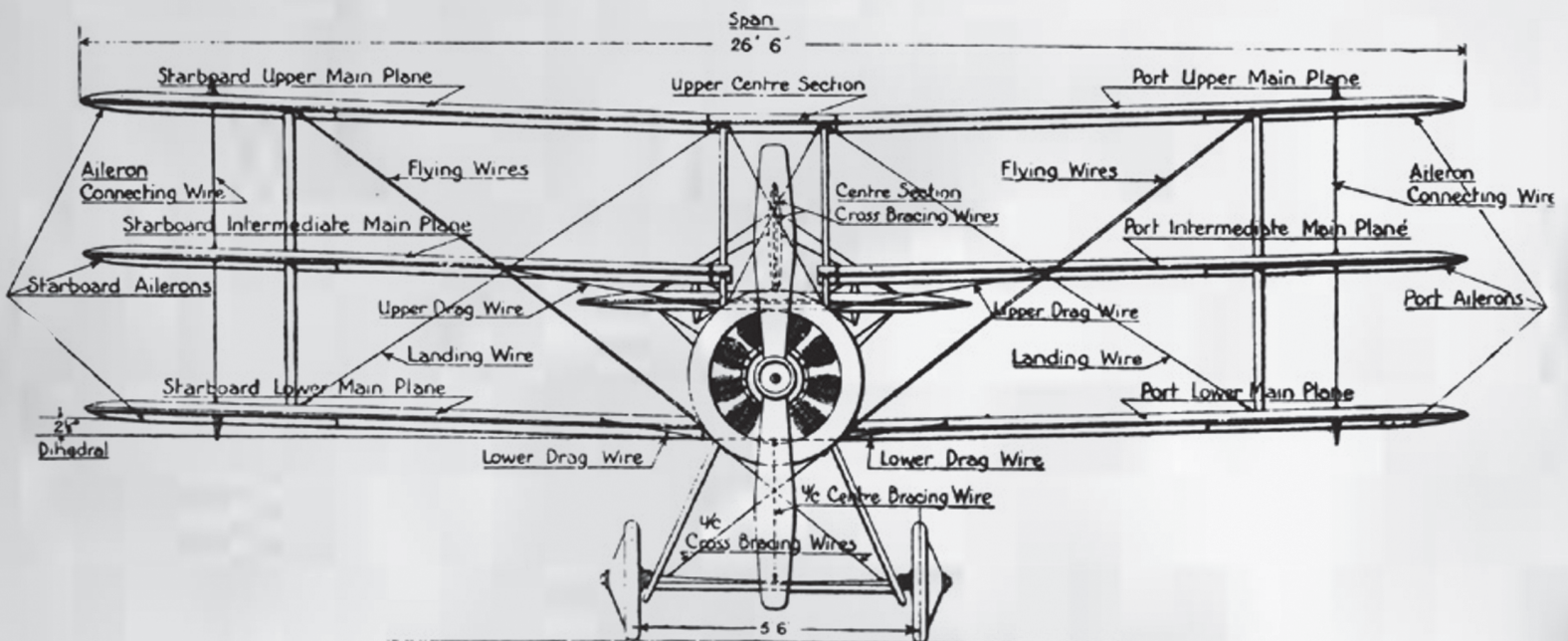


SOPWITH TRIPLANE

AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES!



AIRCRAFT BUILT BY THE SOPWITH AVIATION COMPANY LTD.

