

Popovich, Nicholas Maxwell

Age: 24
Nationality: Canadian/Yugoslavian
Rank: Flying/Officer
Unit: No. 11 Squadron
Occupation: Navigator
Service No: J/47933

Birth: 5 November 1920,
Ladysmith, BC,
Canada

Home Town: Ladysmith, BC,
Canada

Death: 13 July 1945

Consolidated B-24 Liberator 11121,
hit mountain seven miles from
Bamfield, BC, Canada

Burial: Commemorated Ottawa Memorial
Buried near Bamfield, BC.

Others: All RCAF: F/O Robert Joseph Martello, 2nd Pilot;
WO 1 Victor Gilbert Crosson, WAG; F/S Donald William
Hope, F/E; F/O Harry Alexander Lowe, WO;
WO 2 Joseph Bertrand Presse, WAG.



Biography

Born and raised in Ladysmith on Vancouver Island, Nicholas Popovich was of Serbo-Croat-Slovene extraction. His father, John, was born in Yugoslavia, arrived in Canada in 1910, aged 15, and naturalized Canadian in 1923. Nicholas's mother, Alice, though born in Colorado, USA, had a Yugoslav father.

When Nicholas joined the RCAF on 26 October 1943, just before his 23rd birthday, he was still a student. He had graduated from Ladysmith High School, had three years in Arts at Seminary of Christ the King and two years of Theology at University Seminary, Ottawa, Ontario. His work experience was confined to vacation jobs in road construction, mining and lumber. The Medical Officer described him as *“above average aircrew material, keen mentally and fit physically”*. According to his Interviewing Officer he was *“Very good type. Has made his decision for aircrew service in spite of opportunity to continue studies as divinity student. Understood and accepts selection without reservation. Good service attitude. Father (widower) is agreeable to his enlistment in aircrew. Should prove better than average material. Positive responsible personality.”*

Nicholas reached their expectations. At No. 3 ITS he was consistent, cheerful, resourceful and well liked, above average in all ways. He was selected for training as a Navigator with Air Bomber as the alternative. At No. 9 Air Observer School he was judged suitable for a specialized navigation course and suitable as a navigation instructor. On qualifying as a navigator and air observer on 25 August 1944, he was commissioned as P/O. At No. 5 OTU, Boundary Bay, BC, Nicholas came 3rd out of 823 students. According to the Chief Instructor he was: *“One of the better members of a course with a high standard, a thoroughly competent navigator”*. On completing OTU on 25 February 1945, Nicholas was promoted to F/O and a month later joined No. 11 Squadron in Patricia Bay, BC.,

On 25 July 1945, Nicholas was navigator on Consolidated B-24 Liberator 11121 when it hit a mountain near Bamfield, BC. All the occupants were killed in the crash and he was buried in a common grave with the other men on board.

Nicholas, born 5 November 1920 in Ladysmith, BC, Canada, was the third of five children of John and Alice Popovich. He had an older sister Georgina and an older brother John, who was in 3rd Division of the Canadian Army in Germany at the time of Nicholas's death, a younger brother Raymond and a younger sister,

Alice, 19 in 1945 and a nursing student in Vancouver. Nicholas's mother had died in childbirth in 1926 and he willed his estate to his maternal grandmother, Mary Popovich, then living in Ladysmith.



OF NEWFOUNDLAND
 FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
 CLARKE H. B.
 ROYAL CANADIAN
 AIR FORCE
 FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
 APPS G. F. R.
 BUCHANAN D.
 HOGAN D.
 IRELAND E. C.
 MURPHY D.
 FLYING OFFICER
 DAVIES W. E.
 GILLIS F. D.
 HARJU S. M.
 JENKINS J. P.
 LEECE H.
 LOWE H. A.
 MARTELLO R. J.
 MAXON G. M.
 MIDDLETON C. G.
 NEWMAN J. W.
 O'CONNELL R. E.
 PATTERSON R. H. M.
 PHYSICK F. G.
 POPOVICH N. M.
 SMITH J. M.
 WHEELER C. T.
 PILOT OFFICER
 FOREMAN J. I.
 GRANT W. R.

Details of Crash

On Friday, 13 July 1945, F/O William Edward Davies took off from Patricia Bay station at 08:51 on a standard exercise. He was flying Consolidated B-24 Liberator 11121 with a crew of six, all members of RCAF No. 11 Squadron in Patricia Bay:

F/O Robert Joseph Martello	2 nd Pilot
F/O Nicholas Maxwell Popovich	Navigator
WO 1 Victor Gilbert Crosson	WAG
F/S Donald William Hope	F/E
F/O Harry Alexander Lowe	WO
WO 2 Joseph Bertrand Presse	WAG

Davies had flown this exercise once as second pilot but this was his first time as first pilot. He was a qualified first pilot both day and night on Liberators. He had been trained at USAAF Field, Smyrna, Tennessee, had been with No.11 squadron about a year, and was fully certified for instrument flight. The second pilot and remaining crew members were also fully qualified.

