

Captain Lionel Sydney Platt – 17th Lancers & Royal Flying Corps



Lionel Sydney Platt was born on the 1st October 1885 in Wilton Crescent, Belgravia. He was the only son of Sydney Platt (1861-1937) and Agnes Bertha Platt (1863-1952) (née Marshall) who were married on the 18th November 1884. Agnes was the daughter of the landowner Thomas Horatio Marshall (1834-1917), who was prominent in the Cheshire Volunteers, made his fortune from salt and was knighted in 1906. Sydney was the son of John Platt who was Liberal MP for Oldham and chairman of Platt Brothers, which was the largest textile machine company in the world in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Lionel's sister, Eira Gwendolen Platt, was born two years later on the 2nd July 1887.

They lived on the 150-acre estate of Bryn-y-Neuadd, near Llanfairfechan, Caernarvonshire before moving in 1898 to Wargrave Manor in Berkshire.



Bryn-y-Neuadd, Llanfairfechan, Caernarvonshire



Picture of Lionel Sydney Platt while at Bryn-y-Neuadd. Photo courtesy of Anthony Spender, his grandson.

Lionel was educated at Eton College between 1899 to 1904, and then at Magdalen College, Oxford, for one year from 1904-05 before enrolling in the army.



Eton College



Magdalen College, Oxford

He obtained his commission in the 17th Lancers in 1905, and served with them in India and was appointed as adjutant of the Denbighshire Yeomanry in 1913 and served at home and in Egypt and was noted as a gentleman rider.

He married Gillian Mary Spencer-Warwick in 1914 who was the daughter of Major Charles Spencer-Warwick of the Devonshire Regiment.



Gillian Mary Spencer-Warwick

They lived at St Bruno, Sunningdale, Berkshire and had a daughter Cicely Noel Platt who was born on the 24th December 1915.



Cicely Noel Platt

Lionel was promoted to Captain on the 15th April 1914 of the 1/1st Denbighshire Hussars. The Regiment left Beccles as part of the 4th Dismounted Brigade on 2 March 1916, embarked at Devonport on 2 March 1916, and arrived at Alexandria, in Egypt, on 15 March. On 14 April 1916, after a month's acclimatization, the Regt left camp at Merimde Beni Salame, in the western Nile Delta, and arrived at El Alamein on 19 April to form part of the Moghara Field Force, whose primary task was to fortify the defences at Moghara Oasis and El Alamein. Lionel stayed with the Regiment in Egypt until 28 July 1916, arrived in Marseilles on 11 August 1916, and joined the Royal Flying Corps in Britain in September 1916.

He learnt to fly in a Maurice Farman Shorthorn bi-plane at the Military School, Brooklands, in September/October 1916 and was given his wings on 29 November 1916. From December 1916 onwards he served with 57 (Fighter Reconnaissance) Squadron, which had been formed at Copmanthorpe, near York, on 8 June 1916 and mobilized between 6 November and 27 December 1916, after its strength had been increased from twelve to eighteen F.E.2d planes, an improved version of the twin-seat (pusher) F.E.2(c) whose pilot sat in the rear cockpit and whose observer sat in the front cockpit. It had a 250hp Rolls Royce engine and could reach a maximum speed of 94 mph at 5000 ft. and took 16 min to climb to 10,000 ft. The FE2d in 1916 helped to relinquish the German 'Fokker scourge' superiority, but it was already becoming obsolete by 1917.



Royal Aircraft Factory F.E.2d machine.



Cockpit of the FE2d showing the characteristic spade grip of the control column, the altimeter, air speed indicator, air pressure gauge and a watch.

He became a Flight Commander on 6 March 1917 and reported to have shot down a German aircraft while he and his Observer, Second Lieutenant Thomas Margerison (1894-1917), were on an offensive patrol at 12,000 feet over Arras and Cambrai on 5 April 1917. Their combat report reads as follows: "When on Offensive Patrol with 5 F.E.2(d)s, 3 Hostile Aircraft approached from rear. The whole formation turned and the rear machines attacked. F.E.2(d).A/5150 [his machine] dived at a H.A. (probably an Albatros Scout single-seater biplane) which was engaged just below, and which presented only a crossing shot. The Observer was able to fire a burst of about 10 rounds at a range of about 50 yards when the H.A. dived to earth apparently under control. The H.A. was seen to land successfully in a ploughed field".

