

## Discovery of the site of the crash of ANSON L 7056

### Which flew out of Pat Bay October 30<sup>th</sup> 1942

#### Wreckage, discovered by Forestry Engineers of Teal – Jones Cedar Logging Co.

#### By Tom Burdge – Vancouver Island Aircrew Association

October 30<sup>th</sup> 1942 at #32 Operational Training Unit, Patricia Bay, Nr Sidney BC, was a normal Westcoast day, with fairly overcast skies – the Met man reported slightly unstable air over the area, with several layers of cloud. 6- 10/10ths Alto Cumulus and Cirrus above 8,000 ft There was lower strata Cu, at between 3 and 5 thousand feet, and locally 1 thousand ft. in rain showers, and with widely scattered rain showers expected in the area in the morning, but generally clearing after noon. There was a front coming in from the south west, but it was not expected to interfere with the flying - there would likely be a fog bank coming in from the south too, but it was thought that it would not affect the area during the period. However it turned out that the front was considerably closer than expected, and instead of the expected clearing during the afternoon, the weather became considerably worse.

Anson L 7056 and its crew of four were detailed to do a triangular navigation exercise, flying from Pat Bay to Port San Juan (Port Renfrew), 48°20'N, 126°30'W, and thence to 48° N, 126°W, then to Pachena Point and then back to base. Flight duration – 3hrs, Distance - 300 nautical miles. At 09:09, hrs Anson L7056 took off – no w/t contact was received from 7056 after the “go” signal one minute after take off. Several attempts were made to contact Anson 7056 by means of the usual w/t procedure, but without success.

During the Court of inquiry proceedings, it was reported that the pilot of another Anson, who took off about 20 minutes after 7056, to do the same exercise, ran into bad weather about 10:50. hrs, but did not enter the bad weather and flew up and down the front for about one hour and fifty minutes, when a recall message was received from base. Over the next four days several searches were made by other aircraft, but no sign of L7056 was seen, so searches by air were called off.

Now fast forward 71 years – minus 7 days.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013, My stepson, Walter Van Hell, Dennis Cronin & Tom Weston, all Forestry Engineers, were performing a forestry Reconnaissance, and surveying land in the area northwest of Port Renfrew (Vancouver Island,) when one of them - Dennis Cronin - came across the wreckage of an aircraft. Walter, and the rest of the team checked the area around the parts of aircraft that they had found, and quite a lot more yellow & blue/green pieces were seen sticking up from the forest debris etc., and they found what appeared to be the cabin/cockpit alongside an engine with the propeller bent backwards.

There were various bits of flying equipment of a personal type, such as a flying boot, and some shoes, scattered around, and what appeared to be the sleeve of a leather flying jacket. A little way further down the slope they found the second engine and some parts of the wings and tailplane assembly. They also found the tail part of what appeared to be a bomb, so they contacted the RCMP, who, in turn contacted the Military at Naden, and then together with an expert from the Unexploded Ordnance Centre, the RCMP Constable went to the crash site looking for any signs of Human remains, and unexploded Ordnance. There were no visible signs of any human remains, which is to be expected after some seventy years of exposure to the weather and wildlife in the area.

Walter, Dennis, Tom & Mike Pegg, did some research on the internet after looking at some of the pieces of wreckage, and decided that the aircraft was most likely an Avro Anson – a twin engined aircraft, painted yellow, used extensively for training purposes during WW2. It had originally been used by RAF Coastal

Command for patrolling the sea areas around the coasts of the UK, but was found to be too slow, and unsuitable for attacking enemy submarines.

Their next step was to check to see if they could find any details of aircraft crashes while flying out of Patricia Bay during WW2, and again the internet showed that an Anson which left Pat Bay on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1942, had not returned to base, and had never been heard of again.. On October 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, Walter phoned me to tell me all these details, as I had been a pilot in WW2. So a check was made at the Royal Oak Burial Park to see if there were any headstones in the Air Forces section which would have that date, but finding none, the next step was to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who have recorded the names of the four crew members aboard Anson L 7056 which went missing on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1942. The crew members were all listed:-

Sgt. William Baird RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force.)

Pilot Officer, Charles George Fox, Age 31, RAFVR (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve)

Pilot Officer, Anthony William Lawrence, Age 21, RAFVR. (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.)

