

# Turnbull, William McIldowie

**Age:** 20  
**Nationality:** Canadian  
**Rank:** Flight Sergeant  
**Unit:** No. 133 Squadron  
**Occupation:** Navigator  
**Service No:** R/268513

**Birth:** 16 May 1925  
Verdun, Que,  
Canada

**Home Town:** Verdun, Que,  
Canada

**Death:** 17 July 1945,  
de Havilland Mosquito KA109,  
Crashed in Sabine Channel,  
BC, Canada

**Burial:** Commemorated Ottawa Memorial

**Others:** F/O Charles Govan Middleton, Pilot, RCAF.



# Biography

William Turnbull was an anglophone Quebecois whose parents had immigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1916. He was born in Verdun, Que., on 16 May 1925, the third of four children of David Tindle Turnbull, a wireless operator, and Nan Cuthbertson. His sisters, both older than him, were Kathleen and Jessie O'Hara, and his brother, eleven years younger than him, was another David Tindle.

William left school when he was 15 with a grade eight education. He returned later to work towards grade 11 but left after a couple of months and worked as a probationary wireless operator for the Canadian Marconi Company. From 1939 to 1941, he was a trooper in the Duke of York Hussars (Reserves). A shade under six feet and a healthy 156 lbs, William was athletic and into most sports available to a young Canadian.



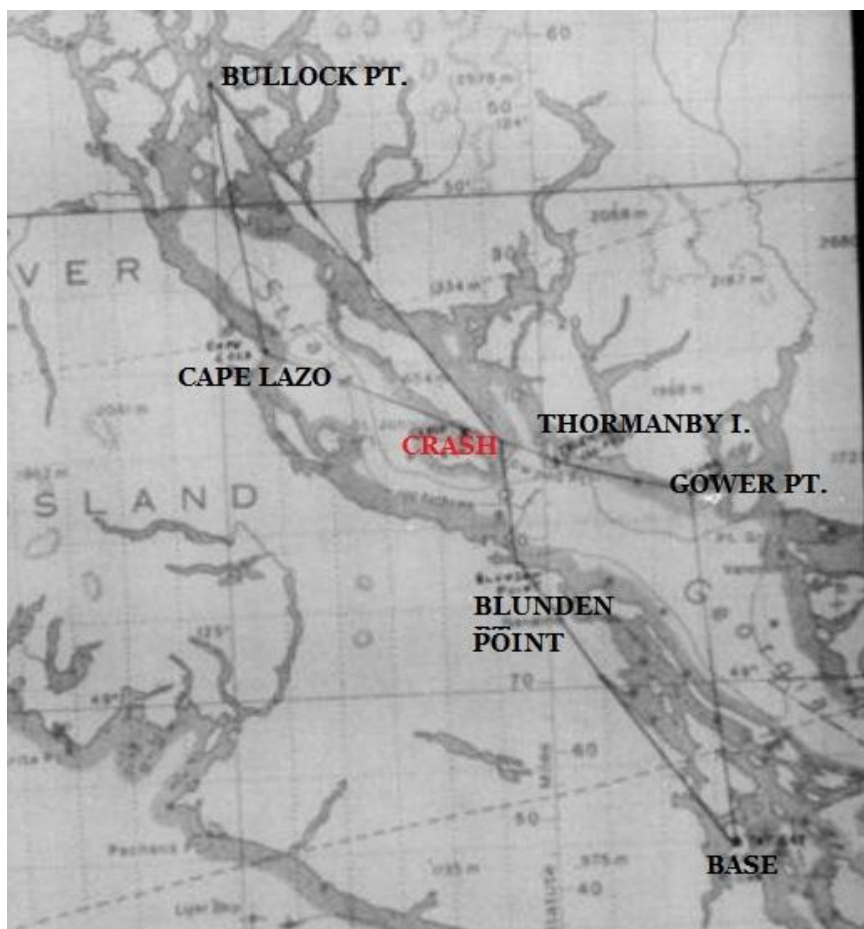
The medical officer who examined William for the RCAF reported him to be of standard mentality, athletic physique, and competent in all the tests given. He wanted standard aircrew and the officer thought he would do well. William attested on 6 August 1943, when he was 18.

