

KITE BALLOONS AT SEA

Gallipoli & Salonika 1915-1916

by Ian Burns

HMS Canning with kite balloon aloft on a calm day. The IWM caption places this at Salonika in November 1915. :IWM SP515

One of the most wonderful sights I have ever seen was from the observer's basket of the kite-balloon let up from SS Manica in June, 1915. We were spotting for the guns of HMS Lord Nelson bombarding Chanak. The sky and sea were a marvellous blue and visibility excellent, the peninsula, where steady firing was going on all the time, lay below us, the Straits, with their ships and boats, the Asiatic shore gradually disappearing in a golden haze, the Gulf of Xeros, the Marmora, and behind one the islands of the Ægean affording a perfect background. No one who was at the Dardanelles, however vivid the horrors and the heat and dust and flies, will forget the beauty of the scene, especially at sunset, and it was seen at its best from the basket of a kite-balloon. (Sir Frederick Sykes¹)

Edward Maitland Maitland from his Royal Aero Club record card (Aeronaut Certificate 13).



From 1878 until the formation of the RFC in 1912 British military aeronautics were in the capable hands of the Royal Engineers. From balloons, to airships and early aeroplanes, the Royal Engineers looked after them all and built the sound foundations on which the RFC could grow.

As formed, the RFC consisted of two Wings – Military and Naval. They were uncomfortable bedfellows, having different work ethics and requirements, and so a split was inevitable. For reasons beyond this brief prologue, after the split the RNAS was given responsibility for balloons and airships. Some experienced aeronauts and airship pilots transferred from the RE/RFC to the RNAS. We need only look at two of these, E.M. Maitland and J.D. Mackworth.

Edward Maitland Maitland was commissioned in the Essex Regiment in 1900 and served in South Africa during the Boer War. Returning home, he took up ballooning in 1908 and during 1910 he was attached to the Balloon School at Farnborough. On 19 August 1911, he was appointed to command No.1 Company, Air Battalion, RE (1 Squadron, RFC, from 12 May 1912), remaining in command until 1 May 1914. The company had charge of all lighter than air aviation until the RFC and RNAS became separate entities. He gained Royal Aero Club Aeronaut Certificate No 13 in November 1910 and Airship Pilot Certificate No 8 in September 1911. He took his pilot's licence in France, gaining *Aéro-Club de France* certificate No.1281 on 5 April 1913. With the formation of the RNAS Maitland transferred and, as a Wing Commander, took command of the Captive Balloon Detachment, RNAS.

After taking a BA at Oxford in 1909, John Dolben Mackworth applied to join the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, receiving his commission in May 1910. Whilst serving on garrison duties in Bermuda he made an application to join the RFC. On home leave early in 1912, he learnt to fly at the Bristol School, Brooklands, taking his ticket (No 209) on 30 April 1912. Transferring to the RFC, he completed his military aviation training at the Central Flying School in May, then served with 2 and 4 Squadrons, but subsequently specialised in lighter than air aviation. Mackworth transferred to 1 Squadron, RFC, in March 1913, gaining both Aeronauts Certificate No 32 and Airship Pilot's Certificate No 17 on 6 September 1913.² He is listed amongst the flying officers of the RNAS, as a Flight Commander, from 1 July 1914. However, whilst commanding 1 Kite Balloon Section on *Manica*, although listed as Squadron Commander, RNAS, from 18 March 1915, he still signed reports as Major J.D. Mackworth.

But, we are ahead of ourselves and need to turn the clock back to September 1914.