



THE RNAS & RAF CAREER OF MAJOR JOHN OSBORN GALPIN, DSC, DFC

by Gordon Leith

Above: A Felixstowe F.2A under tow behind a destroyer.

Right: Portrait photograph of FSL John Osborn Galpin signed "To mother with John's best love", c.1916.

:FAAM JMB/GSL 03677

:Jeremy Galpin

Everyone who is familiar with Squadron Leader T.D. Hallam's classic *The Spider Web* will doubtless recognise the name 'Tiny' Galpin, whose prominent role among Felixstowe's flying boat pilots soon becomes apparent to readers of the book. Despite this, little else has been written about him and he remains relatively unknown. What follows is an attempt to shed more light on the wartime career of Maj John Osborn Galpin, DSC, DFC, one of the stalwarts of RNAS and RAF flying boat operations during the First World War.

John Osborn Galpin was born in Norwich on 17 October 1889 and, until the age of 15, he lived there with his mother and father, three brothers and two sisters. Then in 1905 Galpin took advantage of the opportunity to emigrate to Canada offered to British boys by the Catholic Emigration Association. Along with 58 other boys aged between 10 and 19, he sailed in July 1905 from Liverpool on board the *Bavarian* bound for Quebec,

pilots of British birth or European descent in Canada. Initially only qualified pilots were accepted, which meant that candidates were required to have a pilot's licence issued by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI). At that time the Curtiss school in Toronto was the only flying school in Canada which offered pilot training to FAI standard, and it was quickly overwhelmed with young Canadians wishing to join the British flying services. Because of the long waiting list for places at the Curtiss school many Canadian pilot recruits enrolled in flying schools in the United States instead. On 1 September 1915 a group of thirty aspiring Canadian pilots, including Galpin, arrived at the Wright Aviation School on Huffman Prairie, five miles from Dayton, Ohio, eager to begin their training.

The cost of tuition was \$240 for four hours flying instruction, on top of which there was a \$10 observer's fee for the Aero Club of America examiner, who assessed the three-part flying test required for an FAI pilot's license at the end of the course. The students also had to pay for their board and lodging and were liable to pay compensation to the Wright Aviation School for any accidental damage caused to the Wright Type Bs which they flew during training. Those who obtained their licence received £75 (equivalent to US \$356) towards the cost of their instruction upon enlistment in the RNAS or RFC. Although the Canadian students at the Wright Aviation School expected to complete their training in six weeks, delays caused by bad weather and the availability of only two training aircraft meant that many spent up to three months waiting to accumulate the four hours in the air required before they could take their tests.

As living expenses mounted, many ran short of money. Roy Brown was a contemporary of Galpin's at the Wright Aviation School and his letters to his parents reveal his despair at the slow rate of progress and embarrassment at having to ask his father to finance the mounting cost of his training. Lloyd Breadner, another student at the Wright School at this time,



Galpin at the controls of a Wright Type B while learning to fly at the Wright Aviation School in the USA, Autumn 1915.
:Jeremy Galpin

their destination Ottawa. Little is known about the following 10 years he spent in Canada and the United States, other than that he was at various times manager of a cinema in the Yukon, a journalist in Ottawa and private secretary to one of the vice presidents of the International Patents Bureau in New York.

In April 1915 the RFC and RNAS both began recruiting



A group of RNAS officers at Felixstowe during the Summer of 1916, including at least three from Canada who learned to fly together at the Wright Aviation School in the USA: B.D. Hobbs (top left), J.O. Galpin (middle row, second from the right) and W.E. Robinson (bottom left).

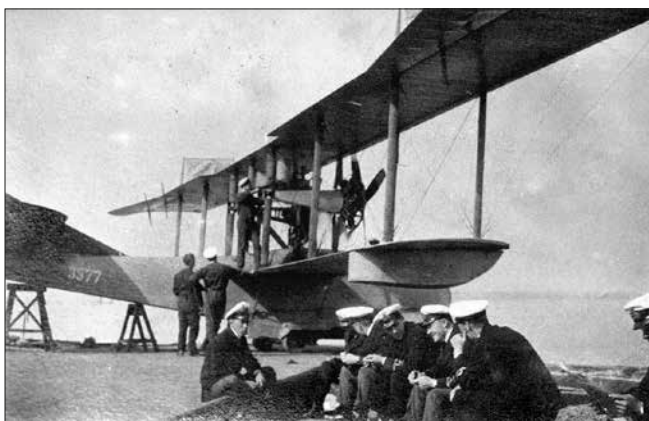
:Jeremy Galpin

complained to the school's owner, none other than Orville Wright, who assured him that the unsatisfactory situation would improve. For Galpin and his contemporaries, however, there was no change for the better and 11 weeks had passed before Galpin was able to take his FAI test, after which he was awarded Aero Club of America Pilot Certificate 364 on 24 November 1915. Two days later he was commissioned as a probationary Flight Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and shortly afterwards he sailed from New York to Liverpool on board the White Star line *Adriatic*, arriving at Liverpool on 16 December 1915. Although his record of service does not show it, his first posting as a newly commissioned naval officer joining the RNAS would almost certainly have been to the Royal Navy recruits initial training depot at Crystal Palace for a short course of instruction in drill, signalling, the operation of lighter than air aircraft and aircraft construction. Then, like many other Canadian RNAS pilot recruits who arrived in the UK around this time, including J.L. Gordon, B.D. Hobbs, W.H. Mackenzie, G.R. Hodgeson, F.S. McGill, N.A. Magor and W.E. Robinson, Galpin was posted to RNAS Felixstowe, a seaplane station on the Suffolk coast, where he reported on the evening of 31 December 1915.

The principal aircraft types in service at Felixstowe in 1916 were the Short 184, the Sopwith Baby and the Curtiss H.4. America. As a trainee seaplane pilot, Galpin was first taught to fly the Curtiss H.4. This twin-engined, biplane flying boat was based upon the 1914 aircraft called the *America*,

Curtiss H.4 Small America 3577 on the slipway at Felixstowe in the Summer of 1916. Galpin flew 3577 on several occasions between August 1916 and February 1917.

:RAF Museum P016321



Felixstowe Air Station, photographed from the north. The original sheds and slipway are toward the top of the photograph and the large sheds, for H.12 and F.2A flying boats are shown nearing completion.

:CCI Archive

designed for an attempt at the first trans-Atlantic flight. It had a wingspan of 72 feet and length of 36 feet and in RNAS service was normally powered by two 100-hp Anzani radial engines, giving it a top speed of 65 mph and a cruising speed of 50 mph. During 1915, the H.4 had been employed at Felixstowe in the anti-submarine reconnaissance role, but was found to be underpowered, lacking in range and with handling qualities unsuitable for operating in rough seas. By 1916 it had been relegated to the training role and Galpin's first flight at Felixstowe on 5 January 1916 was in H.4 3565, accompanied by FSL Scott. Galpin flew H.4s exclusively from January until mid-March 1916, initially accompanied by a more experienced pilot acting as instructor, but as his familiarity with the aircraft increased tuition gave way to practice flights, until by late February Galpin was himself instructing new pilots. His commission as a Flight Sub-Lieutenant in the RNAS was confirmed on 6 March and on 9 March he first took the controls of a Short 184, the principal workhorse of the RNAS home-based anti-submarine stations in 1916. Fitted with two large floats beneath the forward fuselage and another beneath the tail, the Short 184 was over 40 feet long and had a wingspan of over 63 feet. It was originally fitted with a 225-hp Sunbeam engine, later superseded by 240, 260 and 275-hp engines. It had a top speed of 88 mph. and could carry up to two 265-lb bombs on patrols lasting 2¾ hours. On 20 March Galpin qualified as a seaplane pilot and between 29 March and 13 August most of his flying was in Short 184s.

In the spring of 1916, Galpin joined Felixstowe's Short Flight, which comprised of seven Short 184s, six pilots and a chief petty officer in charge of a team of about ten mechanics. Whenever the weather was suitable the Short Flight pilots practiced bomb-dropping, machine gun firing and spotting. They also carried out engine, wireless and range test flights as required. Galpin regularly flew first 8005 and later 8348 with an observer or passenger always occupying the rear seat. The second crew member was usually another pilot or one of the mechanics, although on one occasion he took a Lt Comm Hardy up with him to observe a practice torpedo attack from the air. The Short Flight also carried out light ship patrols and what are referred to in the 'Daily Reports on Operations' as 'reconnaissance flights'. These were anti-submarine patrols over the North Sea shipping channels, 10 or 20 miles off the coast. On these patrols the Shorts carried two 65-lb bombs in addition to their flexibly mounted Lewis gun in the rear cockpit. Galpin first carried out one of these patrols on 24



Curtiss H.4 3549 on the ramp at Felixstowe, clearly showing the twin Anzani radial engines.

