

MacLachlan, Robert Bruce

Age: 21

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: Pilot/Officer

Unit: No. 120 squadron

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: J/10292

Birth: 29 July 1921
Lumsden, Saskatchewan,
Canada

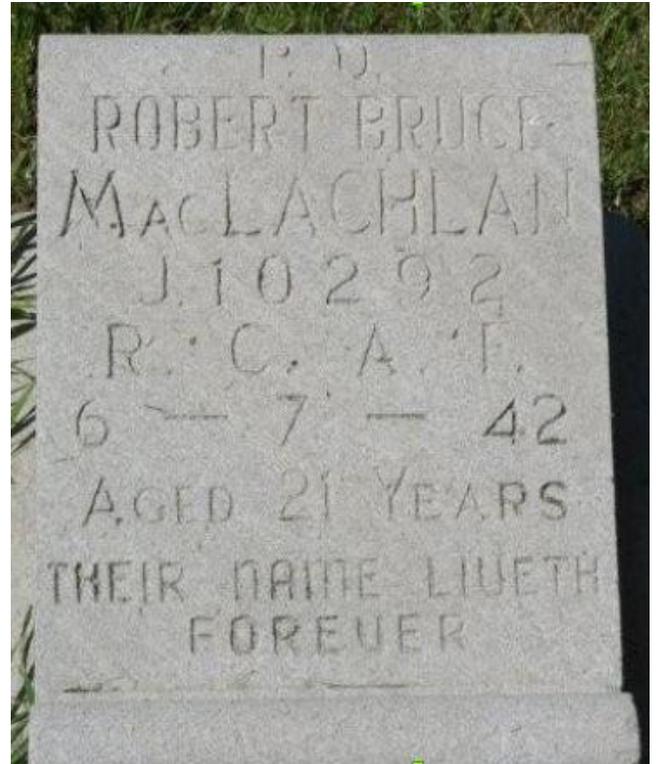
Home Town: Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Death: 29 May 1942

Crash of Lockheed Hudson 765
Bellingham Army Airfield, WA, USA

Burial: Regina Cemetery, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Others: P/O E.R. Brooks (co-pilot); Sgt. V.A. Utting (Radio)



Biography

Robert MacLachlan was exactly the type of young man the RCAF was hoping for. At his initial interview and after each training course he received nothing but praise.

When he joined the service in July 1941, Robert had no relevant education or experience. One of a family of eight children, he earned his senior matriculation at Regina Central Collegiate and went on to business college. He was employed as an accountant at Massey Harris Co., staying in Regina.

Robert, at 5 ft 3 in., was unusually small and did not look his 20 years old, which was noted, but his first interviewers found him to be excellent material; intelligent, straightforward, well adjusted, purposeful, stable, pleasant and very keen. All very desirable in the pilot he hoped to become.

He took his initial training in Regina, where he enlisted, and continued to earn praise. He earned 87% and was 24th out of 244. His final report stated:

'A very keen, conscientious lad, with many characteristics required for air crew. He worked hard, is dependable, has a good sense of responsibility, and can be considered a promising type. Might later be considered for commission.'

Robert then moved onto elementary flying training in Verdun, Manitoba, where he earned another 87% and came 8th out of 61. His report was again glowing:

'A very good student, and generally able, and very popular in the class. Elected chairman for class banquet and carried this function through with distinction. His deportment was very good.'

In service flying training in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Robert made rather a slow start but later progressed rapidly. All his scores were a good high average with his instrument flying and navigation above average. This time he came second in the class and received the following report:

'This student has put a good deal of effort into his work on this station and has shown some very creditable results. His Ground Instruction School marks are excellent, flying is good, and his conduct on the station has been a credit to the service. Though somewhat immature at present, he will develop into a very

valuable man.'

Robert received his pilot wings and was offered a commission with the RCAF Special Reserve. He was discharged from the RCAF on 26 February 1942 in order to take up the commission.

During service training, Robert had a minor accident when he was practising circuits and landings. The undercarriage collapsed on a heavy landing. The accident was attributed to a lack of experience.

Robert was born in Lumsden, Saskatchewan, about 30 km NW of Regina, to Peter Moore MacLachlan and Anna Christena Wills. He had four older sisters and one older brother and both a sister and a brother younger than him. Both his brothers served in the RCAF and survived the war.

On 6 July 1942, about six weeks after being posted to No. 120 Patricia Bay, BC, Robert made a fatal error. When taking off in his Lockheed Hudson 765 from Bellingham Army Air Field, he swerved and instead of aborting the take-off, he attempted to continue with it and stalled and crashed back onto the air field, bursting into flame.



