

Ralph, Jack

Age: 22

Nationality: Welsh

Rank: Sergeant

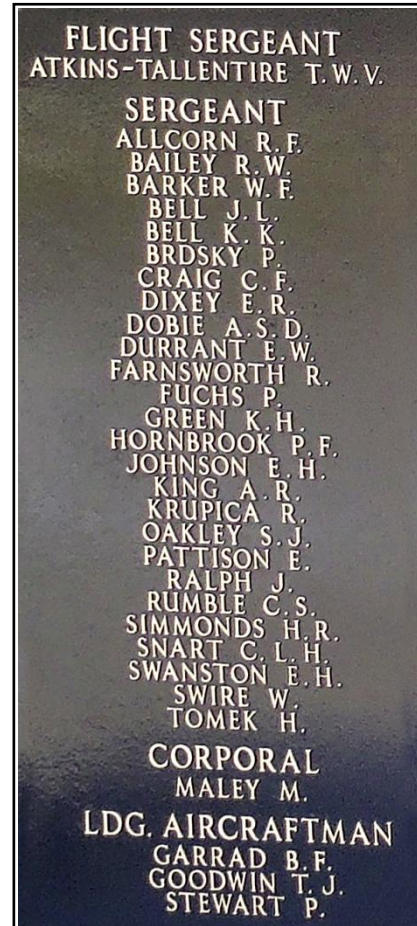
Unit: No. 32 OTU

Occupation: Navigator

Service No: 1395495 (RAFVR)

Birth: 9 January 1921,
Pontypridd, Wales

Home Town: London, UK



Ottawa Memorial

Death: 4 June 1943

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

Burial: Commemorated on Ottawa Memorial, Canada

Others: Sgt William Frederick Barker, Pilot, RAFVR;
Sergeant George Webb Maddrell, WAG, RAAF;
Sergeant Grant Charles Senger, WAG, RAAF.

Biography

Jack Ralph was born in Pontypridd, Glamorganshire, Wales on 9 January 1921. His father, Edward James Ralph, was a boot maker.

Pontypridd sits at the junction of the Rhondda and Cyn Taffonvalleys, where the river Rhondda flows into the Taff. When Jack was born, Pontypridd was the centre of the coal and iron mining industry in Wales, and the hub of the transportation links carrying coal and iron ore to the ports on the coast.

While many of his contemporaries would have followed a family tradition of working in the coal pits, Jack left Wales in 1938 to live in London and work as a clerk for the London and North Eastern Railway. He joined the RAF for the duration at the beginning of the war.

At some point during his RAF training Ralph was sent to Canada for Operational Training and found himself at Patricia Bay Station, British Columbia. On 4 June 1943 he was Navigator on Handley Page Hampden AN100 when it went onto the water near Grays Harbor, Washington USA. The crew members and most of the aircraft were not recovered and Jack was posted first as missing and then as presumed killed.



Pontypridd 1920

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, to either climb over 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, 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 that 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



