



# Royal Aircraft Factory BE2a No. 50

by Paul R. Hare

**R**oyal Aircraft Factory BE2a No.50 was the second example built by Hewlett and Blondeau of Vardens Road, Battersea on contract CP37126/13 and although originally intended for service with the RFC's Military Wing, it was transferred to the Naval Wing (later the RNAS) before construction was completed and was therefore delivered to RNAS Eastchurch on 12 February 1914.

Following erection and inspection it was test flown by C.R. Samson, who made several more flights in it, each of short duration, over the next few days.

Charles Rumney Samson was born on 8 July 1883 in Crumpsall, Manchester where his father was a solicitor. In 1896 he became a naval cadet, training on board HMS *Britannia*, which was moored in the river Dart, and began service as a Midshipman two years later. In 1906 he was given command of a torpedo boat before becoming First Lieutenant on the cruiser

*A studio portrait of Commander Charles Rumney Samson after he had been awarded his first DSO.*



HMS *Philomel*, and then on another cruiser, HMS *Foresight*.

In 1911 he was one of four naval officers selected to learn for training as an aeroplane pilot, gaining his Royal Aero Club certificate, No.71, on 25 April. By October of that year, he had been appointed to command the newly formed Naval Air Station at Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey and was promoted to the rank of Acting Commander the following January. When the RFC was formed in May 1912, Samson was given command of the Naval Wing.

Samson liked the new BE2a, No.50, so much that, as far as was ever possible, he adopted it as his personal mount, and continued flying it long after the provision of more advanced machines, considering it superior to the later model BE2c as a reconnaissance machine and even feeling disloyal to it when circumstances obliged him to fly another aircraft. He has been quoted as saying that he got very attached to aeroplanes, thinking them not as inanimate as was generally believed.

On 28 February 1914 Samson took No.50 up to 12,000 feet which was then a record altitude for any Eastchurch aeroplane and very possibly a record for a BE2a too. However, as no barograph appears to have been carried, the height merely being taken from the on-board altimeter it is possible that, when properly corrected for air temperature and pressure, a slightly different figure may have been produced.

Samson continued flying 50 whenever the opportunity arose and, on the last Tuesday in April, he flew to Dover where he circled the harbour. He took it up again on the following Thursday, and again on the Friday and then, on Saturday 2 May, he flew it to Brooklands, returning to Eastchurch later the same day. The following Thursday, 7 May, was very windy

*A posed photograph of C.R. Samson in the cockpit of BE2a No. 50 as one naval rating stands by ready to start the engine and another holds the outboard interplane strut, presumably to aid manoeuvring into take off position.*

