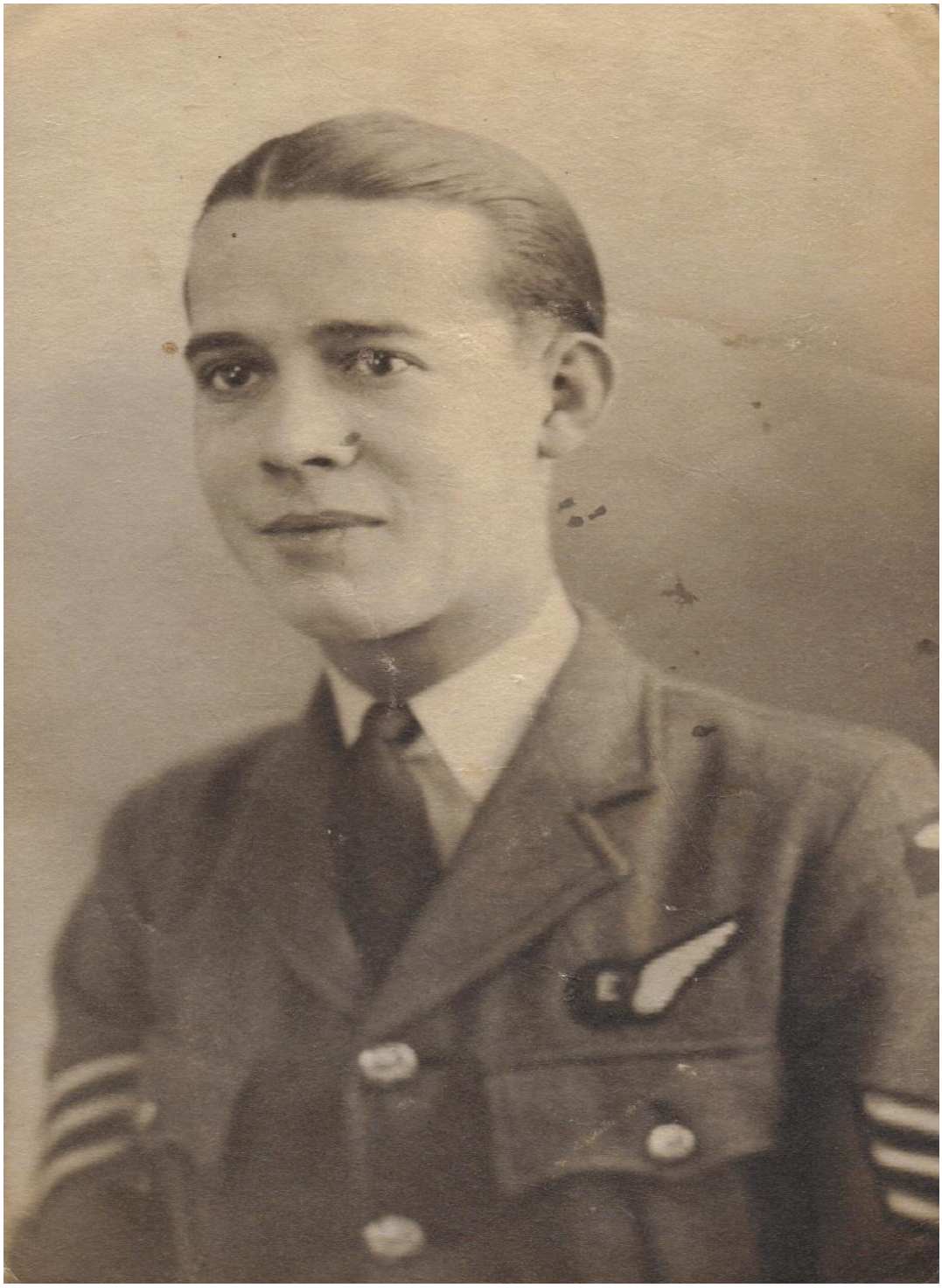
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IN MEMORY OF

Sergeant Stanley Harold Short

Royal Air Force (Volunteer Reserve)

23rd May 1920 - 7th February 1944

INTRODUCTION

The contents of this article describe the search for information relating to the circumstances surrounding the loss of Halifax Mk III aircraft LK 758 of No. 427 “Lion” Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force on 7th February 1944. Sadly, none of the crew survived the crash. Among the crew members who lost their lives was Sergeant Stanley Short of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

The loss of Stanley was very rarely mentioned within the family during the period following the war, and the details of exactly what happened on that day in 1944 have remained unclear for the past seventy years.

