

Captain Thomas Alexander Batchelor. Distinguished Flying Cross. Air Force Cross



Captain Batchelor joined 214 Squadron in April 1918. He was wounded during a raid on the Zeebrugge Lock Gates on the night of 2nd/3rd May 1918. He was then posted as Officer Commanding 207 Squadron R.A.F., on 26th July 1918. He was an inventor who was involved in a number of developments regarding bomb aiming and navigation.

Born on 24/04/1886 at Aldershot, Hampshire, England. Son of Captain Thomas Batchelor of the King's Own Regiment who died in 1917. He did not follow his father into the Army but joined the Royal Navy.

- July 1903. Assistant Clerk R.N. *H.M.S. Wildfire*.
- April 1907. Assistant Paymaster and Additional secretary to the Captain of *H.M.S. Dreadnought*.
- Paymaster R.N.A.S Calshot
- 11th November 1915. Transferred as Acting Flight Lieutenant to R.N.A.S.
- 17th December 1915. Gained Royal Aero Club Certificate in a Maurice Farman Biplane at Central Flying School Upavon.



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- March 1916- July 1917. Served as Armaments Officer at R.N.A.S. Cranwell and Frieston.
- 31/12/1916. Promoted to Flight Commander
- July 1917 to March 1918. Served at the Air Ministry. Hotel Cecil.
- April 1918. Posted to 214 Squadron.
- 02/05/1918 Target Zeebrugge Lock Gates. Captains Darley and Batchelor attempt experimental low level gliding attack.

A great deal of planning had gone into trying to find the best way of putting the Zeebrugge Lock Gates out of action. After the war, Major Brackley was to give a lecture to fliers of the Imperial Japanese Navy, in which he described the operations against the Zeebrugge Lock Gates. Extracts from this lecture, were included by his widow, in her book, Brackley, F.H. (1952) *Brackles: Memoirs of a Pioneer of Civil Aviation*. Chatham, W and J Mackay and Company Limited.

“If only we could have burst the Lock gates during a low tide period the immense pressure of water in the canal would rush out into the sea. The only way to hope for success was to wait for a favourable opportunity when there would be a large number of destroyers at Bruges and along the canal, choose a time when the tide was going out and attack the Lock gates from a very low altitude, with delayed fuses so that the machine could get away before the explosion took place.”

“The late Major Batchelor (the inventor of the Batchelor Mirror for Bombing Practice) came to my Squadron to study this particular operation. He invented a special bomb sight for use in the operation. I decided to send two machines, one of which Major Batchelor would pilot and the other my senior flight commander, the late Major Darley. It was necessary to practice for this operation. Both these officers with their specially selected Observers and Gunners were accordingly sent to Cranwell Air Station in England. There they had marked out on the ground a full scale model of the lock gates they were to bomb. The idea was to carry out this operation in conjunction with our usual nightly programme; but the two special machines were to glide with their engines throttled right down from 9,000 feet as slowly as possible so that the noise of the machine would be as little as possible. They were to judge their glide with reference to the wind so as to be over the lock gates at about 80 feet.’ Captain Batchelor had designed a special low altitude bomb sight was used for this purpose. ‘One bomb was to be released close to the North Gate, one between the gates and one just south of the South Gate. It was hoped that the sudden expansion of water (pressure) due to the explosions would burst the gates, especially as two machines were to try the same thing. ‘The pilots tossed a coin to decide who was to go first to stir up the Hornet’s Nest and the second one followed the first one minute later”.

The two specially selected crews were very much the ‘A’ team of 214 Squadron at the time. Captain Batchelor had Sgt. Bager as his Observer and ‘Tiny’ Wardrop as Rear

Gunner. Captain Darley had Lt H.A. Clark as his Observer and the other Lt Clark, A. R. Clark as the Rear Gunner.

Recommendation for the Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross

'For conspicuous determination and gallantry. On the early morning of the 3rd instant he took off to bomb Zeebrugge Mole and Lock Gates, under the following circumstances: The weather conditions on the night of the 2nd/3rd instant were not good as the Moon was late and there was a ground mist. It was decided however to undertake the operation. He set out at 2:30 am in the company of another machine. The other machine had engine trouble and returned after getting over the objective and putting the enemy thoroughly on the alert. Captain Batchelor, crossing the Mole at 500 feet, released his bombs, coming under intense anti-aircraft and machine gun fire. He was wounded in the wrist but still kept on and attempted to take the line over the lock gates. He was unable to keep the machine on the correct course owing to the wound in his arm and on account of being blinded by the searchlights'.

