were both City and Maritime champions, and belonged to, and was secretary of, the Holy Name Society choir. Martin's father was Foreman in the brick plant at Dominion Iron and Steel and after school, Martin apprenticed briefly as a bricklayer. At enlistment he was a 'time clerk' at the same company.

As the war approached, Martin began to take an interest in aviation. This mainly consisted of reading materials like 'Popular Aviation' though he did manage to take 11 hours of flying instruction and enough wireless training to have a speed of six wpm. In 1939 he made an unsuccessful application to the RCAF, then, in September 1940, he applied again, this time successfully. He was prepared to take on whatever role he was considered fit for, but hoped to become air crew.

Martin described himself on his application form as '*active, adventurous, good team worker, restless, and a person who took things seriously*'. His interviewers described him as '*organized, accurate, confident, mature and pleasant*'. He was not recommended for a commission but was expected to make a good NCO and to make good material for a wireless operator/gunner.

Wireless and Gunnery courses followed Martin's enlistment. He passed both courses, above average in wireless, receiving his wireless operator's badge at the end of August 1941 and his air gunner's badge a month later, when he was promoted to sergeant.

On 29 May 1942, Martin was one of a crew of four on Bristol Beaufort N1026, piloted by Sergeant Stanley Stillwell of RAFVR, when the engine failed and it crashed into the sea close to Sidney, Vancouver Island, BC, Canada. All the occupants suffered fatal injuries.



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## Details of Crash

On 29 May 1942, Bristol Beaufort N1026 took off at 1:15 pm carrying a crew of four airmen:

Flight/Sergeant	George Graham Hall	Air Gunner
Sergeant	Donald Duncan MacColl	Air Gunner
“	Martin Joseph Patrick O’Brien	Air Gunner
“	Stanley Howard Stillwell (RAF)	Pilot

Sergeant Stillwell was thought to be an above average pilot.

Almost immediately after take-off and at about 500 feet while the aircraft was still climbing over Sidney, BC, smoke was noticed coming from the port engine followed by a continuous sheet of bright red flame passing under the mainplane. This continued for about 30 seconds when the port engine cut out completely and, soon after the starboard engine was seen to be just ticking over. The aircraft banked to the left, the nose went down and after about two and a half turns, it struck the water about half a mile north east of Sidney Pier.

The fuselage sank immediately in about 19 fathoms. The marine section began to salvage the wreckage right away. The aircraft was raised and the bodies of the four airmen removed.

The cause of the crash was found to be failure of the port engine due to a broken crankshaft. This was the third such failure and Beauforts of this type were grounded, except for emergency operational duties, until the reason for the failure was determined.

