

# Hatfield, William Miller

**Age:** 26

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 13 OTU  
assigned to No. 115(F)

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** R/92766

**Birth:** 26 October 1915  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**Home Town:** Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**Death:** 21 February 1942  
Crash of Lockheed Hudson 776  
Tsehum Harbour\*\*, BC

**Burial:** Hatley Memorial Gardens, Colwood, BC, Canada

**Other:** P/O B. Hutchinson (WAG)



# Biography

William Hatfield was a book keeper in civilian life, working for Robin Hood Flour Mills. In August 1940, he started his military career in the 91<sup>st</sup> Field Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery Corps (Reserve) as a gunner. He was discharged in March 1941 to join the RCAF.

William enlisted in Calgary, Alberta, hoping to become a pilot, though he would be content with any position on air crew. He was a slender, healthy looking man; neatly and conservatively dressed. The impression gained of him was that he was pleasant, confident and mature; very suitable for the RCAF and qualified for a commission. The President of the interviewing board found him to be alert, quick and stable, and he was recommended for training as a pilot.

William started his training in June at No. 2 Initial Training School. He passed this level and though now thought not to be suitable for commission, he was recommended for more training as a pilot, or, as an alternative, as an air observer. He was reported to be dependable and confident with the ability to make good.

His training continued on de Havilland Tiger Moths at No. 5 EFTS where he rated average or above average on all aspects and was recommended for training on twin engine planes. He was deemed good average, and a good type who worked hard and with more training would make a good service pilot.

In No. 3 SFTS, again he was average or above average in all aspects. His handling of an aircraft was smooth and intelligent. He was not totally confident in his flying but would benefit from more experience. Although not recommended for a commission or as a flying instructor, he received his pilot wings on 5 December 1941 and was posted to Patricia Bay the following day.

On 21 February 1942, William was flying solo in a Lockheed Hudson for the first time. He was practising take-offs and landings when he overshot on landing. On trying to recover he made a fatal error and the plane plunged into the water at Tsehum Harbour\*\* killing both himself and P/O Bruce Hutchinson, the wireless operator.

William was born 26 October 1915 in Calgary, Alberta to William Henry Hatfield and Louisa Goodman. His father probably died in 1925 and when he enlisted, his mother had remarried George Armitage whom he describes as his step-father. William did not marry.

## Details of Crash

Lockheed Hudson 776 crashed at 2:10 in the afternoon of 21 February 1942 approximately 100 feet off Curtis Point\*\*.

Sergeant Hatfield had made two practice circuits with his Instructor; in both cases taking off and landing successfully. The Instructor judged him competent and left the aircraft, leaving him to practice solo with only P/O Hutchinson accompanying him as wireless operator. Hatfield overshot the runway on landing and attempted to gain altitude for a second attempt.

The Flight Commander described the flight as it appeared to him from runway No. 3:

*“The approach was normal in every way as far as I could establish except that the aircraft levelled off over the runway 5 or 6 feet too high. It maintained about the same position until it was about 200ft. before the intersection of No.2 and No.3 runways. At this time the aircraft was becoming quite slow, when the pilot opened the throttle for a take off, raising his wheels immediately, continuing in a normal manner, starting his climb about the time he passed over the edge of the field. The climb was normal, but at a height of about 400 ft. The nose of the aircraft dropped and continued in a straight steep dive until out of view.”*

The finding of the inquiry was that the crash was caused by faulty manipulation of the controls by the pilot.

*“The flap indicator shows that when the aircraft hit the water, the flaps were in full down position. The salvaged tail unit shows that the aircraft was trimmed full nose heavy. The Court has compared the angle of the trimming tabs on the crashed aircraft with those of another Hudson trimmed full nose heavy, and found the angle to be identical.*

*“In our opinion, the pilot made a normal recovery from overshooting and gained a height of approximately 400 feet. The pilot would then normally reduce the amount of flap and re-trim the elevators. After taking off a few degrees of flap, the flap control lever is returned to the neutral position and the pilot in this instance may have put the lever just below the neutral position thus causing the flaps to come down again. This would make the aircraft very nose heavy.*

*“It is the considered opinion of the Court that, that is exactly what happened, and that the pilot then, in attempting to trim the aircraft to counteract the nose heaviness, turned the trimming control the wrong way, thus considerably increasing the nose heaviness and causing the aircraft to assume a vertical nose down position. Under these circumstances it would be a physical impossibility to hold the nose up with the control column.”*

The recommendation of the Court of Inquiry was:

*“That a modification be installed on all Hudson aircraft that will limit the travel of the wing flap to 65% down.”*



\*\*Curtis Point is now known as Aaron Point, Tsehum Harbour also called Shoal Harbour