SOPWITH; A DETAILED TYPE-BY TYPE REVIEW

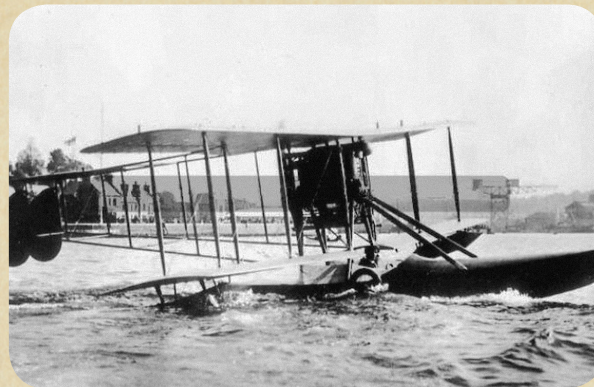
Although the title of this book suggests it only gives a description of the Triplane fighter, details are given here on all important Sopwith aircraft since very little has been published on this recently. Before Sopwith started to manufacture its own types the company had modified a Wright biplane (manufactured by the British Howard Wright) and fitted it with a 50 hp Gnome engine. Later, this was even completely rebuilt fitted with a 70 hp Gnome engine from a Blériot. Also a hybrid biplane with a closed fuselage based on the earlier Wright was built.

The first completely new design from the company was the **three-seat tractor biplane** of 1913 with a 80 hp Gnome engine. It featured three large celluloid windows for the two passengers sitting in front of the pilot. Three were built. Three more modified examples on floats were built, powered by a 100 hp Anzani engine.



This Wright biplane was flown by T.O.M Sopwith in 1911 during several occasions. This plane was designed by the British Howard Wright and bore no relation at all with the U.S. Wrights Wilbur and Orville!

Simply designated as the 'three-seat tractor biplane, this was the first true Sopwith design.



The second Sopwith design: the Bat Boat. The plane is shown near Cowes at the Isle of Wight.

Second type built in 1913 was a small two-seat biplane flying boat known as the **Bat Boat**. The first one was powered by a 6-cylinder 90 hp Austro-Daimler engine. It was soon wrecked, but another two were supplied to the British Admiralty; later to be followed by an improved amphibian version known as Bat Boat II with a 200 hp engine.

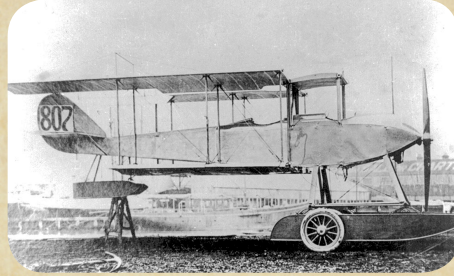
The next design was the **Tabloid**, a single seat high-speed biplane that became world famous when it gained, as version on floats, the 1st place at the Schneider Trophy contest of 1914 at Monaco. Pilot on this occasion was Howard Pixton who convincingly won with his 100 hp Gnome powered racer. More Tabloids were constructed as a landplane with a wheel undercarriage. The Tabloid was the first Sopwith airplane built in substantial numbers with a total of 137 manufactured in various sub types. The Tabloid was further developed into the military types **Pup** (originally known as 'Scout') and the Baby seaplane. One two-seat Tabloid was built as the Sopwith **Sociable**, sometimes called the 'Tweenie' and the 'Churchill' (since it was sponsored by Winston Churchill!)



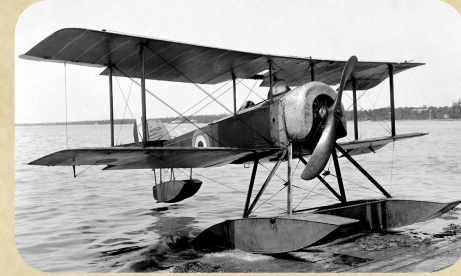
The Tabloid Schneider Trophy racer flown in 1914 at Monaco with pilot Howard Pixton.



The Gordon Bennet racer no. 1215 of 1914. A second machine, no. 1214, was a modified Tabloid.



The Type 807 Folder Seaplane of 1914 was built for the Admiralty. Only two were built.



The Baby seaplane was the first Sopwith plane built in substantial numbers before the war.



Together with the Camel and the Pup the 1 1/2 Strutter was one of the two most successful Sopwith types built in the largest numbers. This 1 1/2 Strutter, no. A1924, was one of a batch of 30 built by the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough.



Further development of the Tabloid resulted in the Pup; a very docile and maneuverable fighter. This one with registration A4-9 served in the Australian air force after the end of the war.

