

# *The Last Person Drowned on the Island of Schokland*



**William Frank Tudhope**  
March 5, 1919 – August 10, 1940

On Friday, August 23rd, 1940 the body of a Royal Air Force pilot was found floating off the Westcoast of the, now former, island of Schokland in the Netherlands. It turned out to be the remains of 21 year-old 2nd Lieutenant William Frank Tudhope.

William Frank Tudhope was buried with German military honours on Tuesday, August 27th, 1940 at the Kampen General Cemetery in IJsselmuiden. The ceremony was attended by a large civilian crowd including the mayor of Kampen, Mr. Oldenhof. A platoon of *Luftwaffe* soldiers fired their rifles in military salute.

William Frank Tudhope's grave, together with other military war graves can still be visited in Kampen. The grave of W.F. Tudhope has two gravestones. One was given to him at his funeral in 1940. The second is a standard white stone from the War Graves Commission.

Tudhope's aircraft has never been found. It still lies under the waters of the IJsselmeer. Later, after the pilot's father came to Kampen in 1952 to visit his son's grave, it came to light that there had been three additional crewmembers. The remains of navigator/bomber Sergeant Spencer Lewis Smith Belton (D.F.M.) and air gunners Sergeant Arthur James Griffiths and Sergeant Duncan MacKay were never recovered.

Since the night of their final flight, no claims have been made by German fighters or coastal flak. There are also no reports from Coastal Rescue Brigades observing a plane going down.

Tudhope was most likely the only crewmember to have been able to jump free from the aircraft from the sliding cockpit roof of his aircraft before it plowed itself into the mud of the shallow waters of the IJsselmeer.

The funeral of 2nd Lieutenant W.F. Tudhope at the Kampen General Cemetery in IJsselmuiden on August 27, 1940. The funeral took place with German military honour. Salute shots were fired by members of the Luftwaffe.



Photo under-right: Tudhope's gravestone from 1940. This stone is missing since 2008.



Nothing is known about the possible use of his parachute.

William Frank "Bill" Tudhope, was born on the 5th of March 1919 in Johannesburg, South Africa. His father, John Henry "Tuddy" Tudhope was a pilot who gained considerable fame as a flying ace in biplane fighter aircraft in German South West Africa and France in World War I. After the First World War the Tudhope family emigrated to the city of Lumby in British Columbia, Canada. In 1920 Bill's father decided to serve in the Canadian Air Force as a flying instructor. Ten years later he was awarded the prestigious McKee Trophy for his role in exploring the Canadian trans-continental postal route.

Flying was commonplace in Bill's young years. No wonder that he aspired to become an airplane designer. But before learning how to build aircraft, he first wanted to know what made them fly by becoming a pilot himself.

In the 1930's, Bill, together with his younger sister Nesta, went to boarding school in the village of Ryde on the Isle of Wight in England. At that time he met a girl named Molly Christopher whose parents lived in Wimbledon near London. They got engaged and agreed to go and live in Canada after the impending war.

In July 1938 Bill left school to sign up for the Royal Air Force to become a pilot. Because he couldn't be responsible for his younger sister Nesta anymore, she travelled back to Canada to finish her school there. Bill wanted to become a fighter pilot, but he turned out to be too big for the



cockpit of a Spitfire so he learned flying bombers. Tuddy Tudhope, Bill's father

With the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Bill became a war flyer. He generally flew the Handley Page Hampden I light bomber. This aircraft was nicknamed the "flying suitcase" because of the narrow box shape of the aircraft's fuselage. Bill usually flew at night, together with other aircraft from the 144th squadron from RAF Station Hemswell in Lincolnshire, England, on low-level bombing missions to enemy targets over Germany. It was the time of the Battle of Britain, the air war between Germany and Great Britain from July to November 1940.

On one specific mission, in the night of July 20 to 21 of 1940, Bill and his crew were on route to Wilhelmshaven near Hamburg. Already above Emden they were severely hit by flak. There

as a flight instructor at Camp Borden, Canada in 1920 directly after the family left South Africa to live in Canada.



Bill Tudhope in the cockpit during a flight in a AVRO Anson instruction plane on March 7, 1939 at RAF Station Hemswell in Lincolnshire England.

A proud Bill Tudhope in RAF Uniform posing in the backyard of Molly Christopher's parents in Wimbledon, London in May 1939.



