

# Pettit, Leslie

**Age:** 19

**Nationality:** English

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 32 OTU

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** 1600923 (RAFVR)

**Birth:** 8 February 1924  
Wandsworth, London,  
England

**Home Town:** Tooting, London,  
Surrey, England

**Death:** 30 November 1943,  
  
Crash of Handley Page Hampden AN131  
Near Ladysmith, BC, Canada

**Burial:** Royal Oak Burial Park,  
Victoria, BC, Canada

**Other:** Sgt Pilots James Fearnley, Pilot



## Biography

Leslie Pettit was born in Wandsworth, a borough of SW London, England, on 8 February 1924, the only son of Cyril Pettit and Nora Donovan. Cyril, born in 1876, was a warehouseman. An older sister, Eileen, was born in 1922 and in 1927 Eileen died and a younger sister, Jean Olga, was born. In 1929 Cyril was married a second time to Katherine Hannon. When Katherine died in 1966, she bequeathed her estate to Reginald Pettit, so possibly, Leslie had a half brother.

On Leslie's record under the Commonwealth War Graves he is described as the son of Cyril and Katherine Pettit; no mention is made of Nora, and Cyril is Leslie's next of kin.

On 30 November 1943, Leslie and James Fearnley, also of the RAFVR, were flying Handley Page Hampden AN131 on an instrument flying exercise. Fearnley was to pilot the first leg and Pettit the second. There were no other crew. Just over 30 minutes into Fearnley's flight the aircraft flew into high ground in dense fog and exploded. Leslie died instantly of his injuries.

He was buried in the war graves section of Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC, Canada.



## Details of Crash

On 30 November 1943, Sergeant Pilots James Fearnley and Leslie Pettit were briefed for an instrument flying exercise. They were to make two flights, the first lasting two hours with Fearnley piloting and Pettit as safety pilot, the second lasting one hour with Pettit piloting and Fearnley as safety pilot. Fearnley was an average pilot with 275 hours of flying and due soon to transfer to the next flight where whole crews trained together. On this exercise, there were only the two pilots.

The route they were to follow was: Base to Pender Island, Ladysmith, Sooke Lake, to Darcy Island, Ladysmith, Sooke Lake, to Darcy Island, and then to base.

They were to fly at 3,000 feet and not to enter cloud below 3,000 feet. If the weather deteriorated they were to return to base and conduct instrument flying exercises in the vicinity of the aerodrome.

They took off in Hampden AN131 at 1:30 pm with Fearnley in control.

The pilots in the second aircraft, performing this exercise, took off 15 minutes later. They saw AN131 about two to three miles ahead of them on the first leg, it turned to the second leg and disappeared into cloud. They did not see them again. Following the set course, they returned twice more to Ladysmith where visibility was zero. The weather worsened and pilots taking off later failed to complete the course.

At 2:20 pm, a civilian witness, a logger working 4.5 miles S.W. of Ladysmith, heard an aircraft that sounded as if it were circling and one minute later heard a crash, and an explosion after another two or three minutes. He did not see the plane due to the fog that had been in the area since about 1:30.

At 2:45 pm, the superintendent of Comox Logging was advised that an aircraft had crashed at the SE corner of lot 59, Oyster District, on Miller Creek. He drove to the site, arriving at 3:20, to find the aircraft burning ferociously and Pettit already dead. The pilot was still conscious, but badly injured. All he said of the accident was "*we got into trouble*", then "*I am going out*". The superintendent made him comfortable and talked to him until he died at 4:10 pm. Pettit had multiple fractures to his arms, legs, and chest and his head and face were burned beyond recognition. Fearnley had severe 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns to his lower body.

The aircraft had flown into high ground at an elevation of about 2,200 feet.



Hampden Aircraft

