

Maddrell, George Webb

Age: 20

Nationality: Australian

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Wireless Operator/
Air Gunner

Service No: 422214 (RAAF)

Birth: 25 August 1922,
Elsternwick, Melbourne,
Victoria, Australia

Home Town: Burwood, Melbourne,
Victoria, Australia

Death: 4 June 1943

Crash of Handley Page Hampden AN100,
near Grays Harbour, Washington, USA

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial, Canada

Others: Sgt William Frederick Barker, Pilot, RAFVR; Sg Jack Ralph
Navigator, RAFVR; Sgt Grant Charles Senger, WAG, RAAF.



Biography

George Webb Maddrell was born 25 August 1922 in Elsternwick, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. His parents were Lewin Stanhope and Ellen Catherine Maddrell.

An apprentice draughtsman, George enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in Sydney, on 25 April 1942, when he was 19.

On 4 June 1943, George was training in No. 32 OTU at Patricia Bay, BC, Canada, which served as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. He was one of two Australian Wireless Operators/Air Gunners on Hampden AN100 when it took off on a navigational training flight. The aircraft hit the water off the coast of Washington USA and sank, taking the crew with it. George's body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.



Details of Crash

On 4 June 1943, Handley Page Hampden AN100 took off at 11:40 am carrying a crew of four:

Sergeant William Frederick Barker	Pilot	RAFVR
Sergeant George Webb Maddrell	WAG	RAAF
Sergeant Jack Ralph	Navigator	RAFVR
Sergeant Grant Charles Senger	WAG	RAAF

The aircraft was authorized to carry out a navigation flight. Prior to take off, the pilot and crew were briefed with instructions as to route, exercise, heights and duration. The route was Base to Port San Juan to 48.10 N 128.07 W to 46.51N 128.07W to Pachena Point back to Base. The first and last legs are over land and the middle three over the sea flying west of Vancouver Island and Washington State. Heights over the sea were to be: the first leg 500 feet, second leg 1,000 feet and third leg 1,500 feet; duration of the flight 4 to 4:15 hours. Instructions were to not fly into cloud; either climb over it, or fly under it.

The flight was to be treated as a fully operational sortie. The aircraft was to carry out a shipping patrol from Port San Juan over the prescribed route back to base.

W/T position reports were to be given every hour and if W/T could not be given after the first hour, the crew were instructed to return to base or to a point where W/T could be re-established. After W/T "go" no communication was received. The WAG on Hampden 104, also on an over sea navigational exercise, picked up a W/T message from Hampden AN100 at 14:35. The message checked with time from take-off as regards one hour signals, but the signal strength was very weak and, though the part of the message, which referred to position, was understood; the rest was not.

At the time of take-off the weather forecast was good. However, weather conditions over the sea on the route to be followed by the aircraft were not good; one pilot stated that the average base of cloud was 500 feet, another pilot stated that there was a low ceiling (300 feet) visibility about three miles. After 14:35 hours no message of any kind was received from AN100 and the crew failed to return to base.

It was concluded that the accident was probably caused by the weather conditions and inexperience on the part of the pilot, who had only 3:25 hours on Hampdens before this exercise. No information was given as to the wireless operator's experience.

The finding of the Court of Inquiry into the accident concluded:

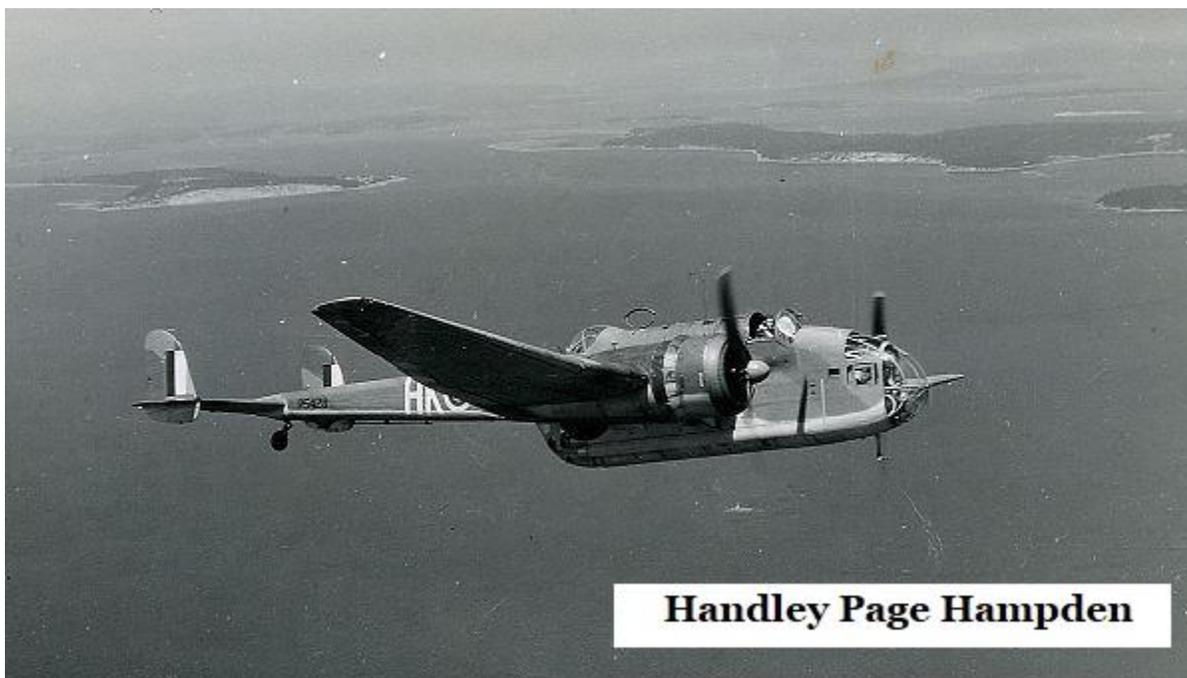
“the pilot in this case probably lost control either while turning at a low altitude, or attempting to climb through cloud. The Hampden is somewhat tricky for an inexperienced pilot to fly by instrument as her trim changes with speed and requires constant watching by the pilot. It was bad luck that he should here meet with such bad conditions on his first trip over the sea.”

On June 14th a second Hampden AJ992 hit the sea, this time 20km west of Cape Flattery.

Following this accident, a memo was sent from the C.I. Accidents to the A.N.T.(D.O.T.)

“I am attaching two files on two accidents, at No.32 OTU, in ten days, both due to bad weather over the sea. In neither case was the weather forecast accurate. In fact, on the forecast given the flights appeared to be justified but on the weather as experienced I think it was unnecessary risk to send pilots comparatively inexperienced on Hampden aircraft on such exercises. Would you please consider these two accidents and let me have your comments.”

After the inquiry, aircraft parts, identified as those of AN 100, were found near Grays Harbor, WA, near the southernmost part of the route AN 100 followed.



Handley Page Hampden