They started their bomb run, with special anti shipping mines, flying low over the Jade river waters, straight through a barrage of anti aircraft fire. During approach their right propeller was hit by a projectile, peppering the aircraft hull with shrapnel and bending the propeller. The rear wheel of the aircraft was destroyed. The rear rudder was damaged on both sides. The navigator, Sgt. Lewis Belton, was hit by shrapnel several times, that, without wounding him, just stuck in his flight suit. The tail gunner spent all his ammunition on ground targets behind the aircraft. During this run,

they flew very low narrowly missing the church steeple in the village beyond their target. After this run Tudhope only managed to gain altitude with difficulty. The



Bill Tudhope behind the rudder of aircraft L4163 of 144 *squadron* during a formation landing at RAF station Hemswell in Lincolnshire, England in November 1939. The plane was lovingly called the "flying suitcase". The Handley Page Hampden I was the type of fighter bomber Tudhope flew until his last mission. The aircraft has a crew of four. It has 2 *Bristol Pegasus* radial 9-cylinder engines of approx. 1000 bhp

each with 3-blade propellers. The airplane had a top speed of 400 km/h and a cruise speed of 340 km/h. Its flying ceiling was 5790 meters. It had an action radius of 1600 km. The bomb load was 1814 kg. Armament was delivered by three machine guns. One in the front, one at the top-rear and one at the bottom-rear of the fuselage.

hydraulic system had been shot and the bomb doors would not close. Under these circumstances it was impossible to penetrate the barrage of anti aircraft fire and Tudhope decided to drop the mines he was carrying north of Wilhelmshaven.

Bill Tudhope had to fly his badly crippled aircraft back to England without the aid of navigational aids. Before landing he had to blow the emergency bottle of compressed air to crank their landing gear into position because their hydraulics were shot up. Their damaged rear rudder and missing rear landing wheel made landing very difficult, but they made a safe landing at RAF station Hemswell in England. After this mission a 150 holes in total were counted in the fuselage of their aircraft.

On July 25th, 1940 twenty-one year-old pilot William Frank Tudhope was awarded the immediate Distinguished Flying Cross (D.F.C.) for his bravery on this mission. His crewmember navigator/ bomber Spencer Lewis Smith Belton was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (D.F.M.). It was cited that pilot officer W.F. Tudhope and Sergeant S.L.S. Belton showed remarkable bravery and



Bill and Molly visiting "Auntie" in Bath. The photo was taken in the few days between being awarded the DFC and his fatal flight to Homberg (D).

completed their duty bringing honour to the RAF when sorely needed.

Canadian First World War air veterans sent him a congratulatory telegram.

Late at night on the 10th of August 1940, pilot officer Bill Tudhope (D.F.C.) and his three-man crew took off on another bombing mission. According to the archives they left at 22:58 hrs. flying aircraft P4368 to Homberg in Germany, just south of the industrial Ruhr-region, but he and his crew failed to return in the morning of August 11th, 1940.

*144 Squadron at RAF Station*

*Hemswell in Lincolnshire, England.*

The aircraft at the back is a Handley Page Hampden I.

Bill sits at the front row, third from the left.



Original newspaper clipping out of the archives of the Museum Schokland from the *Montreal Star* from Canada dated August 12, 1940 in which William Frank Tudhope is reported missing. The Canadian newspaper "The Montreal Star" from August 12th, 1940 published a story with a photograph on the front page about pilot officer William Frank Tudhope, son of the famous squadron leader J.H. Tudhope, having been reported missing in action. The same article mentioned Bill's two younger brothers (Roy and Vernon), who had drowned a few years earlier in a boating accident. Not mentioned in the article was that his mother Jess Tudhope had died shortly before as well.

This left only the youngest daughter, Nesta, and Tuddy, the father of the family, from a family of six.

As by April 1941 no word had been received about Bill, his name and those of his crew were published in the newspaper's list of servicemen killed in action. Until then they had merely been reported missing, now they were presumed dead.

In October 1941, more than a year later the news that Bill Tudhope was buried in Kampen after being shot down in his aircraft over the Netherlands, reached his relatives in Canada.

In 1952 Bill's father J.H. Tudhope came to visit his son's grave in Kampen. He had been working in London since 1948 as an air attaché to the Canadian Government and lived in Horsham, England. He came to Kampen with his second wife and went to the Police Station to ask for directions as to the location of his son's grave. Kampen police inspector Mannus Koers was assigned to help find the grave and visit the place on Schokland where his son's body had washed ashore.

This visit resulted in the exchange of historical information. We learned more about William Frank Tudhope's background, for example that he was called Bill. And his family learned of his burial in 1940 with full military honours by German occupying forces in the Netherlands and that photographs remained from the burial.