'The return journey was made under great difficulties. Capt. Batchelor was in severe pain and suffering from loss of blood, which made it particularly difficult for him to control the heavy machine (a Handley Page) that he was flying. His petrol tank also had been hit. However, by the exercise of great determination and skill this was successfully accomplished and he made a perfect landing.'

'He invariably displays great bravery and skill in action and his presence of mind and determination on this occasion set a very fine example to the pilots of his squadron'.

- Citation for Medals

The auctioneers, Spink, in their catalogue dated 22/11/2012 identified that Thomas Archibald Batchelor also qualified for the 1914 Star.

1914 Star

The 1914 Star was authorised in April 1917 to be awarded to those who served in France or Belgium on the strength of a unit, or who served in either of those two countries between 5 August 1914 and midnight on 22/23 November 1914.

1914 Star Roll gives entitlement to medal as "Ass. Payr. R.N. Compensation Officer" and the medal was 'Retd. To Royal Mint in 1934'.



Captain Batchelor's Medals. From 2012 Spink Auctioneer's Catalogue

Citation for the Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross

'Displayed great gallantry, determination and skill in a night bombing raid under exceptionally adverse conditions. Two machines set out on this raid, but an accident befell one of them, which gave the enemy warning, and Capt. Batchelor's machine was subjected to very intense fire. He continued his course, and dropped his bombs on a vulnerable position in the enemy's strong post from a height of 500 feet. He was wounded in the arm, but managed with great difficulty to return. The loss of blood consequent on the wound made it very difficult to control the heavy machine, the petrol tank of which had been hit. He invariably displays great bravery and skill in action.'

London Gazette. 2nd July 1918

Citation for the Award of the Air Force Cross

'For distinguished service rendered during the war'.

London Gazette. 3rd June 1919

- 26th July 1918. Posted as Officer Commanding 207 Squadron, Ligescourt.
- 7th August 1918. Wounded leading bombing raid on Peronne Railway Sidings.
- Invalided back to the U.K.
- Posted to No.2 School of Navigation and Bombing.
- 22nd April 1919. Died in flying accident

Major Batchelor was killed in a night flying accident on 22/04/1919. He died aged 32. He was the son of Capt. T. Batchelor (4th King's Own); husband of Una Batchelor, of 30, Hampstead Rd., Preston Park, Brighton. He is buried at Penton Mewsey (Holy Trinity) Churchyard, Hampshire.

Major Batchelor was one of a seven man crew flying HP F 3748, which crashed on take-off at RAF Andover. The Handley Page O/400 of 2 School of Navigation and Bomb Dropping was taking off at night from RAF Andover, Weyhill, Hampshire, when the aircraft crashed into a building. The aircraft caught fire, killing five of the seven crew.

"The engines were started at 1.40. After running a short while the revolution counter showed the engines to be all right. The crew got into the machine and were in their places just after two o'clock. Major Batchelor ran the engines again. "All clear" was asked for, and witness gave the signal. The machine taxied to the west end of the flare line, at 2.20 the throttle was pushed gradually over, and the machine started. About three parts along the flare line the tail lifted, and as near as he could judge left the ground shortly after passing the red lamp. She seemed to be going slightly to the right. Immediately afterwards he heard two slight crashes at short intervals, followed by a very loud crash. From the time of the first crash to the final one the engines were still running and did not change note. Witness went to the scene of the crash and found the machine piled up and blazing furiously against the north wall of No. 9 hut". Account possibly taken at the Coroner's Inquest and published in a local newspaper.

'Major Batchelor's death was a severe loss to the to the peacetime RAF as his contribution to navigation training was very great development of low-level bombing at Cranwell... Probably his most important invention was the Batchelor Mirror for Training bomb aimers.' Spink Catalogue 22/11/12.

Major Batchelor's medals were sold at auction by London auctioneers, Spink, for £4,800 in November 2012. The expected price was £2,000 to £3,200.



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