

# Fighter Aircraft in Support of the Gallipoli Campaign

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With the outbreak of WWI hundreds of New Zealanders joined the Royal Navy by transferring from NZ or by direct RN enlistment. The NZ Naval Defence Act 1913 formally established the New Zealand Naval Forces.

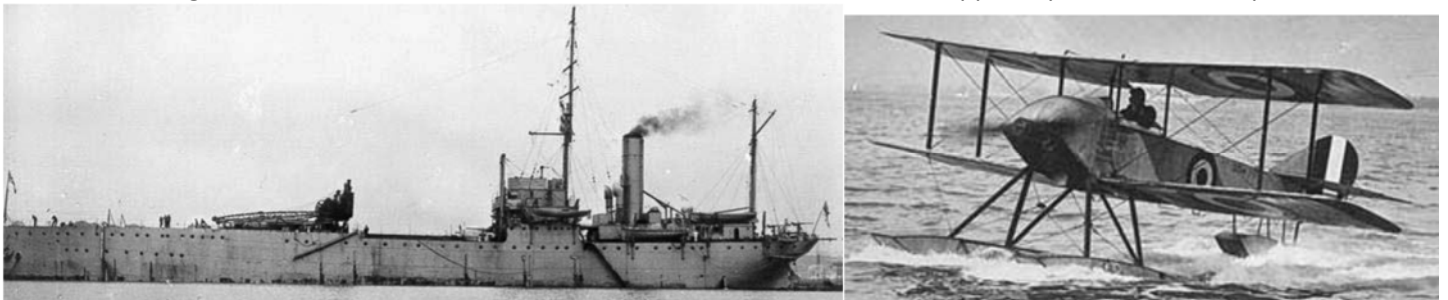
In 1914 HMS *Ark Royal* commanded by Cdr Robert Clark-Hall, was the first ship designed and built as a floatplane carrier. Armed with 8 floatplanes, many bombs and 4 QF 12-pounder, 12 cwt guns plus 2 machine guns she arrived at the island of Tenedos on 17 February 1915. The same day a Wright Pusher floatplane (speed 116km/h) from *Ark Royal* discovered new fortifications in the Dardanelles dropped a single 20-pound bomb and returned with seven bullet holes in its skin. *Ark Royal's* aircraft conducted reconnaissance and observation missions in support of the fleet as it moved further up the Dardanelles. *Ark Royal* lost her first aircraft on 5 March as the propeller of one of her Sopwith Tabloids splintered into pieces at 3,000 feet. Both of the aircraft's crewmen were recovered by the destroyer HMS *Usk*



On 1 March 1915, Lieutenant Cemal Bey dropped bombs on the British battleship *Majestic*, causing substantial damage. At that time there were three enemy aircraft in Gallipoli, manned by German and Ottoman pilots. These formed the Ottoman 1st Air Squadron, under the command of the German Lieutenant Ludwig Preussner.

Later in the March, *Ark Royal's* aircrew learned to spot mines from the air and were moderately successful and the ship's crew cleared a vineyard and built a 600m long airstrip on Tenedos Island (about 30km south of the Gallipoli Peninsular) for No. 3 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) and unloaded its crated aircraft on 26–27 March. On 8 April, *Ark Royal* received a pair of Sopwith Schneider single-seat floatplanes and two Sopwith Type 860 torpedo bombers, another Wight Pusher and a Short Type 166, all two-seat floatplanes. The ship had no room for all these aircraft and she used the collier *Penmorvalt* to store some of them and for additional workshop space. *Ark Royal's* aircraft continued with reconnaissance, observation and bombing missions over the Dardanelles, and discovered a large ammunition dump on 12 April, providing corrective data to direct gunfire from HMS *Lord Nelson* onto the target.

On 25 April *Ark Royal's* aircraft provided support to the Australian and New Zealand troops at Anzac Cove as they landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula. A month later, the battle on the peninsula had bogged down and *Ark Royal* moved to a safer anchorage at Imbros Island, from where her own aircraft continued to support operations at Gallipoli.



Left: HMS *Ark Royal*. Right: Sopwith Schneider built by Sopwith Aviation Company originally designed as a high speed sports aircraft (148km/h) and later adapted for military use, some Schneiders were still in service at the end of WWI.



Left: Short Admiralty Type 166 on HMS *Ark Royal*.

