

Talbot, James Melville

Age: 22

Nationality: English

Rank: Pilot/Officer

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: 163513 (RAFVR)

Birth: 4th Quarter 1921
Uxbridge, Middlesex,
England

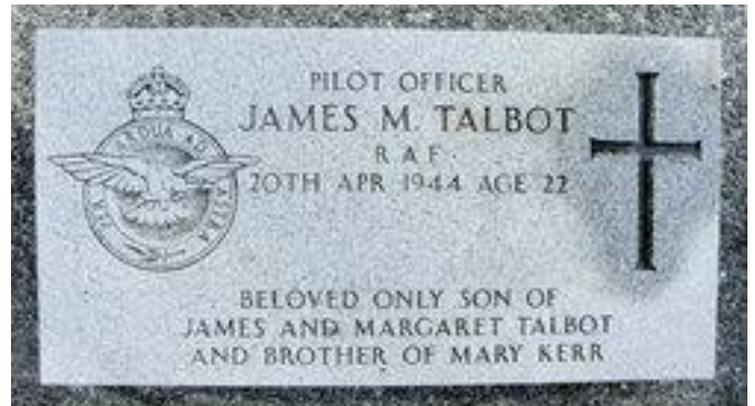
Home Town: Ruislip, Middlesex,
England

Death: 20 April 1944

Crash of Douglas C-47 Dakota FZ576
Port Hardy, BC,
Canada

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

Other: P/O Tom Story Wardlow, navigator.



Biography

James Melville Talbot was born late in 1921, in Uxbridge, Middlesex, the only son and younger child of James Oliver Talbot and Margaret Lucy Harris. James' sister, Mary Beryl, was born about 1905 and qualified as a registered nurse at the Middlesex Hospital in London, on 10 June 1936. By 1946, Mary was married and her family name was Kerr.

James enlisted in the RAFVR and trained as a pilot. By April 1944, James was training with No. 32 OTU at Patricia Bay Station in British Columbia, Canada. He was a below average pilot, appeared to lack stamina, but was keen and intelligent

On 19 April 1944, James was flying his last trip for No. 4 Transport Course, a ten hour navigation exercise partially over the ocean. On the last leg of the flight, James became lost for two hours and by the time he attempted to land at Port Hardy, an airfield he had never landed at before, it was close to 1:00 am on April 20th.

James had been flying for 12 hours continuously, had eaten no more than a sandwich and grapefruit since breakfast, and was close to exhaustion. He approached the airfield flying low, cut through the trees and hit high ground about four miles north of the runway. Both he and his navigator were killed on impact, the WAG suffered only slight injuries, and the aircraft was totally destroyed.



Details of Crash

On 19 April 1944, 15 crews from No. 4 Transport Course were briefed for their last trip of the course. The syllabus for the course flying Douglas C-47 Dakotas normally had no flight longer than six hours, but this time the exercise was to take up to ten hours,. Three of the Dakotas proved not to be serviceable and only twelve crews took off for the flight. Dakota FZ576 carried a crew of three:

P/O James Melville Talbot	pilot	killed
P/O Tom Story Wardlow	navigator	killed
Sgt. Thomas Robert Moss	WAG	slightly injured.

Tom Wardlow had started training as a pilot but, when he failed to fly solo after ten hours of experience, this training was stopped and he was switched to the navigator's course.

The crews had breakfast at around 8:00 am and expected to start taking off by 10:00 am, but the flights were delayed for two hours, due to weather conditions, and FZ576 took off at 12:13 pm.

The route to be followed was: base to a sea position 47° 20' N 135° W; to Massett, Queen Charlotte Islands (now Haida Gwaii); to base.

Eleven of the Dakotas completed the exercise and returned to base successfully. FZ576 reached Massett with no problems. The crew had been provided with a light meal of sandwiches, juice, and fresh grapefruit. Sergeant Moss ate half a grapefruit about 3:30 pm and soon after became sick and spent much of the remainder of the flight unwell and vomiting intermittently, making him unable to perform his job adequately.

