

LT. REGINALD BINCKES No. 214 SQUADRON RAF

19TH DECEMBER 1892 - 21ST JULY 1918



Reginald Binckes was 25 years old when he died, after his Handley Page bomber over-turned taking off from an airfield a few miles south west of Calais. He was in France on active service for only five weeks before his death on 21st July 1918. Reginald joined No 214 Squadron RAF based at Dunkerque in early June 1918. He took part in bombing raids on heavily defended targets such as Bruges and survived being shot down by anti-aircraft fire and crashing between the lines in No Man's Land.

Reginald was born in December 1892. Between 1906-1911 Reginald went to Dame Alice Owen's Boys' School in Islington. He joined the Civil Service on the 16th July 1912 at the age of 19 working for Customs and Excise for the next five years. On the 29th July 1917 Reginald enlisted with the Royal Naval Air Service.

On joining up Reginald was passed fit for General Service by the Navy and given the rank of Temporary Probationary Flying Officer and was posted to HMS President at Crystal Palace in South London for his basic training. Reginald was there for approximately 5 weeks.

On the 4th September 1917 Reginald was posted to Vendome in France for pilot training. Reginald was to be at Vendome for seven weeks or so from 4th September 1917 to 30th October 1917. Reginald's

service record states that he had 10 hours on Caudron G3s. Reginald probably went solo within two or three weeks, about the 20th September. By the 20th October 1917 Reginald is going on solo cross country flights and getting lost in the process or coming down with engine trouble. Reginald probably progressed onto the Curtiss JN4 Jenny. His service record shows him with 5 hours on the Curtiss.

Reginald was posted back to England on 30th October 1917. He was posted to RNAS Cranwell in Lincolnshire. Reginald was at Cranwell until the beginning of March 1918. Reginald gained experience flying different machines. He logged 3 hours on Avro 504s. He also logged 15 hours on Royal Aircraft Factory BE2cs and BE2es. He logged 5 hours on De Havilland DH4s. On the 24th January 1918 Reginald was promoted to Flight Sub Lieutenant (Temporary).

Reginald is then posted to Freiston Gunnery School RNAS was where the trainee pilots got to use live ammunition, firing machine guns and dropping bombs. Reginald's service record card shows his live firing proficiency.

- 'Firing in Air V.G. (Very good ?)'
- 'Bombing. 1st Class'

On 1st March 1918 Reginald is sent to the No. 1 School of Aerial Navigation and Bomb Dropping based at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. He was there for three months but a lot of his time will be spent hanging around due to poor weather and poor organisation. He will spend a lot of time on leave.

At Stonehenge he learnt to fly the very large Handley Page twin engine bombers, the 'Bloody Paralysers' that he will fly on active service. He will also practice night flying. His log book credits him with 1 hour's flying time on the Maurice Farman Shorthorn. He probably flew FE2b or FE2d pusher designs during his training for the HP0/400.

Reginald finished at Stonehenge on 26th May 1918. The next day finds out that he is being posted to No 214 Squadron at Coudekerque just outside Dunkirk in France. The date of this posting on his Service Record is 29th May 1918. Reginald arrived at No 214 Squadron sometime between the 8th and the 11th June. It looks like he was given some leave at the start of June before travelling to France.

Reginald had been in training for the best part of a year and according to his Service Record available on line from the National Archive in Kew he completed at least 39 hours of flying training before going on active service. Reginald was to fly in Handley Page O/100 and O/400 heavy bombers on active service.

On June 12th– 13th 1918 Reginald Binckes flies as Air Gunner in HP 5401 with Lt Freer as pilot and Corporal Wardrop as observer. This may even be his first mission. Reginald was flying in the rear cockpit of the aircraft, manning three Lewis machine guns, one of which fired underneath the plane. Corporal Wardrop's log book describes the short flight at 9:35pm on 12th June; ***'Flew to sands in readiness for raid. Weather unfavourable, three machines only carried out raid'***.

On the night of the 13th - 14th June 1918 Reginald flies in HP 5401 again with Lt Freer as pilot and Corporal Wardrop as observer, Ghisteltes Aerodrome is the target. They carried a bomb load of 16 x 112lb bombs. The crew took off at 9:30pm and returned at 11:45pm. The flight took 2 hours 15 minutes and climbed to 7000 feet.

Reginald was back flying on a raid to Bruges in HP 5401 with Freer and Wardrop on the night of the 15th and 16th of June. D5401 was hit by AA at 10,000 feet above Bruges. The starboard propeller and radiator were hit and the pilot shut the starboard engine down and had to throttle back the port engine. The pilot then glided from Bruges back to the lines. Because they were going so slowly in the glide they were held in the search lights and subject to very intense fire. D5401 was riddled but none of the crew were hit. The plane glided to the lines and crashed on the beach in No Man's Land at Nieupoort.

