



GALLIPOLI & Cmdr SAMPSON, RNAS



The Milton Keynes Branch of Air-Britain
The views expressed in this newsletter are not those of Air-Britain (Historians) Ltd.



INTRODUCTION

On 25 April I saw part of the ANZAC remembrance services held for the 100th anniversary ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign in 1915. Being aware that they were there I wondered what part the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) had played; quite a large one as it turned out.

In looking for information on the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) in the Gallipoli campaign I came across this splendid summary by Peter Hart of the Imperial War Museum, written for an IWM tour of Gallipoli in 2010 (held on the IWM web-site, below). I have added contemporary photos and extended the notes on HMS Ark Royal and the Evacuation sections.

For the 'Background' I drew on the IWM web-site on:

<http://archive.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/2/gallipoli/navigate.htm>

and for 'Evacuation from Gallipoli' on: www.firstworldwar.com/battles/evacuation_dec15.htm

Editor

BACKGROUND



Gallipoli had its roots in strategic failure in the west. By the end of 1914 trench warfare had spread along a line in the west from Belgium to Luxembourg. In the east Turkey had aligned itself with Germany and the 'Central Powers' leaving Russia (Britain and France's main ally) looking increasingly vulnerable.

Early in January 1915 matters came to a head when Russia asked for help in its fight against the Turks in the Caucasus. Britain and France began a naval campaign to break open the Dardanelles, the strongly defended narrow strip of water that led from the Mediterranean into the Sea of Marmara and divided European from Asiatic Turkey. The ultimate aim was to knock the Turks out of the war by threatening their capital, Constantinople.

When the most concerted attempt to smash the central defences of the Dardanelles by naval bombardment failed on 18 March, a military force was assembled and plans were made to capture the shoreline of the Gallipoli Peninsula and so allow the naval campaign to be resumed. The first landings on 25 April were made by British and French troops around Cape Helles and by Australian and New Zealanders Army Corps (ANZAC) to the north of Gaba Tepe. Although impressive in what they did manage to achieve, both nevertheless also failed to make headway and the crucial Kilid Bahr Plateau,

which dominated the Dardanelles shoreline, remained unthreatened.

Quickly contained in narrow, poorly sited positions at Helles and the newly named Anzac Cove, all attempts to move forward were soundly defeated by the determined, well motivated Turkish defenders. The design of the Turkish barbed-wire and machine-gun defences was assisted by experienced German officers. A stalemate, such as the campaign had been intended to avoid, spread across the Peninsula and the frustrations of trench warfare were soon made worse by widespread sickness, monotonous food, trying weather and putrefying corpses.

In May tentative plans were drawn up for a fresh attempt to break out of the Anzac position onto the high ground to the north which climbed up the precipitous Sari Bair Ridge. When more British troops were made available the following month a new landing at Suvla Bay was added to the plan to support the northern flank of the Anzac attack. Both assaults began on the night of 6 August but rapidly disintegrated and within a week the initiative had been lost.

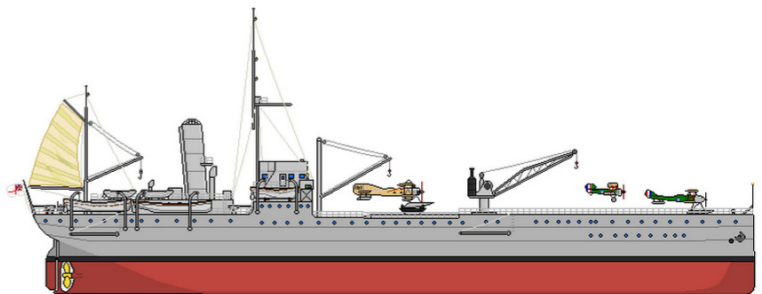
HMS ARK ROYAL - SEAPLANE CARRIER



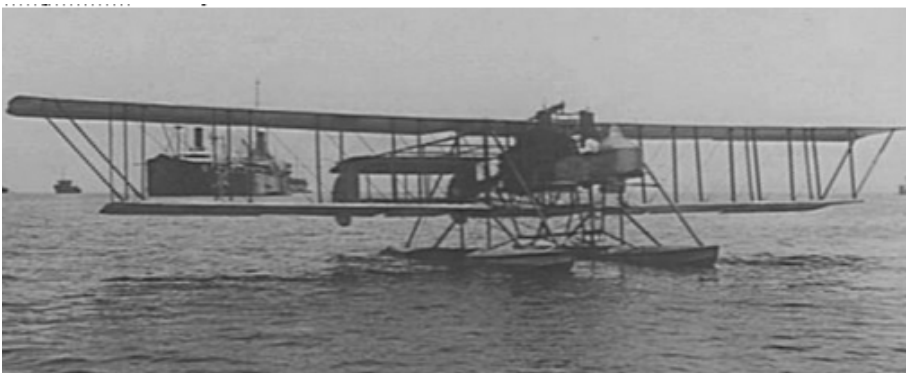
From the very beginning the Allies saw the potential value of aerial reconnaissance and artillery observation to the Royal Navy operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result HMS Ark Royal, a prototype aircraft carrier, was sent out on 1 February 1915 and joined the fleet on 16 February. The Ark Royal had been purchased whilst still a skeleton on the stocks in May 1914, and the intended merchantman had undergone a radical redesign. The superstructure, machinery and funnel were built aft, clearing the forward part of the ship for the aircraft.

The deck was not intended as a flying-off deck, but meant for starting and running up of seaplane engines and for recovering damaged aircraft from the sea. Ark Royal has a strong claim to be the first purpose built aircraft carrier with an internal hangar inside the hull to house the aircraft, which were hoisted by cranes into the water ready for take off.

She had an overall length of 366', a beam of 50' 10", a draught of 18' 9" and displaced 7,190 tons. A large aircraft hold, 150' long, 45' wide and 15', high along with extensive workshops were built. Two 3-ton steam cranes were fitted on the sides of the forecastle, for lifting the aircraft through the sliding hatch of the hangar onto the flight deck or into the water. She carried onboard 4,000 gals of aircraft fuel in standard commercial 2 gal cans.



THE AIR WAR BEGINS



The Ark Royal carried two Sopwith tabloid aeroplanes (for land use), with one Short, two Wight (below) and three Sopwith Seaplanes. These were found to be woefully under-powered and were severely hampered by adverse weather conditions. Early seaplanes had great difficulty in taking off in anything but the calmest seas and the Mediterranean was lamentably uncooperative particularly when it

was whipped up by the prevailing westerly winds. The seaplane engines were unreliable and their lack of power was translated into a disturbingly low ceiling of operations.