His final patrol took place on 13 April 1917 in support of the army's Arras Offensive, over the area Vimy-Beaumont-Palluel, while he was leading a flight of six Royal Aircraft Factory F.E.2d machines from 57 Squadron on a reconnaissance mission. His F.E.2d machine was No A 5150. The patrol took off from the aerodrome at Fienvillers, about 25 miles east of Arras, at 07.00 hours, and headed north-east, but two of the six machines experienced engine trouble and had to return to base; a third had to make a forced landing at Arras; a fourth lost formation and encountered eight enemy aircraft which refused combat; and the other two machines, including Lionel's, failed to return.

This was part of the RFC's 'bloody April' losses where the F.E.2(d) airplane suffered the worst with 70 out of 100 airplanes being shot down. It was now obsolete for day time missions and a few weeks later, 57 Squadron was re-equipped with the two-seat (tractor) D.H.4 day-bomber which could achieve a speed of 136 mph and climb to 20,000 feet in less than 20 minutes.

It later emerged that Lionel, aged 31, and Margerison, aged c. 23, met their deaths near Vitry-en-Artois, about three miles south-west of Douai.



German photograph of wreckage of A5150 – Lionel Platt's machine

They were probably shot down by Leutnant Heinrich Gontermann (1896-1917) of *Jasta* [*Jagdstaffel*] 5 flying a much superior Albatros D.III or D.V. Gontermann, also began his military career as a cavalry officer, was one of the Sqdn's 14 aces, with 39 victories to his credit.

In April 1917, *Jasta* 5 was stationed in the grounds of Château Boistrancourt. Gontermann in the photograph below is second from the left in the front row and wearing the Iron Cross First Class that he had been awarded on 5 March 1917 for shooting down several enemy aircraft, including two F.E.2(d)s from 57 Sqdn. In "Bloody April" 1917 alone, he was credited with 11 victories. On 17 May 1917 he was awarded the *Pour le Mérite*, Germany's highest decoration for valour, and he met his death, aged 21, on 31 October 1917 when the Fokker Triplane that he was testing broke up in mid-air.