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April, but on this and all his subsequent patrols he saw no sign of the enemy. However, during one such patrol on 30 May one of his fellow pilots, FSL W.H. MacKenzie with his observer FSL Ball, surprised a U-boat on the surface and succeeded in dropping their bombs on it, though it escaped apparently unharmed. J.L. Gordon, one of Galpin's contemporaries at Felixstowe in 1916, summarised their patrol work as follows in a paper he wrote while attending the Royal Air Force Staff College in 1924-1925: *It is not, I think, an unfair criticism to say that the seaplane operations at Felixstowe up to April 1917 had little effect on the conduct of naval activities in the seaplane patrol area; nor upon reflection could it have been otherwise owing to the unsuitable and unreliable equipment in use up to that time.* Gordon's sentiments about Felixstowe were shared by C.F. Snowden Gamble in relation to Great Yarmouth, for in *The Story of a North Sea Air Station* he states: *until the late spring of 1917 anti-submarine operations conducted by aircraft were spasmodic, inco-ordinated, and ineffective.* However, while the operations themselves may have achieved little, the experience which they gave to pilots like Gordon and Galpin in 1916 stood them in good stead during the following year, when the more powerful, longer range and better armed Curtiss H.12 and Felixstowe F.2A entered service.

While the Short 184 was a widely used and capable seaplane,

the unreliability of its engine was a major drawback in anti-submarine work, frequently resulting in forced landings in the North Sea. Usually this was no more than an annoyance to the aircraft's crew and their rescuers, but when weather conditions were bad the consequences could be extremely serious, with the loss of both aircraft and crew being not unknown. According to the November 1929 issue of the RAF Felixstowe station magazine *The Felixstowe Foghorn*, Galpin suffered more than his fair share of such misfortunes, *The patrol pilots often found themselves down at sea with engine trouble, Flight-Sub-Lieut. Galpin holding several records for absence under such circumstances, and once riding out a gale for eighteen hours on the bosom of the North Sea.* It is said of Galpin in *The Spider Web* that because of the number of mechanical problems he suffered he came to believe he had a 'hoodoo' (meaning that he thought he was jinxed) and his companions sought to rid him of his superstition by giving him a lucky Egyptian charm (actually a pebble from the local beach!) contained in a silk bag. In December 1916 the *Sunday Pictorial* newspaper published a brief report entitled 'Aviator saved by destroyer' about one such incident complete with photographs of a stranded Short seaplane being towed home. Although the pilot's name is not given in the report, the photograph of the notable *British seaplane commander*

The Chief of the Short Flight, CPO H.C. Bell (front row left), and his air mechanics with one of the Short 184s, Felixstowe, summer 1916. The names of the Flight's six pilots are listed on the blackboard as Flt Cdr Hope-Vere, Flt Lt Teesdale and FSLs Galpin, Mackenzie, Newton and Till.

:Jeremy Galpin





Cutting from the 'Sunday Pictorial' illustrating the rescue of a Short 184 and its pilot, who was probably Galpin, following a forced landing in the North Sea in December 1916. :Jeremy Galpin

referred to in the newspaper certainly resembles Galpin and the presence of multiple copies of this cutting among Galpin's papers strongly suggests that he was the pilot concerned. Unfortunately, however, there is no mention of this incident in the 'Daily Reports from RNAS Stations' for late 1916.

Galpin's poem called *The Rhubiati of Pontius the Pilot*, which highlights some of the frustrating mechanical failures the Short 184 was prone to, was published in the RNAS Felixstowe station magazine *The Wing* in January 1917, not long after the Short 184 rescue story appeared in the *Sunday Pictorial*, suggesting that it could have been inspired by the same event. The poem is too long to reproduce here in full, but the following verses are typical. Here, for example, Galpin bemoans the failure of the make-and-break switch, which supplied high tension current to the spark plugs:

*The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns bitter ashes, ever and anon,
The make-and-break disintegrates and then
The final hope of flying home has gone.*

In another verse he describes the effect of a punctured float in the float chamber of the Sunbeam engine's carburettor:

*Alas! That revs should vanish by a float,
Becoming punctured - for the sages wrote -
'We rise to fall and fall to rise again,'*

Yet one the hole - and plane becomes a boat.

Finally, he describes a number of further engine problems resulting in a night on board an aircraft on the open sea:

*The plugs oft carbonized then fail to pop,
Their jet of life towards its logic mark,
The throttle jams, an airlock fills the tank,
While slowly through the twilight comes the dark.*

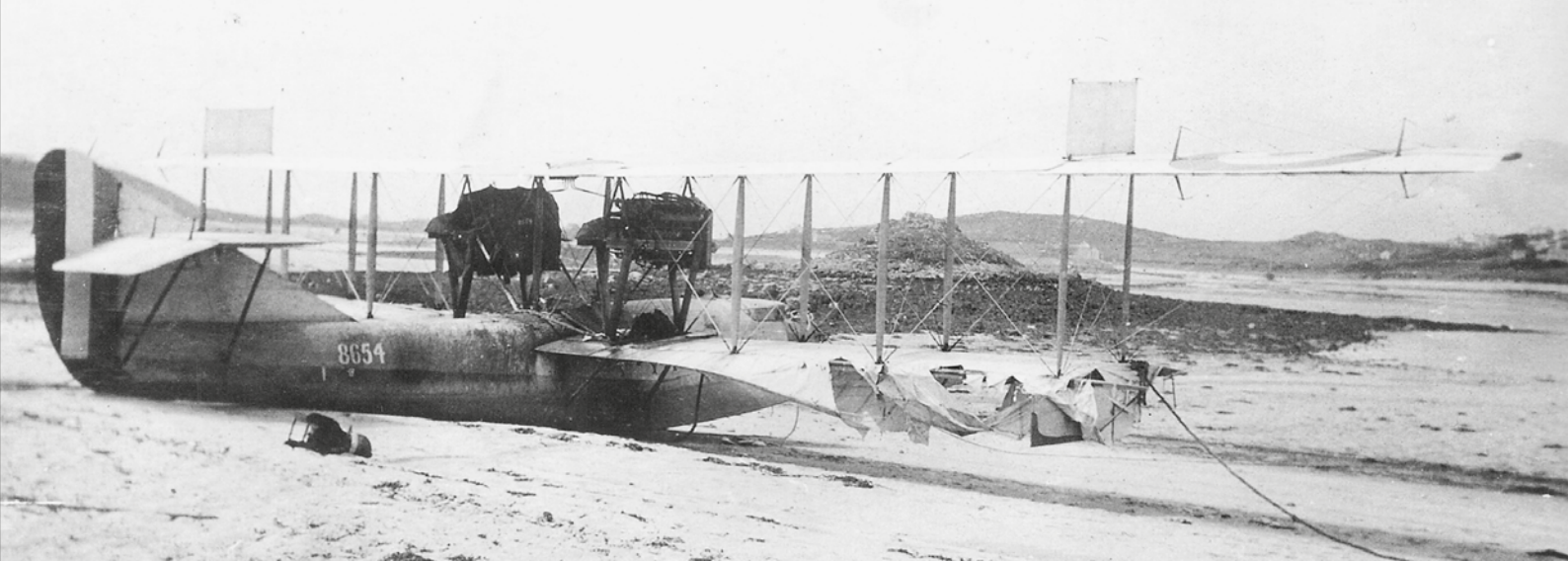
When off duty Galpin helped set up the air station's Entertainments Committee and enjoyed taking part in station concerts, where his fine baritone voice and talent as a comic actor were well received by officers and ratings alike. As seen above, he also had a flare for writing poetry and his verses regularly featured in *The Wing*, the first appearing in June 1916. The subjects of his poems are varied, some were humorous, others sentimental and one or two censorious, revealing the author to be a very articulate man with strongly held opinions.