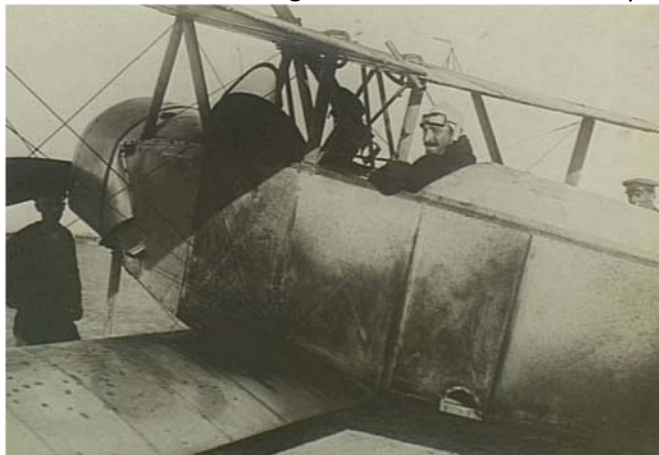


Right: The Royal Aircraft Factory BE2 was a British single-engine

two-seat biplane which was in service from 1912 until the end of WWI. About 3,500 were built. Initially used as front-line reconnaissance aircraft and light bombers; variants of the type were also used as night fighters. Although quite slow it had a relatively low accident rate, and its stability actually proved helpful in its artillery observation and aerial photography duties during the Gallipoli Campaign. The BE2 was not a practical fighter design with the pilot at the rear having the best view and the observer / gunner sitting forward with his view obstructed by the wing. When Lewis guns were fitted to the BE2 they could be placed in four positions but this involved the observer lifting the gun out of one socket and placing it in another. This required the observer to stand and work while the aircraft was likely to be manoeuvring. Later BE aircraft designs changed crew positions to give the observer/gunner an improved field of fire. The BE2 flew initially in a reconnaissance and observation role with a camera fitted to its side next to the pilot. At Gallipoli it was also used in a limited bombing role with the observer being substituted for bombs.

In March 1915 Commander Charles Rumney Samson was sent to the Dardanelles with No 3 Squadron (later No 3 Wing) RNAS originally it was based on the island of Tenedos and, together with floatplanes from HMS *Ark Royal*, provided the only Allied air cover. On arrival, only four BE2s and a Nieuport 10 were serviceable of the 30 aircraft that had been shipped in crates. Samson's squadron pioneered the use of radio in directing the fire of battleships and photo-reconnaissance. On 25 April Samson flew many missions himself at the Landing at Cape Helles, On 27 May, Samson attacked the German submarine *U-21* which had just sunk HMS *Majestic*; when he ran out of bombs he resorted to firing his Lewis gun at it. In June, a temporary airstrip was constructed at Cape Hellas; In August, Samson's wing was moved to a new airfield on the island of Imbros (refer map above) where it was joined by No 2 Wing under the overall command of Colonel Frederick Sykes.

The French designed Nieuport 10 single seat fighter aircraft saw extensive service with the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) It had a wingspan of 8.2m, a wing area of 18sq/m and a length of 7.09m. It was fitted with an 80hp Le Rhone rotary engine giving a maximum speed of 139km/h, a range of about 249km and a service ceiling of 4,572m. The British version was fitted with a model 1914 .303" Lewis machine gun mounted through the upper wing to avoid shooting the propeller. Between August 1914 and June 1915 the British Government had ordered from BSA, 3,052 Lewis Guns at a cost of £165 each although used earlier were officially approved for Land, Naval and Air service on 15 October 1915.



Images above of Commander Charles Rumney Samson who was a British naval aviation pioneer. He was one of the first four officers selected for pilot training by the Royal Navy and was the first person to fly an aircraft from a moving ship. Samson commanded No 3 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) Wing, based on Tenedos Island. Left image: about to start on one of his excursions over the Ottoman lines at Gallipoli in a Nieuport 10 single seat fighter aircraft with bombs and Lewis gun armament. Right: Samson, standing beside a single seat Nieuport 10 aircraft during the Gallipoli Campaign, with a Webley Auto .455" Naval pistol in his hand.

Note: HMS *Ark Royal* was a Royal Navy ship manned & operated by Royal Navy regulars but embarked a RNAS air group whose sole responsibility was to operate and maintain the floatplanes. This split between the men who sailed the ship and those who flew the aircraft became standard practice for all the aircraft carriers that followed.

The role of the Royal Naval Air Service during the Gallipoli / Dardanelles Campaign, ranged from reconnaissance and bombing strategic targets, aerial photography and the fighter planes supporting the invasion landings, limiting enemy reconnaissance including during the preparations and the evacuation of all forces from Gallipoli.

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