

# Bourne, John Henry

**Age:** 55

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Captain

**Unit:** Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps.  
seconded to RCAF

**Occupation:** Ordnance

**Service No:** 34040

**Birth:** 9 March 1885  
Kennington, London  
England

**Home Town:** Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Death:** 14 Aug 1940  
Seymour Narrows,  
Discovery Passage, BC  
Crash of Northrop Delta 670

**Burial:** Named on Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia.

**Others:** Cpl. Robert George Brown; F/O Joseph Georges Hector Desbiens; F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon; S/L Richard Campbell Procter.



**CAPT. J. H. BOURNE**  
Officer in the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps, killed Wednesday when an Air Force plane crashed into Seymour Narrows. Capt. Bourne leaves his wife, in Victoria. They had formerly resided at Ottawa. He was a veteran of the First Great War and had served previously with the Royal Ordnance Corps (Imperials).

# Biography

At 55, John Henry Bourne was more than 20 years older than the other men on the fated Northrop Delta. A lightweight 5'5" /120lbs, he was a career soldier, who enlisted at the age of 18 on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1903, as a private in the Army Ordnance Corps. U.K. This was for 12 years; three years army service and nine years as a reserve. On 18 February 1904, he extended his army service for eight years.

John thrived in the army. When he joined he had only basic education from an industrial school in London U.K. He received further education at the Duke of York Military School and at the Royal Hibernian Military School and received a Certificate as Laboratory Foreman from the Ordnance College in 1905. His appraisals were always "*very satisfactory*" and he was promoted steadily up to the rank of Sergeant.

While in the British army, John served in the UK until 1906 when he embarked for Egypt. In Egypt, he was Laboratory Foreman for the Egyptian army and was sent to Suakimin in 1908 to overhaul the arms dump left over from hostilities in 1884/1885. In 1910, he contracted dengue fever which prompted his return to England.

On 29 January 1911, after completing his eight years of service, John was transferred to the reserves. He would seem to have flourished despite the dengue fever since he was then recorded as having grown 1.5 inches and having added an inch to his chest expansion. His conduct in the army was described as "*exemplary, with no instance of drunkenness, sober and reliable*". While in the Reserves he worked as an insurance agent.

In 1912, one of John's brothers, who was a civil engineer with Canadian Pacific Rail, visited England and persuaded him to emigrate to Canada. On March 21<sup>st</sup> of that year, John applied to the army for a transfer to Canada and on 10 April 1912, he embarked on the ship Lake Erie.

John enlisted in the ordnance corps of the Canadian army on 27 April 1912, shortly after his arrival in Montreal, and was posted to Quebec. In 1914, he was posted to Halifax in charge of North Ordnance. In 1917, John and his family were forced to leave Halifax when their house was destroyed in the Halifax explosion. None of his family is recorded as among the 2,000 killed in this accident.

In 1918, John was transferred to Esquimalt, BC and detailed for Siberia. He sailed on the Empress of Japan in October and returned to Victoria in 1919 when the British Mission took charge of the Siberian stores. He remained in Esquimalt until 1924 and thence was transferred to Winnipeg, Manitoba followed by Montreal, Quebec and St. John N.B., and to Toronto, Ontario, in 1935.

On 15 March 1939, before the start of WW-II, John was seconded to the RCAF with the rank of Lieutenant. He was detailed for duty at the National Defence Headquarters Ottawa, Ontario on 31 March 1939, where he was given the temporary rank of Captain, Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps. His long military service ended abruptly 15 months later in the waters of Discovery Passage.

John was born 9 March 1885 in Kennington, London, UK to John H. Bourne and Alice Johane Heitefusz . He had one older brother, William, and subsequently two younger brothers, Herbert and Harold. On 21 July 1910 John married Kate Dorothea Bancroft. They had five children: Mabel Dorothea, John Herman, Mildred Elsie Reginald Herbert, and Clifford Hugh .

