

Flaherty, James Gerard

Age: 29
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: Squadron Leader
Unit: No. 32 OTU
Occupation: Observer/Navigator
Service No: J/2826

Birth: 9 June 1914,
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada

Home Town: Toronto, Ontario
Canada

Death: 16 January 1944

Crash of Beechcraft Expeditor HB100,
South of Vancouver

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial,
Ontario, Canada

Burial: P/O Harry W. Donkersley DFC and Bar, Pilot, RCAF;
S/L Terence A. Pringle, Passenger, (RAFVR);
P/O Ernest Sowerby, WAG, RCAF.



Biography

James Flaherty was a volatile Irishman. Although something of a dreamer, he was ambitious and sincere and seemed to be good material for the RCAF.

He first applied to the RCAF at the outbreak of WW-II in September 1939. He passed the medical and was accepted for a flying commission. In April 1940 he was enlisted and began training at Observer School.

James was the younger son of John E. Flaherty and Sarah Meaney. Both parents were born in Ireland and married there in 1910. By 1912 they were living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Their older son, John Francis was born in 1912, and James was born 9 June 1914. John Francis also entered the RCAF and was a LAC when his brother died in 1944.

As may be deduced from his early approval for a commission, James was well educated and articulate. He completed his senior matriculation in 12 subjects from Riverdale Collegiate and spent two years as an external student of the University of Toronto, studying English. At school he earned high honours for mathematics. James' hobbies included public speaking and writing and he played rugby, tennis and badminton extensively. He was employed as an accountant.

James trained at Observer School in Malton, Ontario, took armament training at Jarvis, Ontario and completed Advanced Air Observer at Trenton. He excelled in all courses finishing with a mark close to 82 and ranking overall third in his class. He was awarded his Observer badge on 24 October 1940 and a week later was posted to England. In July 1942, James applied for a staff position and described his experience since completing observer training:

I was a first graduate of the Joint Air Training Plan. I was commissioned (R.C.A.F.) in October 1940 and then proceeded overseas where I completed a tour of over 30 operational trips with 22 Squadron (Beaufort torpedo bombers) R.A.F. Coastal Command.

I returned to Canada and completed the specialist navigation course at Fort Albert in October 1941 and then again went overseas to England where I was posted to No.1. E.A.N.S. Eastbourne.

At Eastbourne, until I was posted back to 34 O.T.U. Canada at the beginning of this month, I was a squadron training adjutant. As squadron training adjutant I was responsible for the navigational training, administration and discipline of some 40 instructors and 500 pupils.

As from January 1942 I held the rank of acting Flight Lieutenant.

At 34. O.T.U., I understand there was no vacancy for a P/Lt. Observer and further respectfully submit that having regard to the specialist administrative experience I have had at No.1. E.A.W.S. as mentioned above I should be better employed in some staff capacity.

James was posted to No. 32 OTU in October 1942 and promoted to acting Squadron Leader in April 1943. On 16 January 1944, James was navigator/observer on Beechcraft Expeditor HB100 being ferried from Rockcliffe, Ontario to Patricia Bay, BC, when it crashed 10 minutes south of Vancouver. The one passenger, S/L T. A. Alexander, and all crew were killed in the crash and neither the aircraft nor bodies were found.

The following is an extract from the book "Moonlight Flyer"

J2826 Squadron Leader James Gerard Flaherty

† Age thirty, born in Toronto, Ontario. He returned to Canada in the middle of 1941 after overseas service with No. 22 (TB) Squadron RAF. On 25 June, Flaherty was posted as an instructor to No. 31 Air Navigation School in Port Albert, Ontario. He subsequently received a posting notice to No. 32 Operational Training Unit, Patricia Bay, British Columbia, and reported there on 2 October 1942. Flaherty was promoted to Squadron Leader on 1 April 1943. He was part of the crew of Beechcraft Expeditor Mk III HB100 when it went missing on a flight from RCAF Station Rockcliffe, Ontario, to RCAF Station Patricia Bay, British Columbia, on 16 January 1944. The entire crew—Fg Off. H. W. Donkersley DFC & Bar (RCAF), Sqn Ldr J. G. Flaherty (RCAF), and Plt Off. E. Sowerby (RCAF)—and their passenger, Sqn Ldr T. A. Pringle, are commemorated on the Air Force War Memorial in Ottawa, Ontario.