There are no records of his performance during training but William earned his Wireless Operator's badge in May 1944 and his Navigator's badge in November 1944. During his time in training he was in Kingston, Guelph, both in Ontario, and L'Ancienne-Lorette, Que. In March 1945, he was sent to No. 8 OTU Greenwood, Nova Scotia, and from there to No. 133 squadron first in Moncton and in June 1945 in Patricia Bay.

On 17 July 1945, William was Navigator in de Havilland Mosquito KA109, piloted by F/O Charles Middleton, when it took off at 10:58 for low flying navigation exercises. After half an hour, the aircraft hit the water in the Sabine Channel, between Texada Island and Lasqueti Island. Charles and William were both lost in the accident and their bodies were never recovered.

## Details of Crash

On 17 July 1945, three de Havilland Mosquito aircraft took part in a “rhubarb” low navigation exercise. The third to take off, at 10:58, was KA109 with F/O Charles Govan Middleton as Pilot and F/S William McIldowie Turnbull as Navigator. The crews were permitted to chart their own course which was then approved by the officer responsible for the exercise. The course for KA109 was to be: Base to Gower Point to Thormanby Island to Cape Lazo to Bullock Bluff to Upwood Point to Blunden Point back to Base. For these exercises, the minimum flying height was 50 feet.



At about 11:30 the aircraft was seen by a fisherman in the Sabine Channel, between Texada and Lasqueti Islands, flying in a northwesterly direction along the west coast of Texada Island, about 15 feet off the water. According to his

evidence at the Court of Inquiry, the machine seemed as if it was going to land and then the rear end of the plane seemed to hit the water and the aircraft appeared to climb at a steep angle to about 50 feet. The left wing dropped and the pilot seemed to right it, then the right wing dropped and the aircraft lowered its nose and went into the water, which was very smooth. When the aircraft went into the water there was smoke and fire.

The aircraft sank in 1,000 feet of water and the crew members were never found. When the site was examined later in the day only a few pieces of plywood were found, one with the number "09". Since the only wooden aircraft at Patricia Bay was the Mosquito and KA 109 was the only aircraft missing, it is clear that this is where it crashed.

Because of the concerns of Charles Middleton's father over the state of health of his son on this day, evidence was given to the Court of Inquiry by the Medical Officer:

The Witness, S/L G. MacKay, having been called states: I am S/L George MacKay, (025666), employed as Station Medical Officer, R.C.A.F. Station, Patricia Bay, B.C.

F/O Middleton, R.G. - J.10788.

The above officer was in Station Hospital, Patricia Bay from 20th June, 1945 to 27th June, 1945.

He was under treatment for a minor bladder ailment. Investigation showed no pathology of a serious nature. He responded satisfactorily to symptomatic treatment. While in hospital, he had a complete medical check and was found in good health. He was discharged free of any complaint which he had prior to and on admission to hospital.

Subsequent examination of the above Flying Officer was made one week later. He felt quite well and medical check was satisfactory. This Officer according to our records has not attended any sick parades since the above check.

In addition the Flight Lieutenant who authorized the flight was questioned:

Ques. 1. What was the condition of F/O Middleton's health on 17th July, 1945, when you detailed him on this flight?

Ans. 1. F/O Middleton had returned from a 48 hour pass Monday 16th, July, 1945, about 17:30 hours and had flown back a Mosquito from Sea Island. On Tuesday 17th July, 1945, I detailed him at his own request to participate in a low level cross country. To the best of my knowledge, he was in perfect health at the time he took off as would appear to be proven by his requesting to go flying.

(Sgd.) "James R.F. Johnson" F/L

The pilot of one of the other Mosquito Aircraft performing the exercise, a friend of Charles Middleton, was also questioned on Charles' health:

Ques. 2. On F/O Middleton's return from his 48 hour pass on the 16th July, 1945, had he complained to you of not feeling well?

Ans. 2. No, he appeared to be in a happy mood and did not mention to me of not feeling well as we attended the show on the station together on Monday night, 16th July, 1945.

(Sgd.) "N. Laidlaw" F/O

The conclusion of the Court of Inquiry was that the accident was due to pilot error in flying too low over a glassy surface and losing control, causing the aircraft to stall and crash.

The recommendation was that the minimum height of such exercises be raised to 100 feet.

