

Ramsay, George Balfour Nicol

Age: 30
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: Flight Lt.
Unit: No. 3 OTU
Occupation: Navigator
(Instructor)

Service Number: J/7200

Birth: 4 February 1914
Markinch, Fifeshire
Scotland

Home Town: Oakville, Ontario,
Canada

Death: 2 December 1944

Crash of Consolidated Canso 11086
near Ucluelet, BC

Burial: Commemorated Ottawa Memorial
Buried at site of crash.

Others: Sgt Robert Davidson, F/E; F/O Louis Day, 2nd Pilot;
P/O John Mahoney, W/O; F/O Robert Nash, 1st Pilot;
Sgt Joseph Patenaude, WAG; P/O Frank Porter, F/E;
P/O Alonzo Staples, Navigator, Sgt Joseph Trudel, WAG.



Biography

George Balfour Ramsay, better known as 'Buff', was three years old when he emigrated to Canada from Scotland, where he was born. Until he joined the RCAF he lived entirely in Oakville, Ontario, where he attended Oakville Trafalgar High School, and, from the age of 15 to 18, was a corporal in the Halton Rifles, later called the Lorne Scots.

After graduating from high school with his junior matriculation Buff studied electricity at night school for a year while he was employed making baskets. In 1932 he started working as a clerk and meter reader for the Electricity Company in Oakville and stayed there until he enlisted in November 1940. He had made an earlier application to the RCAF in 1936, when he was told he would be called if a vacancy became available.

When Buff left Ontario for Alberta he left behind his young girlfriend, Marjorie. He must have been frustrated with spending three months principally on guard duty and receiving no training, and communicated this with Marjorie. She wrote an impassioned letter to the RCAF pleading with them to respect him leaving his job and wanting to serve his country and to give him training and a chance to earn his wings.

Buff never did 'earn his wings' but trained as an air observer, air gunner, and later as a navigator. He received his Observers Badge in August 1941 and spent a month at advanced air observer school in Manitoba. When he completed the advanced course, on 1st September 1941, he received his commission, married Marjorie, and two days later was posted to the UK. Marjorie applied to the RCAF for passage to England to join Buff in March 1943, which was probably denied since he was posted to Gibraltar at about the same time.

Until 1943 Buff was training in the UK with Coastal Command as an Air Gunner Observer. In March 1943, he joined No. 202 squadron in Gibraltar on torpedo patrol. In January 1944, he was mentioned in dispatches and in February 1944 returned to Canada, where he joined No. 3 OTU in Patricia Bay, BC. Marjorie moved to Ladysmith, not far from Patricia Bay.

March to April 1944, Buff, already a Flight Lieutenant, went to Navigation School in Manitoba and was approved as a Navigation Instructor. He was pleasant and well liked, intelligent and a good type of officer. In October 1944,

he was recommended for promotion to Squadron Leader.

On 2 December 1944, Buff was the senior officer on Consolidated Canso 11086 when it flew into a mountain near Kennedy Lake on Vancouver Island. When the aircraft was located the following year his remains were buried along with the other crew members in a common grave beside the wreckage of their aircraft.

Wife Given Plane To Seek Airman

VANCOUVER, March 12.—(CP)—R.C.A.F. officials in co-operation with Canadian Pacific Air Lines will provide an aircraft for Mrs. Marjorie Ramsay of Toronto to search for her husband, Flt. Lt. George Ramsay lost aboard an R.C.A.F. aircraft three months ago, Air Vice-Marshal Heakes, officer commanding western air command, announced tonight.

The announcement followed a meeting between Air-Vice Marshal Heakes and Mrs. Ramsay who arrived in Vancouver Sunday.

Flt. Lt. Ramsay was reported missing after a Canso flying boat failed to return from a flight. Mrs. Ramsay said she had a dream about a "Kent Island" and is prepared to spend her \$3,500 savings in the Kent Island area.

Kent Island is off the north-eastern tip of Vancouver Island and about 265 airmiles northwest of Vancouver. Air Force officials said the area has been searched thoroughly by land, sea and air on two occasions since Ramsay's flying boat disappeared.

George Balfour Nicol Ramsay was born 4 February 1914 in Markinch, Fifeshire, Scotland to James Ramsay and Allison Nicol. He had one older brother, William, and a younger brother, Beverley. The family emigrated to Canada around 1917 and settled in Oakville Ontario. He married Marjorie Kathleen Johnson on 1 September 1941.



