

Captain John Aidan Liddell, V.C.

Aidan Liddell was born on August 3, 1888, the eldest son of John Liddell, Esq., K.C.S.G., and J.P. for Northumberland, his mother being the daughter of the late Major Henry A. Berry, of the Cameronians. He was educated at Stonyhurst and at Balliol College, Oxford. His tastes were wholly mechanical and scientific, and as a boy he studied physics and astronomy under Father Cortie's tuition. He accompanied Father Cortie, as his chief assistant, to Vinaroz, in Spain, for the total eclipse of August 30, 1905. He had charge of the 20-ft. coronagraph, and secured during totality six excellent plates, with exposures varying from 4 to 50 seconds. The following year he visited the Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope. Sir David Gill was much taken with him, and, writing to Father Cortie, spoke of him as "an exceedingly bright, intelligent young fellow, and quite 'ready at the uptake,' as the Scotch have it I think the lad might do far worse than take to astronomy as a profession. No one will ever make money at astronomy, but no one will ever do any good at it unless he is born by nature that way. I do think this lad has both the taste and the brains, from the little I could see of him." At Balliol College he devoted his attention mainly to biology and zoology, taking a first-class in the Honours School. After leaving Oxford he, in 1911, joined the special reserve of officers of the 3rd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and on the outbreak of the war proceeded to the front with the rank of captain, in charge of the machine-gun section of the battalion. He was for 43 days consecutively in the trenches, and displayed

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such cool courage and efficiency that he was mentioned in despatches and awarded the Military Cross. His brightness and affability and the general charm of his character made him a favourite with whomsoever he was associated. He was invalided home, and, after his recovery, joined the Royal Flying Corps in May. While at Oxford he had become an expert motorist, and later on received his certificate as pilot for flying at Brooklands in June 1914. He returned to the front on July 23, and, on July 31, it being only his second reconnaissance, he performed the truly wonderful act of devotion and bravery for which he received the V.C., and the wound which ultimately caused his death. The official grounds of the award were thus stated: "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on July 31, 1915. When on a flying reconnaissance over Ostend-Bruges-Ghent he was severely wounded (his right thigh being broken), which caused momentary unconsciousness, but by a great effort he recovered partial control, after his machine had dropped nearly 3,000 feet, and, notwithstanding his collapsed state, succeeded, though continually fired at, in completing his course, and brought the aeroplane within our lines—half an hour after he had been wounded. The difficulties experienced by this officer in saving his machine, and the life of his observer, cannot be readily expressed, but as the control wheel and throttle control were smashed, and also one of the under-carriage struts, it would seem incredible that he could have accomplished his task." Speaking as his former master, there was always in Aidan Liddell's character one trait which made us all expect that he would do something great in the future, and that was an exceptional power of concentrating his mind on anything he had in hand. The boys at Stonyhurst nicknamed him "Oozy," because he was always "messaging about with engines and chemicals." His was a delightful, open, frank, cheery character, and he was devotedly attached to his Alma Mater. He enjoyed but very indifferent health, yet in spite of all was ever cheerful. He lingered at the hospital at La Panne, in Belgium, after it was found necessary to amputate his leg, for a month, and died on August 31. He was elected a member of the Association on February 27, 1907.