Sgt Robert Ernest Lucock, Age 21, RAFVR. (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.)

They are all listed as “Killed with no known grave, or in an unmaintainable grave.”

From there the trail led to the Coordinator of Casualty Identification, at the Directorate of History and Heritage, in Ottawa. At this stage, while it was highly suspected that the aircraft wreckage that had been found by Dennis Cronin, one of the Forestry Engineers, was that of L 7056, it was necessary to get some definite identification – a serial number from one of the engines or some thing that could be checked with the records from 1942. To me, the obvious answer to that was to ask Mel Johnstone, a good friend, who has been rebuilding the Mk.B35 Mosquito over the past several years, and who has some 46 years of experience as an AME, as well as several thousand hours of pilot time, if he would be interested in going up to the crash site with Walter and Walter’s brother, and me. He said that he would like to go, so we arranged it for Saturday November 30<sup>th</sup>. Mel picked me up on a rather wet morning, and we arrived at Walter’s home where we transferred to a four wheel drive Crew –cab truck and set course for the site, which is about a two and a half hour drive from Walter’s home.

After leaving the paved roads we got on to very rough, twisty and hilly roads, which fortunately Walter knows like the back of his hand as he has surveyed, laid them out and watched them being bulldozed into existence! Arriving at the appropriate spot to go into the actual site we bailed out of a nice warm truck into pouring rain ! Walter, with his 36 years of experience in the bush, had borrowed a pair of size ten Caulk Boots for me to wear, as he said that I would not be able to stand upright without them. So we donned waterproof gear etc, and set course for the wreckage. I soon found that my “waterproof” jacket was not as good as it used to be, but it did not really dampen my spirits too much. I felt very strongly that it was very important to be able to confirm that this wreckage was of L 7056, and if we could do that then the next of kin of the crew, or their descendants, could be notified that the crash site had been found and the remains of their loved ones were being taken care of. So they would be able, after all these years, to get some closure. To me it is absolutely vital that this site and any, and all, the personal remains which may still be there, should be protected from scavengers and “gawkers”. These four young chaps who died there, gave their lives to help preserve our freedoms and I think that anyone who desecrates the site in any way should be held accountable to the next of kin.

I will never believe a Forestry Engineer again !! Walter said that it is really quite level and only about 300 metres walk. Well the first (to me) 300 metres was over slash- quite wet and slippery as it was raining steadily all day, and then we reached the standing timber - Virgin Old Growth forest where we walked another 400 (to me ) metres to get to the start of the wreckage field of bits and pieces. We had to walk along



**Wreaths laid at the crash site of Anson L 7056**

a slope of between 30 to 40 degrees, and slightly downhill, and if it had not been for the fact that Walter held my hand (literally !) all the way, I would have spent more time lying on the deck !! As it was, we had to

climb over or crawl under several blow downs as well as try to get my size 10 Caulk Boots, that Walter lent me (I normally take size 7 or 8's ) through all the undergrowth. I found that walking with Caulk Boots is rather like low flying with your undercarriage down! However, they are a great help in stabilizing you on slippery stuff. We started seeing bits and pieces of wreckage sticking up out of the forest debris - all shapes and sizes, and some recognisable, but others not. Walter showed me the tail wheel and a bit of the tail which had been broken off, then we went on towards the main part of wreckage, finding odds & ends as we went - most of them, Walter and his crew had already seen. At the main pile of wreckage, there is part of the cabin/cockpit with a flying boot, and what looks like part of the sleeve of a flying jacket. Also the control column, partly broken, and part of the instrument panel - quite smashed up, but with the Gyro compass still more or less intact. Also the throttle levers, and an assortment of other levers, probably flaps, Bomb bay doors, undercarriage etc. Somewhere they had seen a flying helmet, complete with the earphones still in place. The port engine is right alongside the cabin, but the starboard engine must have rolled down the slope a bit - I did not go down to see it, as if I went any further down then I would have to climb up again, and by that time I was thoroughly wet through !

Mel, who went in with us had already found the engine plate and taken it off so that we could report the serial number to DND. While we were there we saw the wreath of flowers that the logging Company had asked Brian Henderson, another engineer, to place in honour of the crew. Brian's father was a WW2 Pilot, who trained on Ansons, and later flew Canso's with Coastal Command, in both East & West Africa. We added a Poppy wreath that we had brought to honour the 4 crew who were killed there, and also we attached a plasticized list of the names and numbers of each member, and hung it on the wreath.