The Ark Royal had also brought along two of the early Sterling wireless sets. These allowed pilots and observers to transmit messages to receiving sets carried on board ships. The extra weight of the Sterling wireless sets did not help the performance of the seaplanes.

On 17 February only one of four managed to get off, a Wight A 1 Seaplane flown by Flight Lieutenant G R Bromet and Flight Commander H A Williamson. They flew across the Straits, reconnoitred the Turkish forts from about 4,000 feet and even dropped a token 20lb bomb that hit the wall of one fort. They returned with seven bullet holes and reports on the entrance forts of Sedd el Bahr and Kum Kale

When the seaplanes managed to claw their way into the air their reconnaissance work was valuable in determining the layout of the various forts and, crucially, in determining the angles and areas that were covered by their guns. Their spotting work was hampered by a variety of problems with the wireless aerials, short circuits, low clouds, confusion in determining what ship was firing which shells, deliberate Turkish jamming of the wireless signals and, due to their low flying altitude, harassing rifle fire.

These problems became apparent on 5 March, when they tried to supply aerial observation for the super dreadnought HMS Queen Elizabeth as she fired her colossal 15" shells right across the whole Gallipoli peninsula to drop into the Turkish forts from the rear.

At 11.00, First Flight Lieutenant W H S Garnett and Flight Commander Williamson took off in their Sopwith Seaplane, but as they climbed to 3,000 feet their propeller fragmented and both suffered minor injuries when their seaplane crashed out of control into the sea. A replacement Sopwith ("*Type 807" folding-wing floatplane, of type shown right*") then took off with Flight Lieutenant N Sholto Douglas and Flight Lieutenant E H Dunning.



As they were getting ready to observe the effect of the Queen Elizabeth's mighty shells from a height of just 3,000 feet, Sholto-Douglas was hit in the leg by a Turkish rifle bullet and had to return to the Ark Royal before anything of use had been achieved.

A replacement pilot, Flight Lieutenant R H Kershaw, took over the controls and off they went again at 14.00. A few corrections to the fire were sent by wireless to the Queen Elizabeth but it was not long before they ceased fire due to bad light. Although several of the shells had crashed into the fort they had been unlucky as none of the Turkish guns were directly hit and the fighting strength of the fort was unaffected. On 6 March, further attempts to use the Queen Elizabeth firing from inside the Straits failed when the seaplanes failed to take off in choppy seas and a last attempt on 8 March failed as the low cloud made it a fruitless exercise.

During the next period the seaplanes concentrated on reconnaissance flights. The Turkish lines at Bulair were investigated, gun emplacements were identified, camps and concentrations of troops were reported. A further duty involved sweeping across the Dardanelles looking for evidence of minefields prior to the naval assault planned for 18 March.

Previous experiments had been carried out on mines deliberately sunk at various controlled depths near the Ark Royal to test the visibility of mines from various heights, ranging from 1,000 feet to 3,000 feet depending on the time of day. The tests were successful and indeed many mines were subsequently sighted in the Straits between the actual Narrows and Kephez Bay. None however were sighted nearer the entrance where the British ships would be manoeuvring as they fired at the Turkish forts.

On 18 March the seaplanes took off every hour to report on the effects of the British and French naval bombardment on the Turkish forts. They accurately reported the damage to the forts, the fact that some were no longer manned and the declining rate of return fire. It was difficult, however, to determine whether these effects were permanent and whether the actual guns had been destroyed. Furthermore, although they also reported the fire of mobile howitzers it was extremely difficult to pin down their location in the hills and gullies that led down

to the Straits. In the end it was irrelevant as a minefield laid overnight in Eren Keui Bay caused crippling losses and forced the Allied Fleet to retire defeated.

Reinforcements were evidently needed and 3 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service were sent out to arrive at Tenedos (a small island near the coast south of the Dardanelles) on 24 March. Commanded by the irrepressible Commander Charles Samson they flew a variety of aircraft including Henri Farmans, Maurice Farmans and BE2s from their base ashore at Tenedos. They made their first flight on 28 March and had a serious reconnaissance role in preparing for the landings that were now essential after the failure of 18 March.

The possible landing beaches around the Gallipoli Peninsula and Kum Kale on the Asiatic side of the Straits were surveyed and the detailed reports were supplemented by aerial photographs taken by Flight Lieutenant C H Butler. Turkish defensive arrangements were obviously of the greatest interest and their burgeoning preparations were logged on a daily basis.

The area inland was examined as far as possible and at least some corrections to the inaccurate maps were possible. However, the ground in places was just too complicated to get a clear picture from the air and the photographs could not resolve the confusion. Whenever they got the chance, the aircraft bombed the Turkish camps and batteries. The aircraft also took over the role of correcting the naval fire on the identified Turkish batteries.

Meanwhile between 31 March and 17 April, the Ark Royal sailed off to cover the more distant coastlines in the Gulfs of Adramyti, Smyrna, Enos and Xeros with the aim of misleading the Turks as to where the landings were intended. A third element of the aerial forces amassing in the Eastern Mediterranean was HMS Manica.

This former cargo vessel had been purchased in March 1915 and rapidly converted into a kite balloon ship specifically designed for the aerial observation of gunfire. The Manica arrived at Mudros on 9 April and first spotted for a shore bombardment carried out by HMS Bacchante on 19 April. The photo below shows HMS Manica about to launch a kite balloon (which looks rather like a barrage balloon of WWII).



The enemy were not aware of the presence of a balloon ship and had taken no special precautions against being overlooked. The consequence was that when Manica put up her balloon, the first sight which greeted the observers was a sleeping camp, neatly arranged in a dip in the ground, out of sight of Bacchante but within easy range of her guns. Through their excellent field glasses they could see an occasional dot moving about but for the most part the camp was not yet astir. If there were sentries, they doubtless regarded the distant balloon hanging in the sky as a harmless form of amusement for the jaded English and saw no connection between it and the long guns of the Bacchante that were nuzzling round towards them. But the boom of the cruiser's forward

turret opened their eyes and a rude awakening followed when the top of a hillock some 100 yards beyond the camp was hurled into the air.