There is no longer an island in BC called 'Kent Island'. It may be an earlier name of Hope Island off the tip of Vancouver Island. The wreckage was found 1 July 1945 in the area marked.

About 2 years later Marjorie remarried and moved to the USA.

| *Ottawa Morning Journal* 13/3/45

Details of Crash

On 2 December 1944, the crew of Consolidated Canso 11086 were briefed for a night navigation exercise to begin at 4:30 pm. The crew members were:

Sergeant Robert Davidson	Flight Engineer
Flying Officer Louis Day	2 nd Pilot
Pilot Officer John Mahoney	Wireless Operator
Flying Officer Robert Nash	Captain, 1 st Pilot
Sergeant Joseph Patenaude	WAG
Pilot Officer Frank Porter	Flight Engineer
Flight Lt. George Ramsay	Navigation Instructor
Pilot Officer Alonzo Staples	Navigator
Sergeant Joseph Trudel	WAG

Pigeon #43 RCAF 1064 Sole survivor

Three of the crew were French speaking and had chosen to be together. The aircraft had been intended for an earlier exercise but this was prevented by wireless problems.

Crews of six Canso aircraft were fully briefed for the exercise, which entailed flying from base to the southern tip of Vancouver Island, out to sea for about two hours and then back along the same route to base. Two of the aircraft were found not to be serviceable so only four actually became airborne to begin the exercise. Due to wireless problems one aircraft returned after about two hours, and an hour later two more aircraft returned to base because of deteriorating weather. On their return they reported encountering very poor weather in the Juan de Fuca Strait

Signals at No. 3 OTU contacted Canso 11086 and instructed the aircraft to return to base. 11086 acknowledged the signal at 6:55 pm. An aircraft tracking system in Victoria maintained a plot on an incoming aircraft, which was assumed to be 11086, from 7:24 to 7:51 pm but lost this plot when the aircraft entered Juan de Fuca Strait.

W/T contact was maintained with 11086 until 8:00 pm, although difficulty was encountered in making contact, probably because of the low altitude the pilot

was forced to fly at in the Juan de Fuca Strait, due to the poor weather. No further contact was made and at 8:50 pm, overdue action was taken.

The search for 11086 started on December 2nd and continued until December 11th. The search entailed 742 hours of daytime flying and 46 hours at night. A further 250 hours of searching started on December 15th after flares were discovered, which were believed to be connected to 11086. No trace was found of the aircraft or crew.

At 5:00 pm on December 6th, a bedraggled carrier pigeon, #43 RCAF 1064, returned to its loft at Patricia Bay. The pigeon had been issued to Flight Officer Nash on December 2nd and belonged to Canso 11086. It was exhausted, but showed no sign of having been in a crash. The droppings present on its upper tail feathers suggested that it had remained inside its box until the morning after the aircraft went missing. The message capsule was missing from the pigeon's leg, giving rise to speculation that it had been handled.

Around 4:00 pm on December 5th a civilian walking on Long Beach near Tofino found a capped beer bottle containing a message. He smashed the bottle to get at the note on which he could read "SOS" and a location. He took the note home, dried it out and contacted the RCAF at Tofino.

At the Tofino Station the smudged note was deciphered as well as could be done, and it was decided to turn the note over to the Intelligence Officer at Western Command. The Commanding Officer at Tofino thought it most unlikely that an aircrew in a dinghy would have sent a note in a beer bottle, and the date on the note appeared to be in September. Although instructed to send the message immediately, he did not send it until the next plane left on December 9th.

It was ultimately decided that the note was a hoax. However, the Commanding Officer at Tofino was severely reprimanded since, had the note been from Canso 11086, his delay would have impacted the area searched and possibly the survival chances of the crew.

