

London's Stage-Door Dilettante

CAPTAIN JAMES ALTHEUS 'JIMMY' GLEN DSC

3 WING RNAS, 3 SQUADRON RNAS, 10 SQUADRON RNAS, 203 SQUADRON RAF

by Stewart K. Taylor

TRYING TO EKE OUT just about penury, living above subsistence level as a dirt farmer in Manitoba during the late 1880s could be a tough business. When James Altheus Glen was born on a farm near Turtle Mountain on 23 June 1890, his father had already been pondering a family move west to the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, where a fruit farming industry was about to flourish. Jimmy Glen was away attending a country school at Boissevain, Manitoba, with a younger brother, when the Glen family pulled up stakes and settled in Enderby, BC. It was there that a third son was born only months before the father died. Both the elder Glen boys finished high school in Enderby and, as Jimmy wanted absolutely nothing to do with farming, as he hated to soil his hands, he enrolled at a college in Oregon to study electrical engineering. He was away for two years until a romance with a home town girl, Mildred, brought him back to the Okanagan and employment as a telegraph operator for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

With his eldest brother tending the small family orchard, in time he grew increasingly restless. Despite protests from the young lady in his life, he journeyed to Ottawa where, in February 1915, he enlisted as a sapper in the Canadian Engineers. Uneasy with his lot in the CEF, which didn't offer enough in the way of glamour, his desire turned to aviation once the Curtiss Flying School in Toronto had opened. Capt W.L. Elder RN, who Glen would serve under in France, interviewed him in the spring of 1915, during Elder's mission to Canada and the United States to obtain pilots and arrange for manufacture of aircraft for the RNAS.

Captain Elder also obtained Mr J.A.D. McCurdy's consent to train pilots for the RNAS at his Toronto based Curtiss Aviation School. Glen signed a three page agreement with the school



FSL James Altheus Glen, Eastchurch April 1916.
:Herbert Glen via S.K. Taylor

on 7 September 1915 and parted with \$400.00 he had managed to borrow, in order to pay up front for his flying tuition. On 10 September, he took his first instruction from T.C. (Theodore) Macaulay on a Curtiss C-3 flying boat at Hanlan's Point in Toronto harbour. Overcrowding at the school, delays caused by repairs to the too few lying boats and the exorbitant amount of instructional time required to graduate pupils of Macaulay's first class frustrated Glen.

On 28 September, after one short tour of the harbour and with his total flying time only 156 minutes, he decided not to continue his lessons when told he would have a long wait before resuming his training on Curtiss JN-3s at Long Branch. Recruiting rivalry between the RFC and RNAS in Canada made the Admiralty waive certain restrictive regulations governing a candidate's suitability for a commission. The first Canadians sent over by the Naval Department in Ottawa had created such a favourable impression that, in November 1915, when Glen's funds

were nearly exhausted, the Admiralty agreed to send partially trained RNAS candidates overseas to complete their schooling. On 16 December, Glen was sworn in as a Probationary Flight Sub Lieutenant at Ottawa. His passage to England was immediate. In two days, he and eleven other RNAS entrees were aboard the American Line steamship *Philadelphia* when it sailed out of New York harbour bound for Liverpool.

TRAINING IN ENGLAND

Once he reported to the Admiralty in England, the first priority for Glen was to order a uniform, ready to be worn when he checked in at the Hotel London in London; a preferred lodging place for Canadians in the RNAS. Those



FSL J.A. Glen's original 3 Wing Sopwith was Type 9700 9657. Delivered to 3 Wing at Manston on 27.6.1916 it went to France with the unit as a machine of 1 Flight. Initially based at Luxeuil, it was transferred to the advanced aerodrome at Ochey during November 1916. It served throughout the Wing's operational existence and was passed to the French government in April 1917. The application of its unit number 3 was unusual and it seems likely that it would have been re-marked to conform with the method of unit and individual markings applied to other machines of the Wing.