

# Christy, Richard Roland Thomas

**Age:** 19

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 111 (F)

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** R/106837

**Birth:** 21 April 1923  
Victoria, BC, Canada

**Home Town:** Moha, BC, Canada

**Death:** 12 May 1942  
Crash of Curtiss P-40 AK881 (Kittyhawk)  
Saanichton Bay, BC

**Burial:** Royal Oak Cemetery, Victoria, BC, Canada



## **Biography**

Richard Christy was a slim young schoolboy with a romantic dream of becoming a fighter pilot. He spent his spare time sketching aircraft and building model planes and filled the period between graduating from grade 12 and entering the RCAF by taking a correspondence course in aviation.

Richard's application in June 1941 shows a youngster anxious to demonstrate his enthusiasm for flying and proud of his father's rank of Flight Lieutenant in the RCAF. His long term ambition was to work in aviation or mining. Although he was thought youthful and immature, he was well received and reported as 'keen, bright, sensitive type' who 'should make good aircrew, recommended for pilot.'

In September 1941, after initial training Richard is assessed as better than average, aggressive and dependable with plenty of initiative. Although considered unsuitable for commission at this time, it was not ruled out when he had more experience, or more probably when he had matured.

In elementary training, ending the following November, Richard earned average marks and was judged a fair student who required patient explanation. He became flustered at times and also careless. His airmanship needed to be watched. Nevertheless, he was passed on to the next level. In December 1941 in training, Richard's enthusiasm got the better of him and he was confined to barracks for seven days "in that he on 8/12/41 at 15:50 hours did interfere with a Westland Lysander piloted by P/O W. W. Hayes (J8138) without prior arrangement, in contravention to C.A.P. 1000, Sec.1, para. 31."

Richard's service flying training brought mixed reports. His instrument flying was well above average but he was once again judged as being careless on details. In ground training he was an average student, very good at aircraft recognition, doubtless, in part due to his history of building models of them, clean, keen, a good type for fighters. Overall, he was average with the ability to advance very rapidly. He was recommended for a fighter pilot, but not as a flying instructor, and received his pilot's wings. Again, he was thought to be unsuitable for commission. This was March 16, 1942.

Richard's dream of being a fighter pilot lasted two more months. On May 12<sup>th</sup> his Curtiss Kittyhawk reported engine trouble and he crashed into Saanichton Bay.

Richard was born in Victoria to Roland Gilbert Christy and Isabella Sophia Elliot. He had a younger brother and a younger sister. His parents divorced when he was eight years old and his father remarried and took the family to Washington State. Richard named his father as next of kin and his father's brother, with whom he was living in Moha in the BC interior, as emergency contact.



## Details of Crash

In the afternoon of 12 May 1942, Richard Christy took part in a training exercise in interception and attack.

The Court of Inquiry into the accident which resulted in his death reported:

### *Description of Accident:*

*Curtiss Kittyhawk AK881 with Sergeant Christy at the controls took off at 15:15 hours and joined in a formation intercepting and attacking a Bristol Bolingbroke in a practice attack. About 30 minutes later, and during the manoeuvre, Sgt. Christy called on his radio that his engine was running rough. He was told to return to base and land. The pilot sent a later message, which was heard on the R.T. Station and was understood to be to the effect that the pilot was leaving the formation, which at that time was over Victoria Harbour at 3,000 feet. The aircraft was later seen by workers at James Island about 150 feet up, heading West, dropping rapidly, the engine off. The aircraft banked to the left, apparently trying to make land, but it side-slipped into the water and immediately disappeared. The aircraft was later salvaged, totally damaged. The dead body of the pilot was recovered from the wreckage.*

### *Causes:*

*Engine failure due to seizure of Nos. 5 and 6 crank pins, resulting in the rods bursting through the crank case, causing smoke and fumes to enter the cockpit. The pilot intended to abandon the aircraft, but, as the engine had not failed completely, he considered he could return to base 18 miles away. When the engine stopped the altitude was too low for a safe jump and the pilot attempted a steep left turn without engine to land on a sand spit. The aircraft stalled and dove into the sea, port wing first.*

### *Recommendations:*

*None, because the condition of the engine after being salvaged was such that no definite opinion could be given as to the cause of the bearing failure.*

### *Note:*

*There have been accidents due to loss of control in Kittyhawks in the UK. It has been noticed that if the rudder is applied at low speeds it has a tendency to remain over and cannot be centralized. This is due to a lack of fin surface and modification action increasing the fin size is under consideration.*