On 1 July 1945 the wreckage of an aircraft was located from the air by a Douglas DC-3 flying into Tofino. The wreckage was located 30 miles east of Tofino, Vancouver Island, on the S.E. slope of a mountain at about 3,000 feet and appeared to have been heading north-west. The front of the aircraft was completely burnt out but it was determined that both engines were under power at the time of the crash. The plane was identified as Canso 11086 by the number

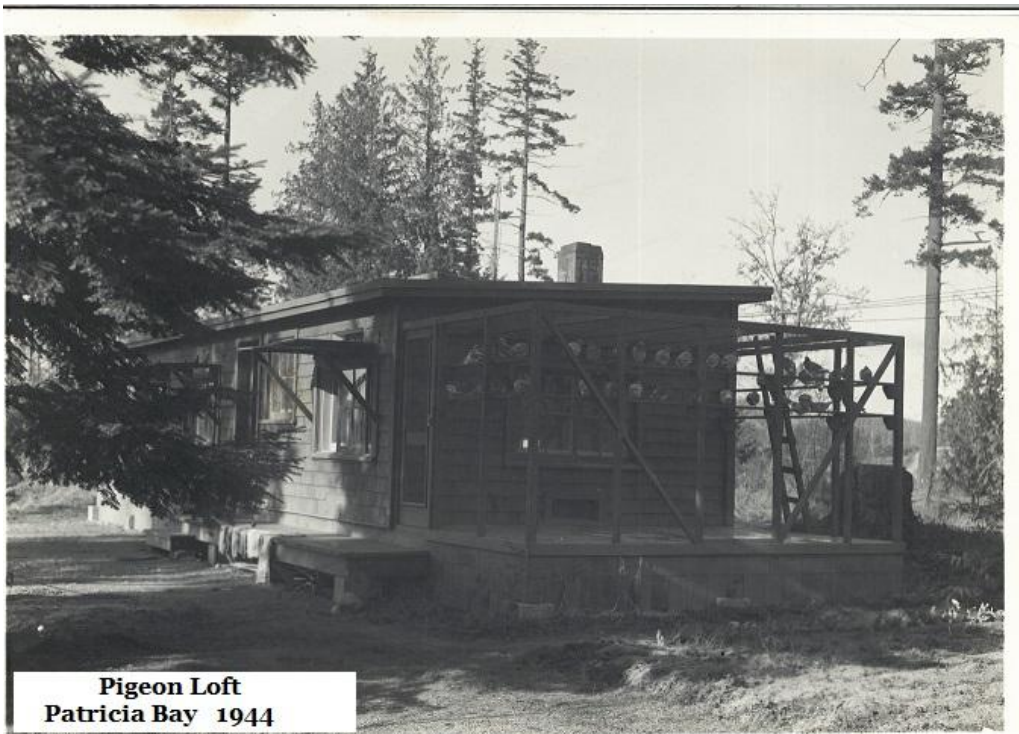
on the fuselage.

A watch was found which had stopped at 8:27, which is presumed to be the time of the crash. The pigeon box catch was found to have been sprung by the crash, so the pigeon could have escaped by exerting a little pressure. The pigeon log was also found with no pages missing. Every effort was made to identify the occupants, who were buried in a common grave at the site and a funeral conducted by the Protestant and Catholic padres who were present. The burial cairn was covered with a Union Jack and a white cross with the name and number of each man was erected.

The investigation into the crash was re-opened and it concluded that the cause of the crash was the failure of the pilot to reach a safe height while flying in bad weather in a mountainous area.

On 24 August 1986, after three years of planning, a new cairn had been built at the site, with a memorial plaque, and a formal dedication service was given for the lost airmen.





The RCAF operated homing pigeons for more than 25 years. They were carried aboard military aircraft for emergency use, as the birds were more reliable and lighter than the tube based radios of the time. The purpose was to use them to send a message back to the base if a plane was downed.

In 1920 Jericho Beach Station in Vancouver became the first station to establish a Pigeon Division. By 1944 there were 30 pigeon lofts in Canada; 16 on the west coast and 14 on the east coast. At its peak the Pigeon Division had one officer and over 300 enlisted men. Pigeons also served in Europe with Bomber and Coastal Command,

Special lofts for the birds were constructed, and airmen of the Pigeon Division were instructed in the raising and caring of homing pigeons. Pigeons were used throughout the war at Patricia Bay Station, where, for exercise, the birds were regularly released in Victoria and left to fly home.

On patrols usually two pigeons in special boxes were loaded onto the aircraft and then removed on its return and the pigeons returned to their loft. The accident described here is the only one out of Patricia Bay in which a pigeon returned to base after a crash. There is no record of whether the aircraft carried a second pigeon that failed to survive.