

Fearnley, James French

Age: 23

Nationality: English

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: 999804 (RAFVR)

Birth: 9 June 1920,
Longton, Cumberland,
England

Home Town: Brampton, Cumberland,
England

Death: 30th November 1943

Crash of Handley Page
Hampden AN131
Near Ladysmith, BC, Canada

Burial: Royal Oak Burial Park,
Victoria, BC, Canada

Burial: Leslie Pettit, Pilot, RAFVR

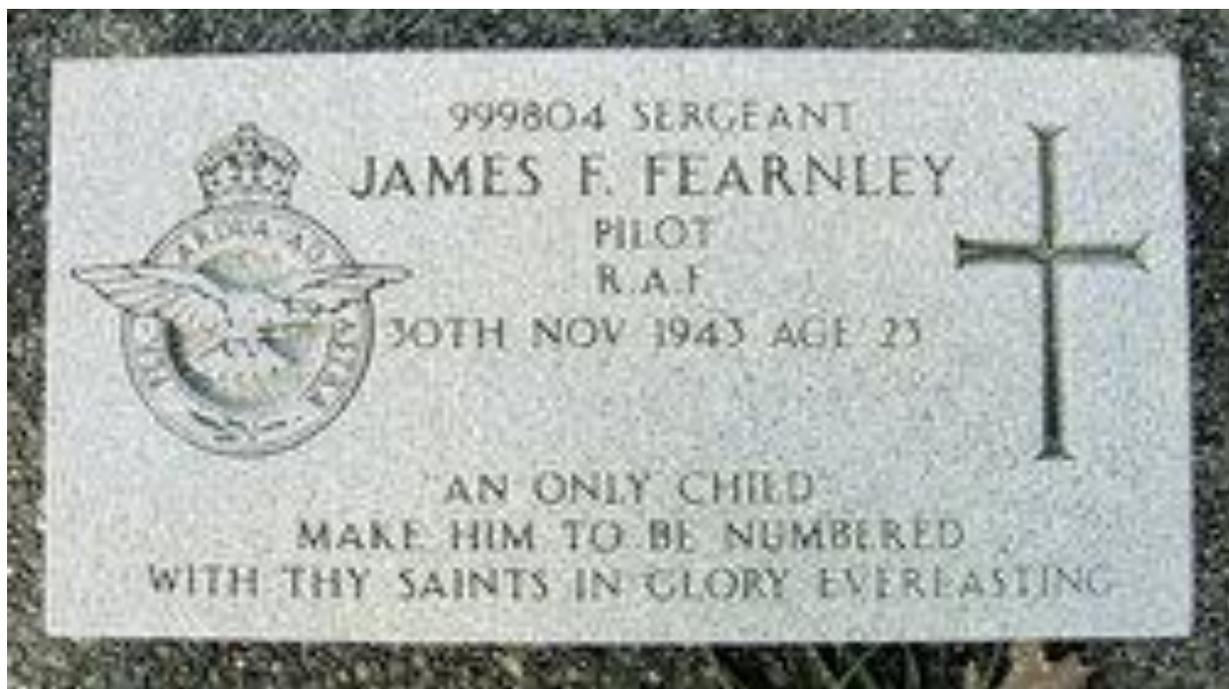


Biography

James French Fearnley was born 9 June 1920 in Longton, Cumberland, England, the only child of Arthur and Anne Jane Fearnley. He served in the RAFVR, training as a pilot, ultimately posted to No. 32 OTU at Patricia Bay, BC, Canada.

On 30 November 1943, James was taking part in Instrument Flying exercises. In the first part of the exercise, he was piloting while a fellow RAFVR airman was safety pilot. Flying too low in dense fog, their aircraft, Hampden AN131, flew into the ground at an elevation of 2,200 feet. James was pulled from the wreckage severely burned, but still conscious. He died within the hour. Both men were buried at Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC, Canada.

He is also commemorated on the family gravestone in Holme Eden, Warwick Bridge, Carlisle, Cumbria.





TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF
ARTHUR
HUSBAND OF
ANNE JANE FEARNLEY
OF THE BUSH HOTEL BRAMPTON
BORN 30 JULY 1887
DIED 13 JANUARY 1947
ALSO OF
ANNE JANE FEARNLEY
BELOVED WIFE OF THE ABOVE
DIED 10 APRIL 1862, AGED 69 YEARS
ALSO OF THEIR ONLY CHILD
JAMES FRENCH FEARNLEY
SERGEANT-PILOT, R.A.F.V.R.
GAVE HIS LIFE FOR HIS COUNTRY
30 NOV 1943, AGED 25 YEARS
HIS BODY LIES IN THE ROYAL OAK
BURIAL PARK, VICTORIA, BRITISH
COLUMBIA
"MAKE THEM TO BE NUMBERED
WITH THY SAINTS IN GLORY
EVERLASTING"

Details of Crash

On 30 November 1943, Sergeant Pilots James Fearnley and Leslie Pettit were briefed for an instrument flying exercise. They were to make two flights, the first lasting two hours, with Fearnley piloting and Pettit as safety pilot, the second lasting one hour, with Pettit piloting and Fearnley as safety pilot. Fearnley was an average pilot, with 275 hours of flying, and due soon to transfer to the next flight where whole crews trained together. On this exercise, they carried no crew.

The route they were to follow was: Base to Pender Island to Ladysmith,
to Sooke Lake to Darcy Island to Ladysmith
to Sooke Lake to Darcy Island to base.

They were to fly at 3,000 feet and not to enter cloud below 3,000 feet. If the weather deteriorated, they were to return to base and conduct instrument flying exercises in the vicinity of the aerodrome. They took off in Hampden AN131 at 1:30 pm with Fearnley in control.

The pilots in the second aircraft performing this exercise took off 15 minutes later. They saw AN131 about 2-3 miles ahead of them on the first leg; it turned to the second leg and disappeared into cloud. They did not see them again. Following the set course, they returned twice more to Ladysmith where visibility was zero. The weather worsened and pilots taking off later failed to complete the course.

At 2:20 pm, a civilian witness, a logger, working 4.5 miles S.W. of Ladysmith, heard an aircraft that sounded as if it were circling, and one minute later heard a crash, followed, after another two or three minutes, by an explosion. He did not see the plane due to the fog which had been in the area since about 1:30.

At 2:45 pm, the superintendent of Comox Logging was advised that an aircraft had crashed at the SE corner of lot 59, Oyster District, on Miller Creek. He drove to the site, arriving at 3:20, to find the aircraft burning ferociously and Pettit already dead. The pilot was still conscious, but badly injured. All he said of the accident was "*we got into trouble*", then "*I am going out*". The superintendent made him comfortable and talked to him until he died at 4:10 pm. Pettit had multiple fractures to his arms, legs, and chest and his head and face were burned beyond recognition. Fearnley had severe third-degree burns to his lower body.

The aircraft had flown into high ground at an elevation of about 2,200 feet.

