

Porter, Frank Ferrier

Age: 29
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: Pilot/Officer
Unit: No. 3 OTU
Occupation: Flight Engineer
Service Number: J/48269

Birth: 2 March 1915
Chatham, Ontario,
Canada

Home Town: Hamilton, Ontario,
Canada

Death: 2 December 1944

Crash of Consolidated
Canso 11086
near Ucluelet, BC



Burial: Commemorated Ottawa Memorial
Buried at site of crash.

Others: All RCAF: Sgt Robert Davidson, F/E; F/O Louis Day,
2nd Pilot, P/O John Mahoney, W/O; F/O Robert Nash,
1st Pilot; Sgt Joseph Patenaude, WAG; P/P Frank Porter, F/E;
Fl Lt. George Ramsay, Nav Instructor; P/O Alonzo Staples,
Navigator, Sgt Joseph Trudel, WAG

Biography

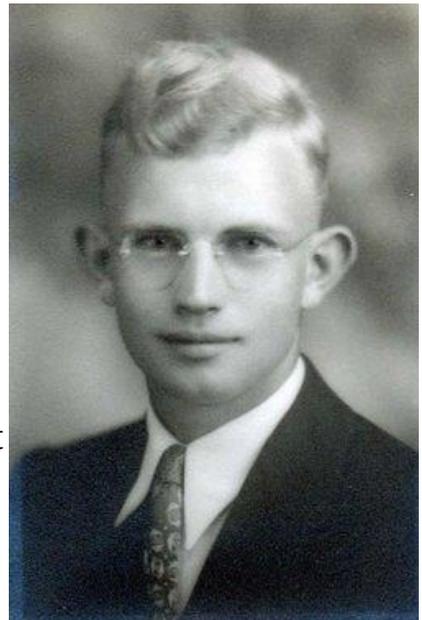
Frank Porter was a married man of 28 when he enlisted in the RCAF in August 1943. He had completed school with senior matriculation and at the time of his enlistment he was working as a brake operator with Canada Westinghouse.

Frank enlisted for flying duties. His preference was to become a pilot but he was willing to accept any other position. He was considered suitable for aircrew, but rather than a pilot he was recommended as a flight engineer.

At No. 5 T.T.S. School in St. Thomas, ON, Frank excelled and graduated with 83%. He specialized in in-line engines, was "*an ambitious, conscientious and industrious trainee; a good practical worker with a thorough understanding of the training covered*".

Although above average in all respects he was not thought at all suitable as an instructor at that time.

Frank completed his training at No. 5 school in June 1944 and received his Flight Engineer's Badge the following August, when he was commissioned. A month later Frank was posted to No. 3 OTU at Patricia Bay where, after only three months, he was killed in the crash of Consolidated Canso 11086, when it hit a mountain north of Ucluelet, BC. The wreckage was not found until July 1945, when the pilot of a Douglas DC-3 flying into Tofino spotted it. The site of the crash was difficult to access and all nine crew members were buried in a communal grave at that place.



Frank Porter was born in Chatham, Ontario, on 2 March 1915, to Frank Wylie Porter, an immigrant from Scotland, and Edna Margretta Heard. He had three younger sisters; Jean, Margaret and Helen.

Frank married Beatrice Annette Johnson, in Wentworth, Ontario, on 1 July 1939. They had one daughter, Beatrice Leora, who was born and died on 23 January 1942. Beatrice did not remarry and lived to be 91.

Details of Crash

On 2 December 1944, the crew of Consolidated Canso 11086 were briefed for a night navigation exercise to begin at 4:30 pm. The crew members were:

Sergeant Robert Davidson	Flight Engineer
Flying Officer Louis Day	2 nd Pilot
Pilot Officer John Mahoney	Wireless Operator
Flying Officer Robert Nash	Captain, 1 st Pilot
Sergeant Joseph Patenaude	WAG
Pilot Officer Frank Porter	Flight Engineer
Flight Lt. George Ramsay	Navigation Instructor
Pilot Officer Alonzo Staples	Navigator
Sergeant Joseph Trudel	WAG
Pigeon #43 RCAF 1064	Sole survivor

Three of the crew were French speaking and had chosen to be together. The aircraft had been intended for an earlier exercise but this was prevented by wireless problems.