"No reveille ever blown commanded so instant a response. Every tent burst into life and the ground was soon swarming with running specks. A second shot burst on the northernmost fringe of the camp and a third right in the midst of the tents. Bacchante had the range to a nicety and began to fire salvos of 6-inch. A scene of indescribable confusion followed. Tents were rent to pieces and flung into the air, dust sprouted in huge fans and columns, and brightly through the reek could be seen the flashes of the bursting shells.

Like ants from an overturned nest, the little brown dots swarmed and scattered. Across the plain galloped a few terrified mules and in an incredible short time the wreckage was complete. Of the once orderly camp nothing remained but torn earth and twisted canvas, no movement was to be seen."

Squadron Commander John Mackworth, HMS Manica.

The beauty of the kite balloon was its ability to stay in the air for as long as the gunners required. They provided a steady platform for observation, communication back to the guns was impeccable and they were not dogged by the mechanical vagaries of the unreliable seaplanes.

Throughout this period there was little or no sign of any Turkish or German aircraft. The only airfield located was at Chanak, and this was badly damaged in a concerted attack on 18 April when six 100lb bombs destroyed the main hangar and the German aircraft it contained.

On 25 April the aeroplanes were responsible for covering the landings at Helles and Kum Kale whilst the Ark Royal and Manica were stationed off what was to be known as Anzac. The No 3 Squadron RNAS aircraft were in the air almost continuously with the intention of spotting the fall of shot for the close inshore naval bombardments of the Turkish beach defences. Unfortunately the naval ships were too overwhelmed with the targets they could spot themselves to pay any attention to the wireless messages from above. As Commander Charles Samson flew in a Maurice Farman above Helles 'W Beach' he had a unique perspective of human courage in adversity.

"Just before the tows were slipped the Turks started firing and I saw Hell let loose. The sea was literally whipped into a foam by the hail of bullets and small shells, It seemed practically impossible that the boats could get in through that tornado of fire; but still they came on and we saw the troops jump out and reach the beach. I saw the men fall the moment they reached the shore; but others charged, some going straight ahead up the slope, others making for the cliffs on the left flank.

I didn't see much more, as our principal job was to find the Turks in order to signal their position to the ships. They were not easy to find; but we located some Turks and guns quite close to the beach. Osmond signalled their position; but the ships disregarded our message and kept their fire to far inland.... My next glance at the beach showed it covered with bodies of our dead; but I could see that the landing had been made good".
Commander Charles Samson, 3 Squadron, RNAS.

Shortly after they returned to Tenedos (a small island of the coast south of the Dardanelles Straits . As they did so they passed above the disaster of 'V Beach' at Helles.



"I could see the landing was held up. The (steamship) River Clyde was fast ashore; but the lighters ahead of her were not in the right position, apparently, and gaps occurred. These lighters were full of corpses; the beach and the water close to the shore were strewn with bodies. It was an appalling sight for us to look down at from our safe position in the air. ... The sea for a distance of about 50 yards from the beach was absolutely red with blood, a horrible sight to sea."
Commander Charles Samson, 3 Squadron, RNAS

Meanwhile, off Anzac, the observer in the Manica kite balloon carried out a marathon stint aloft from 05.21 to 14.00 watching over the right flank of

Anzac in cooperation with HMS Triumph. The Anzac transports were twice harassed by the cross-peninsula salvos of the Turkish pre-dreadnought battleship Turgud Reis stationed in the Narrows. Alert to the danger, the balloon observer brought down counter-fire from the 12" shells of the Triumph which soon forced the Turgud Reis to move away.

The seaplanes were less effective and found it almost impossible to locate the Turkish positions and batteries in the tangled countryside. However, it was noticed that when they were in the air the Turkish gunners were naturally chary of opening fire. This in itself was a boon to the suffering Australian infantry as they fought their way inland.

Once the troops were established ashore at Helles and Anzac the aerial operations swiftly settled into a pattern. Their roles had been clearly defined. The reconnaissance information provided by the RNAS continued to be invaluable to GHQ. One significant early example was the intelligence provided by Flight Commander R L G Marix of the arrival of another Turkish Division at the port of Ak Bashi Liman on 17th May.

This was confirmed by Samson who also bombed the port that day and caused considerable panic amongst the troops. As a result of these reports GHQ realised that the Turks planned a major infantry attack at Anzac and warnings were issued on 18th May. Thus the 'surprise' Turkish night attack of 19th May was repulsed with terrible losses to the Turks when in other circumstances it might well have succeeded.

Later in the campaign air reconnaissance also provided the largely accurate reports of the Turkish forces and dispositions at Suvla Bay before the landing. In the days that followed they monitored the movements of the Turkish reserves as they approached the crucial heights that surrounded the new landing area. Unfortunately intelligence is of no use if it is not used and the advantages created by Hamilton's bold August offensive were

frittered away as his subordinate generals failed to realise the necessity for speed and determination if they were to achieve their objectives.

Although the early aerial photographs had been blurred, as the aerial cameras rapidly improved the peninsula gradually came into focus and a photographic map of the battlefields was created. Although photographic interpretation was in its infancy much useful information could still be gained that helped explain the tangled topography and revealed at least some of the Turkish dispositions and defence works.

The kite balloons of HMS Manica continued to be a thorn in the flesh of the Turks. Turkish batteries were destroyed, harassed and forced to move; new Turkish entrenchments were blasted to pieces almost as soon as they had been dug; transports unwise enough to show themselves within range of the naval guns firing across the Straits were pursued and even in one case sunk by indirect fire at a range of seven miles. The Manica was joined by HMS Hector in July 1915 and the two kite balloon ships continued to perform yeoman service off the coast of Gallipoli.

Samson's squadron had been renamed 3 Wing and based at Imbros (a large island 10 miles west of Gallipoli) on 4 August where they were joined later that month by 2 Wing. The two Wings were placed under the overall command of Colonel Frederick Sykes. The quality of aircraft improved with Morane Parasols, BE2 Cs, Bristol Scout and even a couple of the nimble Nieuport 11 Scouts. Given the state of signalling technology in 1915, spotting for the naval guns continued to be a largely thankless task for the aircraft and seaplanes.

"Spotting you had to do in a two seater. You had to have an observer. We had a wireless telegraph transmitter, it could transmit in code. You had to keep coming back towards the ship every now and then because she laid out strip signals on the deck to tell you when she'd finished and you could go home. I used to fly circles round the target and then fly an extended sweep round over the ship to see if she'd laid out anything.

