

The Flying Suitcase - HANDLEY PAGE H.P.52 HAMPDEN

This article is a revision of two articles I published in the RAF WWII SIG newsletter in 1992/3. My original article was followed up with a quantity of information from Squadron Leader A.W. Bennett who flew in Hampdens from March 1939 to the end of 1940.

At the outbreak of war, a year after its entry into service, the Hampden equipped ten squadrons of which six were operational. After heavy daylight losses Hampdens were used on night operations from December 1939 onwards. These included attacking seaplane bases, leaflet dropping and minelaying as well as bombing once the German forces attacked Belgium and Holland. Daylight operations were tried once more during the battle for Norway but were no more successful than before. The Hampden was withdrawn from the bombing role in September 1942, having participated in the 1,000 bomber raids earlier that year but continued as a torpedo bomber with Coastal Command until December 1943. During the course of its career two Hampden aircrew won V.C.'s.

The Airfix kit has had at least two previous lives, first appearing in the late sixties if my memory of purchasing one is correct, then being re-released in the mid-eighties and it has also been released by Bilek in Eastern Europe. The latest release is moulded in grey plastic rather than the black of previous releases and has 3 decal options - the original 'Popeye I' of 49 Squadron; an aircraft of 106 Squadron and the one supplied to Sweden. One bonus on the decals is a quantity of stencilling and the instrument panel (originally printed on the instruction sheet).

The latest mouldings appear to be slightly thinner than the originals, which is particularly beneficial for the transparencies, but do appear to be starting to suffer from the age of the moulds with edges and detail being slightly less crisp. There are also more sink marks to fill and a number of moulding 'bumps' to remove from mating surfaces.

The kit is basically accurate, needing just a couple of minor modifications after which it can be detailed :-

- 1) The wingtips need to be "squared off" - curiously the paint scheme drawings show the correct shape.
- 2) Reshape the top of the fuselage in front of the gunners position to make a more obvious 'hump' rather than a gradual slope.
- 3) The rivets should be removed and panel lines scribed in if you feel that strongly about them.
- 4) Detail the interior and use Falcon Clear-Vax canopies and Aeroclub guns and engines if desired. On the new release the canopies are not so obviously in need of replacement but the engines (a plastic disc with shallow representations of the cylinders) are not particularly convincing.
- 5) One other item I have noticed in some photos is a small window on port side above chart table on some aircraft.

The re-issue of this kit is very welcome and (as seen on the RAF WWII SIG stand at the Nationals last year) an excellent model can be made from it.

As with all aircraft the Hampden received many modifications during its life so references should be checked as much as possible for the following points highlighted by Bill Bennet :-

The initial 1939 deliveries had no spinners, only one aerial fitted (to the starboard fin) and leading edge slots which were bolted shut by a manufacturer's modification party on the Squadron

in August / September 1939 when the leading edge balloon cable cutters were fitted. Other mods carried out at this time were the fitting of spinners, fitting of armour plate to the rear of the pilots seat, fitting of TR9B (in tail boom behind flare chutes) for R/T and intercomm - replacing the Type B amplifier and requiring a second aerial (to the port fin) and the fitting of IFF even further back in the tail boom with aerials running via grommets in the skin to the leading edge of the tailplanes. The fitting of extra equipment in the tail boom caused some friction between armourers and wireless mechs - you could work on the TR9 (just) around the flare chutes but to remove it or the IFF the armourers had to remove the flares and chutes first.

Other modifications were made as time progressed - flame damping exhausts were fitted early in 1940 and the gun deflecting rail for the upper rear guns was fitted when the change from single to twin guns was made after the Norwegian fiasco in April/May 1940. I do not recall anyone hitting their own tail when firing the single gun before this.

There were two steps down to the Nav / Bomb Aimer compartment, the one immediately behind the pilot was the leading edge of the main spar and the second was on the front face of the bomb bay which was angled. Access from rear to front was by sliding prone on your back under the pilots seat. The corresponding rear edge of the main spar was just forward of the bulkhead/ door shown as 18 in the interior drawing. The Elsan sat immediately behind it, invariably used as a step up. After the Norwegian campaign a few Hampdens were fitted at this point with removable panels to provide gun ports for spigot mounted Vickers 'K' guns - not very satisfactory as the width only allowed a gun to be fitted to one side at a time - but it did add more draughts to an already cold aircraft.

To the best of my knowledge the Navigators forward/downward firing 'K' gun was never fitted after the change to night operations - I am not sure if the fixed Browning was ever loaded from then on although photos show it still in place.

Mike Keep's drawings in S.A.M. 9/5 made several errors in the drawings on page 206. As I mentioned the earlier deliveries did not have spinners or a second H.F. aerial or flame damping exhausts. He also shows on all drawings an SBA (beam approach) aerial fitted under the tail boom; I do not know when SBA was first fitted in Hampdens or to how many but I did not know of any fitted with the equipment or aerial before the end of 1940.

