

Ensign Robert Maury Stocker Junior.

United States Naval Air Service 20th September 1897 – 24th November 1919

On attachment to No. 214 Sqn RAF 8th-23rd July 1918

Members of the United States Naval Air Service (USNAS) were attached to No 214 Squadron in June and July of 1918. Ensign Stocker was one of those American personnel. He was attached to No. 214 Squadron for less than two weeks. According to the ***Weekly Returns of 5th Group Officers and Pilots***, Ensign Stocker arrived between the 8th and the 15th July and had been posted out by the 23rd July.

USNAS personnel were attached to No 214 Squadron because the Americans were planning to set up their own strategic bombing force during WW1, called the Northern Bombing Group, flying DH4s as day bombers and Italian Capronis as night bombers.

On the 17th July 1918 Ensign Stocker was flying in the rear cockpit of HP 0/400 C9646 on a day time training mission. The pilot was Lt. D. R. Tullis and the Observer was Lt. R. Binckes. C9646 started its take-off run but failed to leave the ground properly and crashed nose first, almost turning over on its back, and completely destroying the front cockpits of the plane.

Tullis and Binckes were thrown out of the plane. Binckes broke his spine but fortunately Tullis was uninjured. Stocker may have been injured in the crash and suffered concussion.

Ensign Robert Maury Stocker Jr of the United States Navy Air Service (USNAS) was born on 20th September 1897. He was born into a naval family and his father was a Captain in the US Navy who would retire as a Rear Admiral in 1937. Robert Stocker qualified as a naval pilot at Hampton Roads in Virginia in November 1917.



Robert Maury Stocker was US Naval Aviator No 141 and his aero certificate is dated 18th December 1917 and signed by the then Secretary of State for the US Navy, a certain Franklin D Roosevelt. Very shortly after the crash of C9646 Stocker appears to have transferred from No 214 Squadron to a US Navy bombing unit that was part of the Northern Bombing Group.

Binckes and Stocker probably already knew each other before transferring to No 214 Squadron. Both men had previously been at Stonehenge at the No. 1 School of Aerial Navigation and Bomb Dropping, possibly at the same time. They had a mutual friend in Lt. Leslie Semple who was also a Handley Page pilot with No. 207 Sqn. Leslie Semple kept a diary and was a keen photographer. His diary, log book and some photos are now part of the IWM collection. Semple's diary entry for July 23rd 1918 mentions the crash of C9646... ***'Ensign Stocker, another chum of mine, was also in the bus and he received concussion'***



Ensigns Taylor (left) and Stocker (right) of the USNAS. The photo was taken in the tented night flying camp on the Stonehenge Airfield. IWM HU 38995.

The only Northern Bombing Group night raid was made on 15 August 1918 by a single Ca.5 bomber, B-5, to Ostend; but seven United States Navy pilots and about 40 enlisted men participated in several raids flying two No. 214 Squadron RAF Handley Page bombers from St Inglevert.

Robert Stocker served with distinction until the Armistice and was awarded the Naval Cross. His medal citation reads.... ***'The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Ensign Robert M. Stocker, United States Navy (Reserve Force), for distinguished and heroic service as an Aviator of land planes attached to the Northern Bombing Group in active operations co-operating with the Allied Armies on the Belgian front during September, October and November, 1918, bombing enemy bases, aerodromes, submarine bases, ammunition dumps, railroad junctions, etc.'***

Tragically, having survived the dangers of active service in France, Robert Maury Stocker was to die in a flying accident only a year later on November 24th 1919. His plane, a Briggs F Boat, A5255, crashed into the Delaware River. Stocker and the other crew man died. Unfortunately Stocker's body was not found for a further four months on 19th March 1920.

Funeral of Robert Stocker Jr.

'Remains of young aviator were found yesterday in the Delaware River'

.....Lieutenant Stocker, who distinguished himself by saving two men after his arms were broken in France, was a naval aviator at the time of his tragic death. He was making an exhibition flight when the big seaplane fell into the water, killing Lieutenant Stocker and his companion. Although a search has been constantly made for the body the remains were only found yesterday.Lieutenant Stocker graduated from the Hampton high school and had joined the aviation corps when the call came for troops. He went to France and was in the flying corps about a year, when his machine fell and his arms were broken. Two of his companions were badly hurt, and the machine caught fire. Lieutenant Stocker heroically saved his companions by pulling them from the burning machine. He was 22 years old.

Extracts from Robert Stocker's Funeral Notice and Obituary. The Daily Press March 20th 1920