

ROYAL NAVAL AIR SERVICE OPERATIONS IN GERMAN EAST AFRICA

1914-1918: Part 3

Air Vice-Marshal Peter Dye



No 8 Squadron May 1916 – January 1918

This final section opens with further extracts from LM Lincoln's diary, recording his general observations as well as the daily details of life and work. The diary – over 230 closely-written pages (some with photographs) – is a rich source of fact and opinion, closely parallel

to AM Jack Furniss' album of 269 carefully preserved photographs, which was the inspiration for this article. Some pictures appear in both sources, usually printed and trimmed differently, revealing two diverse characters determined to preserve the story of this 'sideshow'.

FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF LEADING MECHANIC EDWARD ROBERT WINGROVE LINCOLN (F7939)

1 Apr 16: Generally speaking, the standard of efficiency among officers of the RNAS is not particularly high, this is, of course, from the point of view of all round, thorough, capability. As pilots pure and simple little fault can be found with them, but it would seem that the flying man is almost a distinct type; he has all his wits about him while flying but loses them when he comes to earth. As an executive officer he is an utter failure. One explanation for this state of affairs is that pilots for the Services are drawn from the ranks of youngsters, many of them mere boys. Again, flying makes no special demand for men with brains in any way above the average. The qualifications for becoming an air pilot are much on a par with those required for speedy motoring or, more appropriately, speedy motor cycling – a cool head and a decent nervous system. Thus it is that airmen are drawn to a very considerable degree from that type of young gentlemen commonly known as 'Knuts', particularly that type which before the war spent most of its time flying about our main roads in high powered cars and motor cycles.

Most fortunately, however, there is another better type than the foregoing which provides the Air Service with the very best officers and pilots and this Squadron is lucky enough to be officered by 2 or 3 men of this sort.

Sqn Cdr Nanson, a man of about 38 or 40, is our CO. In appearance, clean shaven, sharp featured, with a discerning eye and a thin-lipped, somewhat large mouth which is for ever shaping itself into a most disconcertingly sardonic grin. Very few people know what to make of Nanson's grin. If a man were to tell him he had deliberately set fire to a 'plane, Nanson would grin for about 10 seconds though there would be a deadly look mixed up in it. I have never seen or heard the fellow laugh; he never gets beyond his compressed-lip grin. As a good steady pilot, Commander Nanson ranks among the leading airmen of the RNAS. During his whole flying career which dates back to pre-war days, he has never smashed up a machine.

Amongst the good works done by him during the war, mention must be made of his participation in the great Cuxhaven air raid when he made a successful journey there and back and dropped bombs with some effect. For some time he was CO at Dunkirk Air Station when he did many flights under heavy anti-aircraft fire. I first came into contact with the CO at Dundee Air Station where he was at the head of affairs. Nanson is a man who possesses a

good deal of personality of a desirable kind and the men work very hard for him. He has the happy knack of evincing signs of pleasure when work has been well done, without the use of words. Unlike many COs in the Air Service, Nanson has a very keen sense of duty and takes a genuine interest in everything which appertains to the squadron. 'Duty before pleasure' is undoubtedly the CO's motto. He has gained his promotion from Flight to Squadron Commander since being out here and now wears three rings. It is my earnest hope that I may remain under the command of Nanson all the time I am in the Air Service. I have experienced other COs and like them not.



FSL G. Smethurst (left) and Flt Lt E.R. Moon with the daughter of the Commissioner for British East Africa during an official visit to Chukwani.

Flight Lieutenant Moon is our second in command and has most to do with the working of the station. Thirty years of age, he has had long and wide experience with most kinds of machines and at the present time he also holds place among the crack pilots of the RNAS. As an executive officer, he fulfils his duties admirably. There is nothing about Moon at which one can grumble and to me he has been exceedingly decent from the very commencement of the Expedition. Many a long yarn have I had down in the armoury