On one occasion instead of flying a big circle round the ship I did a figure of eight and crossed the line of fire. I wasn't high enough above because a 15" shell passing underneath me created such a disturbance that my machine went down like a stone, I think I dropped five hundred feet".

Flight Sub Lieutenant Donald Bremner, 2nd Wing, RNAS.

Different signalling systems were tried but most failed and many pilots became excessively frustrated as flight after flight ended with nothing tangible achieved.

"Captain Collett he was going round and round in circles over the top there. He didn't dare go too high or he'd have got in the way of the shells. He was firing Very Lights to indicate where the shells were going. Green was right on target, red was too far and so on. After about two hours he came down. He said, "The Navy don't like us, they're not taking a damn bit of notice of me at all". Leading Aircraftman Arthur Beeton, 3 Sqdn RNAS.

The mood of the pilots was not helped when the infantry, for whom all this effort was being expended, took it upon themselves to join in the fray in an absolutely indiscriminate fashion. All aircraft were treated as nothing more than a jolly interesting target.

"We did once see an aircraft and I think everybody fired at it. I don't think anybody knew whether it was Turkish or English. It was such an extraordinary sight that people seemed to think it was the thing to shot at. I think they treated it as a joke!". 2nd Lieutenant Malcolm Hancock, 1/4th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment.

As Turkish and German aircraft began to appear in small numbers above the Peninsula from June onwards it became essential to try and prevent them observing the details of the British positions and offensive intentions. Regular 'scout' patrols were undertaken and the first decisive aerial combat occurred on 22 June when a German aircraft was shot down by a Voisin from 3 Wing flown by Captain C H Collett. His observer R E T Hogg, who was only armed with a rifle, had great good fortune as he hit the German aircraft in some vital point of the engine. It was forced to land near the looming mass of Achi Baba. The French artillery were quick on the uptake and soon destroyed what remained of the aircraft.

Bombing operations were also undertaken and given the concentrated nature of the Gallipoli campaign targets were numerous not far behind the front lines. Concentrations of troops, gun batteries and camps were all relentlessly bombed by the British pilots. The Turkish lines of communication were vulnerable and crucial facilities such as railway junctions, bridges, port installations and troop transport ships were all attacked.

Although the bomb loads were tiny from any modern perspective, they could still cause considerable damage and panic when they hit their targets. This was amply demonstrated when Turkish and German aircraft also began to bomb any visible Allied concentrations of troops and facilities. The British troops certainly did not appreciate the arrival of this aerial threat that was, of course, completely new to them.

"I've quite decided (since this morning) that the worst one of all is the sinister swish of an aeroplane bomb coming down. You feel such a "fearful ass" (in every sense of the word). You can't do anything and there's

nowhere to go and no time to get there if there was. Everyone shouts "Bomb Coming" which is a peculiarly fatuous remark." Major Norman Burge.

One young officer had a rather terrible glimpse into the future.

"The effect of these aerial bombs is much more stupefying than an ordinary shell, as you can see them coming, without the slightest chance of getting out of their way. I cannot imagine why every nation does not possess hundreds of them". Lieutenant Frank Howitt.

One German aircraft launched an attack on a British aircraft that had been forced to land on the emergency landing ground that 3 Squadron, RNAS had constructed behind W Beach.

"I was checking the valves of one of the BE2Cs that had landed. A Turkish plane came up over the peak of the peninsula and dropped a bomb. He dropped a second one and it was half way between that one and me. I thought well if he's got a third he's here! So I ran like hell for the dugouts. I couldn't get there and I heard this damned thing coming so I dived into this hole in the ground. Someone collapsed on top of me with maps and that - it was a brigadier. He said, 'I had that hole dug for me', I said, 'Sorry Sir'.

Leading Aircraftman Arthur Beeton, 3 Sqdn RNAS.

Ironically the Turkish aircraft also used one of the oldest weapons of war.

"There was an aircraft came over and dropped two boxes of aerial darts rather like cross bow arrows, steel, about a foot long. It pinned through men on the floor, pinned through horses, screams of agony, some were killed some weren't." Private Edward Robinson.

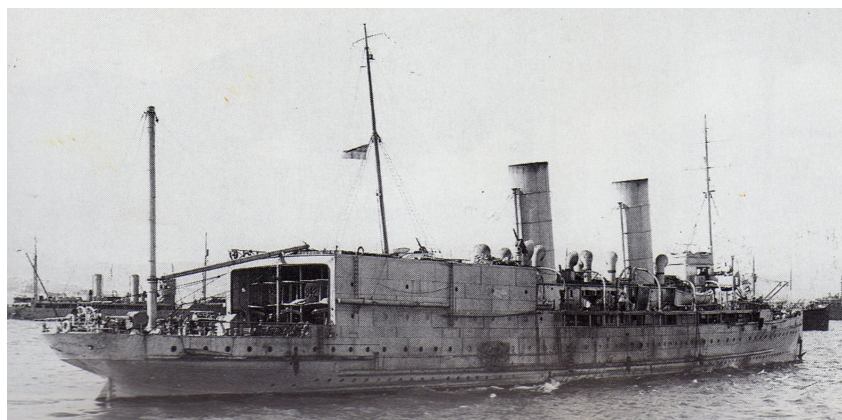
These 'flechettes' were also used to strike at General Sir Ian Hamilton's headquarters at Imbros.

"One morning at shaving time a Boche aeroplane came over and we didn't take all that much notice of him. Suddenly our sergeant major ran out of his tent shouting, "Bombs, spears, darts, arrows". True enough this chap had thrown over steel arrows that were falling all over the place and also a bomb. Nowadays it would be laughed at but in those days appeared to be an enormous bomb and it had landed reasonably close to the tent of Sir Ian, the Commander-in-chief."

Corporal Richard Cook, Surrey Yeomanry.

However the Turks could show a sporting side to their natures as was demonstrated when an aircraft appeared above the RNAS headquarters at Tenedos.

"In the afternoon we had a football match officers versus men. The next day you could see all the officers limping. A Turk plane came over in the middle of the match. I was in goal and I was watching this damn Turk going round and round over the pitch. I thought is he going to drop his bombs or what. No! He went across to the sand dunes and dropped them out of the way. A proper gentleman he was. Leading Aircraftman Arthur" Beeton, 3 Sqdn RNAS.



HMS Ben-my-Chree, Isle of Man steam-turbine Liner converted to Sea-plane Carrier.

