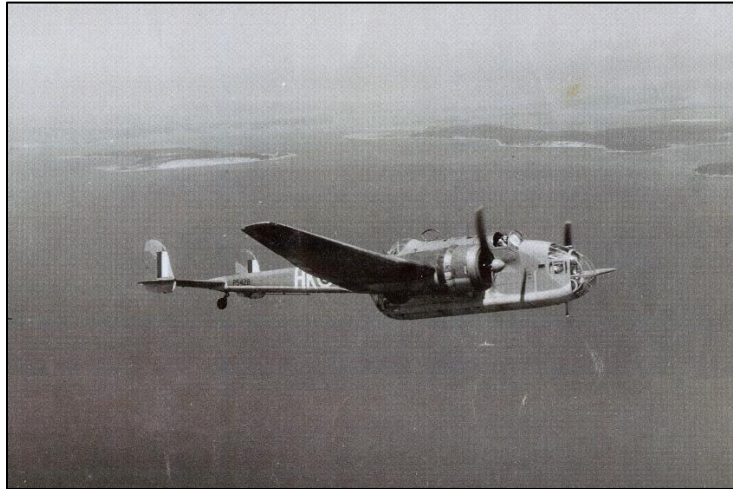


Handley-Page Hampden P5433



Hampden P5428 Above James Island, BC. *Courtesy BC Aviation Museum*

Serial No. P5433
Registry: RAF OTU 32

Construction

Associated Aircraft Ltd. built Handley-Page Hampden P5433 at Malton Airport, in Ontario. It flew west to British Columbia and joined the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Operational Training Unit (OTU) 32 on 18 June 1942.

The Handley-Page Aircraft Company designed the Hampden as a twin-engine medium bomber for the Royal Air Force in 1936. It had a short and narrow but tall main fuselage with a very slender tail unit and double rudders. Sometimes called flying suitcases because they only had a width of three feet, the cramped interior of a Hampden could accommodate a four-man crew. The pilot sat high up in the cockpit elevated above the rest of the crew, a bomb aimer/navigator sat in the nose, and two air gunners had stations in the back

Allied forces built 1,432 Hampdens, 160 of which were built in Canada. Of the 160 planes built in Canada 84 ended up being shipped by sea to Britain, while the remaining 76 joined Patricia Bay's RAF OTU No. 32. Initially formed in Liverpool, in the United Kingdom, on 20 July 1941, the RAF transferred OTU No. 32 to Patricia Bay in August of 1941.

Hampdens participated in the early years of World War II but their poor armament was no match for German fighters. Almost half of the planes built (714) were lost in operations during the early years of the War. As new planes arrived in operational theaters, Allied

forces relegated the remaining Hampdens to training bases. A total of 104 Hampdens operated from OTU 32 in Patricia Bay from May 1942 to February 1944.

Operational History

Little is known about the operational history of Hampden P5433. It arrived at Patricia Bay and OTU 32 took it on strength on 18 June 1942. It would have served as a training aircraft that provided pilots and support aircrew with necessary training hours. In the War's later years, the Air Force reconfigured most of the remaining Hampdens as torpedo bombers, which necessitated the establishment of two torpedo ranges. The Air Forces created one off Cowichan Head and the other in Saanich Inlet, and Hampdens used the ranges to practice dropping torpedoes from low elevations. As training aircraft, it wasn't uncommon for Hampdens to suffer hard landings or spin outs and Hampden P5433 was no exception – on 17 October 1942, it ground looped on landing and collapsed the starboard landing gear. The Air Force repaired it and placed it back in service.

Loss

At 4:30PM on 14 March 1943, Hampden P5433 took off from Patricia Bay on what the crew intended to be a low flight over the sea and a night flying test. The crew onboard the plane consisted of two Australians and two Canadians. Pilot Officer Allan W. Hunt, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) flew the plane. Pilot Officer Reginald K. Manttan, RAAF Navigated it. Pilot Officer Grant L. Hall and Sgt. Howard S. Piercy, both of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) served as Wireless Operators/Air Gunners.

At 5:30 PM observers saw the plane go into a spin at about a 1200 feet elevation and then crashing into the waters of Saanich Inlet. The RCAF operations record book kept at OTU 32 contains the following entry on 14 March 1943 at 17:30, the time of the crash:

During low flying over the sea and night flying test the aircraft was seen to dive towards the sea. An explosion occurred on impact and aircraft disintegrated. Only one body was recovered (P/O Hunt) almost immediately by crash boat. Three flying helmets were picked up later.

