

Senger, Grant Charles

Age: 31
Nationality: Australian
Rank: Sergeant
Unit: No. 32 OTU
Occupation: Wireless Operator/
Air Gunner
Service No: 418185 (RAAF)



Birth: 14 November 1911
Warrnambool,
Victoria, Australia

Home Town: Moonee Ponds,
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;
Sgt George Webb Maddrell, WAG, RAAF;
Sgt Jack Ralph, Navigator, RAFVR.

Biography

Grant Charles Senger was born in Warrnambool, a coastal town in Victoria, Australia, to Albert William and Annie Alexandra Senger, on 14 November 1911. Albert was a teacher. The family subsequently moved to a suburb of Victoria, Moonlee Ponds, where Grant was living when he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force. In the Australia electoral rolls in 1936 he was described as a clerk and in 1942, when he was still living with his parents and apparently unmarried, as a bank officer. Also listed in the electoral rolls as living with Albert and Annie are Albert Leopold Senger and Alan William Senger; probably brothers to Grant.

Grant's military records are unavailable but he can be found on the passenger list of SS Matsonia sailing from Melbourne on 20 June 1942 and arriving in San Francisco on 6 July 1942. He is one of a group of Australian Airmen bound for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada. Also on the Matsonia is Allan Spencer Lynch, who died ten days after Grant in the crash of another Handley Page Hampden out of Patricia Bay.

On 4 June 1943, Grant was with No. 32 OTU at the Patricia Bay station in British Columbia, Canada. He was one of two Australian Wireless Operators/Air

Gunners on Hampden AN100. The other two crew members were members of the RAF. The aircraft disappeared into the sea off the coast of Washington. Neither the wreckage nor any of the crew were recovered and they are all commemorated on the



Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Ottawa.

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 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 the 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 their 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



