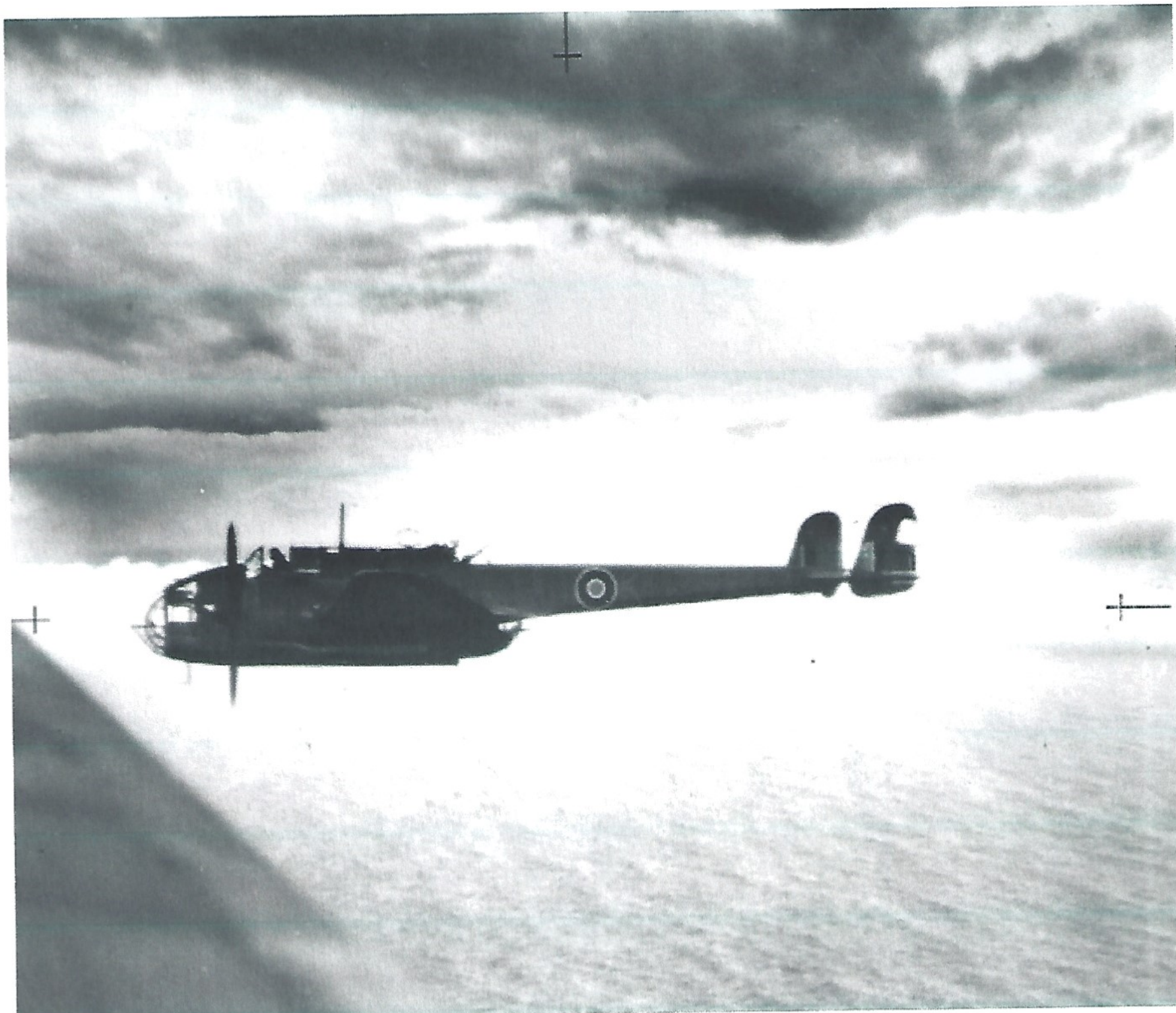


In a 1945 report the then WO Poulton recorded:

"We were shot down by a night fighter at 12,000 feet. Bale out orders were given to all members over the Inter/Com at once as the aircraft was well on fire after being attacked. No reply received from any member from the moment the fighter attacked. I was able to fly the aircraft on both engines down to 10,000 feet when fire forced me to bale out. Owing to my position in the cockpit (Pilot's cockpit – Hampden) I was unable to see any member of my crew and whether anyone had baled out. I also tried to attract the crew through the warning light on the panel. The aircraft was straight and level when I baled out. The aircraft crashed near Groningen, Holland. I was later informed by British Red Cross that the others had died. Captured a few hours after baling out. Released by Russians 22/4/45."

