

Riley, William Dennis

Age: 20
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: LAC
Unit: No. 13 OTU
Occupation: Aero Engine
Mechanic
Service No: R/61579
Birth: 19 August 1921
Regina Saskatchewan



L.A.C. William D. Riley,
Regina, Sask.

Home Town: Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Death: 15 December 1941

Crash of Supermarine Stranraer 927
Entrance to Nanoose Bay, BC, Canada

Burial: Regina Cemetery, Saskatchewan, Canada

Others: AC1 Robert William Adams (crew); Sgt. Gordon Herbert Andrews (co-pilot); AC1 Robert Albert Blakely; F/L Donald Clark MacDougall (pilot); Sgt. Russell Tremaine Mitchell (crew); P/ O Richard Wood (crew); Sgt. John Cunningham Gunn (passenger).

Biography

With only a brief adventure in the RCAF separating him from his school days, William Dennis Riley drowned in a sunken Supermarine Stranraer. His reference on enlisting came from the man who employed him on a newspaper round.

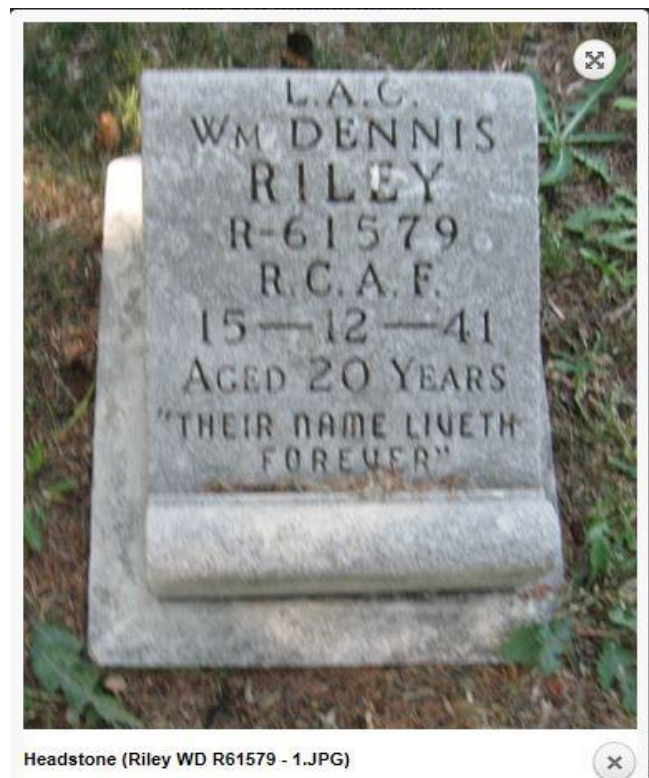
William was more mechanically gifted than academically. When he left high school in 1937 he had only partially completed grade 11. However, he had gained two years of valuable experience as a mechanic, and had completed a 24 week course in aero engines under the Dominion-Provincial Boys Training Program. These stood him in good stead in his application to join the RCAF as an aero engine mechanic. He also claimed a knowledge of wireless codes. Between high school and enlistment he spent time at a commercial school learning shorthand and typing.

At Regina in June 1940, when William was tested for his suitability he showed himself to have had good practical experience and to have good knowledge of engine and ignition theory. His appearance and intelligence were both also rated as 'good' and he was accepted as LAC to be trained as aero engine mechanic.

On another appraisal at about the same time William is reported to be a willing and capable mechanic and to specialize in Pegasus IX and X engines.

He was posted to Patricia Bay on 11 November 1941, a little more than a month before his death.

William was born on 19 August 1921 in Regina, Saskatchewan to Willam Riley, born in USA, and Alice Arnold, born in England.



Details of Crash

On 15 December 1941, at 1:10 pm, Supermarine Stranraer 927 took off from Patricia Bay seaplane base on patrol. It carried a crew of seven:

AC1 Robert William Adams
Sgt. Gordon Herbert Andrews
AC1 Robert Albert Blakely
F/L Donald Clark MacDougall
Sgt. Russell Tremaine Mitchell
LAC William Denis Riley
P/ O Richard Wood

F/L MacDougall was first pilot and Sergeant Andrews was second pilot. All the remaining men were described simply as crewmen.

Sgt. John Cunningham Gunn asked the captain if he could join the crew. Despite having been warned previously not to carry unauthorized passengers, F/L MacDougall agreed to take him. There were two authorized passengers, F/L Booth and Mr. Hobbins, who needed transportation to Vancouver.

The aircraft landed successfully at Jericho Beach, where the two legitimate passengers disembarked, and took off again at 1:55 pm. At 2:33 pm, with deteriorating weather conditions, all aircraft from Patricia Bay were instructed to return to base. Stranraer 927 did not respond and made no subsequent contact with base.

Around 3:00 pm, F/L Mac Dougall tried to land at Nanoose Bay, where conditions were poor with strong winds (40 mph) and very rough seas. With no survivors and no radio contact, his reasons for landing are obscure.

According to civilian witness statements, at about 3:00 pm the aircraft circled once and then came in to land. It touched the surface, bounced twice and was struck by two waves about 10 feet high. The left wing hit the water and the aircraft turned until it was almost vertical, nose down, and started to sink. Seeing the aircraft in trouble, civilian boatmen tried to reach it, but the patrol aircraft sank before they could get there. They were able to pinpoint the location of the wreck when salvage attempts were made later. The witnesses did not think the aircraft had engine difficulties but some reported a 'flash' on the top of a wing as it landed.

It was about 4:00 pm when Patricia Bay were notified of the crash and sent an officer to investigate. No salvage efforts were possible on that day due to the rough seas. Two naval boats dragged the area the following day with no success and the next two days,

the 17th and 18th, weather was again too rough for further dragging.

On Friday the 19th Pacific Salvage dragged area for more than three hours, and finally located the aircraft in 30 fathoms of water. It was raised it and towed to shallow water where a diver was able to attach lines to hoist it onto a barge.

On Saturday the bodies of the crew were removed, brought to shore, and identified. They are recorded as having drowned. Only F/L MacDougall was missing. He was assumed to have escaped through the hatch above his seat and, unable to swim in his heavy flying gear, drowned. His body was never found.

The inquiry into the accident, which did not take place until seven months later, concluded that the cause of the accident was a heavy landing in rough water that damaged the left wing, collapsed the nose, and shattered all the windows, speeding the rate at which the aircraft sank. The damage to the aircraft with this, plus five days under water and the effects of the salvage, was severe.

No recommendations were made since it was impossible to determine why the captain chose to land in such challenging conditions.



SEVEN DEAD IN TRAGEDY

Complement of R.C.A.F. Flying Boat Lost When Craft Sinks

NANAIMO, Dec. 16.—The cause of the tragic death of seven men in the big Royal Canadian Air Force plane which dropped out of a storm, hovered above the waters of Nanoose Bay for a few minutes and then disappeared with a side slip into 240 feet of water, still remains unsolved tonight.

The big flying boat, which left Patricia Bay on Monday on a routine patrol in good weather, evidently had engine trouble at 3:20 p.m. while over Nanoose Bay and after circling twice around the angry waters off Maude Island, settled, hopped three times and then hit again, with one wing dipping into the water, slicing the way for the rest of the huge machine to slide to the bottom. The seven passengers, equipped with life belts, probably were unable to free themselves to obtain a chance to swim clear.

Four officers of the air force arrived in Nanaimo from Patricia Bay today and at noon interviewed eyewitnesses of the accident at Lantzville. They were trying to piece together the story of the crash. On

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