

Robbie Clarke

Robbie Clarke, from Jamaica, had always dreamed of joining the Royal Flying Corps in England. He wanted to travel to England, become a pilot and fly for the British War Effort.

Pilot training is a challenge. You must be: brave, determined, passionate, resilient and much more. Robbie put any fears and doubts he had aside and he achieved his dream when he qualified as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in 1917.

Sergeant William Robinson Clarke made history when he became the first and only Black pilot to fly for Britain during the First World War.

However, soon disaster struck –

On 28 July 1917, Robbie was flying an aircraft which was attacked by enemy fighters. Five enemy planes chased Robbie's aircraft aiming to shoot it down. Robbie flew for his life but one of the bullets hit him in the spine and he was knocked unconscious. Luckily, Robbie's observer took the aircraft controls and forced the plane to crash land. Robbie's injuries were very severe and he was taken to hospital.

Robbie was told that, due to his injuries, he would never fly as a pilot again but Robbie wasn't going to give up now. Robbie decided that instead of returning home to Jamaica, he would join the ground crew of the flying services for the remainder of the war. He qualified as an Air Mechanic making sure that other planes were quickly repaired and safe to fly. Robbie Clarke showed unquestionable determination, passion and bravery in the face of hardship. He never let his injury beat him. It would have been easy for Robbie to give up but he never stopped trying.

Robbie was resilient.