(John Jones - Claim by Ofw Siegfried Ney 5/NJG2 - Slochteren 15km East of Groningen (Lowe or Gazelle) at 21:10. (Nachtjagd Combat Archives 1942 Part 1 - Theo Boiten))

- RAAF 400028 Sgt Ian MacPherson Ince. Aged 23, Son of David Daniel and Ada Maria Ince, of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. (Initially buried at Kolham)
- RAF 1381723 Sgt Samuel Williams. Aged 29, Son of Louis and Leah Williams; husband of Lily Williams, of Hightown, Manchester, England. (Initially buried at Kolham)
- RAF 1375311 Sgt G E Wilkinson. Aged 20, Son of William A. and Florence Wilkinson, of Workington, Cumberland, England. (Initially buried at Kolham)



Above image is example Hampden (not AT119)

Aircraft Type : Hampden built by English Electric Co., Preston,
 Serial number : AT 119
 Radio call sign : UB – Y
 Unit : 455 Sqn RAAF (Squadron code UB)

Summary :

Hampden AT119 took off from RAF Swinderby at 1719 hours on the night of 21/22nd January 1942 to bomb harbour installations at Emden, Germany. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after take-off and it did not return to base. Four aircraft from the Squadron took part in the raid and two of these including AT119 did not return.

Crew:

RAAF 404261 Sgt Francis Gerard Poulton, Captain (Pilot) (POW Number 119 at Hohen Fels Camp).
 RAAF 400028 Sgt Ian MacPherson Ince, (Navigator) (KILLED)
 RAF 1381723 Sgt Samuel Williams, (Wireless Operator Air Gunner) (KILLED)
 RAF 1375311 Sgt G E Wilkinson, (Air Gunner) (KILLED)

Post war it was established that the aircraft was shot down by a night fighter Oberfeldwebel Siegfried Ney of the 5./NJG 2 (flying from Leeuwarden airfield) at 2110 hours on 21 January near Langewijk, near Slochteren, 15kms east of Groningen, Holland.

Sgt Poulton became a POW and the other three crew members were killed. They are buried in the Holten Canadian War Cemetery. Locality: Overijssel, Netherlands.

About the 455 Squadron

No. 455 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force was formed at RAAF Base Williamtown in New South Wales, Australia on 23 May 1941 in accordance with Article XV of the Empire Air Training Scheme. The squadron was formed specifically to operate as a Unit of the Royal Air Force in the European Theatre of Operations. Because of wartime exigencies the squadron's initial personnel in England were drawn from a number of Commonwealth countries including Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Rhodesia, while awaiting the bulk of Australian personnel who were enroute from Australia. On June 6th 1941 the squadron's Commonwealth personnel collected at RAF Station Swinderby in Lincolnshire to formally establish the squadron in England.



The Squadron was to be equipped with Handley Page Hampden bombers and assigned to No.5 Group, Bomber Command in the day/night bomber role. Hampden deliveries and manning were slow and by the end of July 1941 Squadron strength was two Mk.I Hampdens with eight officers and 156 other ranks out of an authorized War Time Manning of 18 Aircraft, 45 officers and 475 other ranks. By late August manning had improved to 16 officers and 323 other ranks but aircraft strength was five machines, of which only two were serviceable. Nonetheless, the push to get an Australian bomber squadron into the War culminated in Squadron's first operational mission on August 29th when one crew flew a 6hr 15min operation against targets in Frankfurt. (Hampden AE296/F crewed by SQNLDR D.J French (P), SGT W.N Pratt (O), FSGT L.J Maidment (WAG) and SGT G. Bernard (WAG), all RAFVR personnel.)