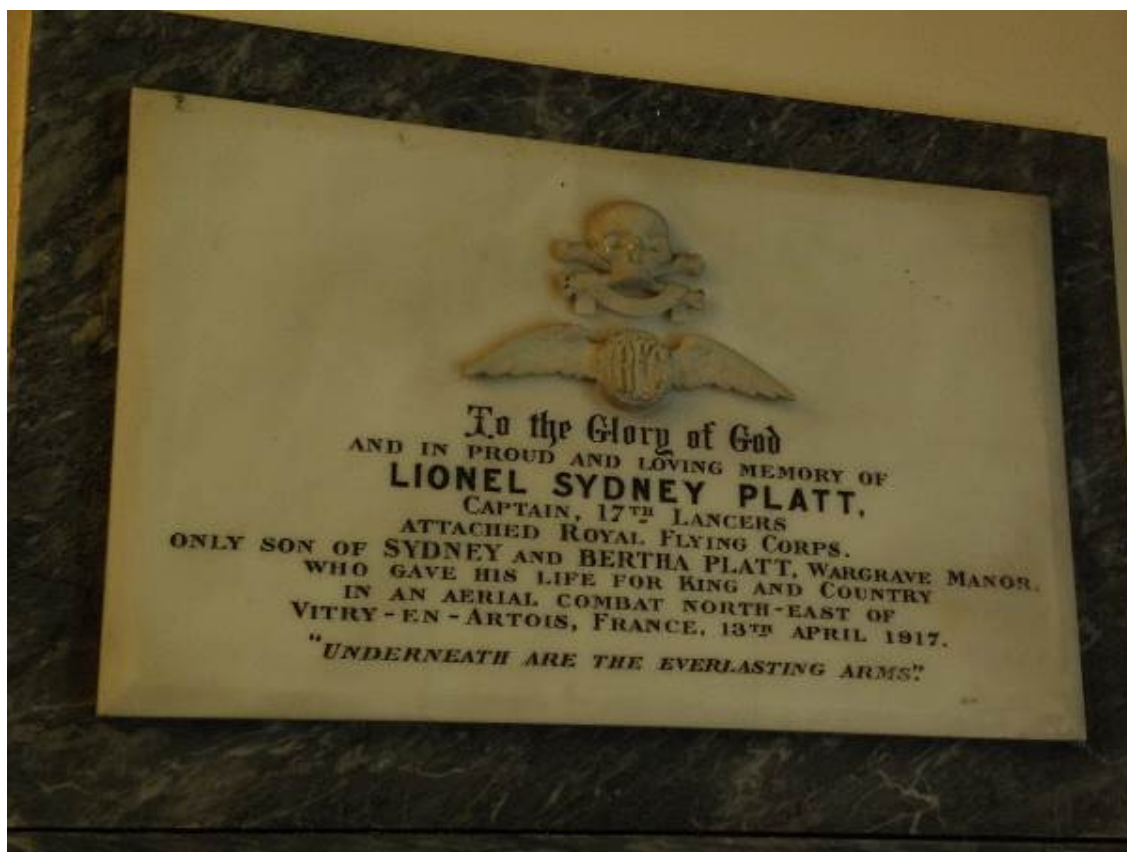


Above: On the steps of Chateau Boistrancourt, April 1917. Front row, left to right: von Hünenbein, Gontermann, Schneider, Neisen, Vorländer, and Nebel with Hans, the German shepherd Jasta mascot. Back row, left to right: Unknown, Mai, Nathanael, Dahlmann, Strum, and Löwensen.

Lionel left £1,108 12s 2d to his widow Gillian, leaving a one year old daughter Cicely Noel Platt. Gillian subsequently in 1919 married Major Charles Edgar Bryant, DSO [1885-1950], a Captain in the 7th Hussars, then a Major in the 12th Lancers, the RFC and the RAF), and they had one son and one daughter. Gillian's brother, John Charles Spencer-Warwick (1890-1915), was killed in action at Gallipoli on 4 June 1915, while serving as a Lieutenant in the Anson Bn of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division.



Gravestone at Brown Copse Cemetery, France



Memorial at Christ church, Llanfairfechan. Photo courtesy of Peter Jones.

Lionel's cousin Lieutenant John Rookhurst Platt who was also educated at Eton and Magdalen College, Oxford was killed near Hill 60, Ypres on 27th March 1916, and another cousin Captain Edmond Wellesley was killed near Ypres on the 30th April 1916.

After the war, Lionel's parents lived at Villa Beatrix, Pau, Basses in the French Pyrenées, and his sister, Eira Gwendolen Platt, married in 1924 at Pau, Charles Georges Joseph Antoine du Breil (1894-1951) who was a regular officer in the French Hussars.

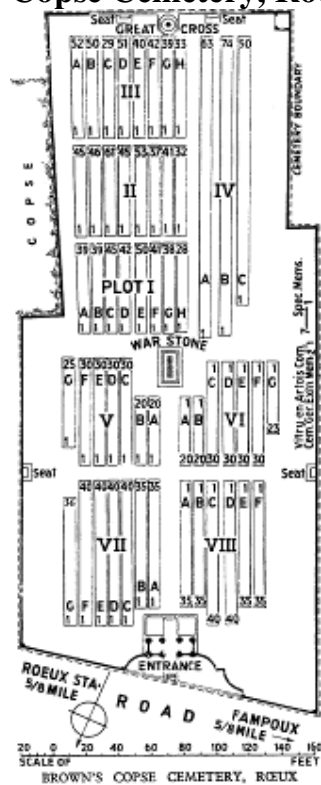
Lionel's daughter, Cicely Noel Platt (known as Noel), aged 22 married the Reverend Alan Spender aged 27 the son of Augustus Parsons Spender on the 14th November 1938 at St Paul's Cathedral, Valetta in Malta. He was a chaplain in the Royal Navy at Fort St Angelo (HMS St Angelo), Malta, and they had a daughter and two sons. Their eldest son married and has a daughter and a son. Their youngest son married and has two sons. Reverend Alan Spender received an OBE in 1942 and died in 1953 aged 42. Two years later in 1955 Noel married Richard Shuttleworth Holden (1909-25-Dec-1983). She died on the 24th March 2002 aged 86 in Marlborough, Wiltshire.



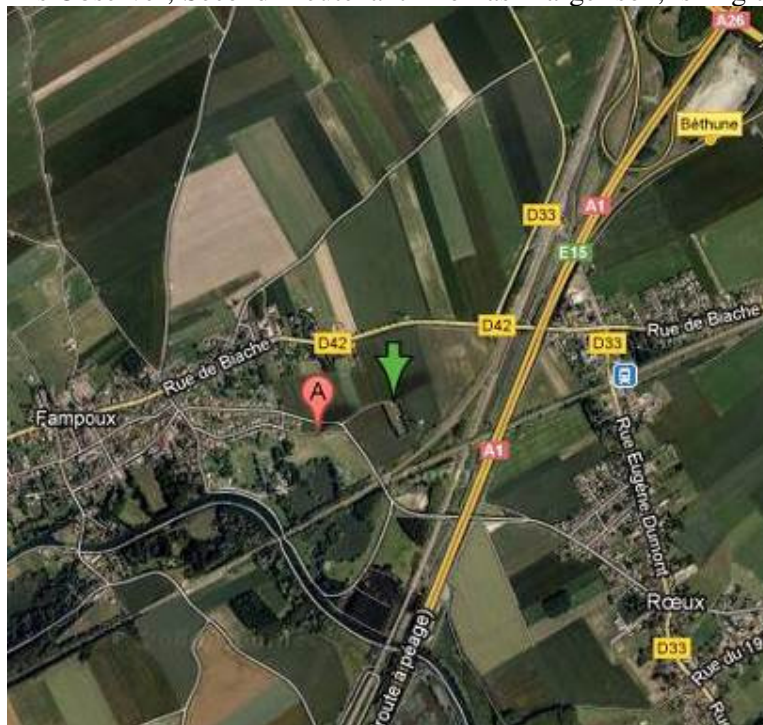
Wedding at Malta of Rev Alan Spender and Cicely Noel Platt

