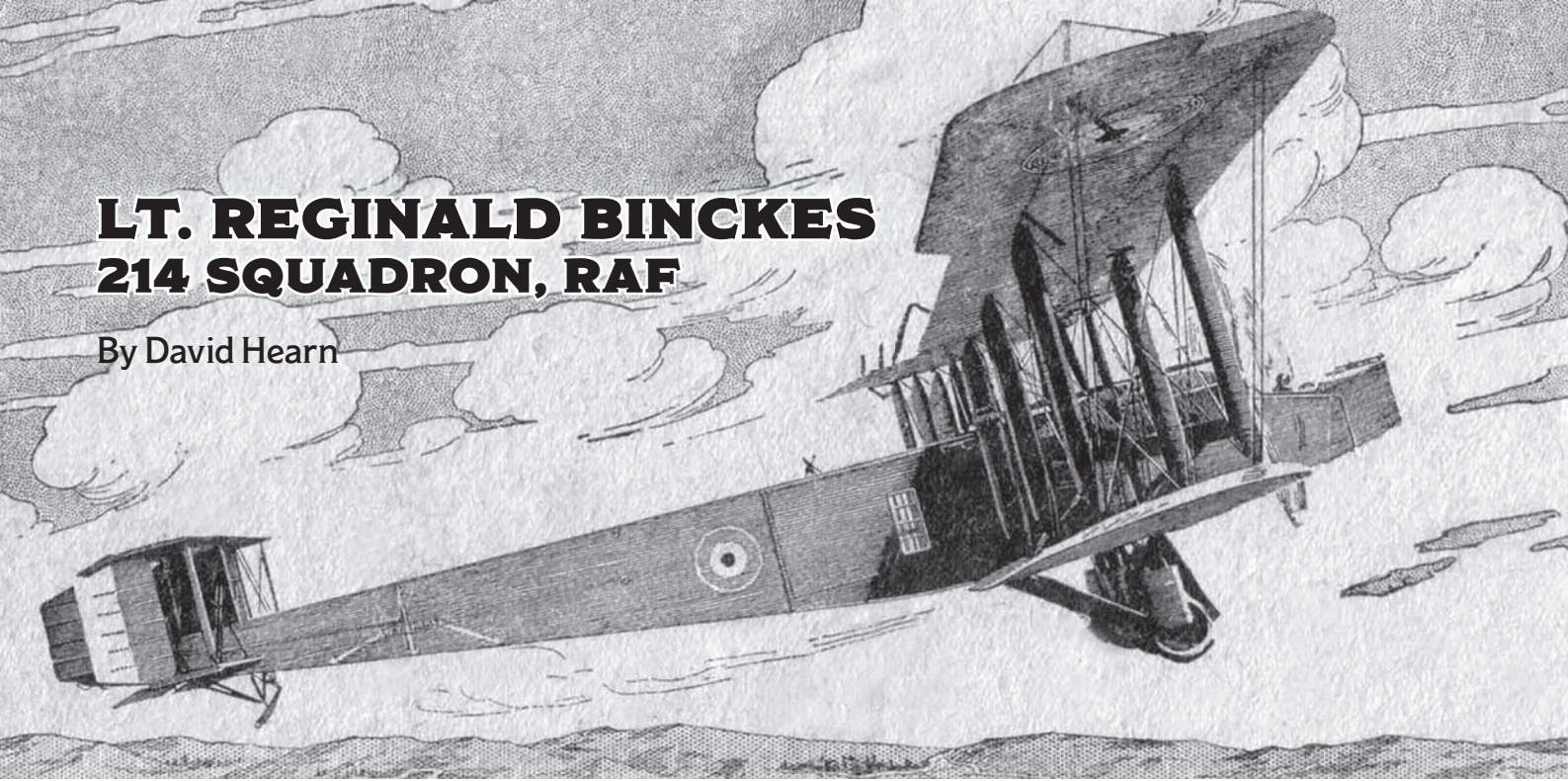


# LT. REGINALD BINCKES 214 SQUADRON, RAF

By David Hearn



*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, 207 Squadron pilot, diary entry for 23 July 1918: IWM Documents Department. Private Papers of Lieutenant L.G. Semple RAF. Documents 4517)

Reginald Binckes, my grandmother's brother and my great uncle, was born on 19 December 1892. He was to die, like so many of the young men of his generation, in France in 1918. He was 25 years old when he died, after his Handley Page bomber crashed 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.

Reginald joined 214 Squadron RAF, based at Dunkerque in early June 1918, at a very crucial time. The Germans had once again reached the River Marne and were only 50 miles from Paris. 214 Squadron was a night bombing squadron that was fully committed to the battle. They were flying strategic raids on Bruges to destroy the submarine pens and destroyers based at the inland docks. The ports of Bruges, Ostend and Zeebrugge formed a triangle of targets regularly attacked by 214 Squadron and other night and day bomber units. The squadron was also attacking German airfields in Belgium from which Gothas and Zeppelin Staaken 'Giant's' took off to bomb London. Important railway junctions, stations and sidings were other strategic targets for the 214 Squadron night bombing crews.

On 17 July 1918, Reginald's plane crashed on take-off. Reginald was thrown 30 feet out of the wreckage and broke his spine. He lived for a further four days and died on 21 July 1918 at 4:45 in the afternoon. He was buried the next day at Les Baraques Military Cemetery, Sangatte just outside Calais.

In the five weeks that Reginald was a member of the squadron, he did his duty for both King and Country and his family can be proud

of this. He took part in bombing raids on heavily defended targets and survived being shot down by anti-aircraft fire and crashing between the lines in No Man's Land. The airfield at Dunkerque was regularly under attack from German bombers and long-range guns. Even when he was not flying missions, he was still in danger from enemy action.

A chance finding of Reginald's Casualty Record card online at the RAF Museum was the discovery which led to me writing this account of Reginald's service history. I have written it as a tribute to a distant relative and gallant airman, who my grandmother loved dearly, and who was killed more than 100 years ago. I feel that it is timely that Reginald's service to his country should be properly recognised and recorded. Reginald Binckes was one of over 14,000 British pilots who lost their lives during training or on active service during the First World War.

It has been an enjoyable treasure hunt to find out about Reginald Binckes and his war time service. I have been pleasantly surprised with the amount of official records that still survive today. I must make special mention of Clive Semple's book *Diary of a Night Bomber Pilot in World War I* that was written from his father's, Leslie Semple's, war time diary. Leslie Semple and Reginald were great friends. I was able to use the book and then Leslie Semple's actual diary at the Imperial War Museum to piece together an account of Reginald's training in France and England.

I felt a genuine sense of awe and privilege when I was able to read Lt Ellison's log books in the Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds. It was such an honour and very humbling to be able to open these fragile documents and read what Lt Ellison had written over a hundred years ago. I remember the great thrill whenever I saw Reginald's name written in a log book or in a document. I knew that I was finding another piece of the jig saw. It was a delight to hear Tiny Wardop's hour long oral history in the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive and the matter of fact way that he described some truly amazing

*Reginald Binckes: 19 December 1892 – 21 July 1918*