Corporal Wardrop's log book summarised the damage that the anti aircraft fire had done to HP D5401. The crew were lucky to survive the trip. ***'Warm trip. Visibility was fair. Our star engine was hit three times aerilon control(s?) shot away elevators and planes punctured. This was done by AA over Bruges.'*** All three crew survived the crash and took cover in shell holes in No Man's Land. They were rescued by Belgian troops.

The weather then took a turn for the worst and there was to be no night bombing operations for the next four nights. Reginald did not fly on night operations on these four days but he would probably have done some day flights when weather permitted, familiarising himself with the local area and the squadron aircraft.

It is not clear if there were any operational missions on the 22nd and 23rd of June. Missions had definitely restarted on 24th-25th June 1918. Eight HPs attack Bruges docks, La Brugeoise Works, two canals and Maria Aalter airfield. Reginald may have flown on this mission. That night 5th Group bombers from No 214 Squadron and No. 38 Squadron dropped six and a quarter tons of bombs in good visibility over Zeebrugge, Bruges docks and the canals in the area. Fires were started and all aircraft returned safely. The Squadron attacks Bruges again the next night 25th-26th June.

On the 26th June 1918 all operations are halted for No. 214 Squadron as they prepare to move 30 miles west, from Dunkerque to St Inglevert, on the other side of Calais. This move has been necessitated by the sustained German air raids on Coudekerque and surrounding airfields earlier in the month. The decision to move No 214 Squadron from Coudekerque is fully vindicated on the 27th June 1918 when the airfield again became a target for 'Long Max' the biggest artillery gun in the world.

On the 27th June 1918 No. 214 Squadron are not flying as they are preparing to move from Coudekerque. The weather on the night of the 27th -28th was bad and none of 5th Group night bombers flew that night. ***'No night work possible due to weather conditions'*** AIR/1/456/15/312/54. It appears that there were no operational flights the following day either on the 28th June. On the 29th June 1918 No. 214 Sqn RAF moves to St Inglevert. This airbase is 8 miles SW of Calais. The Squadron are back in business that night on 29th-30th June 1918. Six HPs attacked an ammunition dump at Stahillebrugge. This dump was located on the banks of the canal between Ostend and Bruges. Reginald probably flew on this mission as an Air Gunner.

On the night of the 30th June 1918, 5th Group night bombers are very active attacking Bruges, Maria Alter, Varsenaire, Vlisseghen and Ghistelles aerodromes and Ostend Docks in poor visibility. It is likely that No 214 Squadron attacked Bruges and Maria Aalter aerodrome. 32 x 112lb bombs and 3 x 550lb bombs were dropped on the airfield. Reginald might have flown on this mission and the next.

It appears that a further period of poor weather limited flying for the next four days or so. There were no missions on the night of the 3rd July 1918. **'No flying possible last night due to the weather conditions'**. The following day was very similar, **'Weather conditions during the night unfavourable for night flying'**.

Operations resumed on 5th July when Ostend, Zeebrugge and enemy shipping were attacked by night bombers. It is not clear if some or all of the locations were targets to No. 214 Squadron. On the 6th July the bombers took off but were forced to return due to poor weather. **'Machines which started for bomb raid last night, returned without attacking objective due to the weather'**.
AIR/1/456/15/312/54

On 7th-8th July 1918 the squadron attacked regular targets with raids on Maria Aalter and Ghisteltes airfield and Bruges docks. Reginald may have flown that night, as the pilot of HP 9643, Lt. Ellison records flying with a new observer in his log book for their raid on Bruges docks.

Another period of bad weather sets in and Reginald and No. 214 Squadron do not fly any night bombing missions for five consecutive nights. Possibly 12 or 13 nights in July 1918 were washed out because of poor weather.

On the night of 13th -14th July 2018 Reginald is flying as rear gunner on a mission to Bruges this trip to Bruges with the experienced crew of Lt Ellison as pilot and Sgt Dell as his observer. Handley Page O/400 9643 took off at 9:52pm for a raid on the eastern side of the docks at Bruges. The mission lasted 2 hours 40 mins. They climbed to 10,000 feet and had Calais, Dunkirk, Furnes and the enemy airfield at Ghisteltes as way points. The bombing attack on Bruges started at 11:23pm. The plane approached the target from the north and with good visibility they dropped to a height of 8,500feet to drop their bombs in a steady straddle over the eastern side of the dock

To avoid the heavy anti-aircraft fire the HP flew north or north west to pass along the coast out of range of the guns. As they passed over Ostend on their return leg they dropped two of the four 25lb Coopers bombs on enemy shipping before landing safely on Mardyck Sands.