With the advent of modern technology it has become more feasible to undertake research of this nature into the events of so long ago, and this article describes the organisations contacted, the information obtained (sometimes conflicting) - and attempts to present some sort of explanation of what happened, albeit with some unanswerable questions.

Sergeant Stanley Short - a brief Service history

According to his Record of Service Stanley Harold Short was born in Griston (near Thetford) in the county of Norfolk on the 23rd of May 1920.

Stanley enlisted as a volunteer in the Royal Air Force on the 30th of May 1940. He was allocated his Service Number 1001740 with the rank of Aircraftsman 2 - this was followed by promotion to Aircraftsman 1 on 31st December 1942.
During the period between May 1940 and and April 1943 it is difficult to ascertain exactly how Stanley was employed. His Service Record lists the RAF stations and units to which he was attached, but this record does not contain any details of the sort of duties he carried out.

On the 1st of April 1943 Stanley was selected for initial aircrew training as a Flight Engineer, and on the 4th of September 1943 he was posted to No 1659 C. U. (B)
(this was in fact No. 1659 Heavy Conversion Unit, based at RAF Station Topcliffe in Yorkshire. It is here that Stanley, who would have undergone his earlier initial flying training on twin-engined training aircraft, would have received his more detailed training on four-engined bomber aircraft).

Note
Royal Air Force aircrew training still follows roughly the same pattern today. Personnel who are successful in passing selection for aircrew start off by being trained initially in the basic skills required (technical skills, airrmanship etc.). This is then followed (usually at a Conversion Unit) by more detailed training that is very specific to the type of aircraft which they will fly.

Following completion of Flight Engineer training, and now promoted to the rank of Sergeant, Stanley was posted onto the strength of No 427 Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force on the 26th of October 1943. He joined a crew led by Flight Sergeant A W Nicol.

Information Source
Royal Air Force Records

Note
The information above has been extracted, with some difficulty, from a copy of Stanley Short's Service Record RAF Form 543. This copy is not of particularly good clear quality, but the principle problem is that it is itself a copy of a seventy-year old document that was completed using spidery handwriting that is now fading almost into illegibility.



427 Squadron “The Lions”

Royal Canadian Air Force

No. 427 Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force

A brief history

No. 427 “Lion” Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force was first formed on 7 November 1942 based at RAF Station Croft, as the eighth of fifteen RCAF bomber squadrons, and was originally equipped with Wellington MK III twin-engine bombers.

Experienced crews borrowed from 419 Squadron enabled 427 Squadron to be operationally ready by 1 December 1942, and to commence operations against the Frisian Islands on the 14th of the same month.

Initially part of 4 Group, Bomber Command, the squadron was transferred to 6 (RCAF) Group, Bomber Command upon its formation on 1 January 1943.

The squadron was transferred to RAF Station Leeming on 4 May 1943, and was re-equipped with the Handley Page Halifax four-engined aircraft. This bomber was used for the greater part of the squadron's wartime operations, only being replaced by the Avro Lancaster as late as March 1945.

Sergeant Stanley Short was one of a number of Royal Air Force personnel who were seconded from the RAF to the RCAF to help “make up the numbers”. Along with other Commonwealth (or Empire as it was known then) countries, the Canadians made a tremendous contribution to the war effort during 1939 – 1945, but their efforts were sometimes hindered by a shortage of manpower, due to the limited population of Canada (at that time). It was customary for personnel from the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force to be “lent” to other forces to help out.

The squadron was assigned to bombing targets located all over Europe; however mine laying and the occasional dinghy search were also part of the job. The squadron's last sortie of the war was, perhaps fittingly enough, once again to mine the Frisian Islands.