Victoria's *Daily Colonist* for Thursday 18 March 1943 reported three flyers as missing following the crash: P/O R. K. Manttan, Australia; P/O Grant L. Hall, Waterford, Ont. and Sgt. H. S. Piercy, London, Ont.

The Court of Inquiry for this plane is missing from Library and Archives Canada records. Without that Inquiry, reconstructing why the Hampden crashed or whether or not the Air Force salvaged it, is not possible.

Salvage

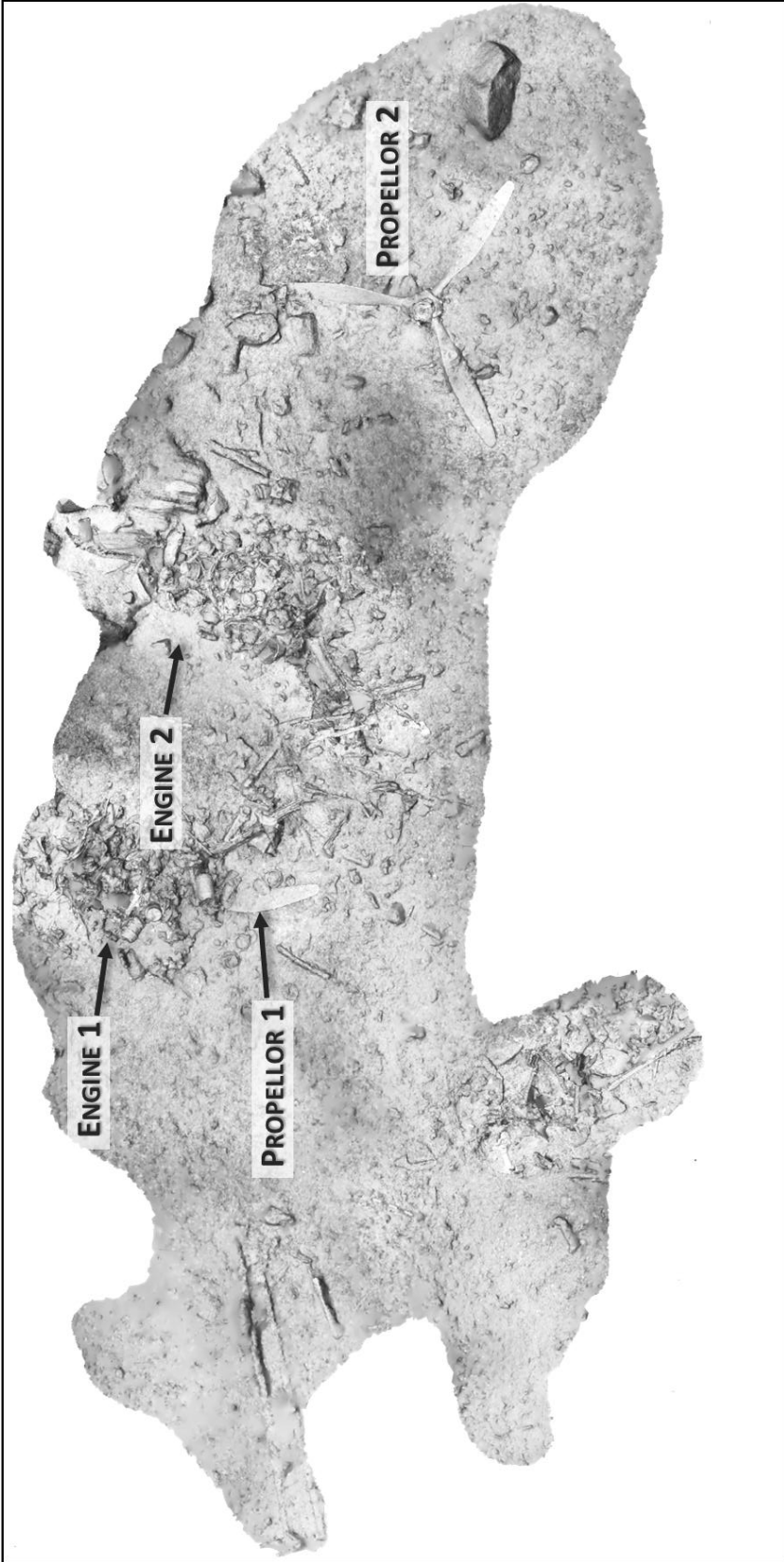
No official report of salvage could be found. However, the lack of a fuselage on the site suggests that the Air Force salvaged much of the plane (staff at the BC Aviation Museum have confirmed that the RCAF would make a concerted effort to recover planes that crashed to retrieve deceased crew members). The UASBC feels that salvagers likely grappled the plane from the surface and as they pulled it up, heavier pieces like the engines broke or fell off the plane to the seafloor.

