

BAIRD, William (Bill)

Age: 25

Nationality: Canadian

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Wireless Operator/
Air Gunner



Service No: R131545

Birth: 16 October 1917
Calgary, Alberta

Hometown: Brooks, Alberta, Canada

Death: 30 October 1942

Crash of Avro Anson L7056
Port Renfrew, BC, Canada

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

Others: P/O C.G. Fox (1st Navigator); P/O A. Lawrence (2nd Navigator)
Sgt. Robert Luckock (Pilot)

Biography

Bill Baird's parents were both born in Ayre, Scotland and married before they came to Canada, in 1912, and settled in Alberta. Bill was their fourth child of seven and the oldest son.

In 1941, when he enlisted in the RCAF, Bill was 23 and a worker at the oil wells in Royalties, Alberta. Apart from a brief period farming with his father, this had been Bill's occupation since he left school. With the large family, it was necessary for him to start earning and he left school just before completing grade 10, though the principal was confident he would have passed the end of year examinations. He was keen on woodworking, duck hunting and fishing and swam and played baseball and hockey with enthusiasm. He had served for a short period in the Calgary Highlanders.

The RCAF found him a confident, intelligent young man, keen, alert and observant, well suited to his hoped-for occupation of wireless operator/air gunner. He was not thought a suitable candidate for a commission. Bill trained in Calgary and Lethbridge, received his WAG badge in August 1942 and was promoted to Sergeant a few days later. The following month, he was posted to an Operational Training Unit at Patricia Bay in British Columbia.

On 10 October 1942, Bill was the wireless operator on Avro Anson L7056 when it took off to take part in joint navigational exercises with the navy over Vancouver Island. The plane was lost when the weather turned foggy and was not found for another 71 years. All of the crew were reported missing and later presumed dead. The discovery in 2013 of the wrecked plane, the recovery and identification of the airmen, and their subsequent military funeral at Royal Oak Burial Park in Victoria, is recorded in the video 'Seventy-One Years' and was extensively covered in the Press of the time.

Bill Baird was born on 16 October 1917 in Calgary, Alberta to James Baird and Frances Murdoch, both from Ayre, Scotland. He had three older sisters, two younger sisters and a younger brother.

WORD THAT SGT. William Baird, wireless air gunner with the R.C.A.F., who was reported missing in November following an air patrol over the west coast, is now listed as killed in action, was received last week by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Baird of Brooks.

Sgt. Baird, who worked at the oilfields at Turner Valley for several years prior to enlisting, was the first Brooks casualty of the war. He was born in Calgary but raised in Brooks, where he received his public and high school education.

He received his sparks from No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary, and his wings from No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School, Lethbridge. His parents, five sisters and a brother reside at Brooks.

Details of Crash

Avro Anson Aircraft L7056 was delivered to Western Air Command on 5 November 1941 for use at No. 32 OTU in Patricia Bay. On 10 October 1942 the aircraft took part in joint navigational exercises with the navy, over Vancouver Island. It carried a crew of four:

Sergeant William Baird	Wireless Operator	RCAF
P/O Charles George Fox	First Navigator	RAFVR
P/O Anthony Lawrence	Second Navigator	RAFVR
Sergeant Robert Luckcock	Pilot	RAFVR

Sergeant Luckcock, the pilot, had 80 hours experience flying single engine aircraft and 238 hours experience on multi-engine.

The forecast was for cloudy weather, 80% to 100% strato-cumulus at 3,000 feet, decreasing to 30% to 50% later in the day. During briefing the crews taking part were warned about a front which was off the coast, but far enough away not to be expected to affect the exercise. However, the front turned out to be considerably closer to the coast than thought and, instead of the anticipated clearing during the afternoon the weather became considerably worse. The crews had been instructed to return to base if bad weather was encountered.

Anson L7056 took off at 9:09 am. The route of the exercise was Base to Port San Juan (now Port Renfrew) to 48° N 126°W to Pachena Point and back to Base, a distance of 300 miles to be completed in three hours. No W/T contact was received from L7056 after the 'go' signal had been received, one minute after take-off. Several attempts were made to contact it by means of the usual W/T procedures with no success. A second aircraft engaged in the same exercise took off about 20 minutes after L7056 ran into bad weather at about 10:50 am, chose not to fly into the weather. It flew up and down the coast for about an hour and 50 minutes, when the call was received to return to base.

An hour after L7056 was due at base a search was initiated involving many aircraft and continuing until November 3rd. No trace of the aircraft or its occupants could be found. A patch of oil found by a flying boat along the planned route was picked up by a rescue boat and sent for analysis to determine whether it contained aero engine oil. No results of the analysis were available to the inquiry into the aircraft's disappearance.

With no wreckage and no witnesses it was impossible for the Court of Inquiry to come to any conclusions or make any recommendations. It was assumed that the cause of the accident was bad weather coupled with the pilot's inexperience on instruments.



71 years later, on 23 October 2013, the Anson and her crew were discovered by forestry engineers in a remote forested area near Port Renfrew, British Columbia. The recovery of the aircraft and crew and the military funeral that followed have been extensively covered, including in the documentary 'Seventy One Years'.

The following article is from the Victoria Times Colonist October 17th 2014

The remains of four young air force men will be laid to rest in the Royal Oak Burial Park in November, more than 70 years after their plane disappeared on a training flight out of Victoria.

"It will be a full military honours [ceremony]," said Stephen Olson, executive director of the Royal Oak Burial Park.

The ceremony will take place Nov. 10 at 10 a.m. at the park's Commonwealth War Graves area. Family and members from the Royal Air Force and Royal Canadian Air Force will attend. The public is also welcome.

The four airmen — one Canadian and three British — took off in an Avro Anson from the Royal Canadian Air Force Base, Patricia Bay on the morning of Oct. 30, 1942.

They were called back with other training planes in the area after a heavy fog rolled in, but never returned to base. A search party was sent out, but within a few days the men were presumed dead and their families notified.

On Oct. 25, 2013, loggers working in a remote area near Lake Cowichan came across the wreckage of a crashed Second World War plane.

A forensic anthropologist with National Defence visited the site and determined through remnants of personal belongings that this was the missing Avro Anson from 1942.

The crew included wireless operator Sgt. William Baird from Brooks, Alta., 25, and three Britons, pilot officers Charlie George Fox, 31, and Anthony William Lawrence, 21, and pilot Sgt. Robert Ernest Luckock, 21.

The families of Baird and Luckock were located and notified of the discovery. Baird is survived by two siblings and an extended family, who said they found peace knowing their loved one would be laid to rest with the honour and dignity he deserved.

“My understanding is that this is only the second time in 60 years that this type of ceremony has occurred, with multiple interments at once,” said Olson.

The four men will be interred in a single grave, with a marker bearing their names. He noted the Commonwealth War Graves area at the burial park includes mostly men who died around Vancouver Island from 1940 to 1945.

“A number of the fellas interred in that section died in training exercises. It’s a given they [the airmen] would have known the other guys,” said Olson, adding this is the burial park’s first interment of missing servicemen.

spetrescu@timescolonist.com

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The Loss and Discovery of Avro Anson L7056

A Documentary proposed by: DV Media Inc.



Aircraft debris at the site of the Avro Anson aircraft crash on May 6, 2014. The Avro Anson L7056, a war-time training aircraft, crashed and went missing 30 Oct 1942.

Image by: Brandon O'Connell, MARPAC Imaging Services.