The war ended with 427 Squadron having amassed an enormous amount of flying hours and having won an impressive list of Battle Honours and individual distinctions. A total of 3200 sorties comprising 26,000 flying hours dropped an incalculable amount of high explosives on Fortress Europe and its ports. During the war, a total of 415 personnel were lost, another 121 were shot down and taken prisoner and 14 escaped to Allied lines.

One of the lighter and perhaps more famous moments of 427 Squadron's wartime era occurred when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer adopted the squadron on

24 May 1943 and allowed the names of their stars (such as Lana Turner, Greer Garson, Joan Crawford and Hedy Lamarr) to be displayed on squadron aircraft. In addition, MGM presented a bronze lion to the squadron, and from this came the name "Lion Squadron". Another highlight was the adoption by the squadron of one of Winston Churchill's lion cubs, Mareth; for this, the squadron was sent a letter of appreciation from the British Prime Minister.

After the cessation of hostilities, the Lions were involved in flying POWs and troops back from Europe to Britain. On 31 May 1946, the squadron was disbanded.

Information Source
427 Squadron Association website

Handley Page Halifax



This photograph is of a Halifax bomber aircraft very similar, if not identical, to the aircraft flown by No 427 Squadron in early 1944.

427 Squadron Operations
January/ February 1944

Operation against Magdeburg 21/1/1944

Flt Sgt Nicholls crew not mentioned by name.

No combat operations until …….....

Operation against Berlin 28/1/1944

Flt Sgt Nicholls crew not mentioned by name.

Then no further combat operations until …….....

7/2/44

Weather: Cloudy to fair with some slight rain in early morning. Visibility good. Under most ideal weather conditions including clear, sunshiny weather, an intensive flying training program was carried out in the forenoon, after information was received from Group that no operations were scheduled for the evening.
Sixteen aircraft wore detailed for a "X" Country run, for the evening. One of the crews piloted by F/S A.W. NICOL, who was flying on a further familiarisation flight in the early afternoon, although scheduled to participate in the "X" country, was unfortunately killed, after a rather unfortunate incident.

Note

The Wartime Operations Log section of the 427 Squadron Association website does not specifically identify which individual aircraft and crews took part in the two combat missions of 21/1/1944 and 28/1/1944 listed above. The statement merely says that e.g. "fifteen aircraft" were launched – without any further details.

It is believed that Sergeant Stanley Short and his fellow crew members ***did*** *take part in the raid against Magdeburg on 21/1/1944, because there is anecdotal information (source unknown) that whilst returning from this operation the aircraft diverted to land at RAF Chedburgh - rather than continuing on to land at its home base at RAF Leeming. The reasons for this diversion are unknown, nor is this diversion mentioned within the Wartime Operations Log. This is actually quite surprising as the website does record*

other “non-operational incidents” of a somewhat similar nature.

Likewise, it is not known whether or not the crew took part in the raid against Berlin on 28/1/1944.

Information source

427 Squadron Association website – Wartime Operations Log section

Loss of Halifax III serial no LK 758

February 7th 1944 - Part 1

This text is a continuation of the text from section **7/2/1944** two pages previous ….

Sixteen aircraft wore detailed for a "X" Country run, for the evening. One of the crews piloted by F/S A.W. NICOL, who was flying on a further familiarisation flight in the early afternoon, although scheduled to participate in the "X" country, was unfortunately killed, after a rather unfortunate incident.

After F/S NICOL had completed his flight and was coming in to land, it appears from all reports, that one wheel remained retracted which - as he neared the ground with flaps down - caused the aircraft to dip into the ground, and immediately was enveloped in flames, with ammunition exploding all around.

The crashed aircraft immediately on impact broke into two pieces, the badly mutilated wing, housing the four motors, was found a distance of 20 yards from the mid-upper turret and remainder of the fuselage.

F/S Nicol was not entirely unfamiliar with this new type of Halifax, having already flown several hours on them in training exercises.

As they were just coming in to land, all occupants of the aircraft other than the pilot were in the rest position, and were in this position when all the members of the crew were killed as a result of the crash.

Information Source

427 Squadron Association website - Wartime Operations Log

Loss of Halifax III serial no LK 758

February 7th 1944 - Part 2

Note

The following text has been extracted from the Crash Record compiled by the Royal Air Force accident Inquiry.

The original document record is very difficult to read and does not copy very well at all.