Details of Crash

On 6 July 1942, Lockheed Hudson 765 was carrying a crew of seven men:

LAC L.A. Beatty	Crewman
P/O E.R. Brooks	Second pilot
Sgt./Pilot D.P. MacLean	Passenger
P/O R.B. MacLachlan	First pilot
LAC C.R. Merredew	Crewman
P/O J.C. Olson	Passenger
Sgt. V.A. Utting	Radio operator

The aircraft took off at about 4:00 pm from Bellingham Army Airfield, returning to Patricia Bay. It swerved on the runway and the pilot failed to correct the drift right away. When it became obvious that he could not correct the swerve, he persisted in his attempt to take off. To avoid hitting a building, he forced the aircraft into the air before a safe flying speed was attained and stalled the aircraft at a height of approximately 50 feet, from which recovery was impossible. The aircraft crashed and burst into flame. Bellingham fire fighting apparatus was rushed to the scene.

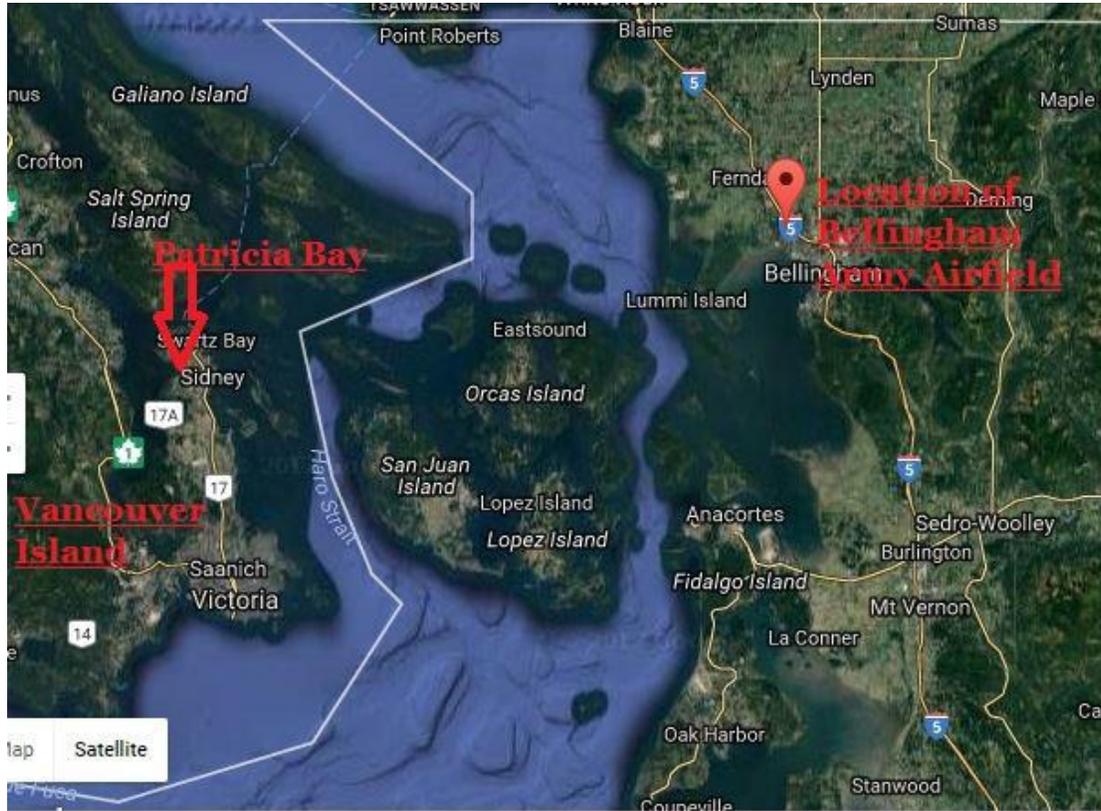
P/O MacLachlan, and Sgt. Utting died in the accident, P/O Brooks died later as a result of his injuries. The other four men were seriously injured.

The court of inquiry following the crash recommended that it be impressed on all pilots that if swerve develops during take-off that cannot be corrected, they should throttle back and come to a stop on the runway and not try to continue

with the take-off. The cause of the crash was pilot error.



Lockheed Hudson Aircraft



Three Killed in U.S.

Victoria, July 8—(CP) — Three men were killed and four injured when their two-motored R.C.A.F. bomber crashed and burst into flames at Bellingham, Wash., while taking off for its base at Patricia Bay.

Killed were Pilot Officer R. B. McLachlan, of Regina; Pilot Officer E. R. Brooks, Belleville, and Sgt. Victor Utting, of Woodstock.

Injured are Leading Aircraftman C. R. Merredew, Sidney, B.C.; Pilot Officer J. C. Olsen, Regina; Sgt. D. P. McLean, of Smithers, B.C.; and Leading Aircraftman L. A. Beatty, Oshawa, Ont.