Other types built before the outbreak of the First World War are

- 1913 **Tractor floatplane** (100 hp Anzani)
- 1913 **Circuit seaplane** built for the 'Circuit of Britain' races of 1913
- 1914 **Circuit seaplane** for the Circuit of Britain 1914. It was tested as a landplane
- 1914 **Gordon Bennet racer** (at the outbreak of the war fitted with a gun!)
- 1914 **Pusher seaplane** with a 120 hp Austro-Daimler engine
- 1914 pusher landplane '**Gunbus**' with 100 hp Anzani and a 2nd one with a 150 hp Sunbeam
- 1914 two-seat scout known as '**Spinning Jenny**'; 24 built for the naval Air Service
- 1914 **Folder Seaplane** (Type 807) built for the Admiralty
- 1914 **tractor seaplane** Type 860; 18 built for the Admiralty

With the start of the First World War, Sopwith received substantial orders starting with a further military development of the Tabloid Schneider Trophy racer fitted with floats. It was known as the Sopwith Baby and fitted with an 110 or 130 hp Clerget rotary engine. During 1915-1917 a total of 286 was built. This included a number built by Fairey and Blackburn.

The Baby was used in the war; not only by the R.N.A.S., but also by France, Italy and Canada. Even after the war, a few were exported to the United States and to Chile. It was also used by the Norwegian naval air service. The Baby was mainly used as an unarmed scout plane.

A bigger success than the Baby was a two-seat armed scout plane powered by a 110 or 135 hp Clerget rotary engine, known as the **Sopwith 1 1/2-Strutter**. It featured not only a second seat for the observer, armed with a machine gun, but also two fixed forward firing machine guns in the nose. It was so good compared with the German types then introduced at the Western Front that it was used quite successfully as a fighter until the Germans introduced more agile fighter types! It was used by various countries, also after the war, and including license production almost 6000 were built in various versions.

Sopwith Triplane - Aircraft of the aces!

The next successful Sopwith type was the **Pup**. It was a smaller and lighter single-seat fighter, largely based on the 1½-Strutter and the Tabloid fitted with a 80 hp Le Rhone rotary engine. It was armed with a single forward-firing synchronized machine gun. It was much more maneuverable than the 1½-Strutter, very docile and easy to fly. It was used by both Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service over the period 1916-1918. During and after the war it flew at various countries like France, Belgium, Australia, Greece, Russia, Japan and the U.S.A. Interned aircraft also saw service at the Dutch army air service. Total production of Pups was 1770, although other sources quote a number of 1847.

The Triplane fighter is, together with some other Sopwith triplane types, the main subject of this book and discussed elsewhere. The Triplane was on the European front soon succeeded by a new type that would become the most well-known Sopwith aircraft: the Sopwith **Camel** fighter. Powered by a rotary engine giving 100-150 hp power output and armed with two synchronized forward firing machine guns it was found to be equal or superior to the German fighters. However, where the Pup and the Triplane fighters were very pleasant and docile to fly, the Camel had some vicious and unforgiving flight characteristics. It could be as deadly to inexperienced pilots as to enemy aircraft but the pilots who mastered flying the Camel scored many victories. Total Camel production was 5490 (5497 + 250 shipboard Camels according to other sources). During and after the war it was used by more than a dozen countries. After the Camel there were two other Sopwith aircraft types manufactured in large numbers.



The Camel, in spite of its demanding flying characteristics, became a legendary plane.



The Snipe was an improved development of the Camel that was in fact just too late to play an important role in the last phase of the war. This one flew in Canada after the war.



The Dolphin was too late to see large-scale action in the Great War.



The little Bee was Harry Hawker's Hawker's personal plane. We see Harry Hawker on the right.



At the end of the war the Scooter succeeded the Bee as Hawker's personal plane.