By the evening the weather forecast had deteriorated between Haida Gwaii and Patricia Bay and there was thought of diverting the crews to Port Hardy or Terrace, neither of which was really suitable for Dakotas. Eventually the planned route was left as it was.

At Massett, the crew of FZ576 entered cloud and became lost for about two hours before they made contact with Port Hardy base, adding a layer of anxiety to Talbot's exhaustion from the length of the flight and lack of sustenance. He contacted Patricia Bay and was instructed to land at Port Hardy, something he had already decided to do.

This was Talbot's first visit to Port Hardy and he omitted to use his landing

lights. On his final approach to the runway he flew too low and hit a 300' hill four miles north of the airfield. FZ576 was totally destroyed, the pilot and navigator were killed instantly, and Sergeant Moss received minor injuries.

There were a great many communications on the factors contributing to this crash.

The C.I. Accidents wrote the following:

“This accident deserves serious consideration.

“The O.C. stated the pilot was below average but in view of his keenness and intelligence considered that he would eventually become an adequate captain of an aircraft. He further stated that this pilot appeared to lack physical stamina. In spite of this summing up of the pilot he was detailed to carry out a flight of ten hours in which he was in sole charge of the aircraft. Such a long flight would entail considerable physical endurance.

“The question of meals was apparently left to the captain of the aircraft. In this case the only food provided in the air was sandwiches, apple juice and grapefruit. There is no estimate of the quantity nor is there any mention of hot drinks. I consider such a matter the responsibility of the station. Adequate hot food or at least hot drinks should be provided automatically for the crew. To make matters worse the crew in this case had breakfast 4 hours before the flight commenced and nothing further except the sandwiches taken in the aircraft

“The pilot became lost and the crash occurred just over 12 hours after take off. I quite agree with the Investigating Officer that the fact that the aircraft was out of radio communication for 3 hours and overdue for 2 and a half hours that the pilot was in no fit state to attempt a landing at a strange airfield. His reactions must have been slowed down by worry and fatigue. I have consulted D.M.S. (Air) M.A. 5 on the proper provision of food for long flights. Properly designed food containers are now available which will keep food and drinks hot for longer than any sortie is liable to occupy. These should be put into immediate use whenever the length of the sortie warrants such provision.

“I consider this accident was due to pilot fatigue and for which the station must share a large part of the responsibility for failing to produce proper organization.

“I have discussed this matter personally with A.W.T who is leaving for the West on Monday. M.A. 2 have also acquainted him with the facilities for providing

food in the air and he will take up the matter with the relevant authorities in Western Air Command."

On the unusual length of the flight, the following was written on behalf of Western Air Command:

Secretary,
Department of National Defence for Air,
Ottawa, Ontario.

ATTENTION D.O.T.

Accident to Dakota III FZ 576 - No. 32 O.T.U.

1. The comments of this Headquarters, with regard to the 10 hour navigational exercise generally, are contained in our letter S.212-1-21 (OTUL) dated 11th May. This exercise was instituted during a period when additional crew flying on the Dakota was needed to replace equivalent time on Beechcraft, impossible of fulfillment because the aircraft arrived with no navigator or wireless operator position. The exercise was included for a short time as a trial only and has since been discontinued. It is not considered that the length of the exercise contributed to the accident, as all other crews arrived back on the same night, with no signs of abnormal fatigue.

The inquiry into the accident made the following recommendations:

1. That co-pilots be provided at this Unit for flights of eight hours or more so that the possibility of pilot fatigue will not arise.
2. That pilots at this Unit be instructed to use their landing lights in making night landings at aerodromes with which they are not familiar.

It was thought that had Talbot used his landing lights, he would have seen the rise in the ground in time to increase his height the small amount necessary to avoid it.

The wreckage remains at the crash site and a memorial plaque has been placed inside the cockpit.

In June 2002 members of 101 (North Island) Squadron decided that a memorial should be placed on the site of the crash of Dakota FZ576. A patrol of Canadian Rangers cut their way to the site and built a helicopter landing pad. A memorial was placed inside the cockpit and arrangements were made for a dedication ceremony. The Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia dedicated the memorial. The aircraft actually crashed about 1:00am on the 20th of April, not on the 19th.