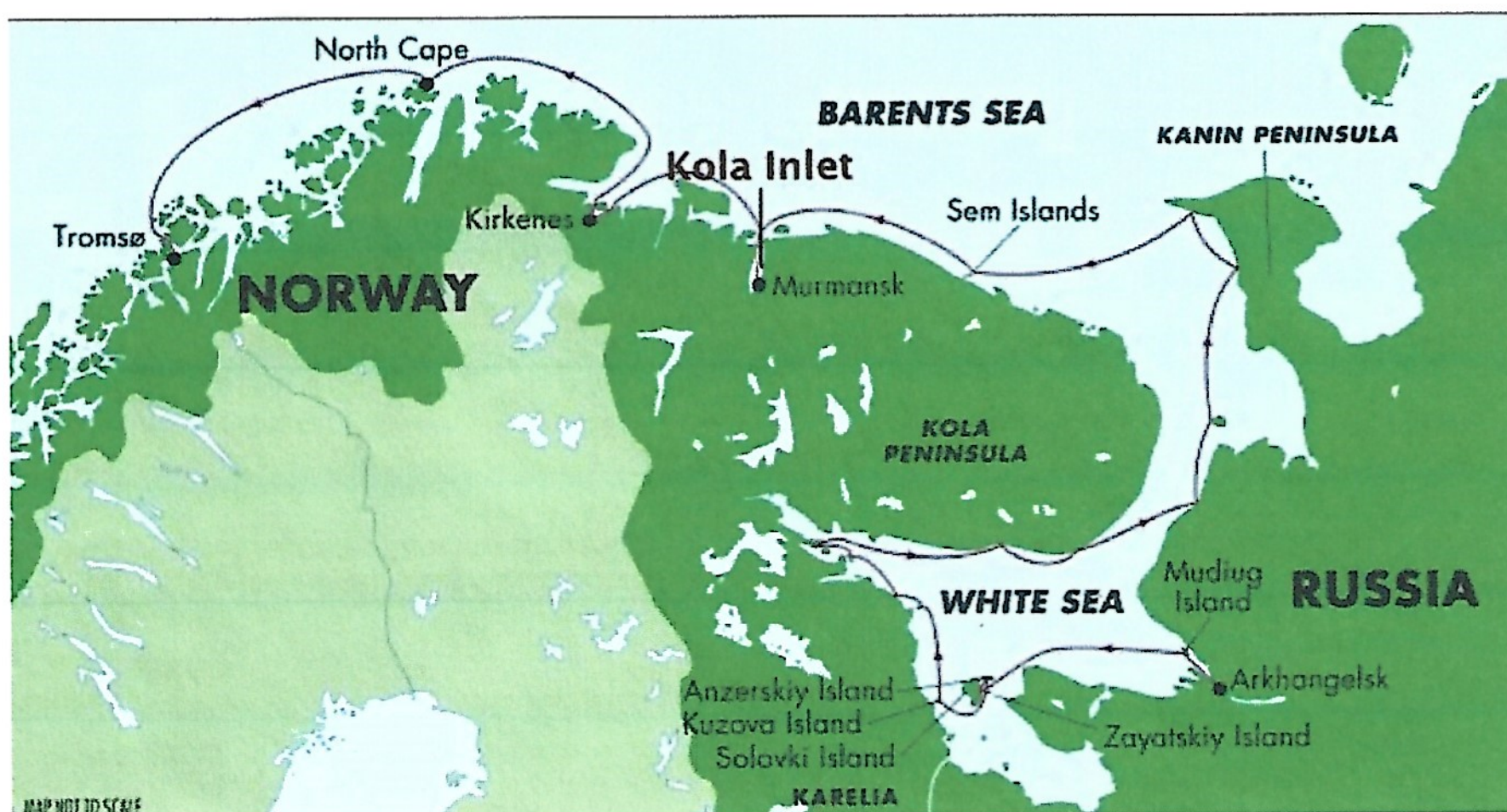
Thus, the media touted 455 Sqn as the 'first Australian squadron to bomb Germany', even though no Australian actually participated in the event. From this very modest beginning the squadron started to slowly increase its operational tempo as more men and aircraft arrived. The Australian ground crew contingent finally arrived in country on 1 September 1941 and coupled with an influx of aircraft the Squadron had sufficient resources to engage in night time mine laying operations off the coast of occupied France and attacks against industrial targets in Germany from October 1941 through March 1942.

One noteworthy incident occurred in February 1942 when the German Navy mounted a large-scale action involving the relocation of the Scharnhorst –class battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau from Brest to German ports. A German flotilla comprising the two battleships, one heavy cruiser, six destroyers and 40 patrol boats departed Brest at 2014hrs on 11Feb42 and headed up the English Channel. When the German breakout was finally noticed the RAF was ordered to attack and 455Sqn despatched nine Hampdens at 1555hrs on 12th Feb. The aircraft could not get into a bombing position and were driven away by the large number of German fighters escorting the flotilla. One Hampden was shot down and the majority of the survivors sustained various degrees of damage.