Here Galpin (left) is seen relaxing with fellow pilots at Felixstowe probably in the Summer of 1916. :Jeremy Galpin

On 6 June 1916 RNAS Felixstowe was visited by King George V, who inspected the station's personnel and their aircraft. Included in the programme for the occasion was a flying demonstration by 10 of the station's aircraft, including Short 184 8348 flown by Galpin, who had evidently become an accomplished Short 184 pilot by that time. Further testimony to his flying skills followed on 16 June, when he flew the same aircraft as part of a display formation in honour of a visit from the Commander-in-Chief of the Nore. His peers must also have rated Galpin's flying skills highly as they selected him to represent the Short Flight on a less official demonstration flight. A new batch of H.4s was delivered to Felixstowe in July and even the experienced pilots, as Galpin then was, regularly flew them between August 1916 and February 1917. This was intended to help prepare them for the introduction into service of the Curtiss H.12 Large America, which had a similar configuration to the H.4, though it was larger and had markedly better all-round performance. Early in August the Felixstowe pilots decided to enliven their training regime by staging a race between a Short 184 and an H.4. Though the report of the contest published in the 5 August 1916 edition of *The Wing* is rather cryptic, the description of the pilot of the winning Short - *Pontius, he of the curly locks* - must have been Galpin, who wrote for *The Wing* under the pseudonym of 'Pontius'.

In February 1917 the naval air stations at Felixstowe, Great Yarmouth and Killingholme introduced the first batch of Curtiss H.12s into operational service. With a wingspan of 92 feet and a length of 46 feet it became known as the Large America to distinguish it from the H.4, renamed the Small America. It was fitted with two Rolls-Royce Eagle engines initially of 275-hp and ultimately 375-hp, giving it a maximum speed of 85 mph. It had a range of 400 miles and its armament of four Lewis guns and two 230-lb bombs made it a formidable adversary for both enemy submarines and aircraft. As one of the pilots of Felixstowe's newly formed War Flight, Galpin had his first opportunity to fly one of the new aircraft on 9 February, flying as second pilot with Flt Comm Cooper on a height test in 8656. A few days later, on 15 February, he flew his first patrol in another H.12 (8653) with Johnson as second pilot and Leading Mechanic D.J. Birse as engineer. Apparently, the aircraft was not yet fitted with wireless as there is no mention of a wireless operator being included in the crew. During the week that followed poor weather kept the War Flight's aircraft grounded and it was not until 23 February that Galpin, Johnson and Birse flew their next patrol, again in 8653. They took-off at 12.30 on what was to have been a special patrol, but a problem with the aircraft's starboard engine forced them to



Curtiss H.12 8654, one of the machines sent from Felixstowe to the Scillies during February 1917, is shown here beached at Tresco.

:CCI Archive

come down in the sea and they arrived back at Felixstowe next morning under tow. This was to be Galpin's last patrol from Felixstowe for over two months as on or about 26 February he joined the detachment of four H.12s from Felixstowe sent to the Scilly Isles. The sudden move took place in response to Germany's resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare on 1 February, which had increased the number of attacks on North Atlantic convoys in the Western Approaches. U-boat attacks on merchant shipping in the western part of the English Channel had been increasing steadily since September 1916 and patrolling seaplanes had successfully intervened to scare off U-boats on at least two occasions, strengthening the urgent demand for long range patrol aircraft. Although there was no established flying boat station on the Scillies at that time, their location 25 miles off the Cornish coast extended the range of the flying boats as far out into the Atlantic as possible. The initial site chosen to operate from was Porth Mellon on St Mary's and it was from here that the Felixstowe detachment carried out their first patrol on 28 February. However, Porth

Mellon was found to be very exposed in bad weather and it was soon abandoned in favour of a more sheltered location on the shore near New Grimsby harbour on the west of Tresco. The construction of slipways, hangars, accommodation, workshops and stores quickly transformed the Tresco site into an important flying boat station, where several members of the original Felixstowe detachment, including Sqn Comm Ralph Hope-Vere and FSL Frank S. McGill, remained throughout 1917. However, Galpin left the Scillies after spending only a few weeks there, and by April 1917 he was again at Felixstowe flying the new North Hinder circular patrols, which used an octagonal grid, known as 'The Spider Web', covering the North Sea between Harwich and the Hook of Holland. The use of a gridded search area to cover a large area of featureless sea with the easily recognisable North Hinder light vessel as its central reference point was very effective and similar grids were devised for the Cardigan Bay and St Georges Channel patrol area and for the Western Approaches.

Without his pilot's flying logbooks, which unfortunately

Tresco Air Station 1917, with the large Type F shed under construction. Pending its completion, the H.12s were either beached, as shown here, or moored in New Grimsby Harbour.

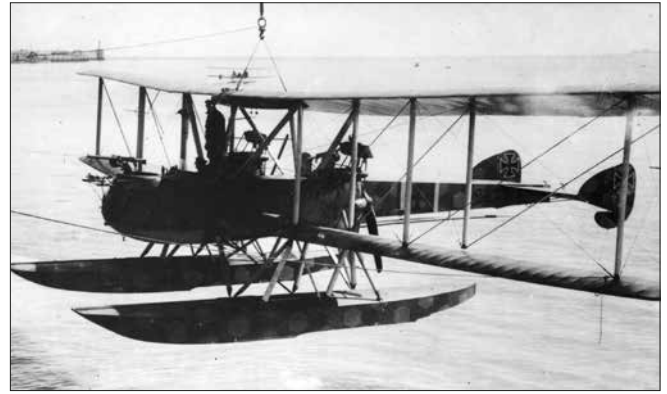
:CCI Archive



have not survived, records such as Felixstowe's 'Daily reports of operations' are invaluable for the information they contain about Galpin's flights throughout 1916. During the early part of 1917, however, there is a regrettable gap in the records for Felixstowe and those for the detachment on the Scilly Isles are sadly lacking in detail. Worse still, from May 1917 onwards aircrew names were no longer being regularly recorded in Felixstowe's 'Daily reports of operations', leaving the 'Summaries of weekly patrol reports' as the main official resource for details of Galpin's flights in 1917 and 1918. Here we find first-hand reports of his U-boat attacks for example, but no record of the many uneventful patrols he would have carried out. How many such patrols Galpin would have flown can only be an estimate. According to 'RNAS Anti-submarine report' for December 1917, 307 patrols were carried out by Felixstowe's aircraft during the six months ending December 1917. 'Reports concerning anti-submarine patrols in home waters' for November 1917-January 1918 records that 29 pilots were available at Felixstowe in January 1918. With each patrol being flown by two pilots this would work out at 22 patrols being flown by each pilot, or approximately one patrol per week flown by each pilot. Judging from the number of patrols listed in his contemporary FSL E.W. Keeseey's logbook around this time (21 patrols in a period of 18 weeks between July and December 1917) this would seem to be a fairly accurate figure. As for the events which occurred during these routine patrols, the anecdotal accounts contained in books like Hallam's *The Spider Web* and Gordon Kinsey's *Seaplanes Felixstowe* are the best and occasionally the only record known to have survived. There follow details of the incidents in which Galpin is believed to have been involved.

At 07.30 on Tuesday 24 April 1917, Galpin took-off from Felixstowe on patrol with FSL H.J. Bath as second pilot and AM2 B.H. Millichamp as wireless operator. At 08.20 they suffered an engine failure and came down in the sea, but half an hour later they were taken in tow by the destroyer HMS *Radiant* (F.59). However, during the tow sea water began to leak into the flying boat's hull through the two-inch diameter copper tube in the bottom of the hull through which the wireless trailing aerial was lowered in flight. Fortunately, Millichamp was able to stem the flow by keeping his foot pressed over the end of the tube until they reached Felixstowe safely at 11.20.

While Flt Lt Perham with Galpin as second pilot were on an



The twin-engine seaplane which attacked Galpin on 1 May 1917 may have been a Gotha WD 11 similar to this one, seen suspended from a crane.
:RAF Museum X003-2602/19817

anti-submarine patrol in the North Hinder area during the late afternoon of 1 May 1917, their H.12 (8663) was attacked from behind by a German seaplane described in 'Daily Reports 1-12 May 1917' as a *large, twin engine, single seater float machine* and in *The Spider Web* as a *nasty-looking twin engine machine*. Though it cannot have been a single seater as stated, it may have been one of several twin-engined German seaplanes, including a Gotha WD11 or W14, a Friedrichshafen FF40 or FF41, or a Brandenburg GW.