A second aircraft carrier HMS Ben-my-Chree (*Isle of Man Steam Packet Company*) arrived to replace HMS Ark Royal in June. It was decided to use the increasingly powerful and reliable seaplanes to try and interrupt Turkish sea communications through the Mamora.

Australian and British submarines had already met with some success in

sinking transports but it was decided to try the feasibility of launching torpedoes from the air. On 12th August, a Short seaplane armed with a torpedo and piloted by Flight Commander Charles Edmonds was sent on a mission over the Sea of Mamora.

Edmonds sighted a Turkish steamer amidst a group of sailing ships and a tug:



"I glided down and fired my torpedo at the steamer from a height of about 14 feet and range of some 300 yards, with the sun astern of me. I noticed some flashes from the tug ... so presumed she was firing at me and therefore kept on a westerly course, climbing rapidly. Looking back, I observed the track of the torpedo, which struck the ship abreast the mainmast, the starboard side. The explosion sent a column of water and large



fragments of the ship almost as high as her masthead. The ship was about 5,000 tons displacement, painted black, with one funnel and four masts. She was lying close to the land, so cannot sink very far, but the force of the explosion was such that it is impossible for her to be of further use to the enemy". Flight Commander Charles Edmonds, HMS Ben-my-Chree, RNAS.

Although it is now considered that in fact this ship may already have been sunk by the submarine E14, the implications of this first aerial torpedo attack on a ship were still considerable -

especially as Edmonds and another pilot Flight Lieutenant G B Dacre claimed similar successes five days later. The torpedoes could have been a lethal threat to the Turkish sea-lanes, but it was soon discovered that the weight of the 14" torpedoes meant that the Short Seaplane could only get them into the air given a perfect combination of calm seas, light breezes and an engine running to its absolute limits. The torpedo carrying aircraft was a weapon for the future...

In October, Bulgaria entered the war on the side of the (enemy) Central Powers. Their successful invasion of Serbia had the effect of re-opening the possibility of a continuous railway line from Berlin to Constantinople which would allow the free flow of munitions and the heavy artillery pieces which threatened to blast the Allies from their shallow beachheads. It was therefore considered imperative to try and sever this link. In November several bombing raids were launched attacking the railway line at vulnerable points.

These raids involved a flight of some 200 miles for the aircraft from Imbros, while Ben-My Chree could sail to within 120 miles of the target. This was a long flight for the seaplanes and aircraft further encumbered by the weight of the two 112lb bombs that each carried on the missions. They did cause damage to the bridge piers, embankments, permanent way, junctions and stations along the line, but it added to little more than an inconvenience to the Bulgarians and Turks.

The campaign was effectively doomed after the failure of the August offensive, but aerial operations carried on right up until the last day. It remained crucial to deny Turkish or German aircraft any chance to examine exactly what was going on behind the Allied lines, particularly once the evacuation preparations had begun.

This screening role was made more difficult following the arrival over Gallipoli of the dreaded Fokker Monoplanes. Flight Sub Lieutenant Bremner and his Observer Midshipman H E Burnaby were easy meat in their two-seater Voisin.

"On one occasion I'd been spotting and my observer wanted to see something a bit further up the Peninsula. Suddenly I found this Fokker behind me. I only had the Lewis gun which my observer could fire forwards and downwards, he tried to get it to bear but couldn't. I had several bursts at me from behind and then made off. I tried to see where he was going but found my engine revs were dropping, he'd put bullet holes through most of the cylinders. The engine revs were dropping rapidly so I couldn't get home so I landed on the emergency aerodrome on the Peninsula.

I cleared the front line trenches by about six feet and just popped down on the aerodrome. They'd got a dugout there, which was really a slot in the side of the hill, which would just take an aeroplane and would prevent direct hits. As soon as I landed the mechanics rushed out and pushed me in there. I tried to destroy the machine, but they wouldn't let me set fire to it because they were evacuating that night. They didn't want any fire occurring that might have indicated that we were destroying stores and were about to leave.

I was sent down to W Beach and went onto a lighter. I sat there from about 6 o'clock that evening, till about one o'clock the following morning. I embarked on SS Partridge which was the second last ship to leave the Peninsula".

Flight Sub Lieutenant Donald Bremner, 2nd Wing, RNAS.

Evacuation from Gallipoli

Such were the demands for men intended for the Salonika landings in Serbia that forces were diverted away from Gallipoli, to the great dismay of General Sir Ian Hamilton – the Commander-in-Chief. As it was Hamilton was facing increasing criticism from London as grim news of the expedition reached home, along with complaints of his mismanagement of the campaign (particularly from the Australian journalist Keith Murdoch, later 'Sir' and father of the present Rupert Murdoch).

Thus with the possibility of further reinforcements to the region seemingly ruled out Hamilton received word on 11 October 1915 of a proposal to evacuate the peninsula. He responded in anger by estimating that casualties of such an evacuation would run at up to 50%: a startlingly high figure.

The tide was clearly moving against Hamilton. His belief in what was widely viewed as an unacceptable casualty rate in the event of evacuation resulted in his removal as Commander-in-Chief to be replaced by Sir Charles Monro. Monro lost no time in touring Helles, Suvla Bay and Anzac Cove upon his arrival on the peninsula on 28 October. His recommendation was prompt; evacuation. This did not however meet with Kitchener's approval. He travelled to the region to see the state of affairs for himself.

With few options remaining but to dig in for a difficult winter the British government, in October, began to consider the need for evacuation. After several weeks of debate and delay the British government, having prevaricated for several weeks, finally sanctioned an evacuation on 7 December.

Unfortunately by this stage a heavy blizzard had set in making such an operation hazardous. Nevertheless the evacuation of 105,000 men and 300 guns from Anzac Cove and Suvla Bay was successfully conducted from 10-20 December 1915. The evacuation of Helles was conducted - comprising 35,000 men - from late December until 9 January 1916.

The evacuation operation was easily the most successful element of the entire campaign, with casualty figures significantly lower than Hamilton had predicted (official figures quote just three casualties). Painstaking efforts had been made to deceive the 100,000 watching Turkish troops into believing that the movement of Allied forces did not constitute a withdrawal.

480,000 Allied troops had participated in the Gallipoli campaign. Of this figure 252,000 were casualties (of whom 48,000 were fatalities). One-third of the 33,600 Anzac casualties were fatalities. Turkish casualties have been estimated at over 250,000, of which at least 65,000 are believed to have been fatalities.