Then came the trek back to the truck, the only snag was that by now my knees were feeling the worse for wear, and the size 10 boots were getting heavier !! and we were going slightly uphill. In other words, I was beginning to be a bit of a burden to the boys - but we pressed on and, ably supported by Walter, who still held my hand through the bush, we reached the slash, and then, with Walter still holding my right hand, and his brother, Henry holding my left, and with fairly frequent stops, we reached the truck!!

Then the drive back to Mesachie Lake, Lake Cowichan (with a stop at Timmy's for coffee) and so back to Walter's home in Cowichan Bay, where we parted company, and Mel drove me home!! There I spent the first half an hour soaking under a hot shower until I felt thawed out and more or less normal again. Looking back, I would not recommend doing your initial trek through virgin old growth on a very rainy day at the age of 91 - (less 25days) yrs old - at least not without plenty of P.Ed to get ones strength up first !

Looking back, I am very glad that I did do the trip as it became, to me, a kind of pilgrimage to honour the 4 crew members who died that October 30th 71 years ago. Now we all wonder what caused the crash, was it an error in setting the Altimeter, or was it an engine failure, or did they get out of control and spin in - because the prop blades, at least on the port engine were bent backwards, it would appear that the port engine was not under power when it hit the ground - so we may never know the real reason for the crash.

After feeding all the information back to Ms. Laurel Clegg, who is the Casualty Identification Coordinator of The Directorate of History and Heritage, in Ottawa, she decided to come out and visit the site herself, and with one or two other Air Force or Navy chaps to try to see if there is any way that it can be determined whether there are any Human remains still on the site.

Walter, Dennis & Tom Weston, accompanied Ms. Laurel Clegg and the other chaps – RCAF; RCMP and Navy people, and after a bit of digging around they found some personal items, and some human remains., even though there was a coating of a few cms of snow on the ground.

Because of the findings, Ms Clegg went out again a second time, but with someone from the Coroners Department, and had a very harrowing experience because of more snow on the logging roads. Apparently

the vehicle that she and the Coroner were riding in was following another vehicle which stopped because of the snow, on a rather steep and treacherous part of the road, and then their vehicle started to slide backwards and sideways towards a rather nasty drop. The driver told them to “unbuckle their seat belts and get ready to jump”!! It is a trip that will remain in their memories!! They had to walk much farther than before, and in deeper snow to get to the site, but they pressed on and did some more searching for remains.

So now, because there are human remains the site will be treated as a Burial Place, and placed under the legal protection of both the Federal & Provincial Laws and it will be illegal to remove anything from the site. I feel that this will at least show the 4 crew members some respect, which is what I had hoped would happen. It also means that both the RAF and the RCAF can now trace the next of kin of the deceased, and let them know that the remains have been located and taken care of, so that they can have closure. I understand from Ms. Clegg that she has already been able to trace the next of kin of the RCAF chap – his elderly sister (aged 95) living in a care home, and a younger brother, (Aged 87) but they both have to be officially, and gently, with compassion, notified by DND.

In all of these happenings, Teal Jones Cedar Logging Company, through Mr. Mark Carter, and all of his employees have really gone out of their way to show respect, compassion, and a helping hand whenever it was needed, and deserve the thanks of all those people – including the next of kin of the four Aircrew – who are involved.

After viewing the wreckage, Mel feels that a possible cause of the crash appears to have been that the port engine was not “under power” when it hit the ground, as the propeller blades are bent backwards, and there is little, or no damage to the leading edges of that propeller. The propeller of the starboard engine is missing and the engine crankshaft is broken off, as though it was under full power when the aircraft hit the trees and ripped that propeller off. From my experience, I know that the Anson was not too good at flying with only one engine when it had a full load, and may have gone into a spin.

So there you have the story, or at least the local part of it.

P.S. I think that anyone wanting to go and see the site should wait until the spring as that area gets a lot of snow during the winter months, and the logging roads are very rough and not well marked., and quite slippery.

Also people are asked to respect that the site is a Burial Place, and as such is to be respected, and protected under both provincial and federal laws. Please have patience and wait until the Coroner, and DND people have thoroughly examined the site.

Thank you for your respect.