Galpin was at the controls at the time of the attack and Perham signalled to him to dive. The German pilot followed them down, but Galpin shook him off by making a sharp right turn at wave-top height. Having lost the element of surprise and now faced with a more difficult target, the German pilot broke off his attack and disappeared in a south easterly direction towards Zeebrügge.

On 9 June two H.12s from Felixstowe, one flown by Galpin and the other by an Australian pilot named FSL C.R. Morrish, were engaged in a Dutch traffic patrol; that is, they were providing the air escort for one of the well-protected convoys of merchant ships which sailed between England and Holland, usually referred to as a 'Beef Trip'. These convoys regularly crossed the North Sea by varying routes to bring back cargoes of vitally needed food. As the two flying boats circled the merchant ships, Galpin twice passed quite close to Morrish's H.12, almost hitting the other aircraft with his trailing aerial. In his alarm, Morrish broke away on a heading that took him

Galpin carried out his first U-boat attack on 14 June 1917 in Curtiss H.12 8682, seen here on one of the slipways at Felixstowe, 1917.

:RAF Museum X003-2602/6550





Curtiss H.12 8662 was the aircraft Flt Lt J. O. Galpin was flying during a U-boat attack on 23 July 1917. Here she is seen in H.12 convert configuration at Great Yarmouth, circa March 1918.
:RAF Museum P017260

away from the convoy and after only a few minutes on his new course he sighted a U-boat on the surface dead ahead. Although he was lined up perfectly for an attack, at only 250 feet he was too low to drop his bombs without risking the aircraft being damaged by the blast. There was no alternative but to climb to a safer height and repeat the bombing run on the U-boat. Unfortunately, however, by the time he had gained altitude the U-boat had submerged, and without a visual reference point the disorientated Morrish was unable to estimate the U-boat's position and lost the opportunity to attack presented so fortuitously by Galpin's poor formation flying.

When Galpin and his crew took-off in H.12 8682 on an anti-submarine patrol at 09.30 on 14 June, Commander Henderson accompanied them in place of the H.12's second pilot. Henderson was not a pilot, but a naval officer tasked with improving wireless communications between warships and flying boats. During the outward flight across the North Sea, he had plenty of opportunity to observe their wireless procedure, but as they approached the northern coast of Holland not far from IJmuiden more urgent matters took precedence. Close to a group of fishing boats they surprised a submarine charging her batteries on the surface. The wireless operator, AM2 B.H. Millichamp, challenged the submarine by firing a flare in the colours of the day, but when it submerged without replying, Galpin and his crew assumed that it was a U-boat and attacked. They dropped their four 100-lb bombs 100 to 150 feet ahead of the position where the submarine had been 10-15 seconds earlier, but after the waterspouts from the explosions had subsided, they saw no evidence to suggest that the U-boat had been damaged. However, that was not the end of the story. Later that day, when one of the Harwich-based Royal Navy submarines failed to return from patrol, suspicion began to grow that the British submarine rather than a German U-boat had been the victim of that morning's attack by Galpin and his crew. In addition to Galpin being reprimanded, the whole of the Felixstowe War Flight was ordered to confine its activities to inshore patrols, where there was less danger of a recurrence of such a tragic mistake. Fortunately, the missing British submarine returned to port five days later and her captain's report showed he had not been in the position where Galpin's attack had taken place. Consequently, Galpin was exonerated, and the War Flight authorised to resume its 'Spider Web' patrols.

At approximately 17.30 on 23 July 1917, two H.12s left Felixstowe on a routine anti-submarine patrol. In 8662 Galpin (now a Flight Lieutenant) and FSL G.F. Moody were the first and second pilots. Accompanying them in 8689 were FSLs H.J. Bath and E.W. Keesey.

For an hour the two aircraft flew at 1,000 feet at their normal cruising speed of 60 knots and at 18.43, as they approached the mid-point between their base and the Hook of Holland, they

sighted a U-boat on the surface. A first-hand account of the ensuing attack follows:

Machine No, 8662

Pilots:- Flt Lt Galpin

F.S.L Moody

Remarks:- Visibility very poor, in parts not exceeding 1½ miles. Submarine when sighted was approx. 10 miles W. by N. of N. Hinder, distant 4 miles. Conning tower just out of water and submerging fast. We opened to 85 knots and changed course towards submarine. When still ½ mile away from place where submarine had disappeared, we observed two bombs from machine No. 8689 strike the water, both of which exploded. We held on our course aiming slightly ahead of the swirl and dropped two 100-lb bombs, only one falling. This exploded approximately 60 feet from the swirl in the direction the submarine was heading. We circled over the spot but nothing was seen except a large brown patch caused by the explosion. We also flashed a message to the T.B.D.'s which were approximately eight miles from the spot, saying 'We have bombed a submarine here' and we continued circling over the spot to give them the position. At 8 p.m. we proceeded on return journey to base for landing at

Flt Lt J.O. Galpin (left) and his second pilot FSL G.F. Moody standing on a jetty at Felixstowe about to set off on a morning patrol in November 1917. Galpin and Moody regularly flew together between July and December 1917.
:RAF Museum B295





Curtiss H.12 believed to be 8693 (the number painted on the beaching trolley), circa October 1917. Galpin – wearing the ribbon of the DSC awarded in September – stands between the two other pilots, believed to be FSL H.C. Gooch (left), and Flt Lt W. Perham (right).

:RAF Museum X003-2602/6565

8.43 p.m.

In recognition of Galpin's work with the hard-pressed War Flight during the Spring and Summer of 1917 he was awarded the DSC. The announcement appeared in the *London Gazette* on 21 September under the general citation *for services in action with enemy submarines* and he received the decoration at an awards ceremony held during King George V's visit to Felixstowe on 26 February 1918.

During August FSL E.W. Keesey's logbook contains references to patrols on the 19th and 20th when he and FSL Bath were accompanied by a second aircraft flown by Galpin and FSL Moody escorting 'Beef Trip' convoys. There is only one entry in Keesey's logbook for a flight where he and Galpin flew together as part of the same crew. This was on 14 October, when they set off in 8677 on an anti-submarine patrol but returned after one hour and 50 minutes due to bad weather. A fortnight before, on 1 October 1917, the announcement that Galpin had been mentioned in dispatches was published in the *London Gazette*.

On 23 October, the high wind and rough sea would normally have grounded the War Flight, but a U-boat's intercepted wireless transmissions revealing its position within the Spider Web made it imperative that a patrol should be carried out and, at 10.00, Flt Lt W. Perham and FSL H.C. Gooch took off in 8693 closely followed by Galpin in a second H.12. The two aircraft flew together for two hours and were approximately 10 miles south of the North Hinder light vessel when a crank shaft broke in one of 8693's engines causing a violent vibration and a sudden loss of power, which threatened to put the aircraft into a spin. Perham was able to retain just enough control to make a heavy landing in which 8693 suffered serious damage, though fortunately none of the crew were badly injured. It all happened so quickly that there had been no time to contact Galpin's aircraft before the crash landing, and although Gooch began desperately firing flares to try to make Galpin aware of their predicament his attempt to capture the other aircraft's attention was in vain and it was some time before Galpin noticed that Perham's aircraft was missing. Guessing what had happened, Galpin turned back at once and began searching for 8693, but with fuel running low he was forced to abandon the search without finding any trace of Perham's aircraft. By a stroke of bad luck, Galpin's wireless operator had accidentally lost their trailing aerial shortly after setting out that morning, so they were unable to report the loss of Perham's aircraft to Felixstowe by wireless. However, they did release a pigeon with a message alerting Felixstowe that 8693 was missing, but by nightfall the patrol sent out to look for 8693 had no alternative but to leave her crew to their fate. The details of the ordeal suffered that night by Perham and the rest of 8693's crew is

