

Dakota 576 1944.04.19

On the 19th of April, 1944 several crews from 32 RAF OTU were briefed on a cross country navigation mission. They were to fly from Pat Bay, do several legs and an approach at Port Hardy, and then return to Pat Bay. In spite of the squalls and strong winds most of the crews just made it back to Pat Bay but the crew of Dak 576 figured they didn't have enough fuel so they elected to land at Port Hardy. Due to the poor weather the pilot, Pilot Officer JM Talbot, missed the first approach and went around for another try. He was on the centre line about five miles from touch down when he ran out of fuel and crash landed in some scrub trees. Unfortunately the nose of the aircraft hit a large bolder and killed the pilot and the navigator, Pilot Officer TS Wardlow. Sgt TR Moss, the Wireless Air Gunner survived and was found by a search party several hours later dazed but not injured. The two deceased men were buried in Victoria.

In September of 1998, 101 Squadron decided that a cairn for the crew of Dak 576 should be erected, an exercise in trial and error. It took a few months to get the obelisk and plaque made courtesy of the Port Alice Pulp Mill but it finally arrived on September 2001 On the 25th Sep 02 the dedication and installation of the obelisk went smoothly. In attendance were the Lt. Governor General Iona Campagnolo, MP John Duncan, MLA Rod Visser, 19 Wing Rep Maj Ken MacKenzie, President of 888 Wing George Potvin, George Kearey Royal Canadian Legion Port Hardy, a squad of Canadian Rangers, Padre Tom O'Neill plus members of N.I. 101 Squadron and other guests. West Coast Helicopters pilot Peter Barratt, made many trips in and out of the crash site, transporting the VIPs plus the majority of people who were present. An excellent debrief took place at the Sportsman.

The CBC ran coverage of the Dedication Ceremony on the National News at 1000PM on the 11th Nov 02. and on Nov 13 the Squadron had wreaths and flowers placed in Victoria on the graves of the two crew members by 800 Wing Victoria and on the memorial monument to the crew of the Stranraer 951 that went missing out of Coal Harbour in 1942 and never found – it was covered by CHTV in Victoria.

On the 19 April 04, at 1030hrs the 60th anniversary of Dak 951 crash was marked by a re-dedication of the plaque by the Wardlow Brothers, Mike and Chris, whose older brother Tom died in the crash, Colour Guard and guests were helicoptered in and the Rangers walked in. It was a touching service with the laying of wreaths and a toast to Tom. Both brothers have returned to Port Hardy from England several times. Contact was established with the Moss family in 2013 and it is being followed up by our UK detachment, Brian and Jan West.

Crash Location

50°43'41.29"N 127°26'6.74"W

Cairn Location

50°43'41.29"N 127°26'6.74"W