Appendices

Copse Cemetery, Roeux



Captain Lionel Sydney Plat is buried at Copse Cemetery, Roeux. Grave Ref: V. F. 4
His Observer, Second Lieutenant Thomas Margerison, is in grave V.F.1



History of the FE2d planes used by 57 squadron from January to May 1917 (Ref 5)

FE2d Plane No	Date entered 57 Squadron	Date left / destroyed	Details	Pilot / Observer
A1949	27/11/1916	27/11/1916	Wrecked in crash after engine failure	
A1946	12/12/1916	12/12/1916	Under repair	
A1940	07/01/1917	24/02/1917	Damaged in test flight	
A1933	06/10/1916	05/03/1917	Damaged in test flight	
A1963	01/01/1917	06/03/1917	Wrecked on patrol	Lt Hills
A1953	07/01/1917	06/03/1917	Destroyed	Captain Bloomfield killed in action
A1948	15/11/1916	06/03/1917	Shot down by Leutnant Gontermann	2 nd Lt Hills
A5148	26/02/1917	24/03/1917	Damaged in collision during trial flight with A5146	
A5146	05/02/1917	24/03/1917	Damaged in collision during trial flight with A5148	
A5151	06/03/1917	02/04/1917	Plane shot down	Captain Tomlinson (Died of wounds) / Observer survived
A1944	Nov-17	02/04/1917	Shot down by Festner	Lt Sworder
A1964	15/01/1917	03/04/1917	Wrecked in practice flight when expended cartridges hit propeller.	
A1959	05/01/1917	06/04/1917	Plane shot down by Leutnant Gontermann	Lt Burill (POW) / Pte Smith wounded
A1952	07/01/1917	06/04/1917	Wrecked in crash after combat	Captain Wright
A1955	07/01/1917	08/04/1917	Severely damaged in combat	Lt A Pryor
A5150	19/03/1917	13/04/1917	Plane shot down by Leutnant Gontermann	Captain Lionel Sydney Platt / Lieutenant Margerison (Both killed in action)
A1950	05/01/1917	13/04/1917	Lost in combat – shot down by Schreider or Klein	2 nd Lt G W Gillespie
A1954	05/01/1917	27/04/1917	Damaged in practice flight	
A1966	20/01/1917	30/04/1917	Wrecked in landing	
A1958	09/12/1916	01/05/1917	Wrecked in collision during formation practice	
A1957	03/01/1917	07/06/1917	Destroyed in combat	2 nd Lt Pollard fatally wounded

