Flying Officer George Robert Pringle, Royal Canadian Air Force

Holder of the 1939-45 Star, The Atlantic Star, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (CVSM) and clasp for overseas service, War Medal





On January 24th, 1943, a 58 Squadron RAF Halifax DT684 of Coastal Command took off on a non-operational flight from RAF Holmsley South en route to RAF Talbenny. The aircraft crashed shortly after take-off in the grounds of Kingston Lacy near Wimborne Minster, all eight crew members were killed. Besides George, who was the flight's observer (navigator),the following were lost.

F/Lt John Frank Hugh Andrews First Pilot, RAF
F/O Murray Archer Legg Pilot RNZAF
Sgt Alexander Sinclair Doull Flt Eng.RAF
Sgt Alan Henry Norman Bickley WOp/AG RAF
W/O Lawrence Edward Gilpin WOp/AG RCAF
LAC Albert Haywood Herbert RAFVR
W/O Sidney James Prince WOp/AG RCAF



58 Squadron Halifax GR Mk II at RAF Holmsley South, before it was repainted in Coastal Command colours. The Halifaxes were delivered to Holmsley South from Bomber Command stocks in December 42 just a month before George Pringle was killed the aircraft in which George Pringle was flying was therefore probably very similar to this one.

Pringle,Prince,Legg and Gilpin are all buried in war graves in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, Bransgore in the New Forest in the English county of Hampshire. They lie alongside three fellow Canadians, two of whom died on May 16th, 1943, and Flying Officer Russell Melvin Reisener a pilot who was killed in a crash at Damerham three days later. These three Canadians also died flying in Halifax aircraft from Holmsley South, but these aircraft were from 295 Squadron and had been adapted for use at Glider Tugs.



The white tombstones of the Bransgore War Graves at St Mary's Church. The four 58 squadron graves are all in the right hand row, George Pringle's grave is closest to the wall



George's Gravestone he was 29 at the time of his death.

In 2007, Bransgore was visited by a representative of the Royal Canadian Legion from the Pringle family's home area. The loss of George Pringle was deeply felt in the community of Peachland, not least because he was the first serviceman from Peachland to lose his life in the 1939-45 war. What follows is his story, derived from documents left by the Royal Canadian Legion with ourselves and (as you will read) more importantly with Bransgore Church of England school, which adjoins St Mary's Church.

On December 19, 1949, commemorating the community spirit, service and devotion to duty of a young minister who left his pulpit to join the RCAF and was killed during flying operations, George Pringle School was opened in Westbank by Education Minister, W. T. Straith. In attendance also was Okanagan M.L.A., W.A.C. Bennett. Unable to attend the dedication ceremony, Mrs. Grace Pringle of Vancouver, mother of the late Rev. George Pringle conveyed the family's heartfelt appreciation in a letter read during the ceremony.

The following text comes from the rededication of George Pringle Elementary School in 1992.

George Pringle was born on November 30th, 1913, in Vancouver, the son of Rev. George C.F. Pringle, D.D. who was a pioneer Presbyterian Minister in the Yukon, and a chaplain in the army overseas during World War I. George did his high school in Victoria and Vancouver and obtained his B.A. at U.B.C. where he was a first-class scholar and athlete. He paid for his university expenses working in lumber camps during the summer, at times doing "tree topping" a job that required special skills and no fear of heights.

After obtaining his B.A. George enrolled in the United Church of Canada's Union College, where he was again a top scholar, graduating and being ordained in 1938. As a student minister he did summer student fields for the Church in Southern Saskatchewan and in the Cariboo district of B.C. near Williams Lake. After ordination his first ministry was at Bralorne (1938-39), and then to Peachland and Westbank United Churches July 1940-June 1941).

He joined the RCAF as aircrew in July 1941 and trained as an observer (navigator) at Regina and Mossbank, Saskatchewan and at Rivers, Manitoba where he graduated at the top of his class and was commissioned as a Pilot Officer. He went overseas in May 1942 where he was posted to Coastal Command and took General Reconnaissance training at Squires Gate RAF Station near Blackpool. He was later posted to RAF Coastal Command's 58 squadron on Whitley aircraft. It is understood that he and his crew were forced to "ditch" in the North Sea while on the squadron, but details of this ordeal are not available since his logbook was never found.

In late 1942 his squadron converted to Halifax aircraft. On January 24, 1943, he was part of a six-man crew flying a Halifax that crashed shortly after take-off on a nonoperational trip from Holmsley South to RAF Station Talbenny. All members of the crew were killed instantly. He is buried in Bransgore Parish cemetery near Christchurch and Bournemouth, (then in) Hampshire, England. His brother John, also in the Air Force (a Wireless Air gunner, also in Coastal Command) attended the funeral held on January 28th, 1943. Rev. W.B. Willan who had preached at George's graduation service, a chaplain with the Canadian forces overseas assisted, reading the scriptures and taking the graveside committal service.
As previously mentioned, George was a top-notch athlete and especially good at basket- ball and was captain of the U.B.C. team that in 1937 won the Canadian Championship. This team also travelled to and played in Japan. He was also an expert softball pitcher, with some "no-hit" games to his credit.

He excelled at tennis, and during one year at Union College when there was a summer games meet involving all the theological colleges from the American Northwest and B.C., he won single-handedly for Union College. He was a top A hockey goalie and practiced with the boxing team. Whilst in the ministry at Westbank and Peachland he won a ping-pong championship tournament in Kelowna.

Many tributes were made in memory of George Pringle including the naming of this school after him. We are gathered here today to re-dedicate the George Pringle School to his memory. (Nov. 10/92)

In the words of all World War Veterans,

"They shall not grow old - as we who are left grow old.