I cannot identify the wireless panel (shown as item 16 in the cockpit drawing) - it must have appeared after my time. The Pilot's remote control in my day was on the port side just below the sliding cover sill and consisted of a transmit/off/receive control and a tuning control, connected to the TR9 by helical wound Bowden cables, plus a volume control rheostat in the centre.

The original D/F loop was retractable when aligned athwartships so is not always visible in photos, winding down onto a shelf above the door forward of the W/Op; a top fairing made a flush fit to the fuselage. I do not know exactly when the streamlined loop first appeared.

Mention was also made of the underwing bomb carriers. We carried either a 250 or 500lb. bomb under the wings on many occasions right from the start of the War. G.P. carriers were used, loaded and unloaded by a 'hockey stick' winch (the armourers unloading onto grass was often by pressing the bomb release!).

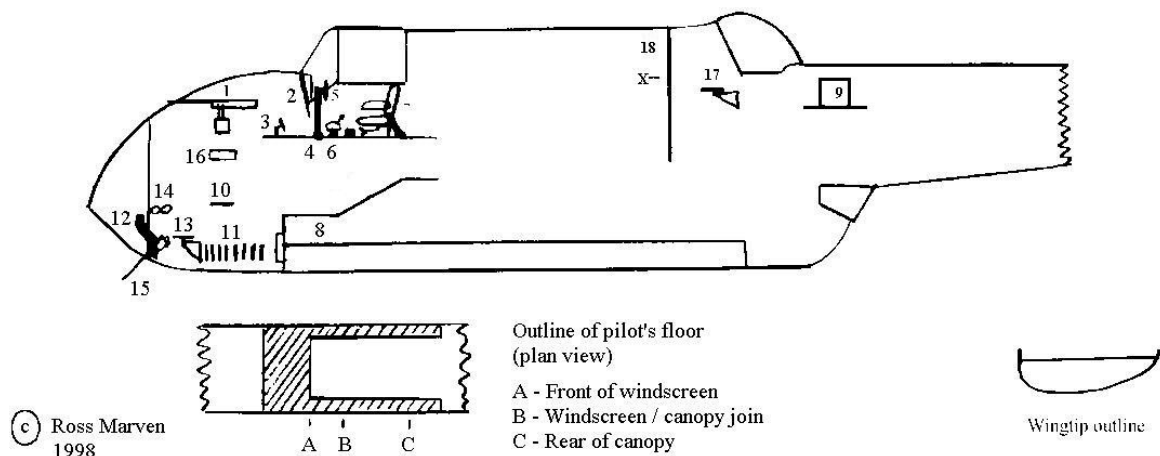
Interiors were initially in matt medium grey but English Electric built models (starting P2062) were in light cockpit green.

The pilot's armour was merely a rectangular sheet with rounded corners fitted between the side rests. It ended about 6" below the fuselage roof and did not fully protect the head of a tall pilot. As the rest of the crew had no protection sympathy was lacking !

Suggested references:-

- 1) Profile No. 58.
- 2) Scale Models International September 1986 (article with plans and colour side views).
- 3) Air International November 1984 (Vol.27 No.5 - Warbirds article with cutaway).
- 4) Air Enthusiast 14 (article on operations with cutaway).
- 5) Air Enthusiast September 1971 (Vol.1 No.4 - Viewed from the Cockpit article with photo of the pilots cockpit).
- 6) Aviation News Vol.6 No.9 (Warpaint - plans and side view drawings)
- 7) Scale Aircraft Modelling February 1987 (Vol.9 No.5 - don't be fooled by their top views, they are both Scheme 'B' in spite of the captions !).
- 8) The Hampden File by Harry Moyle (published by Air-Britain).
- 9) War in The Air - Issue 3, August 1989 (two cutaways).Forgotten Bombers of the RAF by Ken Wixey (published by Arms and Armour).
- 10) Hampden Special by Chaz Bowyer (published by Ian Allan).
- 11) Hampden Squadrons in Focus by Mark Postlethwaite (published by Red Kite)