Obituary in Flight magazine, July 12th 1917, page 711

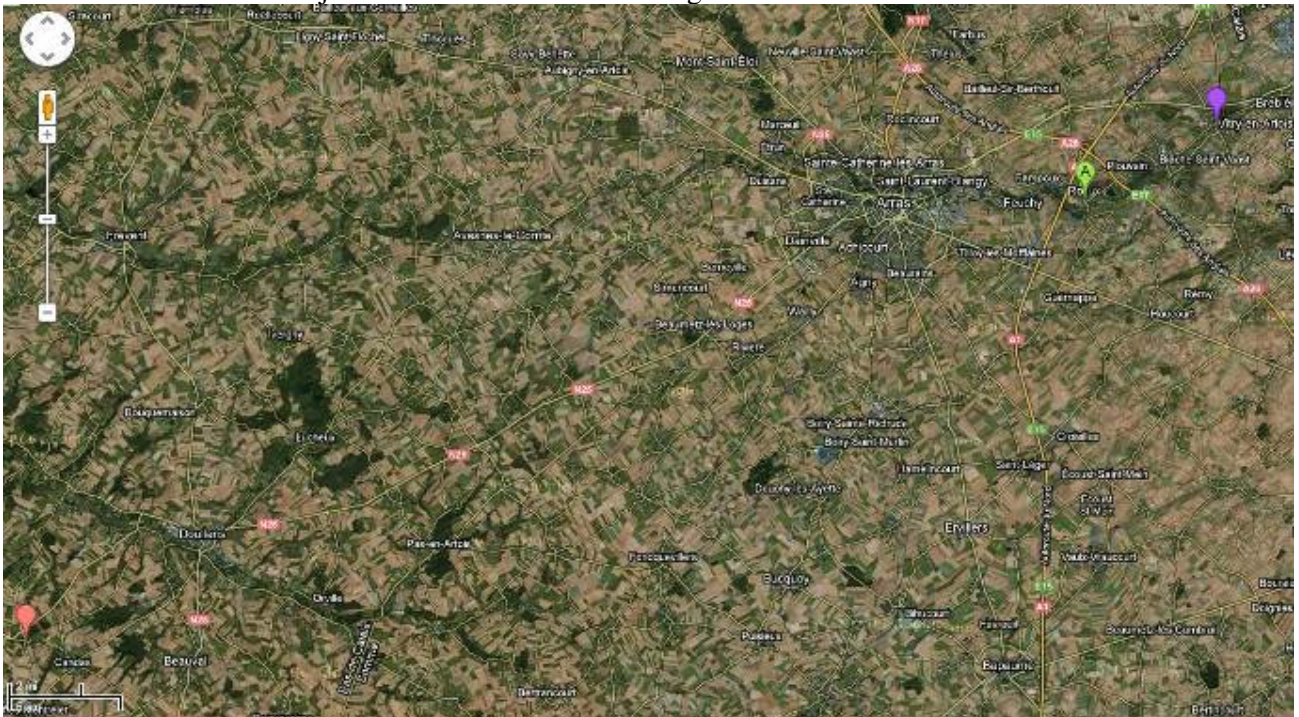
<http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/view/1917/1917%20-%200711.html>

Captain LIONEL SYDNEY PLATT, Lancers, attached R.F.C., the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Platt, of Wargrave Manor, Berks, was born in 1885, and educated at Eton and Magdalen College, Oxford. He obtained his commission in the 17th Lancers in 1905, and served with them in India, and distinguished himself as a gentleman rider. He was appointed adjutant of the Denbighshire Yeomanry in 1913, and served with them at home and in Egypt. He joined the R.F.C. in September, 1916, got his wings in November, and went to the front in December. In March he was gazetted flight commander, and was killed on April 13th while leading his flight on a reconnaissance. In 1914 Captain Platt married Miss Gillian Warwick, and leaves a daughter.

Map showing Locations of

1. Fienvillers aerodrome (Orange marker - bottom left) where Lionel Platt with his flight of 6 planes set out at 7am on the 13th April 1917.
2. Vitry-en-Artois (Purple marker – top right) where he was shot down at 9am.
3. Brown Copse Cemetery, Rouex (Green marker) where he is buried.

The front line was just to the east of Arras running in a north-south direction.



(A) Release		(C) Signature of Part II. of Order	(D) Status of personnel, apprehended, detained, detention, treatment, etc. etc. etc. etc. as subsequent provisions to be made, for notice of entry of which see A.C. 1, 1st of 1917. Cases and to which transferred and possibly be severely noted.	(E) Remarks
Date	Place where detained			
8/9/16.	London Gazette.		Relinquished appointment of Capt. Lambethshire Regt.	28.7.16.
	Unattached		London Marcella	11.8.16.
29.11.16	London Gazette.		Royal Flying Corps (Miles Wing) Capt. Flying Officer	7.11.16.
20.3.17.	—		Royal Flying Corps. Capt. Flight Commander	5.3.17.
	A.C. 1. No 955		Reported Missing	13.4.17.
	W.D. Communique D. 1801.		accepted as 'K in A.'	13.4.17.
			AL Strickland, h/j	
			O. 1/6 Cavalry Section.	
			3rd Echelon. B. E. F.	

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17/4/11

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

No. of Telegram. 955

Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words. Cost.

O. H. M. S.

At _____

To _____

By _____

I certify that this Telegram is sent on the orders of the _____

(Signature) _____

David Stamp.

Attention is called to the Regulations printed at the back hereof

TO | *Platt*
19 Cliveden Place SW 1

Regret inform you Capt L S Platt 17th Lancers
attached RFC 57 Squadron reported missing
April thirteenth. This does not necessarily
mean either killed or wounded and further
news sent when received

FROM | _____

The Name and Address of the Sender, IF NOT TO BE TELEGRAPHED, should be written in the space provided at the Back of the Form

CO. NO.