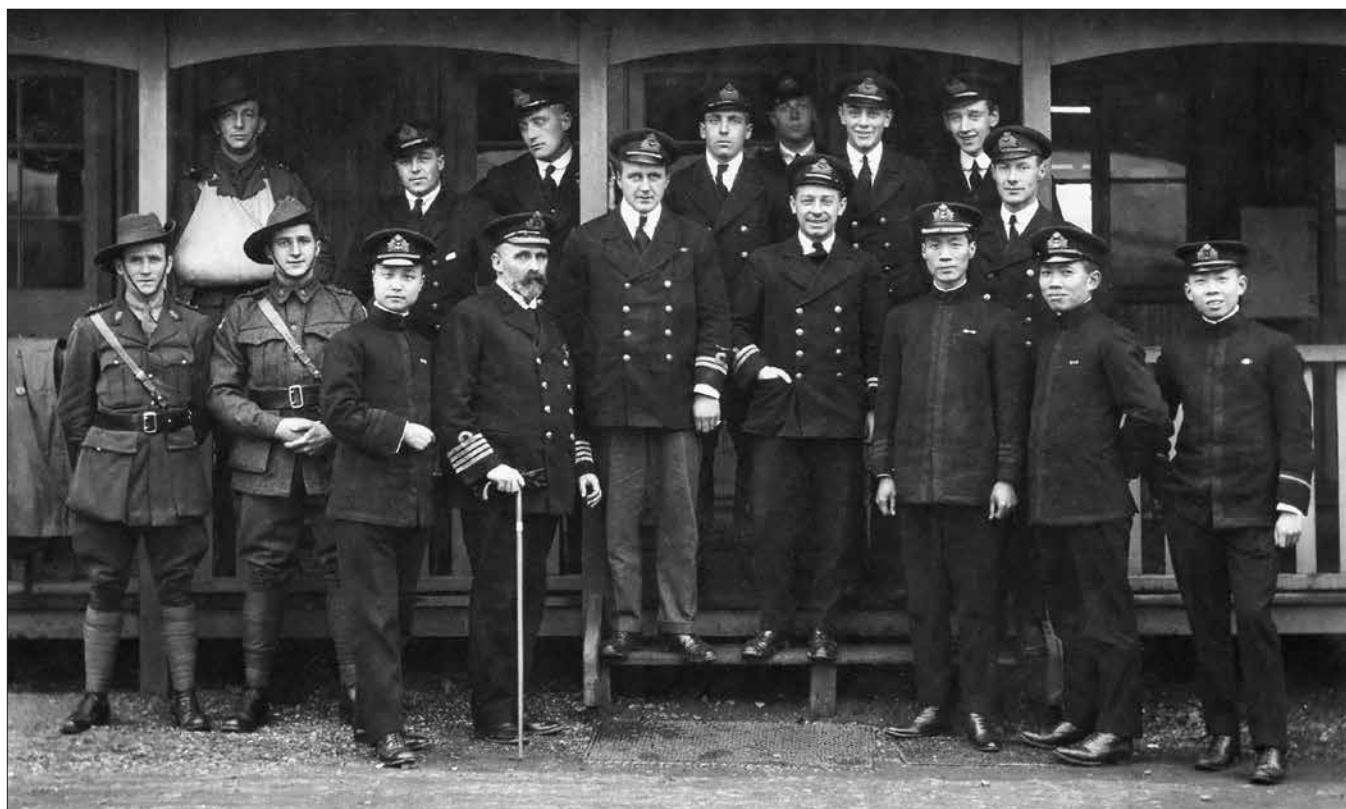


Another view of the H.12 believed to be 8693 probably taken a few minutes after the previous photograph. Here the engines are being warmed up as the two pilots (believed to be Gooch and Perham) prepare to board the aircraft, while Galpin (centre) and an unidentified Flt Lt and Sub-Lt complete the group.

:Jeremy Galpin

a story in itself, but despite the gale and rough sea the H.12 remained afloat and next morning her crew was rescued by a Dutch gunboat and interned in Holland for the rest of the War.

On 3 November, Galpin and Moody set out in 8694 on an anti-submarine patrol accompanied by two other H.12s, but engine trouble forced the other two aircraft to return to Felixstowe, leaving Galpin's 8694 to continue alone. Emerging from cloud 50 minutes after take-off, their position seven miles north-west of North Hinder, they sighted a large U-boat on the surface heading west six miles off their port bow. Taking advantage of the opportunity to attack before the U-boat spotted them, Galpin immediately turned to port onto a northerly heading and lost height ready for the bomb run, but the three minutes it took the flying boat to reach the U-boat's position was enough time to allow it to submerge. Judging the submarine's position from the patch of disturbed water where she had dived just 10 seconds before, they dropped their two 230-lb bombs. However, after the explosions there was no indication that the bombs had done any serious damage. Unfortunately, wireless failure prevented them from alerting other warships and aircraft in the area which might have been able to join in the attack, so Galpin and Moody returned to Felixstowe as quickly as they could to make their report, refuel, rearm and return to the scene of the attack in the hope they would be able to find the U-boat again. However, during their second patrol of the day things rapidly began to go wrong. First, both petrol pumps failed, and fuel had to be pumped by hand from the fuselage tanks to the gravity tank supplying the engines. Then at 16.00 fog appeared, reducing visibility to practically nil. There follows the report of the action written



Flt Lt Galpin (centre of front row) with RN and RNAS officers and visiting Japanese Navy and Australian Army officers at Felixstowe, late 1917.

:Jeremy Galpin

by Galpin and Moody shortly after the events described above:
Sir,

I have the honour to report the following details of submarine patrol carried out by Machine No. 8694 – Pilots, Flight Lieutenant Galpin and Flight Sub-Lieut. Moody, together with Machines No. 8683 and 8661.

The Flight left Felixstowe at 12.34 p.m. on a course of 95°. At 12.56 the Shipwash Light was on our Port Beam one mile distant. Course was then changed to 98°.

At 1.03 both the accompanying Machines left patrol to return to base, Machine 8661 reporting to me that she had developed engine trouble.

At 1.24 the Wireless Operator reported that the W/T Transmitter was out of order. We continued the Patrol hoping this could be remedied en route, and one minute later – 1.25 – emerging from a cloud, sighted a hostile submarine on Port Beam, approximately 6 miles away. We then changed course to 360° and dived at the submarine which was steering West. After diving at him for about a minute, the submarine changed course to South, which was head on to our Machine, and started diving rapidly.

At 1.28 two 230 bombs were released and exploded approximately 30 feet to the left and 20 feet ahead of the swirl of the submarine, which had submerged 10 seconds previously. We circled around the spot and nothing was seen except the large dark patch caused by the functioning of the bombs.

The submarine was large, had two masts, and appeared to be camouflaged with a series of fawn or similar coloured stripes. It resembled an "E" Boat in general contour, but of a much bigger type, with an ability to dive very rapidly.

Being unable to repair Wireless to communicate with base, we decided to return at once for more bombs in case the submarine would be compelled to come to the surface. Turned for home, with North Hinder Lightship 7 miles astern.

Arrived at Felixstowe 2.20 p.m. and made report.

The position of the submarine when bombed was 7 miles W by N of the North Hinder Light.

The W/T was repaired – bombs replaced – and we left again at 2.55 p.m. proceeding to North Hinder and sweeping large circles

around the position where the submarine was bombed.

At 4.00 p.m. our pumps having ceased working, and a thick fog arising, which made observation difficult, we returned to base, having sighted nothing, and landed at Felixstowe at 4.42 p.m.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servants.

(Sgd) J. Galpin Flt. Lieut.

G.F. Moody Flt. Sub. Lieut.

Galpin and Moody were on patrol over the North Sea in H.12 8676 on the morning of 22 December 1917 when, at 11.16, they sighted two U-boats on the surface about 10 miles east of the North Hinder light vessel. The larger of the two was further away and submerged quickly upon detecting the threat from overhead, leaving the flying boat no time to reach its position with any chance of making a successful attack. The smaller U-boat had also submerged as soon as 8676 appeared, but remained just below the surface, with her raised periscope clearly giving her position away. However, just as Galpin began his bombing run, one of the thick banks of mist, which were a feature of that day's weather, shrouded the U-boat from sight making accurate bombing impossible. Hoping that the mist would clear, Galpin broke off the attack and climbed to 2,000 feet, where he circled the U-boat's last position until, quarter of an hour later at 11.35 the mist cleared and the periscope was spotted, now moving on a parallel course five miles to port. Galpin immediately turned towards it and descended to 500 feet, preparing to drop their two 230 lb bombs. A few seconds before they reached the U-boat, she turned to starboard and the periscope disappeared, but aiming at her estimated position they released their bombs and judged that they fell very close to where she probably was. Frustratingly, however, neither of the bombs exploded, making this a disappointing finale to the 23 recorded attacks on U-boats carried out by Felixstowe's flying boats during 1917. This also turned out to be the last opportunity of the war for a Felixstowe aircraft to attack a U-boat.

