

Air ace retired to Kilcreggan

Written by Donald Fullarto - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 February 2013 18:43



A PIONEER of combat flying spent the last two decades of his life living at Kilcreggan.

Group Captain Charles Findlay DFC, AFC, died at his peninsula home in 1971 at the age of 80.

In the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War he was an ace pilot credited with 14 aerial victories, and he went on to have an outstanding career in the Royal Air Force.

Born in Glasgow on June 22 1891, he was a married arts student in the city when World War One broke out.

He enlisted in the Mounted Field Ambulance Section of the 52nd (Lowland) Division in March 1915, but then was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry's 6th Battalion in September 1915.

He was posted to Kantara, Egypt, and fought in the Sinai Campaign in December 1916 before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps.

After pilot training with 52 Squadron he qualified as a pilot the following May and was retained

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as an instructor, but two months later he joined the staff of the Gunnery School in Ayrshire.

In early 1918, at his request, he was posted to 88 Squadron, then forming at RAF Kenley, as a fighter pilot before the squadron took its new Bristol F.2 fighters (*pictured*) to France that April.

He scored his first victory on July 30, forcing a Pfalz D.III down out of control. Seven days later he had the first of 13 consecutive wins over Fokker D.VIIs, the newest German fighter.

On August 11 he had a quadruple victory, setting two Fokkers on fire and driving two down. He ended his tally on October 30, with a double victory.

The previous day his bravery won him the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The citation read: "On October 29 this officer led his flight with the greatest dash and determination against a hostile formation of about fifty machines.

"Reinforced by six more machines — making a total of twelve — he fought his patrol against the enemy's overwhelming numbers for upwards of half-an-hour, but as the enemy was being continuously reinforced he was eventually forced to withdraw.

"Cleverly extricating his formation he retired across the lines, our only casualties being one pilot and one observer wounded.

"The enemy lost heavily, five machines being shot down in flames (one by Captain Findlay), four destroyed and six driven down out of control."

In all he destroyed eleven enemy airplanes, setting six of them on fire and forcing down three more out of control — all without his plane taking a single bullet hole.

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The young officer also helped raid enemy aerodromes and experimented with wireless telegraphy between airplanes.

Now in the Army rank of Captain, he decided to remain in the RAF. He went on to command 9 Squadron, and RAF Hyton. He was promoted from Flying Officer to Flight Lieutenant on June 30 1923.

Soon after, he had as his orderly Leading Aircraftman John Hume Ross — who was formerly better known as Lawrence of Arabia.

On June 30 1931, he was promoted to Squadron Leader, and six years later to Wing Commander.

Between the wars he was one of the men responsible for maintaining the nucleus of the RAF which was to perform so heroically in the Battle of Britain. Although he did not take part in that epic struggle, the men who did used much of his expertise and knowledge.

He was awarded the Air Force Cross on June 9 1938, and promotion to Group Captain came on September 1 1940. He retired in 1941 as a Group Captain, but soon returned to be re-employed for another five years.

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~~Article compiled by the DAFRA 50th Anniversary Office. Original source: [Flight Lieutenant Johnnie](#)~~