

The Sopwith Tabloid, Schneider and Baby

HISTORIC MILITARY AIRCRAFT No. 17

PART IV

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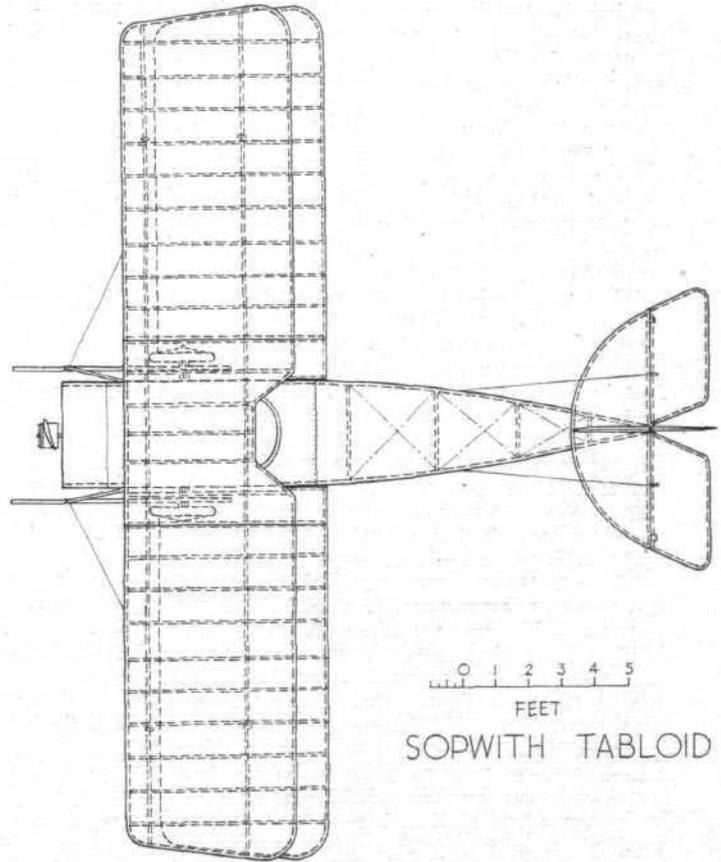
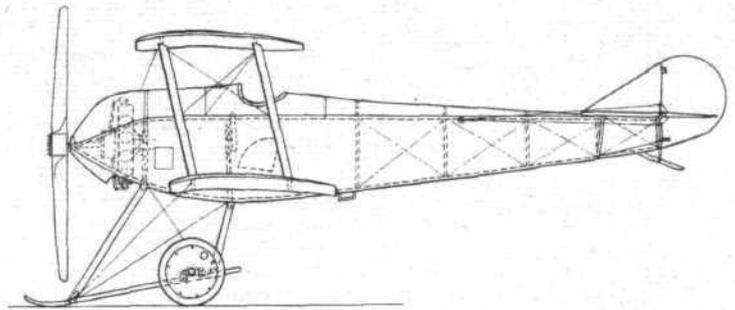
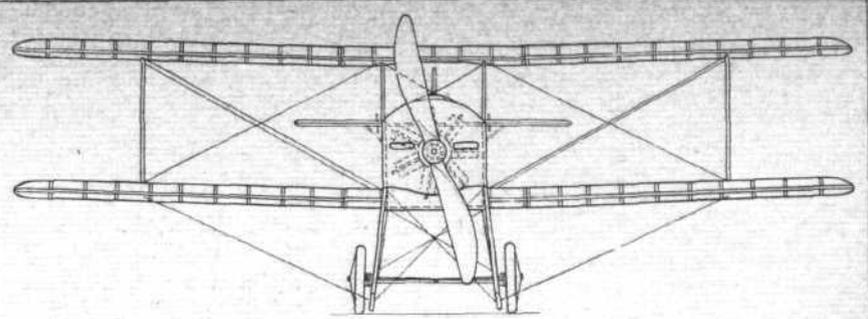
THE 130 h.p. Blackburn-built Babies of the batch numbered N.1410-N.1449 were intended for anti-Zeppelin duties. As originally delivered, they had no machine-guns, but were fitted with canisters (presumably within the fuselage) for Ranken Darts. Each container held 24 darts, which could be released three at a time. The Ranken Dart was a missile which had to be released from a point above the target. Its body was pointed and contained an incendiary composition; it had a tail consisting of four vanes designed to catch in the airship's fabric after the head had penetrated it. As these caught they jerked the spindle on which they were mounted; that in turn rubbed a match strip which ignited the incendiary charge. The Ranken Darts, although widely issued, were not successful, and some at least of the 40 Babies were given machine-guns: N.1437 had a synchronized Lewis gun mounted centrally above the fuselage, and a bomb rack was fitted underneath, just behind a fairing which might have housed the Ranken Dart containers. Likewise, N.1413 was used with a bomb rack under its fuselage, and a photograph shows the machine with a 65-lb bomb in place.

