

Alva James Martin



Alva James Martin lost his life September 12, 1944 when his aircraft crashed in Italy during the Second World War. Alva was buried by members of the Allied army at the scene of the accident near St. Fortunato, southwest of Rimini. He joined the R.C.A.F. in Calgary in 1941 and trained as an observer, graduating in Lethbridge in 1942. His service number was J/87018. He went overseas in August 1942 and received his commission in April of 1944 after serving in North Africa and Italy for 21 months. Petty Officer Martin was born in Edmonton, son of Jay Martin and Annie Williams. He was educated at Balmoral and Crescent Heights high schools. His younger brother, Flight Sargent David Arnold, was on operational training in England as an air gunner at the time of Alva's death.

At the time of his death, Alva was serving in 114 Squadron of the RAF Bomber Command which was flying the Douglas A-20 Boston bomber. Alva's aircraft was BZ499, which may have been a Boston IV model (Douglas A-20J). In April 1943 the 114 Squadron had converted to Bostons from the Blenheim IV and moved to Sicily, moving on to Italy (Falconara) in October. Here the Squadron attacked enemy communications and airfields until the end of the war,



The A-20J aircraft normally had a three man crew (pilot, bombardier and gunner). The A-20G (called the "Havoc" by the Americans) which also served with the 114th, was the most common model produced. It had a solid nose whereas the A-20J (Boston IV) had a glass nose to increase visibility for the bombardier.

Another important medium bomber/intruder was the Douglas A-20. Called the Boston in the RAF, it equipped 418 Squadron, but often was crewed by Canadians on RAF units. In the same weight category of the B-25 and also with R2600s, it was faster (320-340 mph), but carried a smaller bomb load (2600 lb). Production ceased in September 1944, 7385 being delivered, mainly to the US, Britain and the USSR. Shown is 43-21833/BZ465, a Boston IV (A-20J). It was seen while passing through Canada with Ferry Command in mid-summer 1944. Soon it joined 114 Squadron, an intruder unit at Falconara on the Italian Adriatic. On the night of December 9, 1944 BZ465 went missing on ops to the Po Valley, about 150 miles north-west of base. Note the belly gun pack, which sported 4 x 20-mm cannons. Besides Mitchells and Bostons, Canadians flew other medium types in the RAF, e.g. Martin Marauders. (Art Walker Col.)



(extracts from *Canada's Airforce at War and Peace*, Larry Milberry)