

**Major John Frederick Bernard BLATCH.**  
**Glider Pilot Regiment. Second in Command Number 2 Wing.**



Commissioned into the Territorial Buckinghamshire Battalion of the Regiment in August 1939. He served with the Battalion in France and Belgium in 1940. He was wounded during the withdrawal to Dunkirk and after evacuation rejoined the Battalion in July 1940 as Regimental Signals Officer. In February 1942 he transferred to the Glider Pilot Regiment and by the time of Arnhem was Second in Command of its Number 2 Wing.



After Operation Market Garden he was awarded the **Distinguished Flying Cross** for:  
*“Major Blatch took off on 17th September 1944 from Broadwell, but owing to very bad weather was compelled to land in England, this he succeeded in doing safely; the next day he again took off in his glider and over Holland the tug aircraft was hit by flak and Major Blatch's glider had the whole of one aileron shot away, thereby causing him to force land, this he succeeded in doing successfully just inside the British lines near the Albert Canal. Major Blatch then succeeded in contacting HQ Airborne Forces at Nijmegen and made determined efforts to rejoin the Wing in the Arnhem area; but failed to do so. Had it not been for his flying skill, it is certain that the load he was carrying in his glider, which included senior officers, would have suffered serious injury.”*

**OBITUARY NOTICE EXTRACT FROM 2002 "THE EAGLE",  
JOURNAL OF THE GLIDER PILOT REGIMENT ASSOCIATION.**

After many weeks in hospital with a debilitating illness, John Blatch returned home and with characteristic determination regained a considerable degree of mobility, but died peacefully in his sleep on 1st May 2002. He was 85 years of age. So passes one of our wartime senior officers.

Prior to joining the Glider Pilot Regiment in February 1942, he was company Commander in the Oxf and Bucks Light Infantry. On arrival at Tilshead, he was immediately posted as Air Liaison Officer to 102 Glider Operational Training Unit, RAF. Kidlington where, throughout his six months stint, he was influential in resolving inter-Service rivalries and establishing close Army/RAF. co-operation. Having gained his Wings' early in 1943 he was appointed to command No '4' Squadron who, as the Rear Party en-route to Tunisia, gained fame for reasons of security, as the No1 Folding Bicycle Company!

On rejoining the rest of the 1st Battalion at M'Saken in August 1943 he was appointed second-in-command to LT.Col. John Place and almost immediately faced the daunting task of converting the Battalion to an infantry Unit for the capture of the Italian port of Taranto, which objective was secured without a shot being fired. When the Battalion moved up-country to Noci and Putignano he was detailed as Town Major and with characteristic dedication and compassion was instrumental in restoring electricity and water to the distressed towns and organising desperately needed food supplies.

He returned to the UK in December 1943 and in his role as 2 i/c of the newly formed No 2 Wing, organised ground training of glider pilots to fit them for the fighting role so much in evidence at Arnhem. As he flew there on the 2nd Lift he and his tug were severely damaged by flak near the Albert Canal and for safely landing his stricken glider was awarded the D.F.C.

He reached Nijmegen and attached himself to Airborne Corps H.O. Shortly after his return he was posted to India and with his selected staff was en-route on the first leg of their journey when their R A.F Dakota crashed in a snow storm on the High Pyrenees. Only five survived. John Blatch, though seriously injured, organised the rescue of the survivors and for this was awarded the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Subsequent medical de-grading precluded him from flying duties and until his demobilization in February 1946 he served as G2 (Air) at Commander Airborne Establishments, Salisbury. Rejoined his TA Battalion from 1946 to 1948 and his TD was eventually gazetted in November 1990.

This precis of his G.P.R. service does less than justice to his many strengths and virtues. Recognised by the late Michael Briody as one of the most dedicated officers in 2 Wing, he combined a calm and unflappable authority with a genuine understanding and compassion for the men under his command. He was possessed of a seemingly endless 'spring of empathy' underpinned by his deep and abiding Christian faith. Though not adopting a high profile in the G.P.R.A, he devoted his energy and skills to further the interests of the British Legion - a cause near and dear to his heart. For this he was awarded their Gold Badge and Honorary Life Membership of their National Body.

His death leaves an unfillable void. Indeed, the large community which he served, as evidenced by the packed Church at his Service of Remembrance, will be the poorer for his passing.