

Paterson, Gordon

Age: 29

Nationality: American

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: No. 133 Squadron

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: R/190893

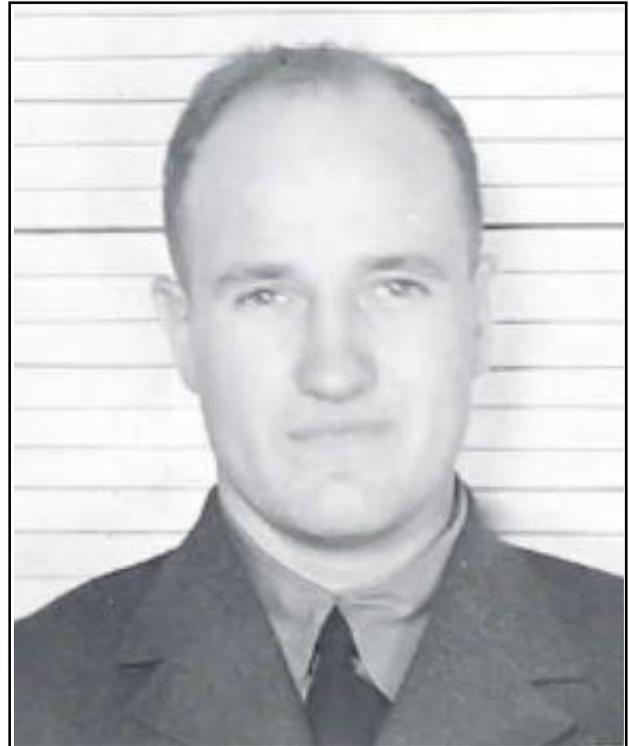
Birth: 14 July 1915
Duluth Mines
Minnesota, USA

Home Town: Toronto, Ontario,
Canada

Death: 29 September 1944

Crash of Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk 1039,
Near Sea Island, BC

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial



Biography

Gordon Paterson was born in the United States, the son of a Canadian father, and, although living in Toronto at the time of his enlistment, he described himself as American. At the age of 27 he applied to the RCAF in September 1942, hoping to become a pilot. He received a mixed reception, being described at his first interview as:

“Rather an aggressive, argumentative type who will probably get under his instructor’s skin. Very filled with self importance, seems very keen to be a pilot, doubt if he makes the grade”.

His second interviewing officer saw him in a different light:

“Superior type, 27 year old insurance salesman, confident and assured. Easy composed manner. Excellent appearance, tall (he was 6’2”) hefty build. Intelligent and alert. Very good attitude, feels his turn has come, always wanted to fly. Appears promising material” He was recorded as suitable for a commission, but this was never realized.

Gordon took two months leave without pay as soon as he enlisted and entered elementary training in November 1942. No records remain of his time spent in training so it is not possible to determine whether he “got under the instructor’s skin” but he did qualify as a pilot, earning his wings in March 1944. In his military record Gordon is referred to as a Sergeant, although on the Canadian Virtual War Memorial he is referred to as Flight Sergeant.

Prior to joining the RCAF, Gordon had an eventful private life. He married Helen while quite young and they had a son born in New York, NY, in August 1938, also Gordon. In 1940, the marriage to Helen was dissolved on grounds of desertion and failure to pay to support his son. He was ordered to pay \$25 each month to Helen, she remarried and the whereabouts of his son was unknown to Gordon’s parents at the time of his death. In 1941, Gordon married Mary Hazel MacAulay, the daughter of a barrister. In March 1944, the same month Gordon qualified as a pilot, Mary sought a divorce on the grounds of adultery with an unknown person. Gordon did not contest the divorce and ended up with a second lot of legal fees to pay.

Five months after earning his wings Gordon was posted to No. 133 fighter

squadron at Pat Bay. Less than two months later he disappeared when his Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk crashed into the sea off Sea Island. The wreckage was located but no body was found.

Gordon was the older of two sons of Gordon Paterson and Bessie Currie. He was born on 14 July 1915 in Duluth Mines, Minnesota, USA. Gordon senior was born in Kingston, Ontario, and Bessie was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. Gordon lived in Minnesota for seven years, New York for 13 years, and Ontario for nine years.

From the age of seven to 15, Gordon was at school in New York, he then spent two years at Upper Canada College in Canada and two years at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He lived in Toronto, Ontario, where his parents and brother were living at the time of his death.

Gordon's War Service Gratuity was granted to his first wife, now Mrs. Helen Rothmeyer, to be held in trust for his son, Gordon Paterson III.



Details of Crash

On 29 September 1944, P/O D. B. Crowe was leader on dawn patrol; his No. 2 was Gordon Paterson in Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk 1039. They took off at 7:00 am. The pilots had been ordered to fly below the clouds and as the flight progressed the weather deteriorated and the ceiling dropped. In his evidence at the inquiry into Sergeant Paterson's accident, P/O Crowe stated:

“On reaching about 5,000 feet, I contacted Sgt. Paterson and he informed me his position was at angle 10. That is he was at 10,000 feet. I then told him to fly a Vector of 180 and I would climb up and meet him.

“I received an acknowledgement of this transmission. I then contacted sector and asked them to transmit to Sgt. Paterson and ascertain his position. They said they showed him over B (Sea Island) at about 10,000 feet. They instructed him to fly 180 but this was not acknowledged. In the meantime, I had broken cloud at 7,000 feet between C and A. That is between Gabriola Island and Point Robert.”

Gordon never communicated that he was in difficulties.

Witnesses in Vancouver reported seeing a P-40 through a break in the overcast, flying south easterly. It flew back into the cloud and when next seen it went into a spin and dived into the ground. None of the witnesses saw the pilot bail out.

The aircraft burst into flame and burned fiercely on impact. When the wreckage was examined, the officer in command of air and sea rescue stated:

“No trace was found of the pilot's body, his uniform or buttons or his parachute and dinghy. This is in spite of the fact that a portion of the pilot's headrest was found which was only partially burned. In addition portions of the controls such as the throttle were found.

In the light of this evidence I am reasonably satisfied that the pilot could not have been in the aircraft at the time of the accident.”

According to the station diary, on October 2nd Avro Anson 1201 searched for the pilot and dinghy unsuccessfully. A second unsuccessful search was made the following day by an Anson from No. 122 squadron. According to No. 133 squadron diary, an extensive search was made over three days by North American Harvards. The army became involved and an exhaustive ground search was made, again with no success, and Gordon was posted as missing.

The cause of the accident was obscure. Either the pilot lost control of the aircraft when attempting to get out of the overcast, or he panicked when he lost the leader and bailed out prior to the aircraft spinning to the ground. Evidence favoured the second possibility. The recommendation from the inquiry focused on the fact that Gordon had lost his leader, and squadron leaders were instructed to impress on their pilots the importance of remaining in formation, particularly when flying in bad weather or cloud.

