

Norman Owen Smith: A Summary of Service

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Background¹

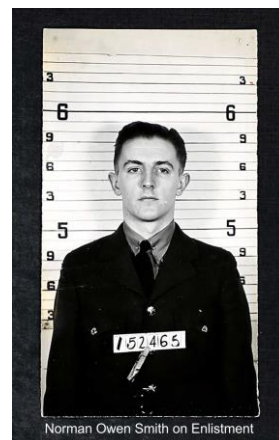
Norman Owen Smith was born 11 December 1920 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. He was the second child and oldest son born to Louis John Smith (1890 – unk) and Annie Gertrude Sims (1896 – unk). Norman had an older sister Clara Myrtle (1916 – 2016) and two younger brothers, Kenneth Lloyd (1926 – unk) and Irvin Edward (1930 – unk).

Norman left school at age 16 after completing 2 1/2 years of technical school. He worked at his father's retail appliance store in Hamilton for four years before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He listed sports, particularly hockey and baseball, and repairing radios as his hobbies.

Norman was engaged to marry Miss H. Walker who lived at 203 Fairfield Avenue in Hamilton.²

Enlistment

Norman enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force on 7 February 1942 at #10 Recruiting Center, Hamilton, Ontario, and was assigned service number R152465. He was judged to be fit to be a pilot, observer, wireless operator, or air gunner, with fitness category A1B – A3B³. His initial rank was AC2 (Aircraftman 2nd class). Directly upon enlistment he was transferred to #1 Manning Depot, Toronto for initial training. This Depot was located in the Coliseum Building at the CNE, and could hold up to 5,000 personnel.



Postings and Training in Canada

After initial training at Manning Depot, Norman was transferred on 28 March 1942 to #5 SFTS (Service Flying Training School) in Brantford. On 6 June 1942 he transferred to #6 ITS (Initial Training School) in Toronto; on 26 June his trade was shown as Aircrew (ITS).

On 31 July 1942 Norman was promoted to Leading Aircraftman – Trade: Pilot.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all information was obtained from F/O Smith's Service Record. Library and Archives Canada; Ottawa, Canada; *Service Files of the Second World War - War Dead, 1939-1947*; Series: RG 24; Volume: 28682. Obtained from Ancestry.com. *Canada, WWII Service Files of War Dead, 1939-1947* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry Operations, Inc., 2015. Accessed 2016.12.27.

² We have been unable to obtain further information on Miss Walker.

³ A: fitness for air duties, B: fitness for ground duties; 1 - 4: type of flying: 1: full flying duties; 2: limited flying duties; 3: combatant passenger; 4: non-combatant passenger.

www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php?14299-Medical-Categories. Accessed 2017.01.22.

On 15 August 1942 Norman was transferred to #9 EFTS (Elementary Flying Training School) St. Catharines where he flew Tiger Moth aircraft. On 25 Oct, he was transferred back to #5 SFTS Brantford. Here he flew Anson Avro aircraft.



On 19 Mar 1943, Norman was promoted to T/SGT (Temporary Sergeant⁴), Trade: Airman Pilot (SG - Senior Grade), and was awarded his Pilots Flying Badge. The same day he was transferred to 1 GRS (General Reconnaissance School), Summerside, PEI, and was discharged from the ranks on appointment to Commission as an officer with the rank of P/O GL (Pilot Officer General List). His service number was changed to J24459 because of his change in status.

RCAF T58A Report on Pupil Pilot – Flying and Ground Training shows the progress that Norman made. At the ITS level, his commanding officer said: "Anxious to succeed. Bright and keen, not frivolous - reliable. Second Aircrew recommendation Air Observer or Navigator." The assessment at EFTS said: "A student of high average ability in G.I.S. [(Ground Instruction School)] but whose flying progress while steady was rather slow. Needs checking on airmanship and details. Is anxious to do a good job and should do well with further service training. Conduct & Deportment - Satisfactory." After SFTS the report read: "An above average pilot who is very accurate in the air and quick to react. He stood high G.I.S. and has made the most of a good deal of natural ability." It should be noted that he stood second in his class of 59 at SFTS.

Embarkation

On 19 June 1943 Norman transferred to #1 Y Depot preparatory to travelling to England. On 22 June he was assigned to the RAF Training Plan, and embarked from Canada on 23 June. On 01 July he disembarked in the UK and proceeded to #3 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth as part of Intake C95. This Centre had the purpose of receiving personnel arriving from overseas.

Postings and Training in UK

On 27 July 1943 Norman was stationed at Training Station # 14 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit where training took place using Airspeed Oxfords. On 5 August he was attached to Dallachy, an RAF Station situated east of Elgin, Moray, Scotland.