Status

In October of 2022, local diver Lyle Berzins was filming Octopus in Saanich Inlet when he came across some plane wreckage. In a subsequent email to Jacques Marc, he described finding two large radial engines and a large 3 bladed propellor and landing gear, which seemed to match that of a PBY Catalina, in about 70 feet of water. Lyle gave the location as about ½ way between Coal Point and Warrior Point and about 500 meters offshore.

Next, the UASBC dove the site on 4 December 2022 and that team confirmed Berzins's observations. The team found a large 3 bladed propeller, two very heavily deteriorated 9-cylinder radial aircraft engines and one set of landing gear, but no fuselage pieces! Did the plane crash and was the fuselage salvaged leaving behind the heavy bits? Or did the plane hit the water so hard it broke up and is spread over a wide area? Figuring that more of the plane may be on the bottom, the UASBC completed additional dives on 14 January and 4 February 2024, searching down to a depth of 39 meters (127 feet), but the divers found no additional wreckage.

Not long afterward, on 4 February 2023, UASBC member Ewan Anderson completed photogrammetry on the engines and associated wreckage. Roger Lacasse completed photogrammetry from the engines to the landing gear on 21 October 2024. Lacasse then merged the two photogrammetry projects to provide a detailed site plan for the wreck.



HANDLEY PAGE HAMPDEN P5433

WRECK SITE MAP (ENGINES SECTION)

Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia
Photogrammetry by E. Anderson
February 4, 2023
©UASBC 2023



Photogrammetry Model Showing Engines and propeller. © Ewan Anderson

The entire model can be viewed here. <https://skfb.ly/p8O89>

Knowing what type of plane lay on the seafloor would prove the key to identifying it. The most distinctive feature on site appeared to be the landing gear, so the UASBC began comparing the landing gear on the seafloor to plane types stationed at Patricia Bay during World War Two. It didn't take long to determine that the landing gear came from a Handley-Page Hampden Medium Bomber.

UASBC dive teams also took measurements off the engines and compared them to a Pegasus radial engine from Hampden AN-105 at the BC Aviation Museum. The measurements for engine cylinder diameter and the lifting ring matched! The next challenge was identifying which Hampden lay on the bottom of Patricia Bay. The UASBC developed a list of Hampdens that served at OTU 32. Researchers identified 104 Hampdens that served at Patricia Bay, 26 of which suffered category "A" crashes that destroyed the planes. Of these 26 Hampdens that crashed, only two are recorded as crashing into Saanich Inlet. The first, Hampden P5436, was recovered by the Air Force in 1986 and the Canadian Museum of Flight in Langley, British Columbia, later rebuilt it. The whereabouts of Hampden P5433 was unknown until Berzins's discovery.

Why did Hampden P5433 crash? The UASBC thinks that it likely lost an engine, as Hampdens held notoriety for engine failures. The fact that the visible prop is in very good condition suggests it was not spinning when the plane hit the water. When compared to Hampden P5436, the lack of fuselage on site suggests that the Air Force salvaged the bulk of the plane.

In addition to the engines, prop, and landing gear, the UASBC identified a number of smaller artifacts on site. Divers found a compass thought to be from the Navigators station near the landing gear, as well as pieces of Plexiglas from the nose. Teams also located components of what appears to be a radio just south of the propeller, and a large round piece of Plexiglas that came from a photography position behind the lower gunner. Divers also observed a few personal effects like shoes and a belt buckle.



Hampden Compass after recovery but prior to conservation treatment.

The UASBC recovered the Navigator's compass on 9 November 2024 on behalf of the BC Aviation Museum (BCAM) under Heritage Conservation Alteration Permit 2024-0318. The BCAM sent the compass to the Canadian Conservation Institute and will go on display in the BCAM Memorial Room when conservation is completed.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The UASBC placed a Memorial Plaque on the wreck on 9 November 2024 to commemorate the four lost crew members. Research is required to track down the missing Court of Inquiry for Hampden P5433. Additional research should be undertaken to determine if records from the crash boats exist, as this could provide additional information on the possible salvage of P5433.

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