205 PL

205 PL

War Office Telegram to his wife

To: Platt, 19 Cliveden Place, SW 1

Regret to inform you Capt L S Platt 17th Lancers attached RFC 57 Squadron reported missing April thirteenth. This does not necessarily mean either killed or wounded.

Chateau d'Hauteville,
 Sur Vevey,
 June 29th.

Dear Mr. Platt,

My husband sent from Berne this morning a telegram to Monsieur de Lasseance. We sent it to him hoping it would reach quicker and that you would hear the sad news from a friend and not from a telegram. You all know how badly we feel and how much we sympathise with you in this dreadful sorrow. We first received the news from a private person, and at once on enquiring the official telegram thus worded was sent through the Swiss Red Cross:- "Le Capitaine L.S.Platt, 17 Lancers, R.F.C. ainsi que le lieutenant Margerison ont été, abattus mourants dans un combat aérien au nord est-de Vitry en Artois à 9 heures du matin le 13 Avril." I am now going to try and find out where Leo (Capt. Platt) is buried all details possible and ask if anything found, watch etc. be forwarded to me at once. Please give my love and sympathy to Mrs. Platt and Eva, and believe me,

Yours very sincerely,
 (Sgd.) Edith Grand d'Hauteville.

P.S. May I keep the photo you sent me of Leo in remembrance of our childhood.

Letter from Edith Grand d'Hauteville (friend of L S Platt)
Vertmont,
33 Burenrichweg,
Berne

September 6th 1917

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of Sept 3rd re my letter of June 29th to Mr. Platt on the subject of Capt. L. Platt and Lt. Margerison reported missing, I beg to say I have no further information to give you than that enclosed to Mr. Platt as received by me in a letter of June the 27th from the Agence Internationale des Prisoners de Guerre, Croix rouge de Geneve.

This information was as follows.

"Une communication de Berlin nous apporte le renseignement suivant.

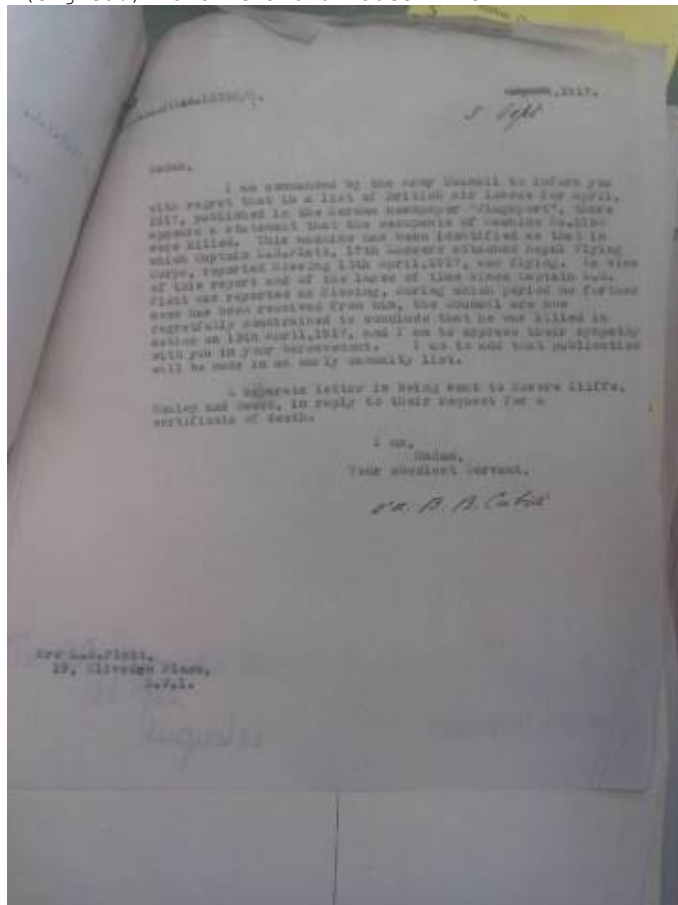
"Capt. L. S. Platt of lancers ainsi que Lt. Margerison 1st Huntingdonshire Cyclists ont ete abattus mourant dans un combat aerien au Nord Est de Vitry en Artois le 13 Avril 17. a 9 h du matin.

Nous regrettons que nos enquete ont abouti a un resultat si triste."