At 12.15 on 27 December 1917, one hour and ten minutes

after Galpin had taken-off from Felixstowe in H.12 8676 on a photographic patrol, the aircraft's port engine cut out, starved of fuel due to a broken petrol pipe. Galpin had no alternative but to land the aircraft in the sea roughly 65 miles from Felixstowe near the Shipwash Light Vessel. His luck then appeared to have changed when the destroyer HMS *Meteor* came to the rescue, taking 8676 in tow while offering her crew hospitality on board the ship, where the passage back to Felixstowe would be more comfortable. However, at 16.45, the tow parted and 8676 quickly disappeared into the darkness of the winter afternoon and was never seen again.

On 31 December Galpin was promoted to the rank of Flight Commander, but four months later, when RNAS personnel were absorbed into the RAF on 1 April 1918, he assumed the equivalent RAF rank of Captain.

By early 1918 the growing opposition to RNAS flying boat patrols over the North Sea from the German seaplane fighters based at Seeflugstation Flanders I at Zeebrügge, was becoming too dangerous to be ignored. In order to counter the threat, the Admiralty proposed that patrols should be accompanied by escorting aircraft which would be able to protect the flying boats from the faster and more manoeuvrable German seaplanes. However, Wing Commander J.C. Porte, Commanding Officer of Felixstowe Air Station, strongly opposed the idea and was convinced that formations of as few as three Large Americas could successfully defend themselves against enemy seaplanes if they employed the right tactics. Furthermore, he believed that if the crews of the Large Americas came to rely upon escorting aircraft for protection it would undermine their confidence in their ability to defend themselves. An opportunity to obtain evidence to help convince the Admiralty that he was right came on 12 March 1918. A patrol sent out from Felixstowe that morning was attacked by enemy seaplanes, and, in the afternoon, Porte sent out another with instructions to search for the enemy aircraft and engage them. Commanding this patrol was Flt Comm Galpin.

First contact with the enemy on 12 March was at 08.47, when a patrol from Felixstowe consisting of an H.12 (8677) and two F.2As (N4513 and N4510) was attacked by five German seaplanes 30 miles from the Dutch coast to the east of the North Hinder. In addition to their numerical superiority, the enemy aircraft had the advantage of speed over the three British aircraft, which in the circumstances, saw a fighting retreat as their most prudent course of action. After jettisoning their bombs, they closed formation and turned for home, keeping their attackers at bay with their rear guns. A fierce but inconclusive running battle lasting $\frac{3}{4}$ hour was fought at wave-top height. At one point, by an incredible piece of luck, the flying boats flew directly over a surfaced U-boat with members of her crew visible in the conning tower. Despite their own

A Brandenburg W.12 (closest to the camera) with three W.29s flying in typical stepped V formation on an offensive patrol over the North Sea, 1918.
:RAF Museum X003-2602/1990



dangerous situation, the gunners on board the flying boats could not ignore such a tempting target and fired at the U-boat as they passed overhead. Finally, at 09.40 British fishing boats were sighted, a sure sign that the English coast was not far off, and the enemy seaplanes broke off their attack. Although all of the British aircraft were holed by machine gun fire, no serious damage was done and there were no casualties. However, at 10.04 8677 had to land to repair a broken petrol pipe – an all-too-common occurrence - after which she re-joined the others and returned to Felixstowe with N4513, while N4510 landed at Orfordness.

At 13.00 three Large Americas took-off from Felixstowe on the second patrol of the day, led by Galpin in F.2A N4282 with Ensign Nugent Fallon of the US Navy as second pilot. With him was H.12 8661 with Flt Lt Webster and FSL Rhys Davies; and F.2A N4510 (pilots unknown), which had also taken part in the morning patrol. 45 minutes after take-off, N4510 developed engine trouble and was forced to turn back, leaving Galpin and Webster to proceed with the patrol. At 14.00, when they were seven miles east of North Hinder, they sighted five German seaplanes below them on the water, waiting for just such an opportunity as this to intercept a British patrol. On sighting the approaching flying boats, the five German seaplanes took-off, only to find themselves under attack as the Large Americas swooped down upon them. The German pilots reacted by forming a defensive circle, a manoeuvre which might have been effective against fighters with fixed forward firing guns, but offered little protection from the Large Americas, whose front, side and rear guns could all be brought to bear. When Nicol, Webster's wireless operator, shot down one of the two-seater seaplanes the remaining four broke formation and dived towards the Belgian coast, pursued by the two British aircraft. Before the faster German seaplanes could get away, Webster's gunners damaged a second, forcing it to make an emergency landing. Ensign Fallon in Galpin's aircraft also hit one of the two-seaters before it could escape, killing the observer. The only British casualty was Galpin's wireless operator, Grey, who was wounded in the throat, but fortunately survived. The faster German seaplanes gradually increased the distance between themselves and their British pursuers, who continued to give chase until their ammunition was exhausted, when they turned for home, ending their victorious fight after 38 minutes. Galpin and Webster arrived back at Felixstowe at 15.40.

The successful outcome of the afternoon's aerial combat was exactly what Wing Commander Porte had been hoping for, as it demonstrated perfectly his theories on the defensive capability of small formations of flying boats. In his 19 March 1918 report to the Admiralty entitled 'Scheme of patrols from Felixstowe Air Station', which described the various new types of flying boat patrols he planned to introduce, he highlighted the important lessons learned by the events of 12 March: *Machines were sent out last week with the direct object of bringing into action enemy seaplanes which were known to be in the vicinity, these same seaplanes having already chased three of our machines home. I impressed upon Flight Commander Galpin, the officer in charge of this flight, the importance of engaging the enemy, and this officer showed the greatest courage and resource in fighting five enemy seaplanes with only two of our own, and by winning the action, proving beyond all doubt that the Large America Seaplane, when properly handled and flying in formation, are well able to defend themselves against interference from enemy aircraft. The result of this has been to completely change the opinions of the personnel generally, and I have no hesitation in saying that they will engage enemy aircraft whenever sighted, with good effect.*

Galpin's American second pilot, Ensign Fallon, also received his share of praise for his part in the action, with commendations both from Wing Commander Porte and



The signed portrait photograph which Galpin sent to his mother in 1918. He is wearing the ribbon of the DSC. :Jeremy Galpin

Admiral Sims, US Navy Commander-in-Chief in Europe. When details of the successful engagement were announced in an Admiralty communiqué on 15 March, *Flight*, *The Aeroplane* and *Aeronautics* published reports under such titles

as 'Desperate Seaplane Flight', 'Two Against Five' and 'Naval Fight Against Odds'. Though wartime censorship prevented the inclusion of both place names and the names of the participants in these accounts, the information they contain is otherwise detailed and accurate.

During the Spring and Summer of 1918 several of the Felixstowe flight commanders, including Galpin, led special reconnaissance patrols comprising groups of three or four flying boats, which were towed by destroyers across the North Sea on specially designed lighters. After the flying boats had been lowered into the sea from their lighters near the Frisian Islands they took-off with their petrol tanks still full, thus increasing their range by 150 miles. On 21 March 1918, Galpin led the second of these patrols on a reconnaissance of the Heligoland Bight. His second pilot was Rhys Davies and the two accompanying aircraft were flown by Barker and Galvane and Webster and Rees. The three flying boats were towed by destroyers to the Dutch coast, accompanied by ships of the Harwich Force. All three aircraft took-off successfully just after 12.00 and set course for the Heligoland Bight to monitor German naval activity. The Admiralty was particularly interested in finding out whether there were any signs of preparations for a sortie by the High Seas Fleet which might disrupt the Royal Navy's attacks on Zeebrügge and Ostend planned for the following month. Galpin's patrol spent three hours observing the movements of the German minesweepers and destroyers as they made their way through the British minefields. At one point the flying boats were fired upon by a flotilla of minesweepers and retaliated with their machine guns. They also encountered two German seaplanes, which observed the British patrol for a while but made no attempt to intercept it. The only incident to cause concern was an engine failure in Webster and Rees' aircraft on the way home. Though they had to land three times to carry out repairs, Webster managed to return safely to Felixstowe. The absence of any German minesweeper activity directed towards clearing a route through the minefield in the direction of the Flanders coast greatly reassured the British planners of the Zeebrügge/Ostend operation and the flying boat crews involved received a letter of appreciation from the Admiralty. On 3 June 1918

A F.2A being manoeuvred onto a towing lighter at Felixstowe.