Crews of six Canso aircraft were fully briefed for the exercise, which entailed flying from base to the southern tip of Vancouver Island, out to sea for about two hours and then back along the same route to base. Two of the aircraft were found not to be serviceable so only four actually became airborne to begin the exercise. One aircraft returned after about two hours due to wireless problems, and an hour later, two more aircraft returned to base due to deteriorating weather. On their return they reported encountering very poor weather in the Juan de Fuca Strait

Signals at No. 3 OTU contacted Canso 11086 and instructed the aircraft to return to base. 11086 acknowledged the signal at 6:55 pm. An aircraft tracking system in Victoria maintained a plot on an incoming aircraft, which was assumed to be 11086, from 7:24 to 7:51 pm but lost this plot when the aircraft entered Juan de Fuca Strait.

W/T contact was maintained with 11086 until 8:00 pm, although difficulty was encountered in making contact in the Juan de Fuca Strait, probably because of the low altitude at which the pilot was forced to fly due to the poor weather. No further contact was made and at 8:50 pm, overdue action was taken.

The search for 11086 started on December 2nd and continued until December 11th. The search entailed 742 hours of daytime flying and 46 hours at night. A

further 250 hours of searching started on December 15th after flares were discovered, which were believed to be connected to 11086. No trace was found of the aircraft or crew.

At 5:00 pm on December 6th, a bedraggled carrier pigeon, #43 RCAF 1064, returned to its loft at Patricia Bay. The pigeon had been issued to Flight Officer Nash on December 2nd and belonged to Canso 11086. It was exhausted but showed no sign of having been in a crash. The droppings present on its upper tail feathers suggested that it had remained inside its box until the morning after the aircraft went missing. The message capsule was missing from the pigeon's leg, giving rise to speculation that it had been handled.

Around 4:00 pm on December 5th a civilian walking on Long Beach near Tofino found a capped beer bottle containing a message. He smashed the bottle to get at the note on which he could read "SOS" and a location. He took the note home, dried it out and contacted the RCAF at Tofino.

At the Tofino Station, the smudged note was deciphered as well as could be done, and it was decided to turn the note over to the Intelligence Officer at Western Command. The Commanding Officer at Tofino thought it most unlikely that an aircrew in a dinghy would have sent a note in a beer bottle, and the date on the note appeared to be in September. Although instructed to send the message immediately, he did not send it until the next plane left on December 9th.

It was ultimately decided that the note was a hoax. However the Commanding Officer at Tofino was severely reprimanded since, had the note been from Canso 11086, his delay would have impacted the area searched and possibly the survival chances of the crew.

On 1 July 1945 the wreckage of an aircraft was located from the air by a Douglas DC-3 flying into Tofino. The wreckage was located 30 miles east of Tofino, Vancouver Island, on the S.E. slope of a mountain at about 3,000 feet and

