



OF THE (AT LEAST) TWO SOPWITH SEAPLANES that the Germans captured in the earlier months of the war only one (3717) was a Sopwith Schneider – the type illustrated in the pages of the ‘Atlas.’ The other one was an example of the later Sopwith ‘Baby’ (8153).

Sopwith Schneider 3717 was from the Naval Air Station at Felixstowe in Suffolk, England and piloted by FSL J.M. d’A. Levy. On 12 August 1915, he should have been patrolling over the North Hinder lightship area but had decided to make an attack on the German seaplane base at Zeebrugge. During this, he was brought down when shots, fired by a pigeon loft attendant, hit his fuel tank and had stopped his engine. Forced to land, he sank his aircraft by kicking holes in the floats. He was captured by the Germans and became a POW. The Germans salvaged his aircraft, repaired the damage and painted not only German national markings on it, but also the new number 1915 – the year of its capture. It is said to have been flown by them at Zeebrugge and later became an exhibit in the DELKA (Deutsche Luftkriegbeute Ausstellung) 1918 exhibition of captured aircraft in Munich.

On 25 March 1916 two Sopwith Babys and three Short 184 seaplanes set off from HMS *Vindex*, which was cruising just off the coast to attack the Zeppelin base at Hoyer. For a number of reasons, the attack was a failure and, on their way back to their mother ship, Sopwith Baby 8153, flown by Flt Lt J.F. Haig, suffered an engine problem and was forced to land on the sea near the coast. One of the Short 184 seaplanes landed, intending to help him, but then they found that they were unable to take off again and all three airmen crew members

were captured. Although he had sunk it, Haig’s Baby was subsequently salvaged by the German, remarked with German national markings and also flown by them at Zeebrugge.

The single seat Sopwith Schneider seaplane was a direct development of the earlier Sopwith Tabloid landplane (so called because of its diminutive size). The Tabloid, designed originally as a two seat sporting machine with its occupants sat side-by-side, had made its first public appearance at Brooklands in 1913 where its speed and manoeuvrability had made a great impression on spectators present. A single seat version, fitted with twin floats and flown by Howard Pixton, had then won the Schneider Trophy competition for Britain at Monaco in 1914.

Like that of the earlier Tabloid, the Schneider’s basic airframe was of conventional wooden construction with its wings and fuselage (apart from its engine cowling and a frontal area back to the rear of its cockpit) covered in fabric. Both Tabloid and Schneider were powered by a 100hp Gnome Monosoupape engine. The main structural differences between the Tabloid and the Schneider was that the fuselage of the Tabloid was one structure whereas that of the Schneider came in two sections, with a joint one bay behind its cockpit. When assembled, the fuselage joint was secured by four turnbuckles, one on each of the longerons. The object of this was to make shipboard storage easier. Also, while the Tabloid had a wheeled undercarriage the Schneider was mounted on three floats – two at the front and a third under its tail at the rear.

Both Tabloids and early Schneiders used wing warping for control rather than ailerons and both had a small triangular

The fuselage, minus engine, of 3717 shown during delivery, with wooden strips holding the rudder. The seaplane arrived at Felixstowe on 22 July 1915 and was flown on an airship patrol by FSL J.M. d’A. Levy on 10 August, two days before its capture. :CCI Archive