The first was a successor of the Camel introduced in 1918. It was called the **Snipe**. Externally it resembled the Camel, but it was fitted with a much more powerful engine; the 230 hp Bentley B.R.2. Sopwith received in the last year of the First World War large orders, but it arrived too late on the Western Front to play a decisive role. The Snipe was used on a small scale during the last months of the war and it will definitely be remembered since one of the British aces, major W.G. Barker, flew a legendary solo mission just a fortnight before the armistice against 15 Fokker D.VII's. He was awarded the Victoria Cross with this epic fight by downing four of the best fighter planes the Germans had!

In total several thousands were ordered but only some 500 were actually completed and delivered. After the war it remained in service in the U.K. as standard R.A.F. fighter and in several other countries, but on a very modest scale and most were scrapped. The last Sopwith type built in large numbers was the **Dolphin**; fitted with a Hispano-Suiza in-line engine. It was a single seat high-speed fighter that was tested in the second half of 1917. First production machines were operational by the end of 1917/early 1918. Just like the Snipe it was ordered in large quantities but the Hispano-Suiza engines proved to be difficult to obtain and difficult to maintain. The Dolphin was too late to play a role in the war. Still, 1559 were built. Other sources even claim a total of 2072, but a very large number was not even fitted with an engine and soon scrapped after the war.

Other Sopwith military aircraft that arrived too late on the Western front to play any role are:

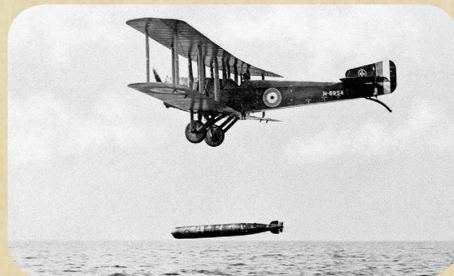
- **Salamander**; development of the Snipe as ground attack plane. Some 500 built but it was only used on a small scale during the last months of the war. However, it made its presence felt to the Germans and the few aircraft used scored remarkably well against German planes. Most were scrapped after the armistice.
- **Dragon**; further development of the Snipe with a 360 hp ABC Dragonfly radial engine. Flew in 1918 and some 200 were built, mostly as engineless airframes. Most of these never flew.
- **Cuckoo**; naval torpedo bomber; 233 built but too late for the war. Used until 1923 and some exported to Japan.



The B.1 was a light bomber that was too late to see any action in the war.



With the Swallow Sopwith tried, and failed, to introduce a monoplane fighter.



After the Great War, small numbers of the Cuckoo served as a torpedo bomber. Although 233 were built, it was introduced too late to be used in the war.



The Dragon was an improved Snipe, but most were delivered without an engine and scrapped shortly after the war. This one, with serial J3628, is shown here during testing at McCook Field, USA

Other wartime Sopwith types that were produced in very limited numbers only were:

- **Bee** (1916); small personal biplane built for pilot Harry Hawker with a 50 hp rotary engine
- **Scooter**; next personal plane of Harry Hawker with 130 hp Clerget. It was a converted first Swallow prototype
- **Swallow**; parasol-type single seat fighter with a 110 hp Le Rhone rotary engine. First flown in Summer 1918 and too late for the war. Only one built + the above mentioned Scooter.
- **Sparrow**; direct forerunner of the Pup fighter using wing-warping for control. Four built.
- **B.1** and **B.2** light bombers; one of each built in 1918 but not operational
- **Hippo**; two-seat fighter built in 1917 with a 200 hp Clerget engine. Only two built.
- **Bulldog**; two-seat fighter/reconnaissance plane built in 1918 and fitted with a 200 hp Clerget rotary engine. Only two built.
- **Buffalo**; armored fighter/reconnaissance plane. Two built in 1918.
- **Snail**; single-seat fighter with a 170 hp ABC Wasp radial engine flown in April 1918. Six ordered but only two delivered for testing.
- **Snapper**; single-seat fighter with a 360 hp ABC Dragonfly radial engine. Three built after the war.



Sopwith Hippo two-seat fighter (Aviodrome Collection)



Sopwith Salamander E5431. It was too late to play a decisive role during the First World War.