The reference No. of my correspondence with the Red Cross was E 48061.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed.) Edith Grand d'Hauteville



Please note that this enclosed information has nothing to do with my former some of information, my time & part of Nashville, Tennessee, which is entirely apart. pr mainly
S. J. Matt.

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COMITE INTERNATIONALE DE LA CROIX ROUGE

Geneva,

September 11th, 1917.

Sir,

In reply to your enquiry of the 7th inst. respecting Capt. L.S. PLATT and Lieut. MARGERISON attd. R.F.C., we regret to say that the following reports appear on lists dated 20.8.17. from Berlin.

"Platt L.S. Capt. R.F.C. died 13.4.17."

"MARGERISON Lieut. R.F.C. died 13. 4. 17."

In addition to the above report respecting Capt. PLATT we may state that a letter from Berlin informed us that this officer died on the date mentioned at 9.30 near VITRY in ARTOIS.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servants,

(Signed.) Edouard Navilly.

His Excellency,

Sir Horace Rumbold,

British Legation,

Berne.

Letter from the International Red Cross, Geneva, September 11th 1917

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We have the honour to be,

Sir,

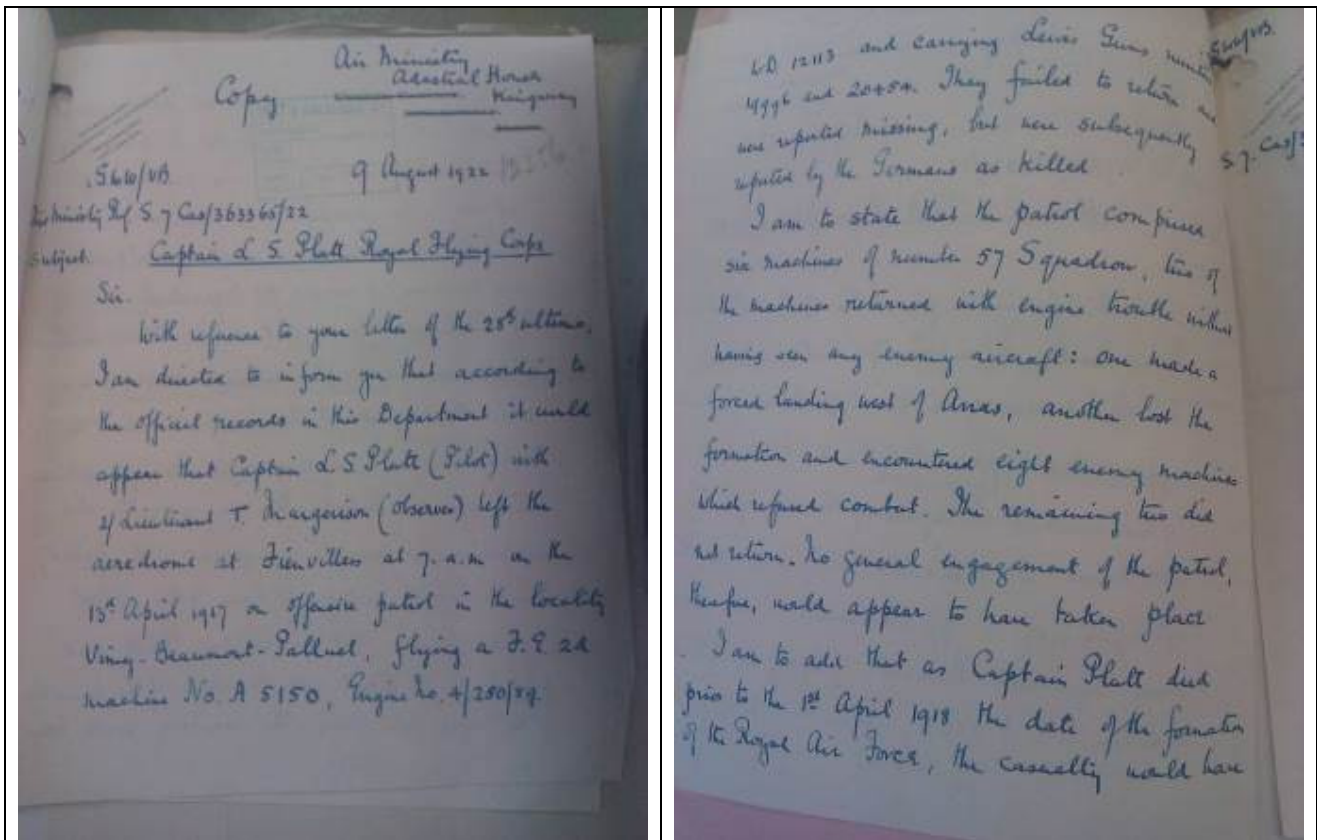
Your obedient Servants,

(Signed) Edouard Navilly

His Excellency,

Sir Horace Rumbold,

British Legation



Letter from the Air Ministry in 1922 (in Service Record at National Archives Kew): Captain L. S. Platt (Pilot) with 2nd Lieutenant T. Margeison (observer) left the aerodrome at Fienvillers at 7am on the 13th April 1917 on offensive patrol in locality of Vincy-Beaumont-Palluel, flying a F.E.2d machine No A 5150, engine no 4/250/89 and carrying Lewis Guns. They failed to return and were reported missing, but were subsequently reported by the Germans as killed.

I am to state that the patrol comprised six machines of number 57 squadron, two of the machines returned with engine trouble without seeing any enemy aircraft: one made a forced landing west of Arras, another lost the formation and encountered eight enemy machines which refused contact. The remaining two did not return. No general engagement of the patrol, therefore, would appear to have taken place.

Extract from Letters of Administration (Will annexed).
 Probate of Will. ✓
 Confirmation. ✓

24th December 1917 Granted at The P.F.R. ✓
 Revoked —

Estate of ✓ Lionel Sydney Platt of St. Bruno, Sunningdale, Co. of
 Berks. Capt. 17th Lancers (attached R.F.C.)

Date and Place of Death ✓ died 15th April 1917 in France killed in action.

Will ✓ Formal Will dated 11th Nov. 1915.

Grantors ✓ Gillian Mary Spencer Platt widow the relict of deceased