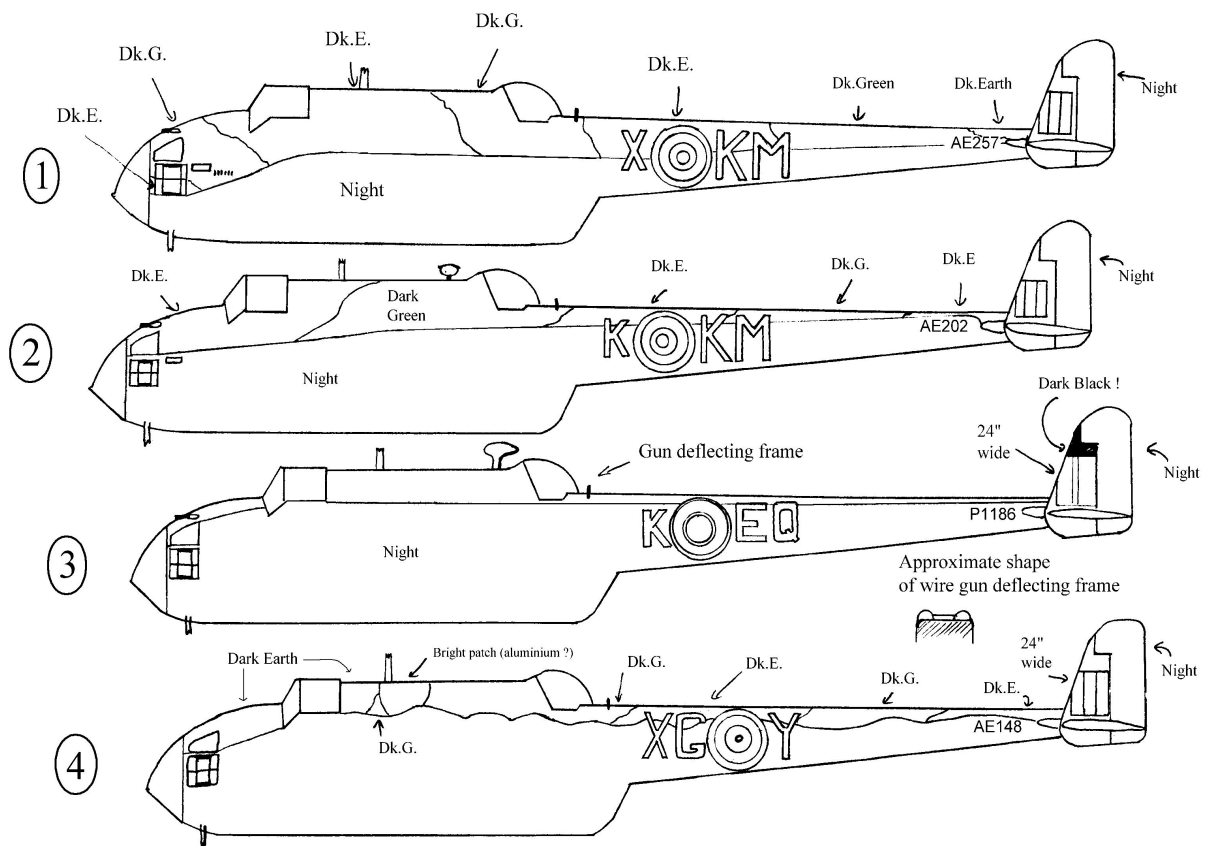
Sketch of Internal Layout



Key to interior detail drawing :-

- 1) .303 fixed Browning and ammunition container; 2) Instrument panel; 3) Rudder pedals;
- 4) Floor; 5) Control column; 6) Engine & propeller controls; 7) Pilots seat (with folding arms and back); 8) Bomb bay; 9) Wireless on sliding mount; 10) Folding chart table; 11) Flame float stowage; 12) Bomb sight; 13) Folding seat; 14) Spare ammunition drums; 15) Vickers 'K' gun; 16) Window to be added to some aircraft; 17) Gunners seat; 18) Bulkhead with central door below.

Side Views of Example Aircraft



Handley-Page Hampden

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Key to side views. -

1) No. 44 "Rhodesia" Squadron - from photos in Aviation News/Profile/Forgotten Bombers and Air Enthusiast 14. Twin dorsal & ventral guns, no 'K' gun in nose, 6 white mission markers (?) behind additional window on nose, escape hatch built into nose side window (note framing). 'B' camouflage scheme, natural metal cowling gills with codes and serials in red or grey or grey code / red serial (it's impossible to tell!). Note the lettering styles are subtly different to Modeldecal! The fuselage type 'A1' roundel seems to be 42" diameter and 21" fin flash fits my drawing best although 24" would be standard.

2) Shown in the same photos this has 'A' scheme camouflage and different upper/lower surface division. Note early DF loop and different code style from 1). The code and serial do seem to be different shades so medium sea grey codes and red serials are likely.

3) No. 408 (RCAF) Squadron during 1942. Late Df loop with underwing bomb racks. The roundels and fin flash appear to have been overpainted from type 'A1' & 'A' to 'C1' & 'C' and codes and serials are red. The camouflage pattern is not easily discernable but my bet would be 'A'.

4) 16 OTU. No Browning in nose, practice bomb racks underwing. 'A' scheme with grey codes and serials.