The exercise was an ordinary cross country flight used to familiarize pilots with the aerodromes in the immediate area, as well as giving Navigators a chance to familiarize themselves with the coast of Vancouver Island. The route was from Patricia Bay to Comox, via Abbotsford and Boundary Bay, followed by Comox to Tofino via Port Hardy, and ending with Tofino to Patricia Bay. Before leaving Patricia Bay the pilot filed a flight plan to Comox. There were no passengers on this leg of the trip.

At Comox, three passengers were approved for the flight: Sergeant Pamela Bennett, Corporal Nora Johnson and LAC Margaret Mann. A fourth passenger, LAC Lloyd Tull, was reported to have boarded the flight just before departure. Before leaving Comox the pilot filed the flight plan to Tofino.

At Tofino it was arranged that three more passengers would be taken on board: Corporal Norman Johnson, LAC Raymond Kitely and Corporal William Hrysko. The weather report at Tofino showed extensive fog banks to the south and west. The aircraft took off at 4:43 pm and the pilot planned to be at 10,000 feet at Ucluelet, which indicated that he planned to cross the island at high altitude rather than follow the coast where the fog lay. At 4:46 pm the aircraft made

contact reporting to be at 49°05N 125°45 W, still, after 13 minutes, within the vicinity of Tofino airfield.

This was the last contact made with 11121 and when it failed to arrive at Patricia Bay at its ETA, search procedures were instigated.

The wreckage of the aircraft was found four days later on 17 July 1945, about seven miles east south east of Bamfield, BC. It took ground searchers four days to reach the crash site, where they confirmed there were no survivors.

At the inquiry into the crash, F/O W.G. Skerik, Air Search Rescue Officer at Tofino, gave the following information:

“I was on the first rescue party to reach the crash of Liberator 11121. The position of same was 48°48N, 124°58.30W. I estimated the track of Liberator 11121 prior to the crash to be 77°T.

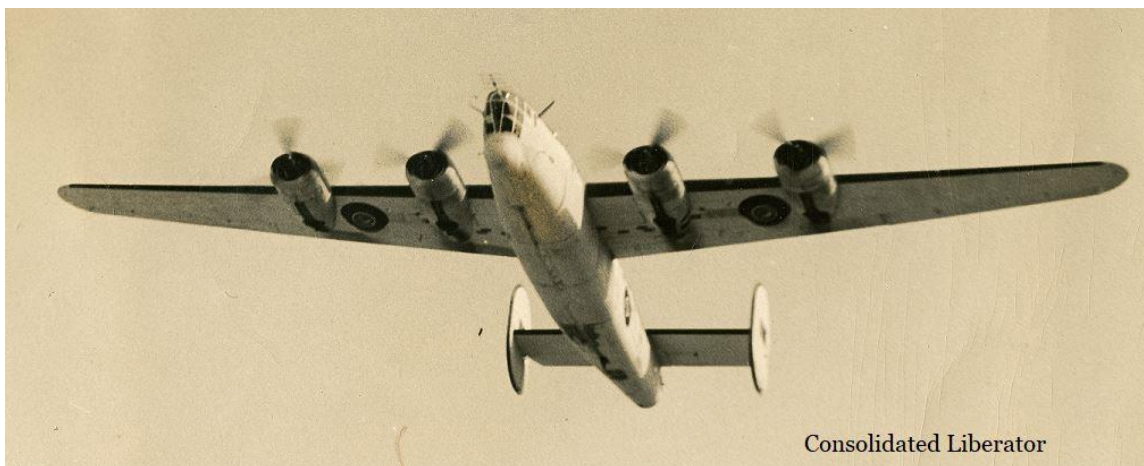
I identified the body of Cpl. N.M Johnson by a wallet on his clothing, Cpl. Hrysko by his wallet, F/O Martello by his wallet, F/O Popovich by his identity bracelet, F/O Davies by a belt buckle, initial ‘D’ and by a ring initialled ‘W.E.D.’, and an RCAF watch serial No. 1165702, F/S Hope by his identity discs. Seven bodies were found which could not be identified, one of which was definitely a woman and one probably a woman. The other five were definitely identified as men.

I searched the slope for about 300 yards below the point of impact for evidence of anyone jumping etc. But nothing was found.”

Due to the difficulty in locating the crash site, the bodies could not be brought out for burial and two graves were dug by the wreckage, one for men and one for women. The chaplain, accompanying the search party, conducted a funeral service and crosses were erected over the graves. Coinciding as closely as possible with the funeral service, a memorial service was held at Patricia Bay in front of a Station Liberator, conducted by the Station Chaplain and attended by all available officers and airmen of No. 11 Squadron.

In 1982, airmen from Comox Base erected a more permanent cairn and bronze plaque, which were dedicated in an official ceremony in 1983.

The conclusion of the inquiry into the crash blames the pilot, in that, contrary to orders, he flew into cloud instead of finding a route through the breaks in the overcast to reach his planned altitude. While in the cloud he flew into the side of a mountain ESE of Bamfield. The Tofino Base was also found at fault for allowing the pilot to take off for Patricia Bay in the weather conditions that afternoon.



Consolidated Liberator