Sopwith Bulldog two-seat fighter and reconnaissance plane of 1918



Sopwith Buffalo armoured fighter and reconnaissance plane.



Sopwith Snail single seat fighter was too late for the first World War.



Sopwith Snapper single seat fighter built after the war.



Sopwith Dove VH-UDN two seat sport version of the Sopwith Pup built after the war.

The unsuccessful triplanes **L.R.T.Tr.**, **Cobham**, **Rhino** and **Snark** will be discussed separately.

When the war was ended, and large numbers of military aircraft were retired and scrapped, orders for new Sopwith types dwindled so dramatically that the Sopwith company had to stop all its activities by 1920. As we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, Sopwith restarted with new capital under the new name of Hawker. If Sopwith had maintained its famous name, we would have known the Sopwith Hurricane, the Sopwith Typhoon/Tempest/Seafury and the Sopwith Sea Hawk, Hunter and Harrier!

The post-war Sopwith types are the following:

- **Atlantic**; a long-range aircraft designed and built to make a trans-atlantic crossing by Harry Hawker. Hawker started this flight in May 1919 together with his navigator Kenneth Mackenzie Grieve from Newfoundland but they soon had to ditch because of engine problems. The two unlucky crew members were rescued by the Danish steamer SS Mary, but it took some time before the rest of the world knew they had survived since the vessel did not have radio equipment on board!
- **Dove**; two-seat sport version of the Sopwith Pup, with shorter and slightly swept-back wings, and an 80 hp Le Rhône rotary engine. Ten were built over the period 1919-1920.



*Sopwith Atlantic long-range plane for Atlantic crossings.
(Aviodrome Collection)*

- **Gnu**; a two-seat touring biplane with a 110 hp Le Rhone rotary engine. Thirteen built over 1919-1920.
- **Grasshopper**; two-seat touring biplane with a 100 hp Anzani engine. Only one built and flown in 1920 with civil registration G-EAIN.
- 1919 **Schneider Trophy** and **Rainbow** racer; biplane racer fitted with a 450 hp Jupiter radial engine built for the Schneider Trophy contest at Bournemouth, U.K. carrying the civil registration G-EAKI. Unfortunately the pilot, Harry Hawker was disqualified when he tried to take off before the starting sign. It was later converted into a land-based racer with a fixed undercarriage as the Rainbow, fitted with a 320 hp ABC Dragonfly engine. It was destroyed in a crash in 1923 when flown in an aerial derby; again with a Jupiter engine.
- **Wallaby**; a single engine long-range passenger plane with a 375 hp Rolls Royce Eagle engine. One built in 1919 with registration G-EAKS. It crashed en route to Australia at Bali. Damaged plane was shipped to Australia and rebuilt as an 8-passenger transport plane.
- **Antelope**; light transport aircraft fitted with a 180 hp Wolseley Viper liquid-cooled engine. One built in 1920. The Antelope was the last aircraft built by the Sopwith works. It flew with the civil registration G-EASS, later changed into G-AUSS when it went to Australia.



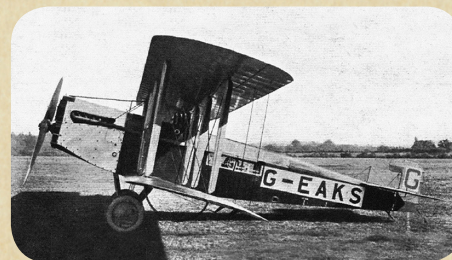
Sopwith Schneider Trophy racer G-EAKI (Dan Shumaker collection)



*Sopwith Gnu
two seat touring
biplane*



*The single
Sopwith Grass-
hopper touring
plane*



Sopwith Wallaby long-range passenger plane G-EAKS; October 1919

During its existence over the years 1912-1920 Sopwith produced in total the staggering number of more than 18,000 aircraft, but most of these were manufactured during the 1914-1918 World War I period as 1½-Strutters, Pups, Camels and Snipes.....



*Sopwith Antelope Brooklands; June 1920.
It was the last Sopwith plane built.*