Conclusion

The air war over Gallipoli saw the infancy of many aspects of aerial warfare. Here you had no landing-decks but there were ship-borne seaplanes, with folding wings for stowage, variously carrying bombs, torpedoes, cameras, and wireless sets. There was wireless spotting for naval guns, at least one I torpedo attack on a ship, bombing of Turkish forces and 'interdiction' bombing of railways and docks to hinder reinforcements and supplies, and aerial combat (one lucky rifle shot).

Photo-reconnaissance led to the whole of Gallipoli being mapped; observers produced sketches with gun positions and troop estimates, and could spot minefields. Lastly, the RNAS provided amusement for allied troops who shot at them 'for fun'.

The airman saw terrible slaughter on the ground and risked their own lives simply by flying. They showed that quiet, often lonely, courage and determination that came to typify aircrew of all kinds.

The Gallipoli Campaign was over but the RNAS continued their valuable work in the Eastern Mediterranean and over the new Salonika battlefields. It had been a strange aerial campaign. Never before or since had seaplanes to work so continuously over land and sea. Yet despite all the difficulties the fledgling Royal Naval Air Service had earned its wings amidst the overall failure of the campaign.

=====
In May 2015 I put together the article on 'Gallipoli – The Air War' which describe the significant role played by the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) in that unfortunate campaign. You may find it interesting since it gives an outline of the Gallipoli campaign and the overall RNAS contribution.

One figure stands out particularly: Charles Rumney Samson, a dedicated and courageous pioneering flier in the RNAS. I thought it would be interesting to find out more about him and found the ideal document (below); this was written by Tim Brown and appears in the Royal Navy Reserve Air Branch Facebook page on:
<http://tinyurl.com/nexna4f>

Air Commodore Charles Rumney Samson CMG DSO* AFC RAF 1883-1931. RNAS Pioneer

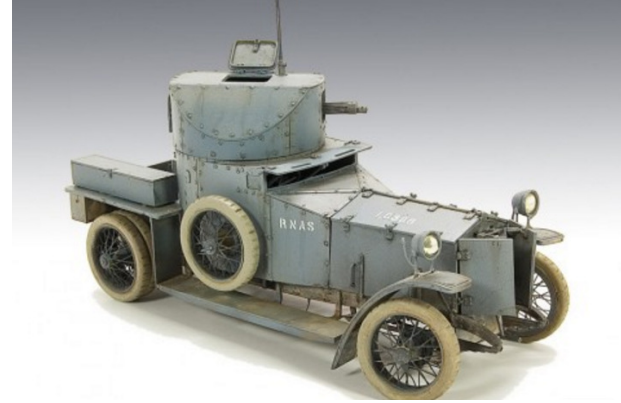
Joined the Royal Navy in 1902 and by 1906 took command of a Torpedo Boat (right). First pilot trained by the Navy and first



C.O. of the Royal Naval Flying School Eastchurch in 1911. In 1912 first RN pilot to take off from a ship when he flew a Short S.27 off a ramp fitted on the foredeck of HMS Africa at anchor in the Medway.



Led the first RNAS squadron, 'Eastchurch Squadron', to France 27 Aug 1914. When aircraft were unavailable aircrew performed reconnaissance in their own cars, later replaced by RNAS armoured cars on a RR chassis.



In 1915 Eastchurch became No. 3 Squadron and moved to the Dardanelles. Later in 1915 Samson took command of seaplane carrier Ben-my-Chree, lost in action in 1917.



1917; Samson made responsible for anti-submarine and zeppelin patrols over the North Sea. Under his command RNAS pilots shot down five Zeppelins. Below, launching fighters in the North Sea lighters towed at high speed. Below left, Lighter H21 as it currently is in the Fleet Air Arm's reserve collection at Cobham Hall, RNAS Yeovilton. The people to the lower left show the size of the craft.



Charles Samson was born near Manchester on 8 July 1883. One of four brothers he entered the Royal Navy aged thirteen and trained on board HMS Britannia, moored in the River Dart. When he left two years later, as a Midshipman he could not have known he was destined to become one of the greats of naval aviation.

Charles was the second son of solicitor Charles Leopold Samson and Margaret Alice Rumney. He was educated at Locker's Park, Hemel Hempsted, and Greenwich before joining the Royal Navy. After training Samson joined HMS Pomone in 1902 as a Sub Lieutenant and then served with the East Indies Squadron in the Persian Gulf and Somaliland (Somalia). An appointment onto a Boys' Training Ship (used for training new entry ratings) followed and he was promoted Lieutenant on 30 September 1904.

In 1906 he took command of Torpedo Boat No. 81 (see above); this was followed by appointments on board HMS Commonwealth, and as First Lieutenant on the cruiser HMS Philomel (*below*) and HMS Foresight.



In 1910 members of the Royal Aero Club offered to lend the Admiralty two aircraft belonging to Frank McClean and the services of George Cockburn to teach a number of naval officers to fly. Samson was among 200 applicants and one of four selected, along with Lt Longmore, Lt Gregory and the Royal Marine Lt Gerrard RMLI. *(below left with Frank McLeon)*

Gerrard notes Samson was the senior of the quartet and remarks, *'he came to us from the Persian Gulf where he had been hunting pirates... doubtless his fierce pointed beard helped inspire terror in the wrong-doer'* and informs us that there was a rumour Samson had returned home with sunstroke? The fierce pirate-hunter was the first of the quartet to qualify as a pilot, having logged just over one hours flying time, he was awarded Royal Aero Club Certificate No.71 on 25 April 1911.



right: Samson in a Short S.27 at Eastchurch).

Samson is often described as the 'first naval pilot', however it would be more accurate to say he was the *'first pilot trained by the Admiralty'*, as Lt George Colmore RN paid for his own training at Eastchurch and was awarded RAeCC No.15 in June 1910; however Colmore did not fly for the Navy until he joined the RNAS in 1914.

Once he was qualified, Samson recommended the Admiralty purchase the two S.27s from McClean and suggested his colleagues should remain at Eastchurch to instruct further

pilots, whilst Short Brothers agreed to train the necessary naval aircraft maintainers. The Sea Lords agreed. One of the aircraft they bought had originally belonged to Colmore and it became known as Naval Biplane No.1... or variously by the nicknames 'The Dud' or 'Th'owd Bitch'.



Left: Samson's seaplane at Southsea

Frank McClean also donated a small parcel of land, adjacent to the RAeC Flying ground, and Samson was appointed as the first Commanding Officer of the Royal Naval Flying School Eastchurch. He was promoted Commander in January 1912 (until March 1914 the rank of Lt Cdr applying only to 'Lieutenants in Command' of ships).

