

Robertson, David Jack

Age: 24

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: Pilot Officer

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: J/13019

Birth: 1 December 1918
Vancouver, BC

Home Town: Vancouver, BC,
Canada

Death: 16 December 1942

Crash of Avro Anson N9560
West of Nanoose Bay, BC

Burial: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver BC

Others: P/O P.F. Biggs (WAG); Sgt. A. J. Doherty (Navigator);
P/O W.W. Harris (Navigator); P/O J.R. Vosburgh (WAG).



Biography

When he applied to the RCAF recruiting centre in Vancouver at the end of July 1941, despite having no flying experience and only half an hour as a passenger, David Robertson was intent on becoming a pilot.

David's education included two years of commercial training at high school and his occupation at enlistment was in business, primarily advertising, but some business consulting. He had been involved in Scouting for nine years, including five as a Scout Leader, and had spent a year with the 2nd Battalion Seaforths in Vancouver. Added to his keenness, pleasant personality and smart appearance, this was judged to be sufficient to qualify him for training and for him to be thought a candidate for commission.

In Initial Training David did well. He was very keen and confident and finished fifth in his class with a mark of 88%. He was recommended for training as a pilot with air observer as an alternative, and sent to No. 5 Elementary Flying School in early 1942.

David's early training in flying earned him a lukewarm report of average but generally careless. He did not do well in Ground Training, being below average, not keen and irresponsible. His instructor found his attitude objectionable and his conduct only fair. Nevertheless, he passed and moved on to No. 7 Service Training School in April 1942.

In Service Training, David made a slow start but went on to earn a 'Distinguished Pass'. Carelessness was behind him and he was very thorough, of very good conduct and learned well. He was recommended for his pilot's wings and for a commission, and was granted both on 31 July 1942.

David was transferred to No. 32 OTU Patricia Bay in November 1942. On December 16th he took off at 9:30 am with four other crew in Avro Anson N9560 on a routine reconnaissance training flight. Radio contact was lost soon after take-off. The aircraft was reported overdue at 1:00 pm and an unsuccessful search made. It was ultimately found by two civilians the following March where it had crashed into thick trees near Nanimo, BC, and the bodies of the airmen were recovered. David had died instantly of impact wounds.

David Jack Robertson was born in Vancouver on 1 December 1918 to John McDonald Robertson, a tailor, and Jannett Stevenson, both immigrants from Scotland. He had a sister, Eleanor Jannette, who was 19 when he died.

Details of Crash

Avro Anson N9560 was transferred to Western Air Command in September 1941. On 16 December 1942 it took off at 9:30 am, on reconnaissance exercises, with a crew of five:

P/O Percival Frederick Biggs	RCAF	WAG
Sgt. Andrew Joseph Doherty	RNZAF	Navigator
P/O William Ward Harris	RCAF	Navigator (US citizen)
P/O David Jack Robertson	RCAF	Pilot
P/O James Roderick Vosburgh	RCAF	WAG

The route of the flight was Patricia Bay to Cassidy, to Powell River, to Jervis Inlet and back to Patricia Bay. Signal section received a wireless transmission “go” five minutes after take-off, which was the last message from the aircraft. The aircraft never returned to base.

There were six aircraft in total authorized to carry out the exercise and all the pilots and crew were briefed prior to the flight as follows:

“Instructed to map read along the coast between each target until they reached Parksville. From that point the navigators were to initiate courses until the square search was completed and Blubber Bay was found. Instructions were to map read from Blubber Bay to Stillwater. On the final leg from Stillwater to base, the instructions were to fly on a course as directed by the navigator.”

Blubber Bay is on Texada Island; Stillwater is on the North shore of Jervis Inlet.

The crew were specifically warned not to fly in or above clouds and were cautioned regarding the heights of land in this area. Instructions were to fly at about 1,000 ft. and not to fly below 500 ft. with the exception of the leg from Stillwater to base that was to be flown at 500 ft.

In addition, the wireless operators were told to maintain contact with base at least once an hour and to return to base immediately if contact was lost. The other five aircraft were unable to complete the reconnaissance due to bad weather conditions at Cassidy and returned as instructed.

Pilot/Officer Robertson had flown this course before. His total flying time to this date was:

de Havilland Tiger Moth	82:25 hrs	Airspeed Oxford	7:05 hrs
Avro Anson	146:50 hrs	Handley Page Hampden	4:55 hrs

He had been with No. 32 OTU as a staff pilot for almost a month. His Flight Commander remarked on his flying ability as follows:

“He was very inexperienced with a poor background. He was posted to this Flight as a Staff Pilot after having been rejected from the Hampden Operational Training Course for poor airmanship.”

The Flight Commander did, however, state that Robertson’s flying ability on Anson was found to be satisfactory. He also gave the opinion that, in general, pilots sent to Patricia Bay were of limited experience and lacked the ability to cope with the flying conditions peculiar to the location. There had been complaints from time to time on the calibre of pilots arriving at Patricia Bay and these had been noted at other Courts of Inquiry.

A search for the crashed aircraft was undertaken for several days following its disappearance, including one made by Anson R3431, which flew into the sea North of Salt Spring Island while searching.

In March 1943, two civilians out cougar hunting, Fred and Duncan Craig, found a large aircraft in heavy bush near Craig’s Crossing in the Nanaimo District; Patricia Bay station received the following communication:

PROVINCIAL POLICE NANAIMO ADVISE RECEIVING REPORT FROM TWO BUSHMEN WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN LARGE AIRCRAFT IN DENSE THICKET OF SMALL TREES LOCATED APPROXIMATELY FOUR MILES WEST OF NANOOSE BAY VANCOUVER ISLAND BC EXTENT OF DAMAGE UNKNOWN BUT AIRCRAFT DESCRIBED AS BEING ALMOST INTACT AND TO HAVE MADE BELLY LANDING THE BUSHMEN'S REASON FOR NOT EXAMINING AIRCRAFT WAS THAT THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD GET INTO TROUBLE IF THEY DISTURBED ANYTHING PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF POLICE (.) 32 O T U PERSONNEL DETAILED TO PROCEED TO SCENE WITH PROVINCIAL POLICE MORNING 29TH FOR INVESTIGATION (.) AIRCRAFT PRESUMED TO BE ANSON 9560 WHICH WAS MISSING DECEMBER 16TH/42 WITH CREW OF FIVE ABOARD (.) FURTHER DETAILS WILL BE TRANSMITTED BY SIGNAL AFTERNOON 29TH

With the assistance of the Craigs, a search party located the site and confirmed that it was indeed N9560. The members of the party identified and recovered the bodies of the five airmen.

A letter was sent to the Governor General of Canada containing a recommendation from the Provincial Police, strongly supported by Western Air Command, that the two civilians, who had devoted two days to assisting in the recovery, should be compensated for their time and effort with a payment each of \$10.

NANAIMO, March 29 (CP) — Bodies of five members of crew of an R.A.F. medium bombing plane which had been missing since December on a navigational flight up the east coast of Vancouver Island were lying in undertaking parlors here tonight following discovery of the wreckage of the craft in a dense clump of trees seven miles inland and about fifteen miles north of Nanaimo on Sunday.

The wreckage was found by Duncan and Fred Craig of Craig's Crossing, who were hunting cougars. The bodies of the airmen were inside the cabin. Last week a portion of the tail elevator was found in a tree about four miles off the main highway in Nanoose district.

A bulldozer, borrowed from a logging company, was utilized to break trail to the scene of the crash.

From the
Victoria
Times
Colonist
March 30
1943.



