

Thorn, Henry James

Age: 19

Nationality: British

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Pilot

Service No: 1315905 RAFVR

Birth: About 1923

Home Town: Weston-super-mare, Somerset, UK

Death: 25 October 1942
Crash of Handley Page Hampden AJ988
Crashed into the sea off Patricia Bay, BC, Canada

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial

Others: Sgt. John Orrell



Details

No details can be found of the life of Henry James Thorn. He served in the RAFVR and came to Canada some time in 1942 for further pilot training. He died, aged 19, in a flying accident in October 1942 and the body could not be recovered.

On 25 October 1942, John Orrell was detailed to practice instrument flying cross country. He took off in Handley Page Hampden AJ988 with a safety pilot, Sergeant Henry James Thorn, at 4:15 pm. The route they were to take was base to north of Galiano Island, to north of Saturna Island, to Elk Lake, to Duncan and back to base. They were to return to base if the weather deteriorated and were not authorized for any low flying. At around 5:15 pm the aircraft crashed into the sea with only a civilian fisherman, Mr. C.L. Musclow, as witness. The Court of Inquiry believed him to be an intelligent and competent witness.

The witness was fishing just west of Mandarte Island when he saw a twin engine aeroplane flying towards him, quite low, over the trees at the south east end of Sidney Island. The aeroplane appeared to lose height and strike the water about a mile from where he was fishing. It became airborne again and began to climb. At about 25 ft. the witness reported there seemed to be an explosion in the sea beneath the aircraft, but the aircraft continued climbing to about 100 ft., passed over his boat, turned, came back and crashed into the water about 60 feet from his boat. Both engines sounded quite normal but he saw white smoke and flames coming from the starboard engine. After it entered the water, the aircraft floated momentarily then exploded into quite small pieces. When the aircraft passed over him he could see no sign of the pilot.

There were no bombs or torpedoes on the aircraft which could have caused the first reported explosion and the aircraft had been entirely serviceable when it was flown by another pilot immediately before this flight.

The accident was deemed to have been caused by disobedience of the order against flying low and an error of judgment resulting in either a wing or a propeller blade entering the water, and the subsequent crash.

A search party found a large oil slick off Mandarte Island with no sign of any survivors. No recovery efforts were made due to the total destruction caused by the explosion.

Hampden Aircraft





Two Airmen Die in Crash

Plunging into the sea off Sidney during a training flight, two Royal Air Force flyers were killed Sunday afternoon. They were flying a twin-engined medium bomber from the Patricia Bay air station.

Names of the victims, both sergeant pilots, are being withheld until next of kin are notified.

Wreckage of the aircraft was too widely scattered to permit recovery.

From Victoria Times Colonist: