

# Crawford, Alan Bruce

**Age:** 22

**Nationality:** Canadian

**Rank:** Pilot/Officer

**Unit:** No. 3 OTU

**Occupation:** Pilot

**Service No:** J/44021

**Birth:** 1 February 1925,  
Flint, Michigan,  
USA

**Home Town:** Flint, Michigan,  
USA

**Death:** 13 February 1945

Crash of Consolidated Canso 9701  
Saanich Inlet, BC, Canada

**Burial:** Gracelawn Cemetery, Flint  
Michigan, USA.

**Others:** P/O R.B. Fraser, Pilot, P/O G.T. Kingswood, Navigator.



# Biography

Alan Crawford should not have been Piloting Canso 9071 when it crashed into Saanich Inlet on 12 February 1945. The glassy surface of the sea that day made judging the distance above the surface difficult and Alan, just out of his teens and about five weeks with No. 3 OTU, was a slightly lower than average pilot with only 11 hours of solo flying in a Canso. Alan was second pilot to an experienced student pilot and it was normal practice in the unit not to allow second pilots to take off or land aircraft. The cause of the accident was deemed an error in judgment on the part of the pilot.

Alan was an American from Flint, Michigan. Both his parents were born in Ontario, Canada, which may partly explain why he joined the RCAF in February 1943 and not the USAF. When he enlisted he made a very favourable impression on both the Medical Officer and the Interviewing Officer. He was well built, alert and of pleasing personality. Hoping to work in aeronautics after serving, he was keen to fly and well motivated. He was initially recommended for standard aircrew training.

At Elementary Flying Training School Alan did reasonably well. He was of average ability and somewhat overconfident. He was average at aerobatics and instrument flying; above average at practical navigation and handled the aircraft well. From a discipline point of view, he was co-operative, hard working and tried very hard.

His performance continued to be rated average at Service Flying Training. He passed and earned his wings in April 1944 and being a 'clean cut, straightforward type' was recommended for commission.

Alan's training did not stop here. He was posted first to No. 1 AGTS in Maitland and from there to General Reconnaissance School from July to September 1944. At GRS they felt he could have done better with more application and, again, that he was too sure of his ability. He was at least average, and was considered that with supervision and experience in operational work he should do well. He was recommended for Torpedo Bombers or Reconnaissance.

Alan was posted to No. 3 OTU, Patricia Bay on 12 January 1945, where he joined the crew of P/O Fraser flying Canso's. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, he took over the controls to land Canso 9071, misjudged and crashed into Saanich Inlet on landing. He died of his injuries the following day.

Alan Crawford was born in Flint Michigan on 1 February 1945, to Duncan Crawford and Edith May Wilson, the third of five children. He had an older sister, Jessie Elizabeth, and a younger sister, Jean Marie. An older brother, Wilson Alexander, died in 1936 and a younger brother, Matthew Ray, was born about 1938. Alan completed grade 12 in 1942 and worked as a clerk in Retailer's Credit Bureau until he enlisted. He had been a keen boy scout and was President of his High School Class.





## Details of Crash

On 12 February 1945, Consolidated Canso 9701 carried a crew of eight:

P/O	R.B. Fraser	Pilot	Killed
P/O	A.B. Crawford	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pilot	Killed
P/O	G.T. Kingswood	Navigator	Killed
Sgt.	A. L. McClean	WAG	Seriously injured, survived
Sgt.	W.B. Norris	WAG	“
Sgt.	H. Collis	WAG	“
Sgt.	F.E. Boalch	F/Eng.	Missing, later presumed dead
Sgt.	L. Desjardins	F/Eng.	Dangerously injured, survived.

P/O Fraser took off at 11:45 for a tow target bombing exercise. Flying Officer Long, a pilot instructor, captained the crew on their first bombing run in order to screen P/O Fraser, and disembarked when the aircraft landed to reload with bombs for the second run. On completion of the second bombing run, P/O Fraser changed places with the second pilot, P/O Crawford, in order to allow Crawford to land the aircraft from the first pilot's position. At 12:25 pm, coming

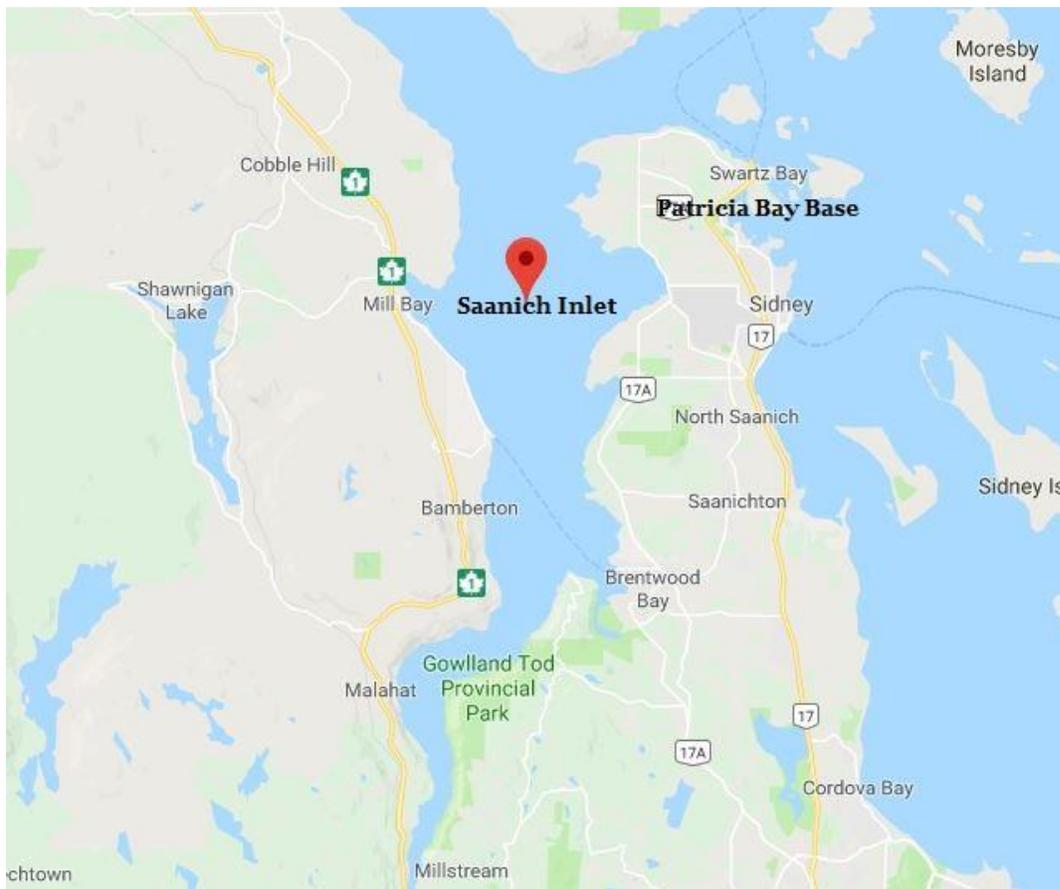
in to land and approximately 20 feet above the water, the nose went down, striking the water at a very sharp angle, there was an explosion and the tail of the aircraft stood straight up for a moment before it fell back into the water. The whole area became enveloped in flame.

The Canso broke into two parts and seven of the crew of eight were either thrown or escaped from the aircraft. When the first standby boat arrived there were five or six men floating, and three were picked up. The remainder were picked up by a second boat.

P/O Fraser and P/O Kingswood both died of their injuries soon after arriving at the hospital. P/O Crawford suffered severe injuries and shock. He had multiple infusions of plasma and blood. His left arm and leg were both mangled and the continuing blood loss made it imperative that they be amputated. The additional shock of the surgery was too much and he died soon after. Sgt. Boalch was assumed to have gone down with the aircraft. Sergeant Desjardins, who was in a dangerous condition was transferred to Shaughnessy Military Hospital in Vancouver, BC.

It was general practice in the unit that when an aircraft had a first and second pilot, the second pilot did not take off or land, because the first pilot needed the practice. The cause of the accident was determined to be pilot error when landing on a 'glassy' sea. The recommendation of the inquiry into the accident was that second pilots never be permitted to take off or land.





## **60 Years Later**

The wreckage of Canso 9701 was located by accident June 23 2005 by a privately owned submersible vehicle being towed by the coast guard ship John P. Tully.

The remotely operated vehicle was operated by the Canadian Scientific Submersible Facility.

**Sandra McCulloch - Times Colonist**

July 17, 2005

*Freddy Boalch died the day he turned 21, when the Second World War Canso bomber he was in with seven other young men crashed into Saanich Inlet on approach to landing in Patricia Bay.*

*The body of the Calgary radio operator-air gunner sank with the wreckage into the depths of the inlet Feb. 12, 1945, just three months before victory in Europe was declared. Until a few weeks ago, Boalch's watery grave remained undetected and the wreckage uncharted.*

*It was the coast guard vessel John P. Tully, towing a remotely operated submersible equipped with a camera, that discovered the historic wreckage in 167 metres of water. It was a fluke; nobody was looking for the old plane, which remained where it came to rest on the sea bottom, four kilometres northwest of Victoria International Airport. Two pilots, a navigator and five wireless air-gunners were on the aircraft that day, returning to Patricia Bay from a training run at about lunchtime. The crash was later blamed on the glassy surface of the sun playing tricks on the pilot's eyes.*