Details of Crash

On 16 January 1944, Beechcraft Expeditor HB100 went missing while being ferried from Rockcliffe, Ontario to Patricia Bay, BC. The aircraft carried a crew of three and one passenger:

P/O Harry W. Donkersley DFC and Bar	Pilot
S/L James G. Flaherty	Navigator
S/L Terence A. Pringle	Passenger (RAFVR)
P/O Ernest Sowerby	WAG

The aircraft departed from Rockcliffe at 11:06 am on 15 January 1944 and stopped over at Winnipeg. It was given a daily inspection at Winnipeg on the morning of 16 January and departed for Lethbridge, where it arrived at 1:30 pm. While at Lethbridge the aircraft was serviced and given a between flight inspection by a mechanic of No. 124 squadron. About 1:55 pm the pilot, or some other member of the crew, telephoned the Meteorologist for a weather report and forecast. The information was supplied and was unfavourable.

There were strong gusts of wind on the route with very poor conditions over the Western part including solid overcast up to 20,000' and icing conditions with a ceiling of 700' at Patricia Bay. Penticton was closed to both contact and instrument flying and Kimberly just on the limits. These were the only two airports which could be used as alternates. The intermediate range stations were closed to contact. Prediction for Vancouver from 17:30-19:00 hours was solid overcast with cloud 3,000' to 6,000' with tops up to 16,000'; from Vancouver to the Cascades, strong winds, freezing level 7,000' with moderate icing above. Ceiling at Vancouver was 900' in rain. Solid overcast dissipated a short distance east of the Cascades.

About an hour later, the pilot and the navigator went to the meteorology office and went over the weather reports and forecast. They were supplied with all of the information available but despite its adverse nature, decided that they could make the trip to Vancouver on instruments. About 2:55 pm the pilot went to the Department of Transport Tower to file a flight plan. The D of T Traffic Officer asked the pilot if he had checked the weather and, when the pilot replied he had, and said that it was satisfactory, referred him to the "N" operator, who entered the details of the flight on the traffic record sheet.

A flight plan form was not filled out and the particulars entered in the traffic record sheet did not include the alternate aerodrome, airspeed, fuel endurance and name of pilot. Information on the flight was transmitted as a flight plan to Edmonton Airway Traffic Control Centre for traffic clearance.

The pilot left the tower after filing his flight plan and went to the aircraft. It is to be noted that he did not consult the radio range operator at Lethbridge who was in a position, had he been contacted, to advise that the Vancouver radio range was unreliable.

The aircraft applied for, and received clearance and took off at 15:15 hrs. It reported over Penticton at 17:17 hrs, estimated arrival at Vancouver 18:00 hrs, and requested Patricia Bay weather. At 17:50 hrs, Bellingham heard the aircraft calling Vancouver and giving its position as over Maple Ridge at 12,000' and descending to 6,000'. Vancouver did not receive this message.

The aircraft was not heard from by any station thereafter, but base continued to call every three to five minutes. When the aircraft was finally considered overdue, search action was instituted. Air search was convened on January 17th and continued daily to January 30th. No sign of the aircraft or the airmen aboard was ever found.

The pilot was deemed responsible for the accident since it was his decision to fly the plane in what were obviously adverse conditions in which he had limited experience. However, there were discussions and concerns about the control of RCAF flights from civilian airports, and among the recommendations on which action was taken was the staffing of control towers by RCAF personnel.

No evidence appears to have been given as to why an experienced pilot would make such a decision, risking his own and other lives, or what, if any, the urgency of the flight was to cause him to do so.



1300-RE100-1
28th March, 1944. *WJ*

C.A.S.
 Accident to Beechcraft HB100 from No. 32
 O.T.U., Patricia Bay, on 16th Jan. /44.

1. As I have already stated on this summary, I think the captain of the aircraft took unjustifiable risks in commencing this flight from Lethbridge. The weather in the Western part of the mountains was definitely bad. The captain of the aircraft had limited experience of range flying and the weather conditions were becoming complicated by approaching darkness. The organization for control of such flights requires considerable improvement as laid out in the findings and recommendations of the court. I attach a brief of the relevant regulations which has been prepared in this Branch.

2. The file has been referred to A.M.S.

J.W. Wilkins
 J.S. Wilkins) G/C
 C.I. Accidents.

A.M.A.S.
 Would it not be a good thing
 to have unit personnel employed
 in ferrying come under the Transport
 Command during the period of the
 ferrying flight?
W.J. Wilkins
 29 Mar. to C.A.S.

