

# Weekes, Neville Oswald

**Age:** 31

**Nationality:** Australian

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** No. 32 OTU

**Occupation:** Wireless Operator  
Air Gunner

**Service No:** 413700 (RAAF)

**Birth:** 27 August 1912  
Wingham, NSW,  
Australia

**Home Town:** Sydney, NSW,  
Australia

**Death:** 9 October 1943

Crash of Handley Page Hampden AN101,  
near Stuart Island, Washington, USA

**Burial:** Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC, Canada

**Others:** Sgt Francis Keith Maiden, WAG, RAAF; P/O Kenneth Shaw,  
Navigator, RAFVR; F/O Alan Warner, Pilot, RAFVR.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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## **Biography**

Neville Weekes, born in Wingham, NSW, Australia on 27 August 1912, was the only child of Henry Harry Weekes and Sarah Ann Lynch. He reached an intermediate level of education at Taree High School and worked as a shop assistant in a General Store. He did not marry.

Before joining the RAAF, Neville was with Australian 16<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun (reserve) regiment for three years rising to the rank of corporal. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in Sydney, NSW, on 12 September 1941, applying for flying duties. A tall slim young man, he was passed as medically fit for aircrew.

Neville started training in Australia, passing Initial Training School on 7 November 1941, and embarking for Canada in Sydney NSW, on 2 July 1942. He arrived in Canada on 7 August 1942 and was sent to Lachine, P. Quebec, where he stayed for one week until he was posted to Calgary, AB. From Calgary, on 29 May 1942, Neville was posted to No. 8 BAGS school in Lethbridge to train as a wireless operator/air gunner (WAG). He earned his WAG badge on 27 July 1943 and was promoted to sergeant.

On 24 July 1943 Neville was posted to No. 32 OTU at Patricia Bay, BC. On the afternoon of October 9<sup>th</sup>, he was one of two Australian WAG's on Hampden AN101 when it crashed near Stuart Island, WA, USA. The bodies of both Australians were found floating in the sea and recovered for burial at Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC.





*Family Grave in Wintham, NSW, Australia*

## Details of Crash

On 9 October 1943, at 1:25 pm, Handley Page Hampden AN101 took off on exercises with a crew of four:

Sergeant Francis Keith Maiden	423799 (RAAF)	WAG
P/O Kenneth Shaw	152316 (RAFVR)	Navigator
F/O Alan Warner	151705 (RAFVR)	Pilot
Sergeant Neville Oswald Weekes	413700 (RAAF)	WAG.

The object of the flight was light attack exercises with camera on shipping. The crew was briefed before take-off and instructed to return to base if weather conditions became unfit for the exercise.

At take off, the ceiling was unlimited, visibility was four miles, and the wind S.E. 17 mph. At the place and time of crash the visibility was good in the immediate vicinity with light fog patches in the area. The wind was easterly and light.

F/O Warner, the pilot, had a total flying time of 303 hours, 72 of which were on Hampdens. He was considered a good average pilot and the crew were experienced on the exercise, having made four such flights totalling 4:30 hours.

The aircraft was spotted in Haro Strait by SS Princess Alice at 1:35 pm. It made three attacks on the ship without any untoward incident being observed. After completing the third attack run, it flew away to port of the ship and made a normal turn to starboard climbing to 100 ft. It then went into a tight turn to port and while in this turn the aircraft seemed to lose flying speed or stall and it dove into the sea. The ship put about and returned to the point where the aircraft had entered the sea. The bodies of two of the crew were found floating on the water along with a dinghy. These bodies were recovered and an unsuccessful effort made to revive one of them, who appeared to have some sign of life. The other crew members were never found.

