



CAPTAIN C.A.H. LONGCROFT

his long-range flights

by Paul R. Hare

RIGHT FROM ITS INITIAL INCEPTION the Royal Flying Corps set out to establish exactly what the aeroplane could do as a weapon of war by conducting experiments in aerial photography, artillery observation, bomb dropping, tactical reconnaissance, and wireless telegraphy. In the pre-war period, before the stalemate of what became trench warfare, it was always assumed that any war would be one of movement, and so 2 Squadron, under Major C.J. Burke, conducted numerous exercises in mobility, moving en-masse to Montrose, crossing to Ireland to take part in the army manoeuvres and then, in May 1914, brought almost the entire squadron south to take part in the Concentration Camp at Netheravon. Rather than dismantling its aeroplanes to travel by road or rail, the squadron always endeavoured to move them by air, its pilots flying hundreds of miles at a time when such a feat was still far from usual, its most proficient cross-country pilot being Captain C.A.H. Longcroft.

Charles Alexander Holcombe Longcroft was born on 13 May 1883 at Llanarth, near Aberaeron in Cardiganshire and was educated at Charterhouse School and then at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the Welsh Regiment as a Second Lieutenant in 1903. He swerved in India in 1904-5 and in South Africa in 1909 and then, having developed an interest in aviation and its military potential, he enrolled at the Bristol School, Brooklands and gained his RAeC Certificate, No.192, on 5 March 1912. Once qualified as a pilot, he volunteered to serve in what was then the Air Battalion RE into which he was accepted on 10 April 1912, and so became one of the 15 original Officers in the Royal Flying Corps, Military Wing, upon its formation on 13 May 1912, serving with 2 Squadron which was then based at Farnborough. At this time the RFC had just four aeroplanes, and Longcroft, like the other junior pilots, gained his first experience of Military aviation in balloons and in the airship *Gamma*.

On 20 May 1912 he was sent to the Breguet factory at Douai with a view to his taking delivery of a Military aeroplane which the British Government had ordered. This aeroplane appears not to have been ready so Longcroft put in time flying a REP whilst he was waiting, finally returning to the UK on 26 May.

Breguet B3, which Longcroft flew after joining 2 Squadron at Farnborough.
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Back at Farnborough he began flying the Breguet B3 and then the Aircraft Factory's BE1 and BE4, sharing them with other pilots of the squadron.

On 14 September he flew 100 miles in BE1 (201) but since he logged no destination, this distance was presumably covered in circuits around the aerodrome. His first cross-country flight appears to have been on 3 December 1912 when, flying the BE1 with Major E. Maitland in the front seat, he set off for Chartley Castle, near Stafford at 09.25. A broken petrol pipe brought them down near Oxford and, landing in the mist, Longcroft broke an undercarriage strut. This appears to have been fairly easily repaired as they took off again at 12.45 and, flying via Banbury, Warwick and Lichfield, landed at Chartley Castle at 14.20. The petrol pipe broke again on the return journey, two days later, bringing BE1 down about 8 miles north of Banbury. With the pipe mended and the tank refilled, Longcroft set off again at 13.30 but left Maitland behind. He ran out of petrol just short of his destination and landed in a small field at Cove at 15.25. Once re-fuelled he took off again at 16.25, clipping the fence as he did so, and landed back on Farnborough Common just five minutes later.

BE1's petrol pipe continued to give trouble, as on 12 December, when Longcroft had set out for Portsmouth with Captain B.R.W. Beor as his passenger, it broke near Longmoor Camp, forcing them down. Once it was repaired they took off again only to have it break again almost immediately. When they flew off after a second repair the weather was so bad that Longcroft noted that they endured the worst bumping that he had experienced to date and they turned back towards Farnborough, only to have the pipe break yet again, this time over Borden. After having lunch with the regiment stationed there and with the pipe repaired again they made it back to Farnborough, landing at 15.52.

Early in 1913, the squadron received the first two contractor-built BE2as, both manufactured by the British & Colonial Aeroplane Company, Bristol on contract A1147. 217 (c/n 114) joined the squadron on 7 February and 218 (c/n 117) arrived four days later, just in time for the move to Montrose.

It had been decided by the War Office that an airfield should be established on the east coast of Scotland so that 2 Squadron,

BE1 in its guise as 201, the machine on which Longcroft made some of his first cross-country flights.
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