

# Martello, Robert Joseph

**Age:** 30  
**Nationality:** Canadian  
**Rank:** F/O  
**Unit:** No. 11 Squadron  
**Occupation:** Pilot  
**Service No:** J/26660  
**Birth:** 12 October 1914,  
Rossland, BC,  
Canada  
**Home Town:** Rossland, BC,  
Canada  
**Death:** 13 July 1945



Consolidated Liberator 11121,  
hit mountain seven miles from  
Bamfield, BC, Canada

**Burial:** Commemorated Ottawa Memorial  
Buried near Bamfield, BC.

**Others:** All RCAF: F/O William Edward Davies, pilot;  
F/O Nicholas Maxwell Popovitch, Navigator;  
WO 1 Victor Gilbert Crosson, WAG; F/S Donald William  
Hope, F/E; F/O Harry Alexander Lowe, WO;  
WO 2 Joseph Bertrand Presse, WAG; Passengers: Sgt  
Pamela Bennett; Corporal Nora Johnson; LAC Margaret  
Mann; LAC Lloyd Tull; Corporal Norman Johnson;  
LAC Raymond Kitley; Corporal William Hrysko.

# Biography

Robert Joseph Martello applied to the RCAF for aircrew, with a preference for pilot or observer, and everyone who interviewed him agreed that he was physically fit and of average intelligence. He was described as “...*excitable, nail biter, stutters...*” but his education level was satisfactory, he showed the ability to learn and he was very keen. At one inch over six feet and 184 lbs, he was too big for an air gunner and the selection board agreed he should be trained as a pilot or observer.

Robert lived in Rossland, a few miles west of Trail, BC, Canada. His father was a smeltermen in Trail, and Joseph described himself either as a smeltermen or as a plumber in a smelter. He had completed grade 11 in 1932 and had returned to school in 1934, going to Normal School to complete grade 12 and train as a teacher. He did not complete this course but the teacher training he had received was considered an asset by the RCAF. Robert enlisted in Calgary in May 1942.

From August to October 1942, Robert attended No. 4 ITS and he was sent from there to No. 5 EFTS in High River, Alberta. His appraisal at the end of EFTS was lukewarm:

*“Just average ground school ability – slow to learn. Just average flying ability -rather weak on coordination of throttle and elevators and has a tendency to over control. This airman is very slow to start with but showed good improvement towards the end of the course. Only did a fair job as Flight Senior. Conduct very good.”*

He passed the course and in February 1943, he was sent on to No. 15 SFTS in Claresholm, Alberta. This time, his instructor recommended him as suitable for a flying instructor, and described him as:

*“an outstanding student with a very pleasant attitude. Has done very well on the course and is an above average flyer....very good type”*

The Commanding Officer was even more impressed:

*“This pupil has progressed amazingly well after a very slow start. He graduated 6<sup>th</sup> due entirely to his own efforts and interest. Very deserving of a commission”*

Robert completed SFTS on 28 May 1943, when he received his pilot's wings and a commission.

The recommendation as a flying instructor led to Robert being transferred to No. 1 Flying Instructor School in Trenton, Ontario, where he proved to be totally unsuited to the task:

EXAMINING OFFICER'S REPORT

This officer's progress on the instructors' course has been most unsatisfactory. His knowledge of sequence is poor and his manner in demonstrations is not instructive. His instructor rates his flying ability as average but while demonstrating his flying is poor. Therefore, this officer is considered unsuitable as an instructor. Recommend posting to a Bombing and Gunnery School for a short period and then an operational posting.