The Squadron continued in the night/day bomber role for the next two months before the Hampden was deemed unsuitable for use with Bomber Command. In April 1942 the Squadron was moved from Bomber Command to Coastal Command and reequipped with Hampden Mk. I torpedo bombers, the role change also meant a move from RAF Wigsley to RAF Station Leuchars in Scotland. Torpedo bombers began arriving at the Squadron in May 1942 and from then until early July no operational tasks were undertaken with all efforts aimed at training the crews on the new aircraft and torpedo tactics. On 01Jul42 twelve aircraft relocated to RAF Station Wick to undergo final tactical training with major units of the Royal Navy but this training was abruptly curtailed soon after when it was learned the German battleship Tirpitz with the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper and six escorts had sortied from Trondheim, Norway to attack the Soviet bound convoy PQ-17. The squadron Commanding Officer (RAF pilot 37302 Wing Commander Grant Moore Lindeman OBE DFC) led the squadron on a futile search for the German ships. Two days later the squadron repositioned to RAF Sumburgh in the Shetland Islands to prepare for another attack on the German force, now returning to Trondheim. The Commanding Officer again led what proved to be another futile search for the ships.

In early August the Leuchars Strike Wing comprising Hampden torpedo bombers from 144Sqn RAF and 455Sqn RAAF were tasked to provide defence of the Allied Arctic convoy PQ 18 from Vaenga airfield on the Kola Inlet, 40km north of Murmansk. Aground element departed Scotland by ship for Vaenga on 13Aug42 followed by the aircraft on 04Sep42, seventeen departing Leuchars but only thirteen reaching Vaenga as three were lost enroute and one returned to Sumburgh with mechanical issues. After completing one unsuccessful anti-

shipping sweep the remaining aircraft were handed over to the Soviet Air Force with the RAAF crews instructing the Soviets on their operation before their departure in late October.



The Squadron was employed in largely uneventful anti-shipping and anti-submarine patrols during the latter half of 1942 but on 28 Jan 43 claimed their first success when seven aircraft from Nos. 455 and 487 Squadrons sank a 3,570-tonne merchant ship with torpedoes. An interesting event occurred on 30 Apr 43 when a 455 Sqn Hampden (Hampden AN149/X fl own by Aus411768 FSGT J.S Freeth and crew) was providing ASW cover for a coastal convoy and the crew spotted a surfaced U-Boat which they immediately attacked. In two attacks the crew accurately dropped their eight depth charges that straddled the submarine causing it to come to a halt before sliding stern first below the waves. The crew then counted at least 30 survivors (The boat was U-227, a 789 ton Type VIIC submarine on its 1st war patrol under the command of 25 year old Kapitan leutnant Jurgen Kuntz.) in the icy waters in position 64.05N, 06.40W in the Norwegian Sea north of the Faroe Islands. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this engagement was the fact there was no official recognition of the sinking nor an immediate award of decorations for the crew, which was the normal outcome of such a momentous occasion at that stage of the War.

Further success followed in May/Jun 43 when a 6,018-tonne merchantman was sunk near Egero Island, Norway on the 12th; an 8,000 ton tanker was hit and left ablaze off the Norwegian coast on the 15th; and, a 2,500 ton merchant was hit amidships and left ablaze on 19th June. As soon as the brief summer period ended the weather became the dominant factor in operations and for the next few months very little contact was made with the Enemy as crews battled the freezing conditions with severe icing and extremely poor visibility the norm.

By late 1943 the Hampden's limitations could no longer be ignored and the Squadron was informed in November that the Hampdens would be replaced by the Beaufighter TF.X. Thus the Hampden era drew to a close and perusal of the 455 Sqn Operations Record Book reveals that during the 25 months of operations Hampdens flew 1,152 sorties claiming nine merchant vessels and one submarine sunk; six merchants, one destroyer and two submarines heavily damaged. Additionally, one enemy aircraft was destroyed and four damaged. On the debit side of the ledger was the loss of 50 Hampden aircraft plus 68 aircrew killed in action and seven taken prisoner.

455 Squadron is known to have operated 142 Hampdens during the period and 50 aircraft (35%) were lost through a combination of operational and non-operational causes. The remainder of this document briefly details the history of how the 50 aircraft were lost and the fate of the gallant men who flew them.