:FAAM JMB/GSL 03644





Wing Commander John Porte with the Royal Navy, Royal Flying Corps and United States Navy officers under his command at Felixstowe, early 1918. Galpin is third from the right, front row. Douglas Hallam (author of 'The Spider Web') is fifth from the left, front row. :RAF Museum X003-2602/18203

Galpin was mentioned in dispatches for the second time.

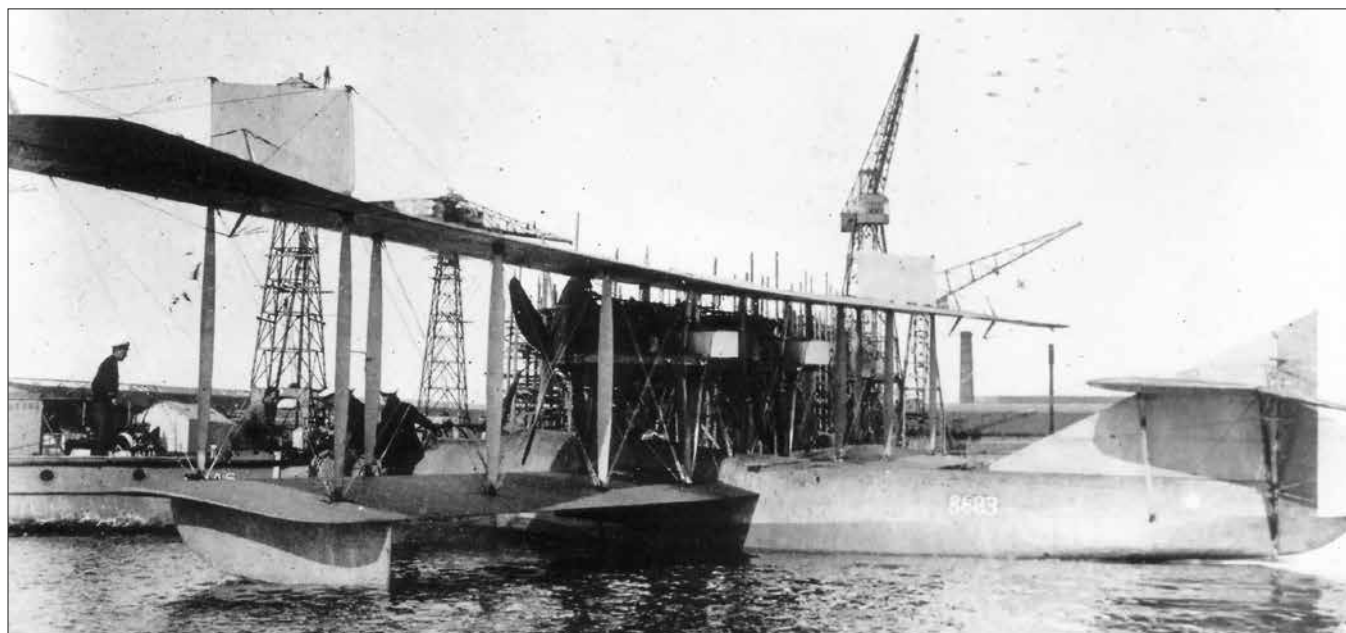
Lt Colonel E.D.M. Robertson took over from Lt Colonel Porte as Commanding Officer of RAF Felixstowe on 1 May 1918, and on what is likely to have been a familiarisation flight, Robertson and Galpin set off on an inner submarine patrol in H.12b N4345 at 03.55 on 6 June. When they had been in the air for an hour in which they had flown 50 miles they were approaching one of the offshore sandbanks in the Thames Estuary known as the Inner Gabbard at 1,000 feet when they spotted five German seaplanes at about 200 feet heading towards them from the south. Galpin, who was flying the aircraft at the time, immediately turned back towards the coast, opened the throttles wide and put the nose down, increasing their speed to 110 knots. Pulling out of the dive at about 30 feet above the sea, it looked at first as if they might escape, but a lucky shot from one of the pursuing seaplanes, flown by Obermatrose Metzger, hit N4345's engine controls and, without warning, the port engine suddenly lost power, putting the aircraft into an involuntary turn to port. With insufficient altitude to recover, Galpin hit the water and N4345 tipped up on her nose, fortunately with no injuries to himself or the rest of the crew. Seeing their plight, two of

the Brandenburg seaplanes landed nearby and after taxiing up to N4345 the German spokesman chivalrously offered their victims the choice of being taken back to Zeebrügge as prisoners of war or staying where they were in the hope of being rescued by their own side. Knowing they were not far from the coast and with the sea calm and approximately sixteen hours of daylight remaining, Robertson decided to gamble that a British vessel or aircraft would find them before too long if they stayed where they were, and he declined the German's offer of rescue. After hearing his decision, one of the German airmen took a photograph of the scene and with a friendly wave both seaplanes took-off and departed.

Eventually N4345 capsized and began to drift with her crew clinging to her upturned hull. Fumes from the petrol leaking out of the fuel tanks added to the crew's discomfort. They were unable to send out an SOS using the wireless and the homing pigeons, which were carried for release in just such an emergency, had drowned inside N4345's flooded hull. However, they had not been forgotten and at 10.00, with N4345 long overdue, the alarm was raised at Felixstowe and F.2As N4530 and N4531 were despatched on a search patrol to look for the missing aircraft. At 12.30, the two F.2As spotted

Curtiss H.12 8683 moored at Felixstowe, before being fitted with the hull of an F.2A.

:CCI Archive





H.12 Convert 8683, which Galpin crash landed at Orfordness on the morning of 30 June 1918. Despite the serious damage to the aircraft all four on board walked away.
:RAF Museum P018442

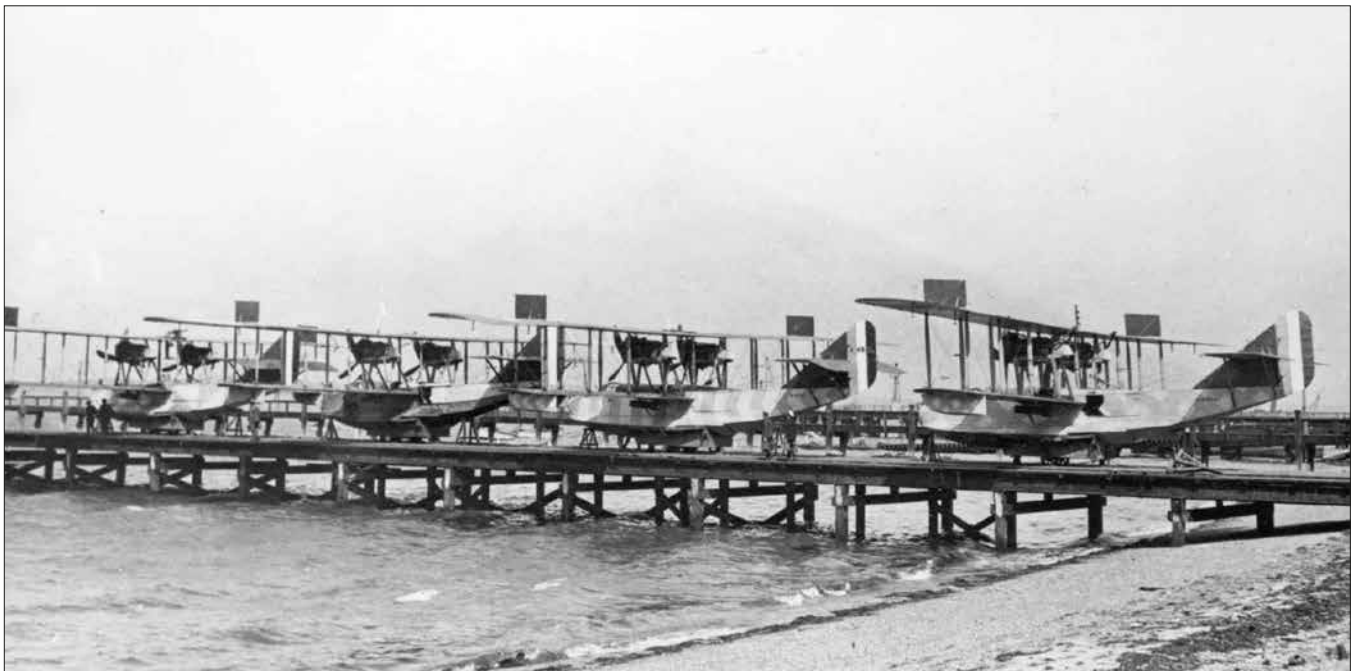
the floating wreckage of N4345 and landed to pick up the survivors, who had spent almost eight hours in the water. An announcement in the June issue of *The Wing* spoke of the station's relief at the crew's rescue, *Congratulations to our commanding officer and Captain Galpin and their boat's crews on their safe return from the little trip over the North Sea. It was a close call. A sigh of relief went up from the whole Station when Colonel Robertson, in the evening, was seen walking with some difficulty, across the Quarter Deck, after his boat had been reported 'Doomed'.*