A summary of the relevant information is as follows.

Summary

The accident occurred at 1300 hours on 7 February 1944. The card states that the aircraft was on a training flight ("Flying Training Day") and crashed on landing "after doing steep un-controlled turn - burst into flames" The words "Did steep turn to avoid other a/c" are crossed out.

The Court of Inquiry found :-
"Poor airmanship - commenced to climb before completing turn when low. Stbd engine had ?? & did not pick up immediately - controls sluggish at low speed and a/c stalled. No evidence mech[anical] failure but [Starboard Outer] engine ?? and did not pick up immediately."

Information Source

Royal Air Force Museum – Hendon, Middlesex U.K.

Conflicting Crash Descriptions

The two preceding descriptions of the circumstances surrounding the loss of Halifax III serial no. LK 758 have elements of both agreement and conflict.

Both parties seem to agree that, during the latter phase of approach to landing, the aircraft encountered some sort of problem from which it was unable to recover, resulting in it crashing to the ground.

There seems to be two quite differing perceptions regarding the actual nature of the problem.

According to the information recorded by the 427 Squadron Association website, one side of the main undercarriage failed to extend. This would have caused the phenomenon known as “asymetric drag” i.e. more air resistance on one side of the aircraft compared to the other. This would have the effect of putting the aircraft into a turn whilst not under full control.

According to the information recorded by the RAF Crash Investigation, the pilot commenced to climb the aircraft ***before*** completing a turn at low level, during which the starboard outer engine failed to respond. Reduction of power from an outboard engine on one side, compared with the full power being exerted on the other side, would have a very similar effect to asymetric drag, i.e. the aircraft would be put into a turn whilst not under full control.

Those who died

At the time of the accident the aircraft Handley Page Halifax Mk III, serial no. LK 758, was crewed with following members:

Flight Sergeant A.W. NICOL the pilot (and aircraft captain),

Flight Sergeant V.R. POLOWY the Air Bomber,

Sergeant J.D. ROBERTSON, (RAF) the Wireless Operator,

Flight Sergeant J.W.H. VIDAL, the mid-upper gunner,

Sergeant D.W. HOWARD, the rear air gunner

Sergeant S.H. SHORT (RAF) the Flight Engineer.

The latter, Sergeant SHORT was quite a versatile and popular member of the squadron. In civilian life he had been a talented variety artist on the London stage, and when he came to the Lions he promoted the welfare of the airmen by producing a splendid Christmas Review, and his untimely death came as he had another show in production.
The only member of the full crew who was still alive *(at the time this report was written)* was 08861116 Lieutenant F.S. SHOVE of the U.S.A.A.F. Since the crew were only engaged on local flying and the presence of a Navigator was not necessarily required Lt. SHOVE was not flying.



F/S AW Nicol and crew downed 7 Feb 44

Note

The above photo was kindly provided by the current Squadron Historical Officer of 427 Squadron. The exact date of the photo is not known, therefore it is uncertain that that ***all*** *of those crew casualities listed correspond to the persons in the photo.*

However, what is quite certain is that there is an american airman (second from left). This might be Lieutenant F.S. SHOVE of the U.S.A.A.F, who was not flying on the day of the crash.

What is much more certain is that the person standing third from right is Sergeant Stanley Short.

Resting Place

Warrant Officer Class II Pilot Nicol,

Sergeant Air Gunner Howard,

Warrant Officer Class II Bomb Aimer Polowy

Warrant Officer Class II Air Gunner Vidal

…..are all buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.

Sergeant Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Robertson

…..is buried in the All Hallows Churchyard, Ordsall, Nottinghamshire, U.K.

Sergeant Flight Engineer Short

…..is buried in the North Sheen Cemetery, Surrey, U.K.

Source

Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum

Commonwealth War Graves Commission


The picture can't be displayed.


The picture can't be displayed.

