

# THE MORANE TYPE L IN RNAS SERVICE

by Nick Forder

**A**LTHOUGH THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS had been formed in 1912 with Military and Naval Wings, and a joint Central Flying School, the Admiralty sought to distance itself from this organization, leading to the creation of the Royal Naval Air Service in 1914. One consequence of this was a failure to develop a co-ordinated approach to influencing aircraft design for military purposes and stimulating Britain's aircraft industry.

Unlike the RFC, whose Director-General of Military Aeronautics dealt directly with the Secretary of State for War, the RNAS was regarded in the same way as any other branch of the Royal Navy. Responsibilities were thus divided among the four Sea Lords. The First Sea Lord was responsible for the general use of aircraft, as advised by the Director of the Air Department. Personnel and training were the responsibility of the Second Sea Lord, while the Third Sea Lord was responsible for airship design and construction, and the Fourth Sea Lord for aviation stores.

There was a Joint Air Committee, chaired by the Secretary of State, which included representatives from the Army, Royal Navy and the Royal Aircraft Factory. However, it had no executive powers and so was regarded redundant when the outbreak of war created new priorities. Any hope of central control disappeared with it.

The War Office and the Admiralty had different policies for procuring aircraft. The War Office purchased from the trade, both in Britain and abroad, but had its own manufacturing capability at Farnborough. Also, its use of aircraft was linked quite closely with the need to co-operate with ground forces.

When the outbreak of war demanded expansion, the War Office sought to undertake this by placing orders for a limited range of proven types as an interim measure pending the ability to standardize on a small number of types deemed suitable to meet the requirements of the British Expeditionary Force. As the aviation industry base in Britain was then quite small, additional orders were placed for proven designs and with established manufacturers overseas also.

The Admiralty policy was to purchase in any available market, including French and American designs, often without a clear idea of how they might be employed. In April 1915, the First Lord was reviewing the minutes of a conference held in October 1913, *to discuss the question of employment of aircraft in war, and what types were best suited to the different duties required.* While recognizing that *the possibility of working a squadron or squadron of aeroplanes from an overseas base had not been foreseen; the operation was now being carried out with great success, and had materially altered preconceived ideas as to the means of employment of aircraft,* he went on to note that *the employment of aircraft in co-operation with the Fleet at sea had not been developed as much as it had been anticipated would be the case.* Commodore Murray Sueter agreed that *before the war practically no experience had been gained in the working of seaplanes from specialist ships.*

Essentially, in seeking to expand its role, the RNAS can be said to have lost its way.

The Admiralty, purchasing what was available, and in competition with the War Office, ordered and, in some cases reordered, aircraft even though their value was questionable. During a meeting of 3 April 1915, Wing Commander Longmore *pointed out that the 'Curtiss aeroplanes supplied from America were far from perfect, and for war purposes were not yet efficient.* The First Lord, in response, *pointed out that the Curtiss machines – and in fact all aeroplanes and seaplanes delivered from America – must be considered as an addition to our forces. The machines must be taken as they are, and must be made the most of in spite of the defects.* (q in Roskill, p.197)

Both the War Office and the Admiralty ordered aircraft from Morane-Saulnier. The RFC had a need for Corps aircraft, pending the availability of greater numbers of BE2 s. The Admiralty had a need for similar aircraft, especially to support the bombardment of shore targets by warships, but this does not appear to have influenced the decision to acquire the Moranes.

## THE MORANE WITH 1 SQUADRON & 1 WING RNAS

The RNAS was to receive 25 Morane-Saulnier MS3 Type L Parasols, to be fitted with 80-hp Le Rhone engines, and allocated the serials 3238 to 3263. Most of these were delivered to the RNAS aerodrome at St Pol, near Dunkerque.

The first six aircraft arrived by 18 April, these being 3239 (MS304), 3240, 3241 (MS311), 3245 (MS35), 3251 and 3252. Nine more (3242, 3243, 3244, 3246, 3247, 3253, 3254, 3255, 3256) were delivered by the end of the month.

These aircraft were allocated to 1 Squadron RNAS which became 1 Wing RNAS on 21 June 1915. 1 Wing, initially, had four squadrons: A, B, C & D. The Moranes went to C Squadron along with 80-hp Nieuport two-seaters. E Squadron, with Avros and Nieuports, and F Squadron, with seaplanes, were added in July, and the Wing was to operate in two sections. C Squadron, with A and B Flts, was under Squadron Leader

*The original form of the Morane Type L. Those received by the RNAS (and RFC) had mainplanes of greater span.* :CCI Archive