On the 17th July 1918 Reginald crashes and is seriously injured in HP O/400 C9646. Reginald and his two crew man, Lt. D R Tullis and Ensign Stocker of the US Navy, started their take off at St Inglevert. The aircraft was taking off, uphill, fully loaded, when the wheels caught in a tall wheat crop and caused the plane to nose over. All three crew members were injured, with Reginald's injuries being very serious. According to Leslie Semple's diary, Stocker got concussion and some reports say that Lt David Tullis was also injured. Reginald was transferred to hospital in Calais after the crash.



Remains of the pilot's seat

The remains of HP 0/400 C9646 at St Inglevert. Photographed by Lt. D. R. Tullis who was piloting the aircraft when it crashed on take-off. Photo by kind permission of Mr Brian Tullis

The day after the crash, 18th July 1918 Reginald was being treated in Field Hospital 308/3. The initial diagnosis was that he was dangerously ill with concussion and this was later changed. The card reads

'Corrected diagnosis frac. spine'. On the 19th July Reginald remained dangerously ill in hospital with concussion and a fractured spine. The weather took a turn for the worst during the day and yet again this wet and soggy July there were no night operations **'No night bombing due to unfavourable weather'**.

Reginald Binckes finally succumbed to his injuries and died at 4:45pm on the 21st July 1918 from the fractured spine he suffered in the crash four days previously. It appears that a letter was sent to his next of kin the same day. Reginald's Casualty Record card in the RAF Museum archive suggests that he was buried at 1:30 on 21st July. This must be an error and his burial at the Les Baraques Military Cemetery at Sangatte, just west of Calais must have been the following day, 22nd July 1918. Alternatively if he died at 4:45am and not 4:45pm on the 21st July the afternoon burial at 1:30pm would have been possible

ROYAL AIR FORCE. F.S. Form 558

KILLED CASUALTY CARD. *R.A.F. - 616895*

Surname **BINCKES** *Lieut.* Branch File No. _____
 Christian Name *Reginald*
 Regiment *R.A.F.* Squadron *214.*

Date of Report.	By whom reported.	Reference to List.	Date of Casualty.	NATURE OF CASUALTY.	Date published in Press.
18.7.18.	<i>566th Calais</i>	<i>F.H. 304/2</i>		<i>Dangerously ill Concussion</i>	
18.7.18.	<i>do</i>	<i>F.H. 305/2</i>		<i>Corrected diagnosis frac spine.</i>	
21.7.18.	<i>566th Calais</i>	<i>F.H. 309/5 21.7.18</i>		<i>Died. Letter 21.7.18.</i>	KING'S LIST. 685
21.7.18.	<i>566th Calais</i>	<i>F. 35</i>	<i>21.7.18</i>	<i>Died of Injuries</i>	
22.7.18.	<i>566th Calais</i>	<i>F.H. 311</i>	<i>21.7.18</i>	<i>Died 4.45 p.m. Fract. Spine (Acute)</i>	

Buried: - Les Baraques Mil. Cem. Sangatte 1.30. 21-7-18

'Am very very sorry that poor old Binckes has gone under. He was a topping fellow. Most obliging and a really good chum. He was an old Owenian and would go out of his way to help anybody. A real loss to the service he was a really good pilot'. Leslie Semple. Pilot with No. 207 Squadron. Diary entry July 23rd 1918

News of Reginald Binckes death is sent to his family. This is a double blow for the family after Reginald's father's death only four weeks before. His next of kin now listed in his service records is his mother Charlotte Elizabeth Binckes. It appears that following Reginald's father's death the family have now moved from Clerkenwell to 7 Fairfield Road, Crouch End. N8.

Reginald's Service Record in the **National Archive at Kew** is stamped **'SERVICE CONSIDERED FOR THE GRANT OF WAR MEDALS'**. Although he was only on active service for five weeks Reginald had done his duty for his King and Country. He had been on a number of missions over enemy territory and he had now paid the ultimate price. The website **Forces War Records** indicates that he was eligible for two medals, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Reginald Binckes's death and service to his country were recorded by his old school. Reginald was one of 160 young men, who had gone to Dame Alice Owens Boy's School, who made the ultimate sacrifice. Reginald's name and theirs are carved on the school memorial stone that is in the grounds of the school now relocated to Potters Bar.