



**Major William John Charles Kennedy Cochran-Patrick**  
**DSO, MC, FRGS, AFRAeS (1896–1933)**

*Major Charles Cochran-Patrick was on the Board of Directors of Aerofilms Ltd in 1928 and 1929 and was a pioneer of aerial surveying and photography.*

*He was involved with Major Hemming in the Burma survey and the Bermuda and West Atlantic Co survey and was also a founder of the Aircraft Operating Company of South Africa Pty Ltd.*

Charles was a First World War flying ace with a distinguished record who became a pioneer of aerial surveying and photography. He was a director of the Aircraft Operating Co Ltd between 1923 and 1930 and on the board of Aerofilms Ltd in 1928 and 1929. As a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, he had a lifelong interest in the use of aerial photography and developed the use of large-scale mosaics in surveying previously unmapped areas of South America, Burma, Africa and Iraq. His aim was to establish this new science as a recognised service and he strove to overcome both technical and financial difficulties (*The Times*, 1933b).

Charles Cochran-Patrick was born in Edinburgh on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1896 (*The Aerodrome*), the first child and only son of Neil James Kennedy and Eleanora (née Cochran-Patrick), who had assumed the name and arms of Cochran-Patrick when Eleanora's father died without leaving an heir. Charles was educated at Wellington College and Trinity College, Cambridge but, when war broke out, he transferred to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, where he was commissioned in The Rifle Brigade on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1915. It is possible that Charles first encountered Alan Samuel Butler at Sandhurst: both men went on to become directors of Aerofilms Ltd. Here he learned to fly and such was his competence that he became an assistant instructor at the Central Flying School

of the Royal Flying Corps. At this time the RFC's role was to support the British Army through artillery cooperation and photographic reconnaissance (*The Times*, 1933b).

He arrived in France at the end of 1915 and became chief test pilot at the aircraft depot at St Omer. Here he experimented with gun sights for use in aircraft, a compensating foresight for observers and a fixed gun sight designed to allow for the speed of the enemy machine at which it was aimed. While at St Omer, Charles brought down his first German aircraft – the crash landing was witnessed by Col. Charles Marling Cartwright who said, “I ... shall always remember him as the coolest youngster I have ever met” (*The Times*, 1933c). He was nineteen years old. He was described by Lord Trenchard as one of the finest flyers on the Western Front (*The Times*, 1933a).

For the last year of the war he was at the Air Ministry, having responsibility for all training for air fighting, developing gunnery training on the ground and producing the gunnery and air-fighting training manuals which were the standard works at the time (*The Times*, 1933b). Lt. (T./Capt.) William John Charles Kennedy-Cochran-Patrick, M.C., Bif. Bde. and R.F.C. was decorated for gallantry on three occasions, receiving the Military Cross, Bar and Distinguished Service Order. See Citations below.

When the war ended, he resigned his commission and joined A V Roe & Co Ltd for a short time. In March 1921 Charles, representing the Bermuda and West Atlantic Aviation Company Ltd for the Aircraft Operating Company, led the first air-surveying expedition to leave the British Isles – a survey of the Orinoco Delta for an oil company, financed by Alan Butler (Land of Six Peoples). He also carried out aerial surveys in Burma, the results of which enabled him to improve

the accuracy of small-scale aerial survey, while reducing the costs (*Flight*, 1925:0734).

In 1923 he was one of the 'prominent pilots' who became directors of the Aircraft Operating Co Ltd – a role he fulfilled until 1930. In 1924 he was elected Associate Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and by 1927 he was in charge of the Air Survey of Upper Zambesi, where a series of overlapping vertical photographs were taken to create a mosaic of the river and the rapids to assist in developing the material resources of the British Empire (*The Times*, 1928). During 1928 he carried out aerial surveys of Brazil, Iraq and Northern Rhodesia for AOC and, during an expedition to Venezuela in 1929, he surveyed the Orinoco Delta. Between 1928 and 1930 he was a member of the board of Aerofilms Ltd.

On 26th September 1933 Charles took off from Baragwanath Aerodrome near Johannesburg, with Sir Michael Oppenheimer, Bt., in a twin-engined De Havilland 84 Dragon. He made a sharp vertical turn, the plane lost speed, stalled and crashed with the engines running at full speed. As it hit the ground, the plane burst into flames and Charles was killed outright; Sir Michael died shortly afterwards (*The Times*, 1933a).

Charles had been a quiet boy and a man of 'infinite charm and personality', who dedicated himself to his great passion – the advancement of aviation (*The Times*, 1933c). In 1918 he married Ella Gertrude Gross (*The Times*, 1918) and in 1924 he married Natalie Bertha Tanner. Their son, Neil Aylmer Kennedy Cochran-Patrick, was born in 1926.

## Citations

### Military Cross (MC)

2nd Lt. William John Charles Kennedy-Cochran-Patrick, Rif. Brig, and R.F.C.

*For conspicuous skill and determination. He climbed and attacked an enemy machine at 14,000 feet and, although he failed in his first and second attacks, he went for it again a third time, shot both pilot and observer and brought it down. He followed it down and landed alongside.*

(Supplement to the London Gazette, 1916:4930).

### Military Cross (MC) Bar

Lt. (T./Capt.) William John Charles Kennedy-Cochran-Patrick, M.C., Rif. Bde. and R.F.C.

*For conspicuous gallantry in attacking hostile aircraft. Within two months he brought down two hostile machines in flames, and four others completely out of control. In addition, he has driven several others down in a damaged condition.*

(Supplement to the London Gazette, 1917a:8355).

### Distinguished Service Order (DSO)

Lt. (T./Capt.) William John Charles Kennedy-Cochran-Patrick, M.C., Bif. Bde. and R.F.C.

*For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on numerous occasions in destroying and driving down hostile machines, frequently engaging the enemy with great dash and a fine offensive spirit when encountered in superior numbers. By his cool judgment and splendid fearlessness he has instilled confidence in all around him, his brilliant leadership being chiefly responsible for his numerous successes.*

(Supplement to The London Gazette, 1917b:9557).

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*The Times*. (1933d). Major Cochran-Patrick. Saturday 30 Sept 1933; Pg. 12; Issue 46563 [online], Available at <<http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/>> [accessed 16 September 2014].

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