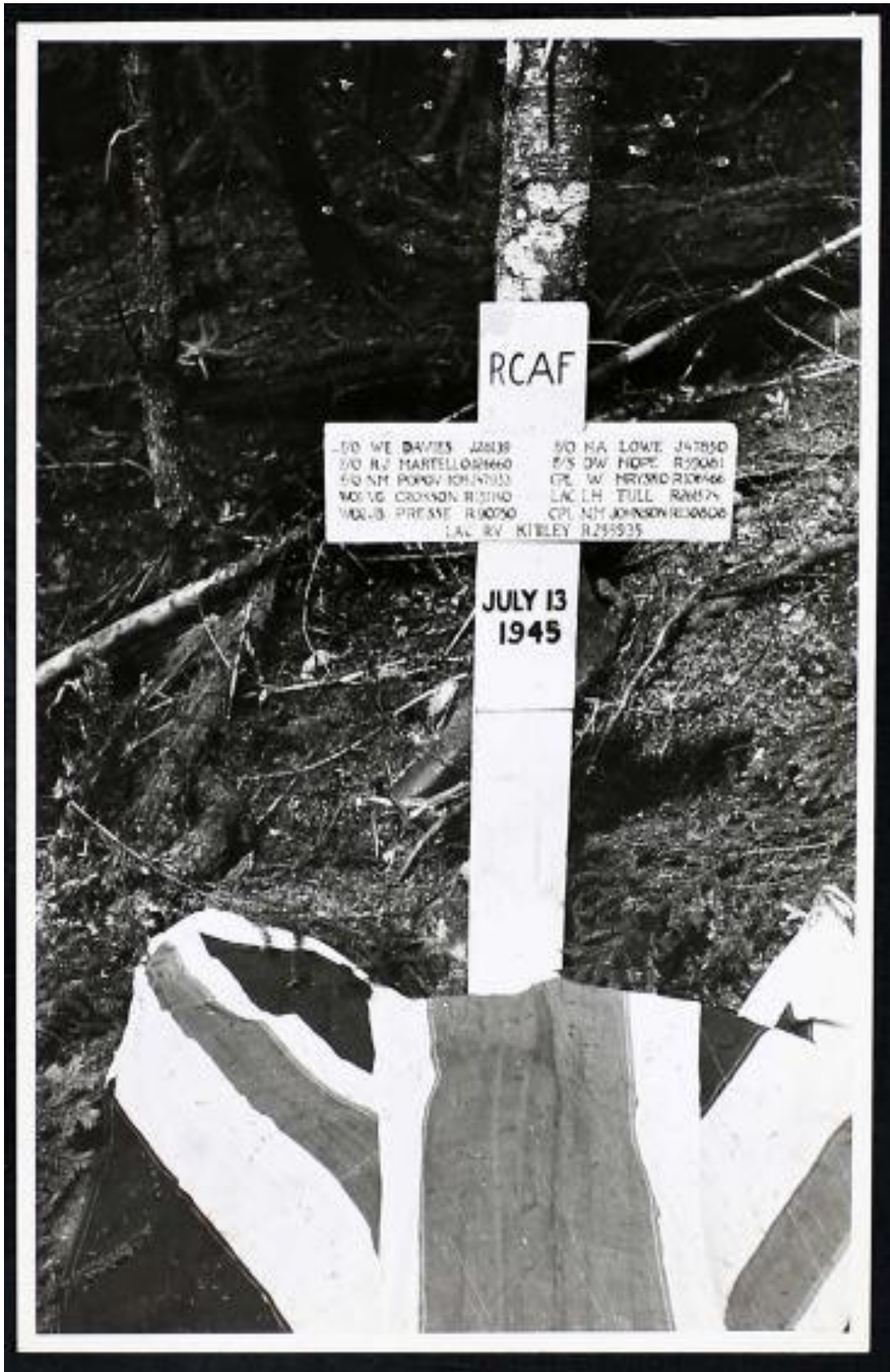
P.C. *W.A.*

Robert spent a short time at No. 1 BGS followed by No. 5 OTU in Boundary Bay. From here, he was transferred to No. 11 squadron, initially in Dartmouth, NS, and, on 25 May 1945, in Patricia Bay.

On 13 July 1945, Robert Martello was second pilot on Consolidated Liberator 11121 when it flew into a mountain near Bamfield, BC, killing everyone on board. He is buried in a common grave with the other men on the aircraft close by the wreckage.

Robert was born in Rossland, BC, on 12 October 1914 to Nunzio Martello and Minnie Arnot. Both parents were born in Italy and Nunzio was naturalized Canadian in November 1928. Robert was the youngest of their four children and had a brother Frederick and two sisters, Mary and Rose.





RCAF

...ED WE DAVIES J48138	S/O HA LOWE J47850
S/O RJ MARTELLO R20660	S/S DW HOPE R20061
S/O NM POPOV J09147113	CPL W HRYSD R20466
MAJ VG CROKSON R23190	LAC LH TULL R26574
MAJUS PRESNE R20050	CPL NM JOHNSON R230006
LAC RV KIBLEY R295535	

JULY 13  
1945

## Details of Crash

On Friday, 13 July 1945, F/O William Edward Davies took off from Patricia Bay station at 08:51 on a standard exercise. He was flying Consolidated Liberator 11121 with a crew of six, all members of RCAF No. 11 Squadron in Patricia Bay:

F/O Robert Joseph Martello	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pilot
F/O Nicholas Maxwell Popovitch	Navigator
WO 1 Victor Gilbert Crosson	WAG
F/S Donald William Hope	F/E
F/O Harry Alexander Lowe	WO
WO 2 Joseph Bertrand Presse	WAG

Davies had flown this exercise once as second pilot but this was his first time as first pilot. He was a qualified first pilot both day and night on Liberators. He had been trained at USAAF Field, Smyrna, Tennessee, had been with No. 11 squadron about a year, and was fully certified for instrument flight. The second pilot and remaining crew members were also fully qualified.

The exercise was an ordinary cross country flight used to familiarize pilots with the aerodromes in the immediate area, as well as giving Navigators a chance to familiarize themselves with the coast of Vancouver Island. The route was from Patricia Bay to Comox, via Abbotsford and Boundary Bay, followed by Comox to Tofino via Port Hardy, and ending with Tofino to Patricia Bay. Before leaving Patricia Bay the pilot filed a flight plan to Comox. There were no passengers on this leg of the trip.