On October 12th, 1956 Bill's father, J.H. "Tuddy" Tudhope, died aged 64





in Horsham, England. His ashes were brought to Canada and were scattered over the Rocky Mountains from a Lockheed 12A, the same aircraft he flew in 1937 looking for a suitable trans-continental air route over Canada for Trans Canada Airways. John Henry Tudhope was one of the founding members of the National Canadian Airline.

Molly Christopher, Bill's fiancé from Wimbledon, England, moved to Canada after the war, just as she had once agreed to do with Bill.

Bill's only remaining sister, Nesta, went from Canada to South Africa where she married Arthur Ravenscroft in 1953. Their first son was christened William but again called Bill, after his uncle Bill Tudhope and also after William Ravenscroft, the brother of Nesta's husband who was killed in Egypt during WWII. When Nesta and Arthur conceived a daughter for their second child, Molly Christopher was

asked to be the godmother of their little daughter Anne Tudhope Ravenscroft. Later still, a second daughter Jill, sister to William and Anne, was born.

Molly Christopher never married. She died in 1993 in Canada.

After 1952 Mr. Koers in Kampen has always kept in contact with Tudhope's relatives. This is why there is so much historic material on William Frank Tudhope.

In June 1996 a ceremony took place in Grafhorst to unveil a monument to the crew of the Australian RAAF Lancaster W4316 that crashed into the waters of the Ganzendiep near Grafhorst on June 13th, 1943 on its way to Bochum. Six of the seven crewmembers perished.

John Cornish, the surviving air gunner of the aircraft, had already returned to the spot in 1985 from Canada. In 1996 this monument was visited by Bill Tudhope's niece Anne and her husband Roy Smith. Radio IJsselmond conducted an interview on September 23rd, 1996 with Anne and Roy Smith in which they expressed their gratitude to the people of Kampen for keeping the memory of their uncle Bill Tudhope alive.

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Many thanks to former Police Inspector M. Koers of Kampen for sharing information with me for writing this article. All his documents are donated to the archives of the Museum of Schokland.

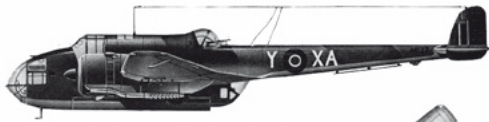
Mr. Smith and his wife Anne Smith-Ravenscroft at Bill Tudhope's Grave in 1992 on the

Kampen General Cemetary in IJsselmuident.

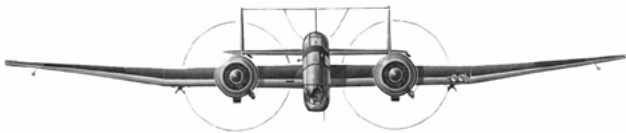
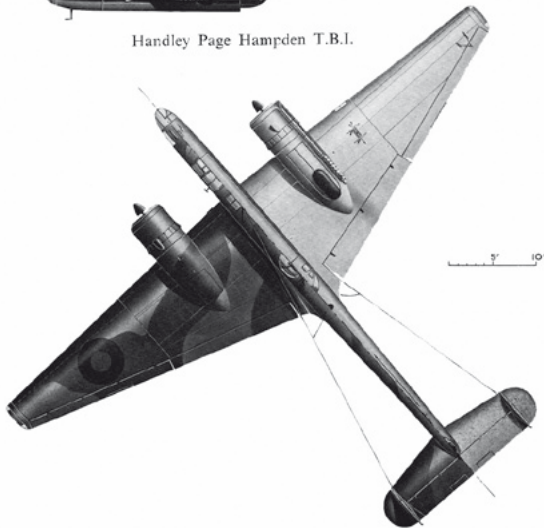
Anne is the daughter of Nesta, Bill Tudhope's younger sister.

She has never known her uncle Bill. He died before

she was born. Her husband and her live in South Africa (2011).



Handley Page Hampden T.B.I.



Three views of the torpedo bomber version of a Handley Page Hampden I. The fuselage of the aircraft was unusually short narrow and gave the airplane the nickname "*Flying Suitcase*".



Photograph that emerged in 2005 from the archives of the undertaker in Kampen.

pdf-file:

[www.isle-of-wight-memorials.org.uk/  
people-ryd/ryd\\_tudhope\\_wf.htm](http://www.isle-of-wight-memorials.org.uk/people-ryd/ryd_tudhope_wf.htm)

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