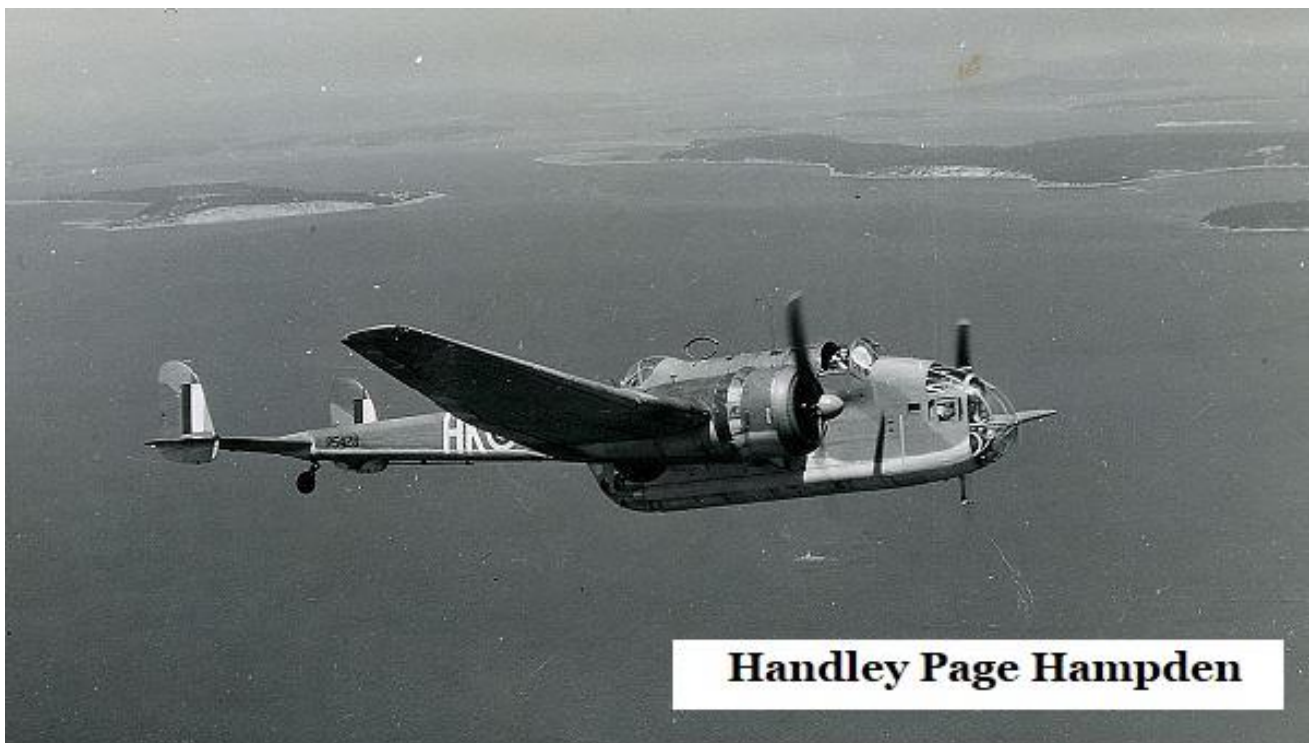
The pilot who flew the aircraft on its last preceding flight stated that it had a tendency to slip inwards on steep port turns. The C.O. of the Flight testified that Hampdens lose height rapidly in turns due to slipping or skidding, particularly in steep port turns. He stated that pupils are constantly warned of this tendency and instructed in how to prevent it.

The recovered bodies, those of the Australian WAG's, were examined and found to have serious head wounds and not to have drowned. It was assumed that all four crew members had died on impact.

A Supermarine Stranraer, a Westland Lysander and a crash boat were despatched to the scene by Flying Control but found nothing.

The cause of the crash was determined to be pilot error. The pilot failed to make a turn to port with sufficient care and accuracy and failed to take proper corrective action when the aircraft lost height.

The recommendations of the Court of Inquiry were for more adequate and frequent instructions to be given to all student pilots at No. 32 OTU in the proper methods of making all types of turns in Hampden Aircraft. Particular reference should be made to steep turns to port, emphasizing the probable result if such instructions are not carried out accurately. It was also recommended that more adequate and repeated instructions be given students in the proper method of recovery when a Hampden aircraft started to lose altitude in a turn.





SS Princess Alice