At Comox, three passengers were approved for the flight: Sergeant Pamela Bennett, Corporal Nora Johnson and LAC Margaret Mann. A fourth passenger, LAC Lloyd Tull, was reported to have boarded the flight just before departure. Prior to leaving Comox the pilot filed the flight plan to Tofino.

At Tofino it was arranged that three more passengers would be taken on board: Corporal Norman Johnson, LAC Raymond Kitely and Corporal William Hrysko. The weather report at Tofino showed extensive fog banks to the south and west. The aircraft took off at 4:43 pm and the pilot planned to be at 10,000 feet at Ucluelet, which indicated that he planned to cross the island at high altitude rather than follow the coast where the fog lay. At 4:46 pm the aircraft made contact reporting to be at 49°05N 125°45 W, still, after 13 minutes, within the

vicinity of Tofino airfield.

This was the last contact made with 11121 and when it failed to arrive at Patricia Bay at its ETA, search procedures were instigated.

The wreckage of the aircraft was found four days later on 17 July 1945 about seven miles east south east of Bamfield, BC. It took ground searchers four days to reach the crash site where they confirmed there were no survivors.

At the inquiry into the crash, F/O W.G. Skerik, Air Search Rescue Officer at Tofino, gave the following information:

*“I was on the first rescue party to reach the crash of Liberator 11121. The position of same was 48°48N, 124°58.30W. I estimated the track of Liberator 11121 prior to the crash to be 77°T.*

*I identified the body of Cpl. N.M Johnson by a wallet on his clothing, Cpl. Hrysko by his wallet, F/O Martello by his wallet, F/O Popovitch by his identity bracelet, F/O Davies by a belt buckle, initial ‘D’ and by a ring initialled ‘W.E.D.’, and an RCAF watch serial No. 1165702, F/S Hope by his identity discs. Seven bodies were found which could not be identified, one of which was definitely a woman and one probably a woman. The other five were definitely identified as men.*

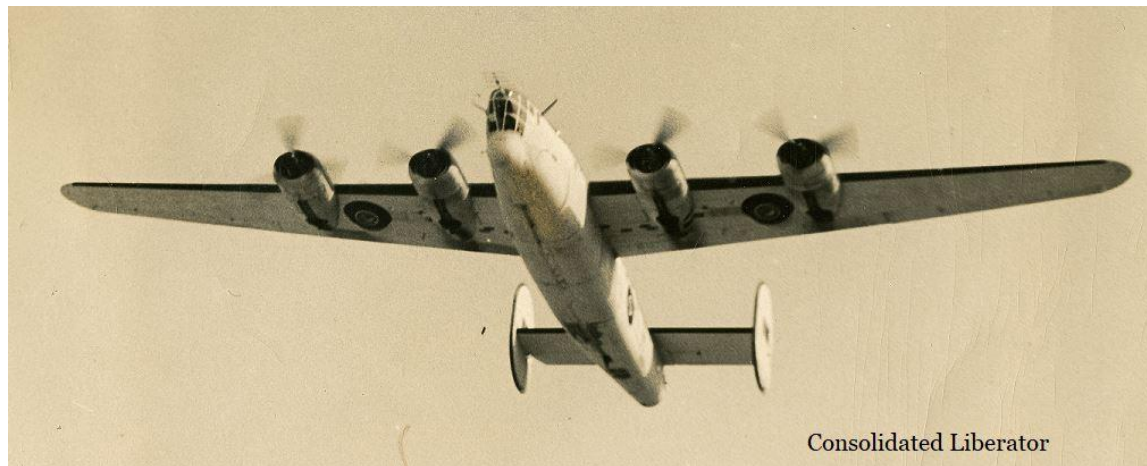
*I searched the slope for about 300 yards below the point of impact for evidence of anyone jumping etc. But nothing was found.”*

Due to the difficulty in locating the crash site the bodies could not be brought out for burial and two graves were dug by the wreckage, one for men and one for women. The chaplain accompanying the search party conducted a funeral service and crosses were erected over the graves. Coinciding as closely as possible with the funeral service, a memorial service was held at Patricia Bay in front of a Station Liberator conducted by the Station Chaplain and attended by all available officers and airmen of No. 11 Squadron.

In 1982, airmen from Comox Base erected a more permanent cairn and bronze plaque, which were dedicated in an official ceremony in 1983.

The conclusion of the inquiry into the crash blames the pilot, in that, contrary to

orders, he flew into cloud instead of finding a route through the breaks in the overcast to reach his planned altitude. While in the cloud, he flew into the side of a mountain ESE of Bamfield. The Tofino Base was also found at fault for allowing the pilot to take off for Patricia Bay in the weather conditions that afternoon.



Consolidated Liberator



