

Trudel, Joseph Romeo Antoine

Age: 21
Nationality: Canadian
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: No. 3 OTU
Occupation: Wireless Operator/Air Gunner
Service Number: R/211246

Birth: 16 October 1923,
La Prairie, Quebec,
Canada

Home Town: Montreal, Quebec,
Canada

Death: 2 December 1944

Crash of Consolidated Canso 11086,
near Ucluelet, BC

Burial: Commemorated Ottawa Memorial
Buried at site of crash.

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



Biography

Romeo Trudel's choice, when he joined the RCAF in December 1942, was to be assigned to ground duties, specifically as airframe mechanic. He was a truck driver and had worked in the garages of Coca Cola following three years of delivering laundry. He was considered a '*good type*' and was tested as a driver but was also deemed good aircrew material.

Romeo was not trained as an air frame mechanic, but spent one uneventful year in the Motor Division and was then selected for aircrew and sent for training as a wireless operator and air gunner (WAG).

From January to August 1944 Romeo was at the same wireless and gunnery schools as John Mahoney and fellow Montrealer Roger Patenaude. They all received their WAG badges on 25 August 1944 and were sent together to No. 3 OTU Patricia Bay two weeks later. Less than three months later, they died together when Consolidated Canso 11086 flew into the side of a mountain near Ucluelet on Vancouver Island. Romeo was buried along with the rest of the crew beside the wreckage of their aircraft.

Romeo was born in La Prairie, Quebec, on 16 October 1923, to Clement Louis Adelard Trudel and Angelina Charest. His parents already had two sons, Adelard and Maurice, and two daughters Gilberte and Germaine. Two further children, a boy, Fernand, and a girl, Cecile, followed Romeo. He completed grade 10 in Montreal and was bilingual in French and English. Romeo was not married.

250 hours of searching started on 15th December 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.

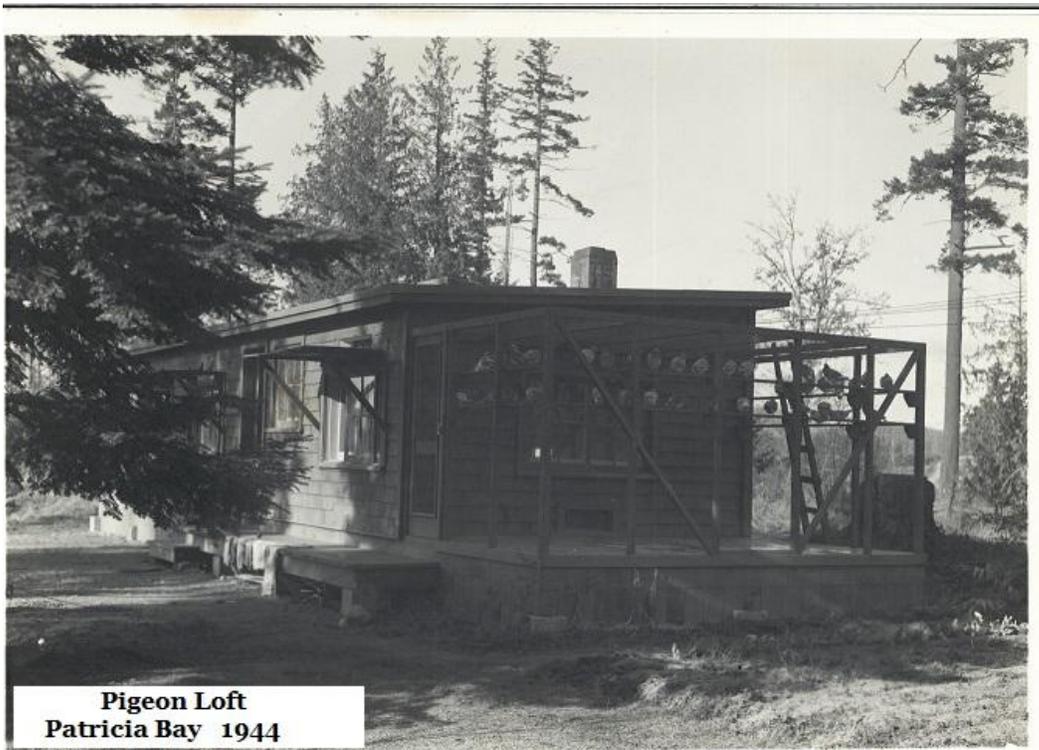
A watch was found which had stopped at 8:27, which is presumed to be the time of the crash. The pigeon box catch was found to have been sprung by the crash so the pigeon could have escaped by exerting a little pressure. The pigeon log was also found with no pages missing. Every effort was made to identify the occupants, who were buried in a common grave at the site and a funeral conducted by the Protestant and Catholic padres who were present. The burial

cairn was covered with a Union Jack and a white cross with the name and number of each man was erected.

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 had been built at the site, with a memorial plaque, and a formal dedication service was given 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 it was common to load two pigeons in special boxes onto the aircraft. On its return 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 which failed to survive.