

Smith, Mervyn Charles Bruce

Age: 20
Nationality: Australian
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: No. 32 OTU
Occupation: Wireless Operator
Air Gunner
Service No: 423098 (RAAF)

Birth: 13 May 1923,
Uralla, Sydney,
NSW, Australia

Home Town: Bundarra, NSW,
Australia

Death: 16 October 1943
Crash of Handley Page Hampden AN132
Maggie Lake, BC, Canada

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial,
Ontario, Canada

Others: Sgt. Ronald Frank Allcorn, Pilot, RAFVR;
Sgt. Peter Francis Hornbrook, Navigator, RAFVR;
P/O Raymond Robert Porter, WAG, RAAF.



Biography

Mervyn Smith's father, Charles, owned or managed a station called 'Carinya' in Uralla, NSW, Australia. Mervyn was born there on 13 May 1923 and attended Uralla public school until he was 14, when he left to work for his father as a station hand and grazier. This was a reserved occupation and in 1941 when Mervyn applied to enlist in the Royal Australian Air Force for aircrew he needed permission from his employer, his father, which was given.

He was passed as medically fit for air crew and passed the test he was set to determine his suitability. He found that although he passed the initial tests, he needed further education:

Form P/P.78/44B.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

M. C. B. Smith

"Carinya" Bundarra.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
No. 24 Recruiting Centre,
Palmer & Plunkett Streets,
WOOLLOOMOOLOO. N.S.W.

J. Inverell

25 NOV 1941

Dear Sir,

With reference to your recent application to serve with the Royal Australian Air Force as a member of an Air Crew, I have to inform you that at your examination you were successful in passing all initial tests.

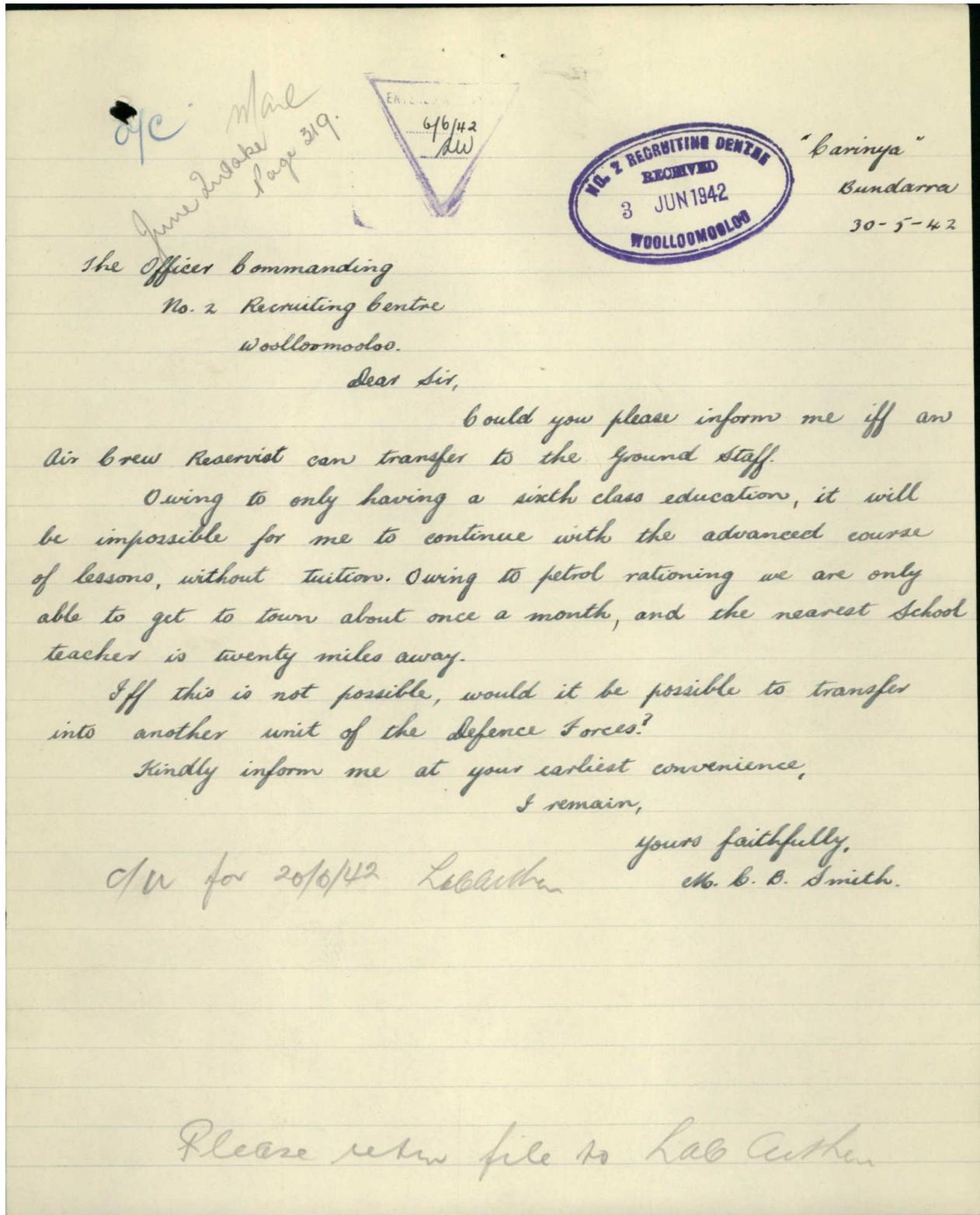
You are required to do the Educational Course which was set you at your interview.

Subject to the successful conclusion of such education course, you have been selected to enter an Initial Training School as Trainee Aircrew.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

In May 1942, Mervyn sent the following letter:



The situation was obviously resolved as Mervyn enlisted on 20 June 1942 for aircrew and in August was sent to No. 1 Initial Training Course where he was found to be a very keen average student with the potential to improve with training.

On September 7th, Mervyn embarked in Melbourne to travel to Canada for further training. On 10 October 1942, he was posted to No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary and from there, in May 1943 to No. 2 BAGS in Mossbank, Saskatchewan. Mervyn was an above average wireless operator and in gunnery school he was above average academically and average in firing ability. He was assessed as a steady, dependable, hard worker, but slow.

On 24 July 1943, Mervyn was posted to No. 32 OTU at Patricia Bay, BC and on August 21st he married Iris Olive Trim, of Calgary, at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver, BC. At the time of Mervyn's death, less than two months later, Iris was living at the Cedar Grove Inn in Saanichton, near Patricia Bay. After his death, she travelled to Australia and gave her address as c/o her father in law.



Mervyn Smith age 19

On 16 October 1943, Mervyn and fellow Australian Raymond Porter were Wireless Operator/ Air Gunners on Handley Page Hampden AN132 when it disappeared on night navigation exercises. In July 1945, the wrecked and burned aircraft was located on a hill near Ucluelet, BC, and the crew were buried in a common grave at the site of the crash.

Details of Crash

Handley Page Hampden AN132 carried a crew of four; two from the Royal Air Force and two from the Royal Australian Air Force.

Sgt. Ronald Frank Allcorn	Pilot	RAFVR
Sgt. Peter Francis Hornbrook	Navigator	RAFVR (resident of USA)
P/O Raymond Robert Porter	WAG	RAAF
Sgt. Mervyn Charles Smith	WAG	RAAF

On 16 October 1943, the crews of six aircraft were briefed for a night navigation exercise over the Pacific Ocean. The pilots were instructed that if they encountered a bank of cloud in the direction of the Malahat they should climb over it. The route to be taken was base to Amphritite Point, to Catala Island, to two more positions over the sea, to Pachema Point, and back to base. The duration of the flight was approximately 3:30 hours at a height of 6,000 feet or 2,000 feet above any low cloud. If W/T contact could not be made on any of the given bases within one hour, the crew was to term this W/T failure and return to base.

AN132 took off at 18:55 and gave bearings at 19:27, 19:44, 19:47 and 19:49. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after this.

The pilot of AN144 returned to base at 19:25 with W/T trouble and reported that the weather was not good. There was considerable cloud about near the station and frequent showers. At 20:18, the weather was worsening and all aircraft were recalled to base. Every effort was made to contact AN132 with no success; the other four aircraft returned safely.

On October 16th, a search for the missing aircraft started and continued for five days with no results. The aircraft was presumed lost with all crew.

The pilot, Allcorn, had 305 hours experience, 66 hours in the previous six months mainly on Hampdens. He was rated as above average on night and instrument flying and sound on single engine. Though mild mannered, he did not lack confidence. A flying instructor had flown AN132 immediately before the exercise and found it serviceable for what was required.

At the court of inquiry into the accident it was concluded that no decision on the

cause of the crash could be made and that all crew members had died.

On 6 July 1945, a crashed Hampden was located on a hill near Maggie Lake, seven miles NE of Ucluelet.

When the inquiry was reopened, Sergeant A. Nobleman, an Armourer at RCAF station Tofino gave the following evidence:

“On 7th July 1945 I proceeded to the scene of the crash of a Hampden aircraft accompanied by W.G.Willie as a guide, a fisherman from Ucluelet, BC, Sergeant Rose, a hospital assistant, and L.A.C. Wilson.

At the time of impact, the aircraft appeared to have been flying from west to east, judging by the path cut through the trees by the aircraft. At the same time, the aircraft appeared to have hit fairly straight in, as few trees were broken. The aircraft appeared to have exploded and burned on impact. The wreckage was spread for a distance of 160 yards down the mountain.

Although every effort was made to identify the occupants of the aircraft, no identification was possible. It was not even possible to learn the number of occupants. The aircraft was identified as a Hampden by a metal tag found bearing the name and number 52333L17M-5201C1 1SS5/FAL/CA/6122. I was unable to find the number of the particular aircraft.”

An investigation was able to identify the aircraft based on the number given, as Hampden AN132. Due to the difficulties in reaching the site the bodies could not be removed and on July 30th a funeral party with a chaplain was sent to bury the bodies by the wreckage and erect a white cross.

The total destruction of the aircraft made it impossible to reach any further insight into the cause of the crash and the original conclusions of the inquiry were upheld.