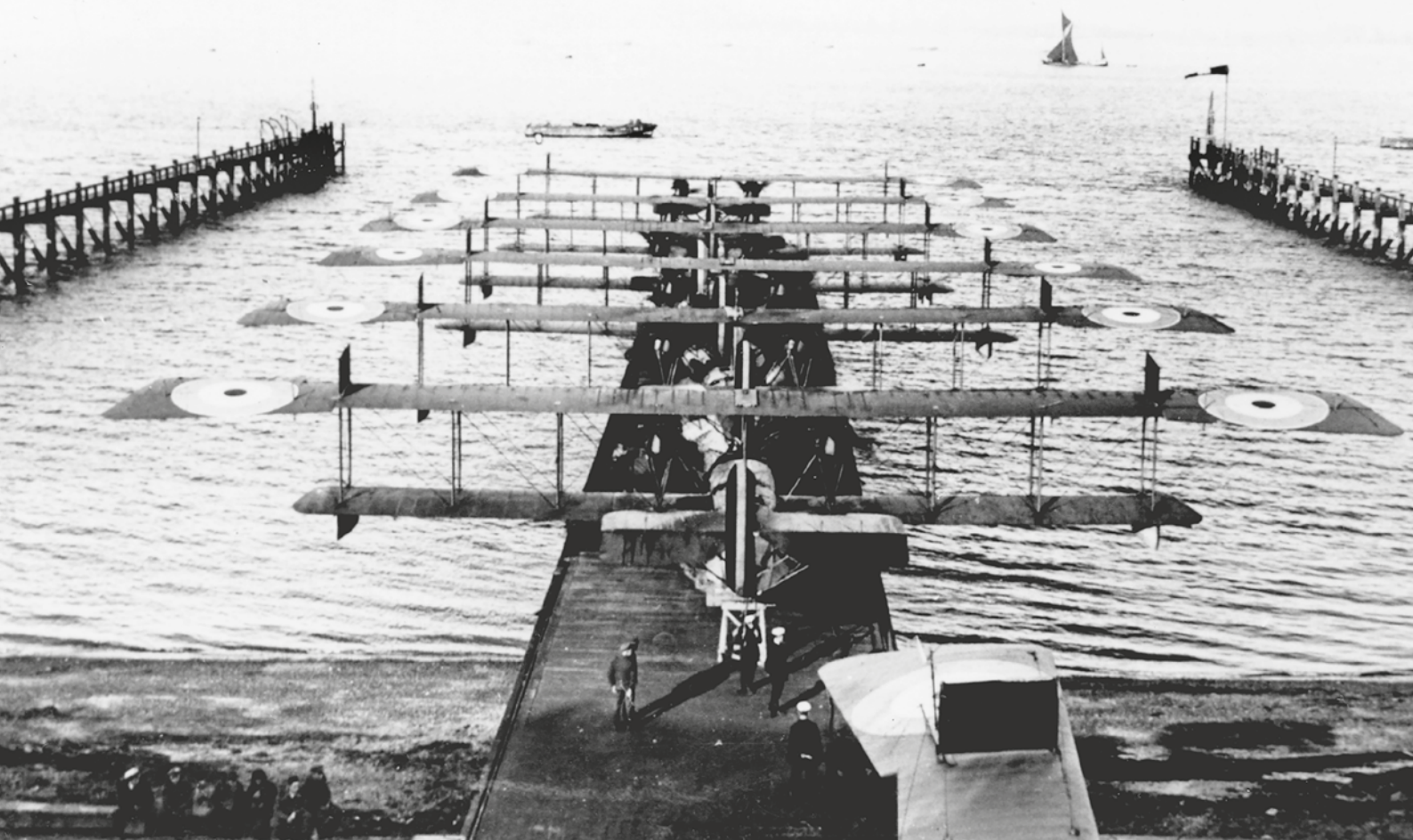
Galpin's last documented patrol was on 30 June 1918, when at 09.05 he took-off on a hostile aircraft patrol in H.12 8683 accompanied by Capt M. Faux, Capt F.H. Wallers and Lt Jones. However, after only a few minutes the aircraft's controls jammed and Galpin had to crash land near Orfordness. The aircraft was so badly damaged that it was assessed as unrepairable and was written off. A surviving photograph of the wreckage shows how lucky Galpin and his crew were to escape with only minor injuries.

As the War drew to a close, patrols were flown just as

frequently, though they became increasingly uneventful. From July 1918 until the Armistice one or two patrols were flown every day from Felixstowe whenever the weather and the availability of aircraft allowed. They usually consisted of at least two aircraft and sometimes as many as six. The final clash between Felixstowe's flying boats and by seaplanes of Seeflugstation Flanders I from Zeebrügge took place on 4 July, when three F.2As on an anti-submarine patrol were attacked by seven enemy seaplanes 25 miles south-east of North Hinder. Two of the F.2As were forced down, one of which later sank, and RAF casualties among the flying boat crews were one killed and three wounded. To offset these losses two of the seaplanes were claimed as destroyed. After 6 September there were no further sightings of enemy aircraft or U-boats, so that the only reports were of drifting mines broken loose from their sinkers, suspicious patches of oil and on one occasion an observation balloon suspended by its cable above the sea, apparently tethered to a sunken ship. Zeppelins still regularly reconnoitred the North Sea and were occasionally sighted, but they flew at such high altitudes that patrolling flying boats

F2As N4541, N4300 and two unidentified aircraft loaded with bombs ready to go on patrol on the slipway at Felixstowe. Their brightly-coloured paint schemes suggest that this photograph dates from the summer or autumn of 1918.
:RAF Museum X003-2602-6623





Six F.2As on one of Felixstowe's slipways; probably a rear view of the scene in the previous photograph.
:FAAM JMB/GSL 03640

Below: This photograph of Major J.O. Galpin was published in the October-November 1918 edition of 'The Wing'. He is described as "The 'father' of the Entertainment Committee and as 'Pontious' a frequent contributor to 'The Wing'."

were unable to intercept them.

Unfortunately, the official reports contain no names of the Felixstowe air crews who took part in these final patrols of the war, and it is possible that his increased responsibilities reduced the time Galpin could spend in the air. On 20 August, he was promoted from Captain to Major and appointed as commanding officer of the newly formed 231 Squadron at Felixstowe. The squadron comprised 329 and 330 Flights, each of which had an establishment of four F.2As. He was also appointed second in command of 70th Wing, formed that same month under the command of Lt Colonel E.D.M. Robertson, with overall control of the six operational squadrons at Felixstowe. The announcement of the award of the DFC to Major Galpin appeared in the *London Gazette* of 21 September 1918. The citation read *A skilful and gallant pilot, who has performed valuable services in attacks on enemy aircraft.*

Galpin's RAF service ended in February 1919, and rather than returning to Canada, which he had left three years before, he decided to open a new chapter in his life by accompanying his brother Charles to Ceylon. Here he joined the Vavasour Company as manager of the Lunavilla Mills, which produced desiccated coconut for the European market. Three years later, in 1922, he resumed his earlier career in journalism, joining *The Times of Ceylon* as Assistant Manager and later becoming General Manager. In 1927 he married Doris May Fraser in London and the couple settled down to married life in Colombo. However, during the late 1920s, Galpin's health deteriorated rapidly, and by June 1930 he had become so ill that he was forced to retire. Shortly afterwards he left Ceylon and returned to the UK, where he died of heart failure on 12th 