Later that month, Samson became the first Royal Navy pilot to take off from a ship when he flew a Short S.27 off a ramp fitted on the foredeck of HMS Africa at anchor in the Medway. About five weeks later Samson achieved a world first by taking off from HMS Hibernia

whilst the battleship was underway steaming across Weymouth Bay on 9 May.

(The caption for the photo below says HMS Hibernia, but the author thinks this was Samson's first flight from HMS Africa.)



Samson, known as 'Sammy' to his friends, continued to pioneer other innovations, including bomb aiming sights, wireless telegraphy, navigation lights and the first cross country flights. On 14 April 1914 Samson led a formation of aircraft from Eastchurch in a flypast during the Fleet Review at Spithead.

The Naval Wing participated in the Staff Camp at Netheravon that Summer; the aim being to prepare a Military Wing for mobilisation and deployment in support of the British Expeditionary Force in the event of war (It was widely accepted by all present that war against Germany was

inevitable). Immediately after the camp the Admiralty announced the establishment of an independent Royal Naval Air Service in July 1914

In August the Kaiser's army advanced into Belgium; Britain, compelled by an eighty year old agreement, declared war against Germany. The Government informed the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill that, with the BEF in France, responsibility for the air defence of the British Isles would fall upon his newly formed RNAS. However Churchill and the Director of the Air Department, Cdre Murray Sueter RN, were both of the opinion that the best form of defence is attack.

On the night of 25 August Samson was summoned to London. He arrived at 22.00 and was immediately taken to see Sueter who ordered Samson to return to Eastchurch post-haste and begin preparations to depart the following morning, with his squadron, for Ostend to support Gen Aston's Marine Division. Samson telephoned back to Eastchurch and told them the news. When he arrived there at 02.00 everyone was collected in the Officers' Mess awaiting his return. At 03.00 news arrived that the Marines had been delayed and were not crossing until 27 August and they should delay their departure. This was not received well and there was general suspicion that the war would be over before they arrived.

However after lunch on 27 August Samson climbed into BE2A No. 50 and started up. Samson had ordered union flags be tied onto the aircraft struts for identification, and the pilots wrapped bicycle inner tubes around their chests as life preservers and carried a .45 automatic pistol; and so the 'Eastchurch Squadron' of nine aircraft set off across The Channel. The party included Capt Barnby RMLI (Royal Marine Light Infantry) as Camp Commandant and Staff Surg H.V Wells as the doctor, both of whom were also pilots; as well as two of Samson's brothers, Bill and Felix.

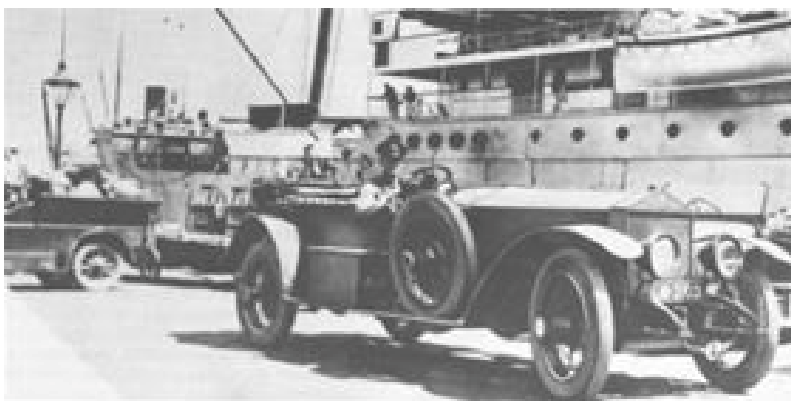
They took nine aircraft comprising Royal Aircraft Factory BE2s, Sopwith biplanes, Blériot monoplanes a Henry Farman, Bristol Boxkite and a Short biplane. Ten cars, two Mercedes trucks, and eight London double-decker buses which were loaded onboard the recently converted seaplane tender HMS Empress.

The crossing was rough and the fliers encountered low cloud and thunderstorms before coasting in at Calais. Samson turned North East and they flew past Dunkirk towards Ostend. Samson spotted the Leopold racecourse on the south side of the town and decided that would be a good spot for the squadron to land.

The course was narrow and with the wind blowing across it the landings were difficult. They were not helped when a small party of Marines had seen them approaching and opened fire on them. Samson touched down first and almost ran into some railings so he jumped from the BE2 and tore them down before the Briggs and Osmond made their approach. The following day the squadron moved to another site near to the harbour.

The strength and speed of the German advance, forced a British withdrawal as Ostend fell. Samson was ordered to return to Britain, but demonstrating his determination, and a tendency towards maverick behaviour he informed his superiors that the weather was too bad for his men to return across the Channel. This bought him time to lobby military commanders and politicians who requested the naval aviators remain in situ, which they did

until early 1915 flying scouting missions and bombing raids that disabled and discouraged the German army.



When aircraft were unavailable Samson ordered his officers to drive out, often in their own private cars (including Samson's Rolls Royce, below) to reconnoitre the surrounding countryside for enemy units.

So that the men were better protected on these forays sheets of metal were welded onto the cars in workshops and forges of Chantres de France in the dockyard. They were also fitted with machine gun mountings. Thus was born the armoured car and with them the RNAS Armoured Car Corps under the command of Flt Lt T.G Hetherington. Samson later said of the first vehicle, *'the car looked very fierce and warlike, and no doubt the German's considered it more invulnerable than it really was'*. Samson was becoming such a thorn in the side of the German army that the Kaiser placed a £1,000 bounty on his head, payable dead or alive.



A later armoured car based on a Rolls Royce chassis and engine was used by the RNAS (and later by 'Lawrence of Arabia').

On 1st October 1914 Samson was Mentioned in Dispatches, for the first time, by Brig. General Paris *'for great gallantry under difficult circumstances whilst attacking a large German Force outside Douai with Armoured cars'*.

The armoured cars were so effective that the RNAS was tasked to escort a relief column that needed to be sent to Antwerp. A line of London Transport double-decker buses moved troops and supplies forward, escorted by Samson's cars on the ground and naval aircraft overhead.

The Germans had begun to launch Zeppelin raids on Britain. In truth these had mixed success but were massively demoralising the British public. So the RNAS launched daring raids on the Zeppelin sheds at Friedrichshafen, Koln and Dusseldorf. Although these raids did little damage they reminded the Germans that they were not immune, and they bolstered public support at home. The raids were also in strict contrast to the RFC who, at this stage of the war, were largely flying unarmed scouting sorties.