#### CAPT. JOHN HENRY BOURNE

formerly of Ottawa and London, England, was born March 9th, 1885, in London. He entered the army at Woolwich, England, on January 28th, 1903, and in March, 1938, he was loaned to the R.C.A.F. as an Inspector of Explosives. Capt. Bourne had a long and outstanding military career. He served first at Arundel, Sussex, and later at various points in the British Isles. In 1905, after completing a laboratory foreman's course, he was posted to Dublin, Ireland, where, however, he remained only a short period. The following year he was posted to Aldershot, and later to Borden Camp. While here he received orders to leave for Egypt, and sailed in September, 1906. Upon arrival he was posted to Cairo. A year later he was accepted as a laboratory foreman in the Ordnance Department of the Egyptian Army, and he was given charge of the Sixth Fishkhana Magazines, situated near the Dead City of Cairo, being shortly later posted to Khartoum. In 1908 Port Sudan was being opened up by the authorities, replacing Suakim and Capt. Bourne proceeded to Suakim to overhaul the ammunition dump left over from the 1884-5 activities in the Red Sea Province, arriving to find but two white men, the Governor of the Province and his secretary. He took ill with Dengue Fever in 1910 and was in the Egyptian Army Hospital at Khartoum, later causing his transfer to the Reserve and subsequent return to England. At this time, his brother, a civil engineer with the Canadian Pacific Railway, visited England and urged him to go to Canada. Arriving in Montreal he went to Ottawa and enlisted on April 27th, 1912, and was posted to Quebec. In 1914 he proceeded to Halifax and was given charge of the North Ordnance, where he remained until December 6th, 1917, the date of the great Halifax explosion and disaster. Captain Bourne was a refugee with his wife and four children as his home had been completely wrecked. In January, 1918, he was transferred to Esquimalt, B.C., and later in that year he was detailed for Siberia. He sailed with the advance party in October on the old *Empress of Japan*. In June, 1919, the British Mission took charge of the Stores in Siberia, and Capt. Bourne returned to Victoria on the steamship *Monteagle*. He then served at Esquimalt until February 29th, 1924, when he left for Winnipeg, remaining there two years until October 1st, 1926, when he proceeded to Montreal. St. John, N.B., was his next post, which he took up on May 1st, 1931, remaining there until 1935, when he left for Toronto. On August 16th, 1940, he was reported "killed in a flying accident." He married Kate D. Bancroft, July 22nd, 1910, by whom he is survived, together with three sons and two daughters. His widow resides at 29 Prospect Ave., Westmount, Que.

Article taken from  
Canadian Virtual War  
Memorial:

## Details of Crash



On 10 August 1941, the Commanding Officer of No. 120 squadron was asked to supply a Northrup Delta Aircraft for transportation to Alliford Bay and back. F/O Desbiens was detailed to take the trip. The flight was attempted, but had to be abandoned and postponed until the following day when the weather deteriorated. The aircraft reached Alliford Bay and made the return trip on August 14<sup>th</sup>.

The aircraft was carrying 5 men:

Cptn. John Henry Bourne	Passenger	RCOC seconded to RCAF
Cpl. Robert George Brown	AEM	
F/O Joseph Georges Hector Desbiens	Pilot	
F/O Hugh Lockart Gordon	Passenger	
S/L Richard Campbell Procter	Passenger	

Captain Bourne and S/L Procter were on an annual inspection of explosives at all bases and F/L Gordon was carrying out an audit of accounts prior to the arrival of the Inspector-General.

The Delta reached Bella Bella from Alliford Bay for refuelling and took off again at 1:34 pm, heading to Patricia Bay.

On 9 August 1940, a message had been received at Western Air Command Headquarters from the Commanding Officer Pacific Coast requesting that an aircraft be detailed to keep the ‘Southern Cross’, a yacht anchored at that time at Vancouver, under surveillance when it departed for Campbell River. This had been done on August 13<sup>th</sup>, however, S/L Proctor was aware of the arrangements prior to leaving for Alliford Bay and when, on the return flight a vessel that appeared to be the “Southern Cross” was seen in the vicinity of Seymour Narrows. The Delta circled it to confirm identification.

There were several witnesses to the resulting accident, both on the “Southern Cross” and on a nearby Japanese fishing boat, the “Arashiko”. At about 3:00 pm the Aircraft descended and made 1½ right-hand circuits round the yacht, decreasing altitude from 1500 feet to 100 feet, and then headed towards Campbell River. There was a burst of power and the aircraft dropped straight down, with no faltering or nose dive, striking the water with the starboard wing, bounced, and struck the water again sending up 60 feet of spray. The tail rose up and the aircraft turned over and sank leaving the pontoons floating on the surface.

The “Southern Cross” sounded an alarm and the Japanese fishing boat headed towards the floating pontoons. One pontoon sank but they roped the other one and the Commander on the “Southern Cross” asked them to take it aboard and carry it to Vancouver. En route for Vancouver, they were stopped by the police and directed to take the pontoon to Campbell River, which they did.

According to the witnesses, it was a bright, sunny day with strong gusts of wind.

The Duty Air Staff Officer in Victoria received a message at 3:45 that an aircraft had crashed at Seymour Narrows, where it was estimated Delta 670 should be given the time it left Bella Bella. At 5:45 a report was received that a pontoon model 75 serial #4298 had been picked up by a fishing boat. It was confirmed that the pontoon belonged to Delta 670.

Subsequent examination of the pontoon indicated that the aircraft landed port wing down, the port pontoon failed and struck the starboard pontoon causing severe damage.