*Pilot Rupert Brook Fraser of Victoria wasn't at the controls at the time. Records show a student pilot, Allan Bruce Crawford of Flint, Mich., was flying when the amphibious aircraft plunged into the sea, broke apart and sank. Fraser, Crawford, Boalch and navigator Gordon Thomas Kingswood of Brantford, Ont., all died that day or shortly afterward.*

*Four others survived. Two are alive today, including Hank Golis, who was 19 at the time of the crash, and was shocked Thursday to hear the old plane wreckage had been found.*

*"Freddy Boalch was sitting right in front of me and Kingswood was on my right-hand side -- that's how close we were, and to this day it haunts me how I survived and they didn't," said Golis, 79, who lives in a suburb of Winnipeg.*

*The other survivor, Albert Maclean, now 91, still remembers the crash well 60 years later.*

*"We were coming in for a landing and we were laughing about it," said the former radio operator-air gunner, who now lives in Cornwall, Ont.*

*"The second pilot had taken over and we were laughing and saying, 'Oh, here we go, and there we went.'"*

*Maclean remembers chatting with Kingswood, who was leaning on the back of his chair. "I was sitting in the wireless operator's seat and watching the pilots, who were directly ahead of me. Just before we crashed, I saw them look up at the controls above their heads. Just as they did that, I heard a crash."*

*Golis, the youngest of the crew members, remembers the men were planning to have a party to celebrate Freddy's birthday that evening.*

*Without warning, Golis said, everyone hit the deck. The impact, he said, "took us all by surprise."*

*The eight had been a crew for only three months but had grown close through hours of training in Pat Bay. "Freddy Boalch, now that's his grave," said Golis. "He was the only child in the family, the only child and it was his 21st birthday."*

*Those who got out of the plane alive had to fight through fire and the icy February sea to survive. Golis pushed upward and broke through the surface, where the water appeared to be on fire. "I was right smack dead centre of the fire -- it was all over me.*

*"I kept splashing my way out until I got into the open water."*

*Golis said he was "mad as the dickens" that he wasn't unconscious because he figured he'd never survive. "I was conscious all the way through and scared, of course, thinking what mother and father were going to think of when they got the word.*

*Maclean was knocked out momentarily when he went head first into the radio equipment. When he surfaced, he noticed a life belt floating at the end of a wing. "I didn't know Kingswood was in it. The poor guy was dead." The sea was burning as far as he could see, and he could hear Golis yelling for help. "But I knew they couldn't come out for us because the flames were too high and they were burning for a 100-foot circle around the plane."*

*Air force rescuers who arrived in boats about a half-hour later were met by a grisly scene.*

*"They pulled Crawford into the same crash boat as me and I noticed his arm was ripped off," said Golis, adding the pilot lived until the middle of the following night."*

*Also pulled from the water were wireless air-gunners William Bertram(Shorty) Harris of Sydney, N.S., and Lloyd Desjardine of Edmonton. Harris died a hero in the mid-1980s after he tried to save three people from drowning near his home, said Golis.*

*Desjardine is also believed to be dead. "He had head injuries from the crash," said Golis. "I escorted him home to Edmonton because he couldn't do his laces up or anything."*

*Golis was in hospital for five or six months with a broken leg and burns. He returned to Winnipeg and worked for the railroad. He has five children and five grandchildren with wife Elsie, whom he married in 1950.*

*Maclean suffered two broken legs, burns and lacerations on his face that required 90 stitches. He returned to Ontario, where he worked as a medical therapist and then a federal civil servant before returning to the family farm on the St. Lawrence River. The last of seven brothers, he never married, and says he's never dwelled much on the crash. "It never bothered me at all. I considered it part of life. Those things happen."*

*It's too early to say whether the government plans to raise the wreckage or if the site will be left as is, an underwater memorial to the dead men.*

*As for Maclean, he doesn't care about the downed plane's fate. "The only thing that bothered me was the first pilot -- he was getting married three or four months after the crash. It must have been awful for his family."*

*Golis has had a harder time reconciling his survival with his buddies' deaths, and calls the plane's discovery the "final chapter" in his life. Hungry for information on the Canso, he's curious to see the wreckage. Golis has returned to Victoria only once since the war, in 1982. He stood at the old ramp overlooking Saanich Inlet and cried.*

*"I'm not heavily spiritual but I believe in God. Was I lucky? Was it fate? Maybe God was with me. Whatever it was, I'm here today talking to you."*

# The Wrecked Canso