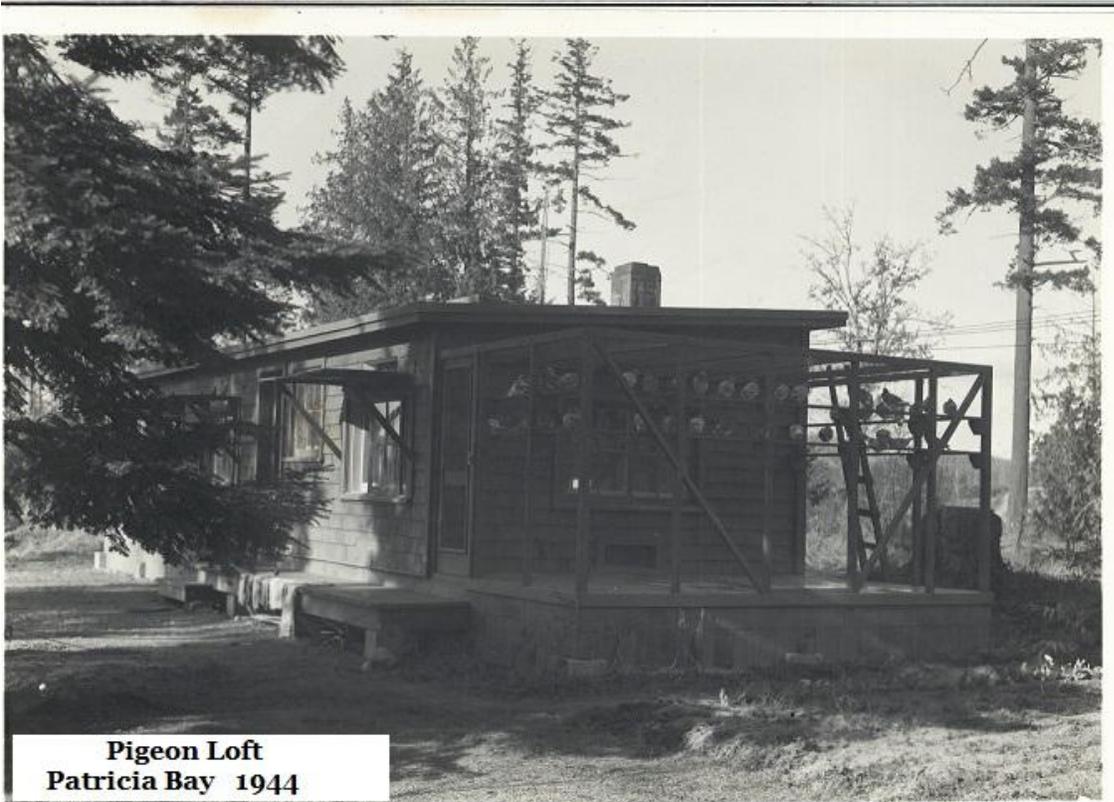
appeared to have been heading north-west. The front of the aircraft was completely burnt out but it was determined that both engines were under power at the time of the crash. The plane was identified as Canso 11086 by the number on the fuselage. A watch was found which had stopped at 8:27, which is presumed to be the time of the crash. The pigeon box



catch was found to have been sprung by the crash, so the pigeon could have escaped by exerting a little pressure. The pigeon log was also found with no pages missing. Every effort was made to identify the occupants, who were buried in a common grave at the site, and a funeral conducted by the Protestant and Catholic padres that accompanied the search party. The burial cairn was covered with a Union Jack and a white cross was erected with the name and number of each man.

The investigation into the crash was re-opened and it concluded that the cause of the crash was the failure of the pilot to reach a safe height while flying in bad weather in a mountainous area.

On 24 August 1986, after three years of planning, a new cairn with a memorial plaque had been built at the site, and a formal dedication service was held for the lost airmen.



The

RCAF operated homing pigeons for more than 25 years. They were carried aboard military aircraft for emergency use, as the birds were more reliable and lighter than the tube based radios of the time. The purpose was to use them to send a message back to the base if a plane was downed.

In 1920 Jericho Beach Station in Vancouver became the first station to establish a Pigeon Division. By 1944 there were 30 pigeon lofts in Canada; 16 on the west coast and 14 on the east coast. At its peak the Pigeon Division had one officer and over 300 enlisted men. Pigeons also served in Europe with Bomber and Coastal Command,

Special lofts for the birds were constructed, and airmen of the Pigeon Division were instructed in the raising and caring of homing pigeons. Pigeons were used throughout the war at Patricia Bay Station, where, for exercise, the birds were regularly released in Victoria and left to fly home.

On patrols, usual practise was to load two pigeon in special boxes onto the aircraft. These boxes were then removed on its return and the pigeons were returned to the loft. The accident described here is the only one out of Patricia Bay in which a pigeon returned to base after a crash. There is no record of whether the aircraft carried a second pigeon that failed to survive.

