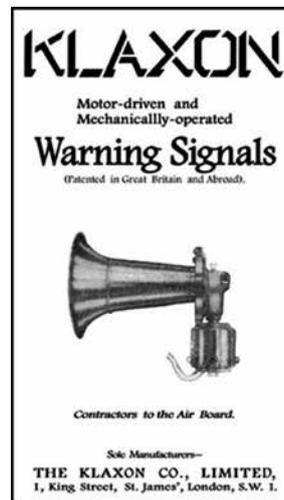
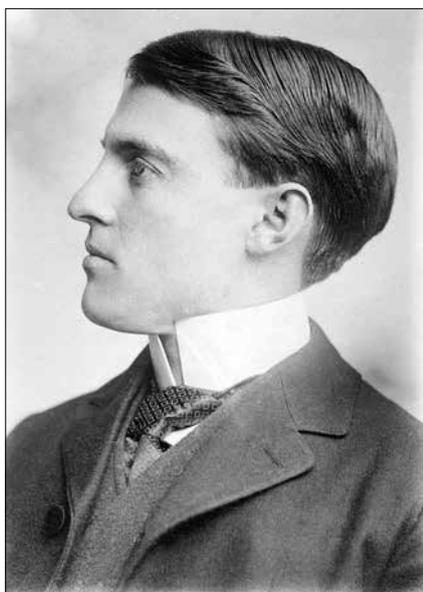


# THE RFC & RAF USE OF THE KLAXON DURING WORLD WAR ONE

by Mike Meech



THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS (and later the Royal Air Force) use of the 'Klaxon' fitted to aeroplanes in World War One did not suddenly appear; pre-war there was experimentation and use of this device. The 'Klaxon' is reported as being invented by an American electrical engineer and prolific inventor Miller Reese Hutchison initially as a warning device on motor cars. However, in Britain its use when fitted to an aeroplane occurred during 1912 with reports appearing in *Flight*. In the 14 September edition, page 839, it announced, in a report supplied by a Mr H. F. Shaw of the Klaxon Co, that there were: ...some trials made with a Klaxon horn mounted on a Farman machine and piloted by Commander Samson at Eastchurch on September 2nd. Lieutenant Hewitt was taken up as a passenger to operate the Klaxon by blowing it several times for two or three seconds at half minute intervals. The biplane was circled around the aerodrome at heights of from 400 to 500 ft., and when it was found that the horn could be clearly heard through the din of the 50-h.p. 'Gnome' engine, Commander Samson went further afield, and at a higher elevation. At frequent intervals Lieut. Hewitt sounded the horn, giving signals by means of Morse Code, these were clearly heard and 'read' by those below, and at one period the signals could still be heard even when there were two other machines in the air, one of them a 'Deperdussin' monoplane flying close by us at low altitude. This test lasted fully half an hour, the Klaxon behaving most perfectly throughout.



Miller Reese Hutchison, inventor of the Klaxon

On landing, it was found that the machine had flown at 850ft at its highest point and when circling the aerodrome it had been at a distance from the observers of between a mile and a mile and a half away. The Klaxon had been 'read' from that distance as well as up and down wind. It appears that this had been a full trial conducted by the producer of the Klaxon and the military with a purpose of reading messages from the air. This was probably the military 'requirement' as a method of sending information from the air to the ground.

In the following week's *Flight*, 21 September on page 839, it reported another trial, information again supplied by Mr H. F. Shaw, so one suspects a bit of an 'advertisement' for the product. This time the trial was at Hendon at the invite of the Grahame-White Aviation Co. Ltd. This was more of a civilian event with the horn being fitted to a Blériot monoplane piloted by Mr Marcel Desoutter, the report stated that: ...after having found that the horn could be easily heard whilst circling

round the aerodrome, the pilot flew off in the direction of Cricklewood, blowing the horn at regular intervals. On his return Mr. Desoutter said he had been at a height of a thousand feet and was over Cricklewood when he was furthest out, this representing a distance of practically three miles. In a subsequent flight as arranged, and announced through the megaphone to the crowd, the pilot signalled in the Morse Code, the message 'Good luck to the spectators!'

What the residents of Cricklewood thought of having their Sunday disturbed, not only by the aeroplane but by the Klaxon horn, is not mentioned. It appears that, on this flight, the aeroplane had only the pilot on board, so operating the Klaxon himself, but also sounding it from a greater distance than had been the case at Eastchurch. Once again, the trial included the sending of a message in

Morse code and not just used to 'make a noise'.

The Klaxon re-appeared in *Flight* on 12 October, page 940-94; here it mentioned that a Klaxon, amongst other equipment, had been fitted to Claude Grahame-White's Henry Farman biplane. Included was a drawing of the aeroplane and equipment. There is also a later photo showing the Farman with 'WAKE UP ENGLAND' on the side (*below*), Grahame-White and R. T. Gates in the cockpit and the Klaxon on the left front inner strut, as well as a later photo of a Grahame-White Type 10 *Charabanc* with Claude and his wife with others in the cockpit and a Klaxon on the side of the fuselage, the aeroplane being used during 1913 and 1914. The Klaxon was facing forward rather than down, as in the Farman fitment, so