Additional information

As part of the research undertaken for the compilation of this article, contact was made with the officer who was, at the time of the enquiry, responsible (among his other duties) for the Squadron History of 427 Squadron, who are currently located at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa in southern Ontario. In response to the request for any historical information that could be provided, the following reply was received :

"I found a list created by Howard Edmonds of Niagara Falls, Ontario that you may find interesting. He has transcribed most members names that were part of 427 Sqn during WWII. Unfortunately he does not have Sgt Short's name listed (maybe overlooked?). His list was from a book "They shall grow not old", published by the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum Inc. , Brandon, Manitoba in 1992. As Mr. Edmonds wrote, there were over 18,000 names listed alphabetically in the book with many listings taking from 3 to 8 full lines. These included in part, type and location of operations, crews, POWs, actual names of cemeteries and towns of burials (not just countries). For unknown graves, memorial inscriptions are noted at specific locations.

I also came across a type-written document with the 427 Sqn WWII veterans. According to this book, Sgt Short SH (FE) was "Killed in Action" 7 Feb 1944. This book also has 5 other aircrew that were killed in action on the same day; F/S Sgt Nichol AW (P), Sgt Polowy VR (BA), Sgt Robertson JD (AG), Sgt Vidal JW (AG), and Sgt Howard DW (AG).

In another book, I found a picture (attached) in a 427 History book (1942 - 1970) labelled with only the pilot's name (F/S AW Nicol). Assuming the listed men were on the same crew, Sgt Short may be in the picture?

I hope this information will assist in your search, I will send you any additional information I can find.
Cheers,
Neil Gabourie
Capt
OT Flt
427 SOAS

Acting upon the reference made in the previous response to the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum, an approach to them was made with a similar request for any historical information that could be provided and the following reply was received :

Flt Sgt. Stanley Short is in fact listed in our memorial book, “They Shall Grow Not Old”. I have attached the paragraph associated with one of the flight crew, Sgt. Howard.

Following are details of the crash, the aircraft and crew of a 427 Squadron Halifax which crashed on February 07, 1944.

No. 427 Lion Squadron (Ferte Manus Certas). The crew of Halifax aircraft LK 758 (ZL-E) was returning from a training flight when they crashed at the east boundary of Leeming aerodrome, Yorkshire. The aircraft was seen to make a sharp turn before crashing. The Halifax broke into two parts then catching fire.

HOWARD, DONALD WILLIAM SGT(AG) R186134. From Galt, Ontario. Killed Feb.7/44 age 21. Sergeant Air Gunner Howard is buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.

NICOL, ALBERT WILLIAM WO2(P) R139309. From Thorold, Ontario. Killed Feb.7/44 age 23. Warrant Officer Class II Pilot Nicol is buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.

POLOWY, VINCENT RONALD WO2(BA) R159089. From Hilliard, Alberta. Killed Feb.7/44 age 23. Warrant Officer Class II Bomb Aimer Polowy is buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.

VIDAL, JOSEPH WILFRID HENRI WO2(AG) R96518. From Val Alain, Lotbiniere County, Quebec. Killed Feb.7/44 age 22. Warrant Officer Class II Air Gunner Vidal is buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.

ROBERTSON, JAMES DONALD Sgt. (WAG) 1438554. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. From Retford, Nottinghamshire. Killed Feb.7/44 age 21. Sergeant Wireless Operator Air Gunner Robertson is buried in the All Hallows Churchyard, Ordsall, Nottinghamshire, U.K.

SHORT, STANLEY HAROLD Sgt. (FE) 1001749. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. From Fulham, U.K. Killed Feb.7/44 age 21. Sergeant Flight Engineer Short is buried in the North Sheen Cemetery, Surrey, U.K.
I hope the attached information is of value to you.
All the best.
Yours truly,
Stephen
Stephen Hayter
Executive Director
CATPM

Comment
There is a very subtle difference between the information provided by the

above compared with other sources.
The pilot, who has elsewhere previously been identified as Flight Sergeant A.W. Nicol was apparently interred with the rank of Warrant Officer Class II, as were the Bomb Aimer V.R. Polowy and the Air Gunner J.W.H. Vidal.
In another minor anomaly, Sergeant Stanley Short's age is given as 21 years, whereas elsewhere he is identified as aged 23.
This comment has been included merely to illustrate one of the difficulties encountered in researching an incident of this nature which occurred so long ago. If the same question is asked of two different sources, the two answers may not necessarily be identical. This has been demonstrated to a more visible degree in the two differing perceptions of the cause of the crash.