 the sole executrix named in the said will.

Gross Value £ 1108. 12. 3d.

Disposal of Movable }
 Devolutions } To the Widow ✓

Extracted by }

3638.

PLATT, Lionel Sydney
 Wargrave Hill, Wargrave, Berks.

Born 1st October 1886 At London
 Nationality British

Rank, Regiment, Profession Capt. 17th Lancers
 Certificate taken on Maurice Farman Biplane
 At Military School, Brooklands.
 Date 23rd September 1916.
 killed in action 15th April 1917

References

1. Ref WO 339/6363. War Service Record of Lionel Sydney Platt. *National Archives, Kew*
2. WW1 speciality plane website: http://www.theaerodrome.com/aircraft/gbritain/raf_fe2.php
3. Obituary in Flight magazine, July 12th 1917, page 711
<http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/view/1917/1917%20-%200711.html>
4. http://www.jasta5.org/Jagdstaffeln_5/red_baron_j5_Boistrancourt.htm
5. 'FE2b/d' book by Cross & Cockade & RAF Museum. ISBN: 978-0-9555734-1-5. Page 156
*There is also an FE2 machine on display at the RAF Museum, Hendon.
It is located behind the Lancaster in Bomber Hall.*
6. Heinrich Gontermann victories listed at
<http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/germany/gontermann.php>
7. Malta -Navy marriage records <http://website.lineone.net/~stephaniebidmead/navy0079.htm>
8. Photographs of Cicely Noel Platt and Gillian Spencer Warwick via James Spender at Ancestry
<http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/26453825/family>

Also extensive notes, kindly supplied by Emeritus Professor Richard Sheppard of Magdalen College, Oxford who is writing a biography of all the Magdalen College people who were killed in WW1, which have the following references:

'Captain Lionel Sydney Platt', *The Times*, no. 41,524 (7 July 1917), p. 9, col. C.

[Thomas Herbert Warren], 'Oxford's Sacrifice', *The Oxford Magazine*, 36, no. 1 (19 October 1917), p. 9.

G. K. Merrill, *Jagdstaffel 5*, Windsock Datafile (Berkhamstead: Albatros Productions, 2004).

'Heinrich Gontermann', Wikipedia article. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Gontermann

AIR1/128/15/40/172. - 57 Squadron, R.F.C. - mobilisation of. *National Archives, Kew*

AIR1/693/21/20/57. - History of 57 Squadron, R.A.F - 1917-1918. *National Archives, Kew*

AIR1/1224/204/5/2634. - Combat reports: 57 Squadron - 1917 Mar to 1918 Oct. *National Archives, Kew*

WO95/4427. - Suez Canal defences -> 1/1 Denbighshire Yeomanry. *National Archives, Kew*

WO339/6363 – Lionel Sydney Platt - War Service Record. *National Archives, Kew*

D.A. Farnie, "Platt family (1815-1930)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 44(2004)

Author: William Bridge, January-March 2012. Updated June 2015
williambridge@stanwardine.com