Age shall not weary them - nor the years condemn:

At the going down of the sun- and in the morning –

We will remember them."

Tributes

George Pringle received many scholastic and athletic awards, but the personal tributes seem to spell out just what kind of a person he was. His close friend Steve Gardiner who trained with him in the airforce and also served on Coastal Command. makes the following statement. "As you go through life a certain few people stand out as being "a cut above the crowd". This is the way I have always thought of George. Tall, Blond and handsome - soft spoken and so highly regarded by everyone who knew him."

George's brother John talks about the many friends he had, including girlfriends, but as far as John knows he never became seriously involved, preferring to wait till the war was over before considering such things as marriage and family. A news item from Peachland at the time of his death states in part, "During his year in Peachland he won all hearts by his sincerity and friendly interest in young and old alike. His ability as an athlete made him the idol of the young people, while his example was a force for good in all his work with them. Both he and his brother, John, played for the Summerland basketball team in the winter of 1940-41. This is the first loss that Peachland has had in the present war."

About the same time that George Pringle came to Peachland, Harold Burks became a teacher there. He states in part, "George had a great love of life. This was often expressed through his sense of humour. Often, when I "vent by his house on my way to the class- room, he would spot me and yell out. "Hal, come here, I have another joke for you". These jokes helped me get through some tiring days in front of forty-two boys and girls. In the best meaning of the concept, George was a confirmed Christian. This was the central fact of his existence. His belief in Jesus Christ would not have been extraordinary of itself; what was unusual was his evident desire and ability to demonstrate personality characteristics that Jesus showed in His sojourn on earth, and to influence others to practice these characteristics.

George frequently talked about his mother and father in warm and affectionate ways. The confidence he derived from their love and support must have contributed to the absolute sense of trust he inspired in others." (Harold Burks, Ph.D. expressed the foregoing in a letter to Ron Dale, Administrative Assistant at George Pringle School, in October 1983.)

J.G. Brown, principal of Union College, in his remarks at George's memorial service, stated in part, "Mention has been made of his prowess in athletics. He won distinction not only in basketball, but in every other field of sport. His name will be remembered not only for his achievements, but because of the exceptionally fine spirit and the good fellowship he created with his team-mates and with all round him in the world of athletics. Rarely h there been one who, because of his personal qualities, proved himself to be a real leader and brought into the world of sport the fine flavour of a Christian gentleman.

Leonard S. Klinck of U.B.C. in his tribute to George had this to say. "In the passing of George Pringle, the University of British Columbia has lost a much-loved graduate, the United Church of Canada one of its most promising young ministers, and the province of B.C. a citizen whose devotion to duty will long remain an inspiration to the host of friends whose privilege it was to know him."

The School was demolished in 2023 due to School District 23 facing urgent enrolment pressures. The site was selected as the optimal location to build a much-needed second regional high school. Construction reached its structural "topping out" milestone in May 2025, and the school is scheduled to officially open in February 2027.



It will accommodate approximately 1,200 students in grades 9 through 12. The new building will serve as a multi-use neighbourhood learning hub, featuring a 36-space childcare centre, a black box theatre, a large Indigenous cultural space, and two full-size sports fields. The school's name continues to honour George Pringle.

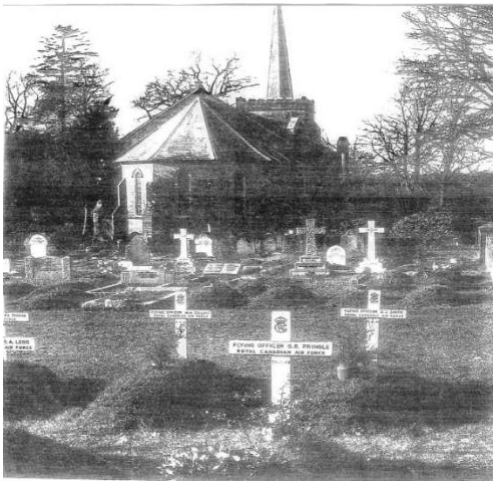
“Chantelle Derosiers, vice-chair of the board of Central Okanagan Public Schools, said the school board’s decision to name the new high school in honour of George Pringle came quickly.

“It was pretty much taken from the moment we decided that we were repurposing that school site, and I think it was a direct recognition of what this means to the community in Peachland and in West Kelowna and Westbank as well.”

Derosiers said the high school that first bore Pringle’s name has its own legacy after so many people attended the school over more than 70 years.

“For many people that have young children now, they graduated there. And often their parents did as well and there's a lot of heritage, emotion, community engagement with the school and what that means to them,” she said.

“So, we saw it more as repurposing the site to renew and refresh it and we didn't want to lose any of that history and legacy.”



The temporary wartime graves at St Mary's Church (before it lost its spire)



There is a tree planted with a plaque in the grounds of Kingston Lacy house near the crash site.
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/kingston-lacy

“Collect a map of the estate when paying or showing your card. Follow the path past the main entrance to the house. You will be on the Woodland Trail (marked purple on the 2022 map). Ignore the one-way arrows, which apply to cyclists. After about 300 yards you will reach a fence and cattle grid which separate the estate from the surrounding parkland. On the map there is a distinct change in the shade of green at this point. Do not cross the grid but turn left. The memorial is about 25 yards off the path. It will be easy to see when there are wreaths beside it. Otherwise, the wooden fence will direct you to the spot and there are metal railings around the tree. If these directions fail you, the volunteer staff do know of the memorial and its whereabouts, so ask them.”
https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/279689/