The fitting of the 130 h.p. Clerget produced the ultimate in Baby overloading: a few Blackburn-built machines had two Lewis guns—one fixed, the other in the original centre-section position—and the customary load of bombs.

Blackburn-built Babies and Hamble Babies were distributed to coastal stations on much the same scale as their predecessors; they also served with a number of carrier vessels. In only a few cases have they been specifically identified in the narratives of the war. One such instance was the attempted attack on the German cruiser *Goeben* on January 20, 1918, made by two bomb-carrying Blackburn-built Babies escorted by a Camel. The three British machines were attacked by ten enemy seaplanes. Capt. A. Moraitinis, the Greek pilot of the Camel, shot down three of the enemy, but Flt. Sub-Lt. W. Johnston's Baby fell in flames. Flt. Sub-Lt. R. W. Peel, flying the other Baby, pressed home his attack, but both his 65-lb bombs missed the *Goeben*. A refractory—possibly damaged—engine brought him down to the water, but he contrived to coax enough power out of it to enable him to taxi and fly in brief hops round Cape Helles and back to Imbros.

On November 2, 1917, the seaplanes on board the carrier *Empress* were two Hamble Babies (N.1209 and N.1210) and four Blackburn-built Sopwith Babies (N.1028, N.1036, N.1038 and N.1129). On that day three of the carrier's seaplanes bombed the railway bridge at Jaljulye with 65-lb bombs; after their return, *Empress* steamed north to Haifa, and a further raid was made, this time on an oil factory near the port. Two of the Babies were forced down in Haifa Bay and were lost; their pilots were rescued by the *Coutelas*, a French destroyer.

Baby seaplanes of all makes served with the Adriatic, Aegean and Egypt Groups in 1918; they operated from such bases as Otranto, Santa Maria di Leuca, Imbros, Mudros, Suda Bay and Syra. They were never very numerous: by the end of August

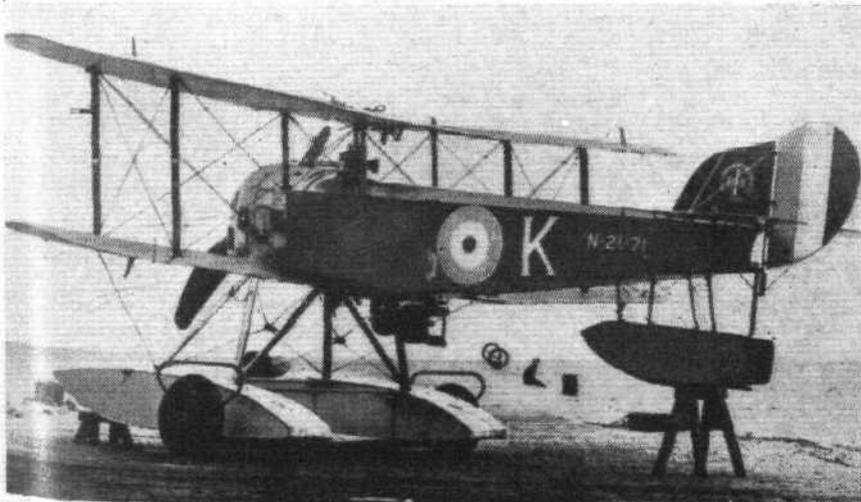


SOPWITH TABLOID

1918 the Aegean Group had only eight serviceable Baby seaplanes, and late in 1918 there remained a total of 30 in the Mediterranean area. Several were lost while *en route* to the Mediterranean when the merchantmen in which they were being transported were sunk by enemy action.

In home waters the Babies went about their routine affairs, patiently and unobtrusively, until the Armistice brought them respite. They had their moments of action, too; as, for instance, on September 23, 1916, when F/L. C. J. Galpin of Great Yarmouth air station attacked a Zeppelin 30 miles east of Lowestoft. He was flying a Schneider or Baby, and succeeded in firing a full drum of explosive ammunition into the airship; he claimed that some of his bullets struck the gondolas, but his attack failed to ignite the Zeppelin and he was compelled to break off the engagement owing to darkness.

On June 16, 1917, F/L. G. H. Bittles, also of Great Yarmouth, attacked an enemy airship in the same area. Bittles coaxed his Sopwith up to 11,000ft and opened fire. Like Galpin, he emptied



Blackburn-built Baby, with two Lewis guns and—attached beneath the fuselage—one 65 lb bomb.