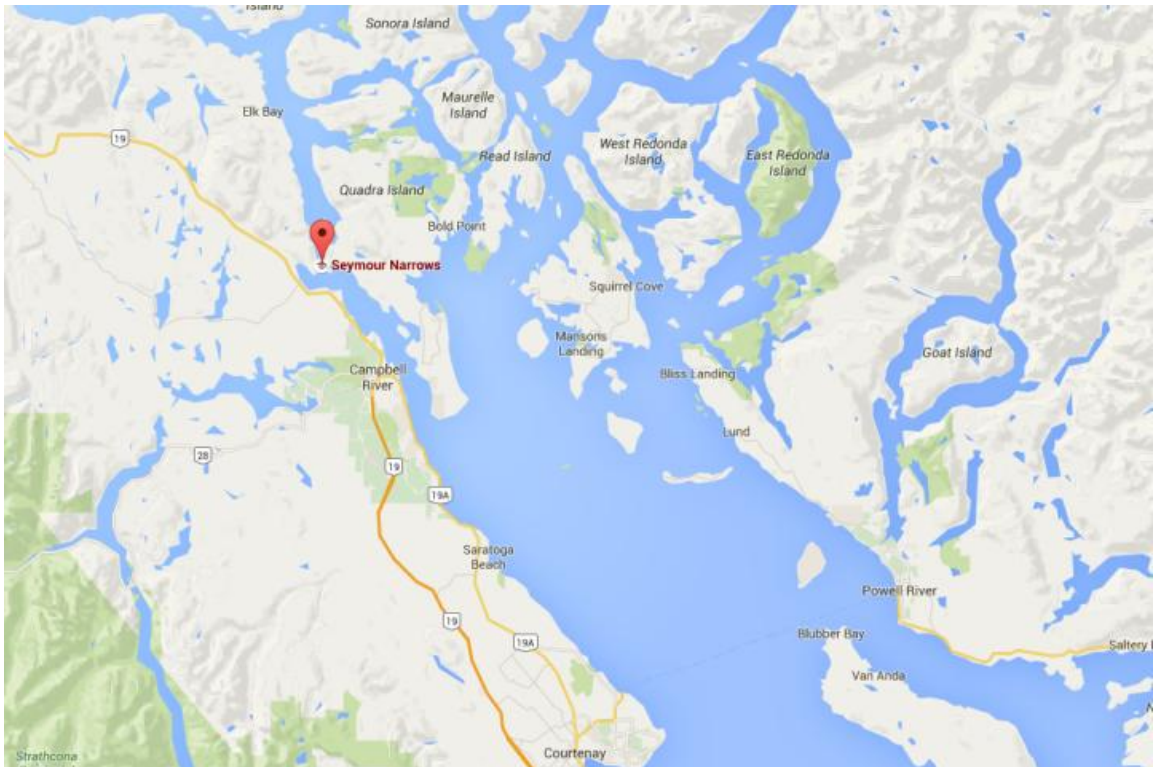
Evidence was given at the accident inquiry on the stalling characteristics of Delta Northrup aircraft.

*“The Northrop Delta aircraft on floats without flaps extended stalls at approximately 72 miles per hour. Between 90 mph and 72 mph the deceleration is very rapid. That is to say, after falling below a speed of 90 mph the stalling point is reached very quickly. When below 90 mph, an application of engine power does not produce marked acceleration unless the airscrew is in low pitch. The aircraft will spin from a turn if the speed is dropped near the stalling point, and no decisive airframe warning characteristics are felt during the period immediately before the stall or spin has developed. The aircraft will then flick over from the inner side of the turn, and spin will develop in the opposite direction from the turn. During this period the reactions of the cabin controls are violent. A measure of elevator control remains after rudder and aileron control are lost. As the spin is developing, recovery can be effected by a quick application of full engine power, at the same time putting on bottom rudder and moving the control column forward. At least 500 feet would be lost in the recovery dive. The outstanding characteristics of a spin in a Delta are the violence with which the spin is entered, and the violent reaction of cabin controls. This necessitates the pilot keeping a firm grip of the controls during this manoeuvre.”*

Dragging and diving operations took place for a week and nothing was found but two life jackets picked up by fishermen four days after the crash. The strong current of the area and the depth of the water were given as reasons not to pursue the salvage operations. The cause of the accident was recorded as “obscure” and the recommendation of the court of inquiry was that all units flying this aircraft be supplied with all the data available on its characteristics.

The plane had crashed at Seymour Narrows, Discovery Passage, between Quadra Island and Vancouver Island, in an area of dangerous currents near the notorious Ripple Rock that was blasted in 1958.

These were Pat Bay’s first casualties of the war. The bodies of the five men were never recovered and remain in the waters of Discovery Passage. They are all recorded on the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Ottawa, Ontario.



## SEYMOUR NARROWS

Treacherous currents, swirling eddies, and turbulent tide-rips still harass vessels, despite the blasting away in 1958 of the twin peaks of Ripple Rock. Charted in 1792 by Captain George Vancouver, the Narrows has claimed numerous ships and lives and is considered by many seamen the worst hazard to marine navigation on the British Columbia coast.