

Johnson, Gerard Pringle

Age: 29

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: Flight/Officer

Unit: No. 132

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: J/10430

Birth: 22 March 1913
St. George, New Brunswick,
Canada

Home Town: Moncton, New Brunswick,
Canada

Death: 6 October 1942

Collision of Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawks ET860 and AL216
Pedder Inlet, BC, Canada

Burial: St John (Cedar Hill) Cemetery, New Brunswick, Canada

Others: F/L J. D. Butler



Biography

Gerard Johnson did well at school. He completed senior matriculation and went on to a Business College where he passed with 'the highest honours'. In 1930's New Brunswick, work was not plentiful and when Gerard applied to join the RCAF in 1940 he was employed as a garage mechanic.

The interviewing board were impressed with this attractive 6 footer. They thought both his intelligence and his personality were above average, that he was an exceptionally good candidate and suitable for a commission. He had no flying experience but had done a summer camp and winter evening training as a private in the New Brunswick Rangers in 1931. During Initial Training, Gerard was picked out as a potential pilot.

Gerard was at Elementary Flying Training School from late July to mid September 1940. At first it seemed there was no hope of him becoming a pilot since for the first two hours he was stricken with air sickness every time he went up. Fortunately, the cause of this was diagnosed as a bad head cold and when he recovered the air sickness vanished. His performance in Elementary Training was far from stellar. He was slow thinking and inclined to be forgetful, would *'require prompting especially in airmanship'*.

In Intermediate Flying Training in September – November 1940, Gerard rated low average; he progressed very slowly and was inclined to be erratic. He lacked confidence and was no longer regarded as a candidate for a commission. It seems he started to find his feet in Advanced Training, where he was conscientious and showed real enthusiasm for flying. He was awarded his pilot's wings after this training in December 1940 and was promoted to Sergeant.

Gerard served in Trenton, Ontario from January to March in 1941 and on January 9th he married Elma Gregory Belyea in Belleville, Ontario. They had one child, a son, Lynn Gerard, on 3 April 1942.

Posting to Patricia Bay for Gerard was at the end of December 1941. He served at that station, first in No. 111 squadron and then in No. 132 squadron, until his death. In March 1942, he was finally granted a commission and became Pilot Officer. He was promoted to Flying Officer in July.

On 6 October 1942, Gerard Johnson and two other pilots were on tactical

exercises in Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawks. The pilots were flying in close formation in poor visibility. Gerard and the lead pilot, Jack Butler, collided and both aircraft crashed to the ground and burst into flames.

Gerard Pringle Johnson was born on 22 March 1913 in St. George, New Brunswick, Canada, to Rev. William Herbert Johnson Pringle and Caroline (Carrie) Pringle. His older sister was Dr. Gladys Enid Johnson MacLeod. She was a strong supporter of the Federation of Medical Women in Canada and the FMWC Enid Johnson MacLeod Award is named for her. He also had two younger sisters.

The Enid Johnson MacLeod Award recognizes any category of FMWC member involved in the promotion of women's health research and/or women's health education. This award was established to honour Dr. Enid MacLeod, a long-time member of the Federation from Nova Scotia. Dr MacLeod was known for her research into the use of curare for anaesthesia and remembered for her generosity and warmth of spirit.



Details of Crash

In October 1942, No. 132 squadron, Patricia Bay was taking part in joint tactical exercise with the US Navy. On October 6th, at 10:15am, three Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft took off and entered formation. The pilots were: F/L J. D. Butler (the leader), F/O G. P. Johnson and P/O I. V. Kirsch. When flying in poor visibility, pilots were instructed not to leave formation unless told to do so by the leader.

The surviving pilot, P/O Kirsch, reported that the formation started to encounter patches of fog and when he could no longer see the leader he throttled back. He lost R/T contact with the other two planes, though he was always in contact with the ground. Although F/L Butler never gave the order to break formation, P/O Kirsch decided to do so. At his last sighting of the other two planes, their wings were overlapping 1 or 2 feet. He flew around for a while, keeping clear of the other two planes and returned to base.

At 10:18, the planes flown by F/L Butler and F/O Johnson were seen diving out of clouds in steep descent. They crashed into the ground about half a mile apart and a mile from the North end of Pedder Inlet, BC. Both pilots died on impact.

The two aircraft were severely damaged and an inspection could not ascertain the cause of the accident. It was possible that a portion of the port elevator on ET860 was 'chewed' which could have been done by the propeller of AL216. A witness to the fall of one of the planes reported it showed signs of damage as it fell.



The conclusion of the Court of Inquiry was that the cause of the crashes was a mid-air collision of the two planes and that F/L J. D. Butler made an error in judgment by continuing with the formation after poor visibility was encountered.



Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawks

Two Airmen Killed Here

Believed victims of a collision in midair, two R.C.A.F. pilots were killed near William Head yesterday morning. Names of the men, members of the personnel of the station at Patricia Bay, are being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

As far as could be determined, there were no eyewitnesses to the accident and the causes were said to be obscure. Two aircraft were involved.