On 21 December Samson and F/Lt W Wilson flew the first night bombing raid. They took off from St Pol on MF11 No.1241 and attacked positions around the harbour at Ostende.

The RNAS acquired an 80ft long motor launch. Samson quickly put this to use patrolling along the coastline operated by two RNVR officers. To provide some form of defence a three-pounder gun was fitted to the vessel. Samson directed them to act as an Air Sea Rescue craft and rescue the crew and salvage, where possible, any plane that ditched. By the end of 1914, just three months into the war, Samson had earned for himself and the men of the RNAS four Distinguished Service Orders, and considerable regard.



In the spring 1915 the Eastchurch Squadron, now renamed as No. 3 Squadron RNAS, was ordered to move to the Dardanelles. Samson insisted that his horse, a fine black thoroughbred charger, should go too. This had been captured from a German Uhlán (Prussian lancer) officer during an armoured car raid at Aniche. But shipping his favourite horse to the Mediterranean would be the least of his worries.



On arrival Samson discovered that only five out of the thirty aircraft dispatched were serviceable. However, assisted by seaplanes from HMS Ark Royal and the balloon ship HMS Manica, they set about supporting the troops ashore by spotting for the warships guns and bombing strategic shore targets.

The airfield was initially on the island of Tenedos, but they later moved to Imbros as it was nearer to the Gallipoli. Conditions were satisfactory according to pilot Flt/Lt Donald Bremner:

'We were really comfortable. We had a stone built mess-room, which was the Gunroom, and the next door was the Wardroom. We all ate in the Wardroom. We lived in aeroplane packing cases... I suppose they were about ten feet long, perhaps seven feet high, and possibly seven feet wide...'

Samson quickly realised that the small bombs his crews could drop were ineffective, so carried out an unauthorised trial dropping a



500lb bomb. The trials were effective, as were subsequent bombing raids.

(Photo above right) *Samson* attacked a Turkish camp on Gallipoli, dropping a 500-lb bomb from a Henri Farman biplane. This was by far the largest bomb that had ever been dropped from an aeroplane. Aiming by eye (bombing sights were yet to be invented) he scored a direct hit.

Samson was not averse to revenge attacks. When a German aircraft came over the RNAS airfield on Christmas Day 1915 and dropped a bomb Samson recalls that it *'broke up our football match, Officers vs Men, to celebrate the day. It was just as well, as some of us were feeling we had quite enough of football on top of Christmas dinner. We all rushed for our aeroplanes, and everyone went up to the enemy aerodrome, loaded up with every sort of bomb and frightfulness we had.'*

In November 1915 Col Frederick Sykes had arrived in theatre. His orders were to take over command from Samson, who was recalled to London where he was given command of the converted IOM passenger ferry Ben-my-Chree. (see also picture on page 1).



Ben-my-Chree sailed for Port Said in May 1916 where she patrolled off the coast of Palestine and Syria. She also attacked Turkish positions before sailing through Suez to Aden. Here the ship conducted a six-day bombing campaign that silenced enemy guns at Perim. In almost continuous action throughout 1916 Samson was surprised to receive a signal from the Admiralty enquiring why the ship was using so much ammunition. Samson offered the simple explanation; *'there was unfortunately a war on'*.

In September Ben-my-Chree sailed from Port Said, accompanied by HMS David. At 5.00am on 14th five aircraft were prepared for a reconnaissance flight over Gaza. Samson himself flying a Sopwith Schneider No.3789. The flight encountered some anti-aircraft fire as they approached Beersheba, and suffered light damage, but pressed on.



Samson noted engine vibrations and landed a short distance away from the ship. As he taxied towards her, suddenly, the aircraft's engine fell forward off its mountings... Samson later commented, 'I was glad it was kind enough to wait until I had landed'. (Photo left: Note - Samson's Schneider has two Lewis guns strapped onto the struts either side of the cockpit.)

In December 1916 Samson was not recommended for promotion. His confidential report states, *'although a brilliant pilot & a gallant officer he is not considered to possess the necessary administrative qualifications'*.

Early in 1917 Samson sailed to Castellorizo under orders from a French Admiral. Unfortunately this put the ship within range of Turkish gun positions ashore and on 11 January Ben-my-Chree was hit, caught fire and sank. Samson was acquitted at the subsequent court marshal and his crew were commended for their action.

Returning to Britain Samson took command of a unit based at Great Yarmouth on 26 November 1917, where he was responsible for anti-submarine and zeppelin patrols over the North Sea.



In order to provide better fighter cover at sea Samson adapted a lighter that had been introduced to allow ships to tow a seaplane behind them. The craft were

generally towed by destroyers. The lighter was a lesser-known variant on sea-borne air power. A 1918 Admiralty Seaplane Lighter is now the world's oldest 'aircraft carrying vessel'; Lighter H21 (photo, page 1). It was rescued from the Thames mud in 1996 and is currently at the Fleet Air Arm Museum Reserve Collection awaiting display.

Samson used these lighters towed at speed to carry (Sopwith Pup) fighters that could fly off whilst under-way. He conducted the first sea trials himself and very nearly died when his aircraft fell over the bow and the lighter ran over both him and the aircraft. However, following modifications the idea proved highly successful and by the end of the war pilots under his command had shot down five Zeppelins.

Initially resisting a transfer to the Royal Air Force when it formed in April 1918 Samson eventually resigned his naval commission and was appointed as Officer Commanding No.4 Group as a Lieutenant Colonel, and shortly afterwards promoted to Group Captain. He was removed from the Navy List on 22 January 1920.

Three years later he was appointed as AOC Mediterranean, based in Malta. Promoted Air Commodore Samson was given command of No.6 Fighter Group based at Kenley. In 1926 he took over as Chief Staff Officer RAF Middle East Command.

In 1926 and 1927, he led two record-breaking flights, the first a return flight from Cairo to Aden (16 - 29 September 1926) and the second from Cairo to Cape Town (30 March - 22 May 1927). Samson resigned his commission two years later, and retired to Wiltshire, where he died at home from heart failure on 5 February 1931.

In some quarters Samson was possibly seen as a bit of a loose cannon; however without the drive and determination of pioneers like Samson in both the Army and Royal Navy it is doubtful the country would have been prepared for air combat in the early years of World War One.