While in Dallachy, he was assigned to 7 (e) OTU (Operational Training Unit). A record of his marks obtained on course 55 indicates: "This pilot has made a good showing here, particularly so in view of his taking the abbreviated A.F.U. [Advanced Flying Unit] course. He flies confidently and intelligently and although is a high average twin pilot now, he should soon

⁴ The term "Temporary" applied to all ranks during wartime, and would usually be used only in official documents, such as the Record of Service. See <http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php?18081-T-Sgt> Accessed 2017.03.09.

reach an above average standard.” On 19 September he was promoted to Flying Officer (T/F.O.). On 1 January 1944 Norman was transferred to Meteorological Conversion Unit, Tiree RAF station, which was located 2.5 nautical miles NNE of Balemartine on the Isle of Tiree, Inner Hebrides, Scotland. On 15 February he was assigned to 517 Squadron, a meteorological squadron based at RAF St. Davids (Pembrokeshire, Wales) with a detachment at Tiree. On 5 March he transferred to 547 Squadron, part of Coastal Command which was tasked with anti-shipping and anti-submarine duties⁵, primarily over the Bay of Biscay.⁶ This squadron flew Consolidated B-24 Liberators Mark V at this time.⁷ It was based at St Eval, Cornwall, England.

Death

The following is excerpted from a report that was filed on 27 April 1944 by the Commanding Officer of 547 Squadron:

Liberator Aircraft BZ.882 took off from R.A.F. Station St. Eval, near Wadebridge, Cornwall at 0200 hours on Wednesday, 26 April 1944 to take part in a Night Anti-U-boat training exercise, with the following crew members:

F/L (A/S/L) K.T.P. Terry, U.K., Captain
F/O N.O. Smith, Canada, 2nd Pilot
F/O T. Hinde, N.Z., U.K., Navigator
F/O D.S. Richards, U.K., 2nd Navigator
Sgt. R.H. Walters, U.K., F/Engineer
F/O M.E. Heels, U.K., W/Op. Air.
W/O C. Chegwiddden, N.Z., W/Op. Air.
F/Sgt. K. Fawcett, U.K., W/Op. Air.
Sgt. W.W. Chancey, Nfld, W/Op. Air.
F/O J.H. Corless, U.K., W/Op. Air. (squadron Radar Leader).

At approximately 0442 hours, during the hours of darkness, the aircraft gradually lost height and crashed into the sea near to the target submarine at a point approximately 9 miles north of Fishguard [Pembrokeshire, Wales]. Squadron Leader Terry was picked up alive by the crew of the submarine but afterwards died on the way to hospital. Sgt. Chancey was picked up dangerously injured suffering from fractured leg and skull, but he also died after being landed at Fishguard. Flying Officer Smith was found to be dead when picked up; there was no trace of the remaining occupants of the aircraft, who are all missing, believed killed.

⁵ Rickard, J (21 February 2012), *No. 547 Squadron (RAF): Second World War*, http://www.historyofwar.org/air/units/RAF/547_wwII.html

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_St_Eval

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._547_Squadron_RAF

The aircraft is believed to be a total wreck (Category “E”) and next of kin have been informed in respect of British personnel only, with the exception of Sgt. Chancey whose next of kin is resident in Newfoundland. Next of kin have not been informed in the case of Dominion personnel.

The bodies of Squadron Leader Terry and Sgt. Chancey are at present located at Haverfordwest Hospital, and the body of F/O. Smith is being held in the Station Mortuary at R.A.F. Station, St. Davids.

On 3 May 1944, Clifford Wright, Wing Commander of 547 Squadron, wrote to Miss H. Walker, Norman’s fiancée. The following excerpt gives more details of the accident:

[F/O Smith] was carrying out night exercises with a submarine and, as far as the submarine crew could see, the aircraft flew low directly overhead and hit the water about half a mile away. It broke up at once and the crew must have been killed instantaneously. It was a part of the exercise to fly low as he was doing, the submarine crew can give no clear account as to why they hit the water. The accident is of course being fully investigated but it is unlikely that anything further will be brought to light.

He was buried yesterday at the Royal Canadian Air Force Regional Cemetery at Chester and all arrangements were made by the R.C.A.F. authorities. The grave will be looked after by the Imperial War Graves Commission⁸, who put up a temporary wooden cross now which is replaced by a stone one after the war.

Flying Officer Smith was a highly esteemed and very efficient Officer, and I should like to express the great sympathy we all feel for you in the sad loss you have sustained. I should also like to assure you how much we all admire the gallant sacrifice made by your fiancé so far from his own country.

A Court of Inquiry was held at St. Davids on 28 April 1944 by Wing-Commander Kay. Unfortunately the results of this Court of Inquiry are no longer available.⁹

In 2005 a Memorial was placed at St Eval to honour all those who were killed while based there.

Honours and Awards

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Overseas Clasp, awarded 15 January 1944

⁸ Now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-air-force-operations/#8-crashes-and-casualties-1939-1965>

1939-1945 Star, awarded posthumously

Atlantic Star, awarded posthumously

Defence Medal, awarded posthumously

General Service Medal, usually known as The War Medal 1939-1945, awarded posthumously

Norman's mother, Annie Gertrude Smith, received the Memorial Cross on 22 September 1944.

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Maps:





Aircraft:





Medals and Awards:



Atlantic Star



1939-1945 Star



Defence
Medal



CVSM with Clasp



War Medal
1939-1945



Memorial Cross

St Eval Memorial¹⁰:



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