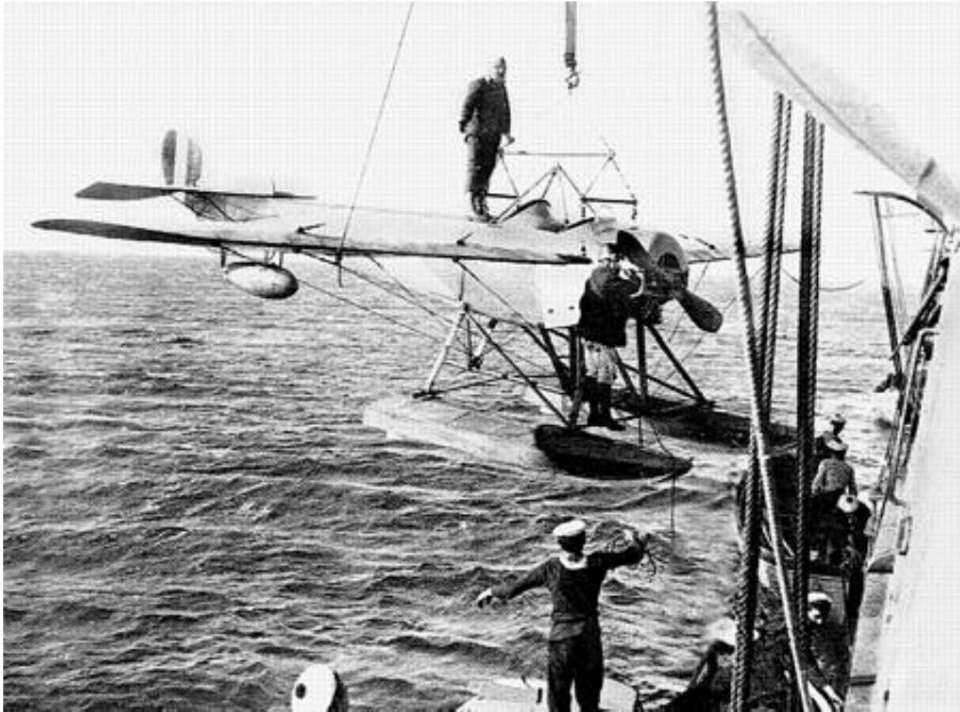


On British and French air forces in Egypt, 1914-15

Introduction



Nieuport X hydroplane being hoisted aboard Campinas, February 1916 1).

From Source 7

Accounts of the Turkish operations against the Suez Canal in 1915 mention, among other things, that the forces during the advance were flown over and attacked by British and French planes. The purpose of this article is to describe these Allied air units and their aircraft.

Nieuport X hydroplane

The French Navy placed a squadron of reconnaissance aircraft at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt, General Sir John Maxwell, in November 1914.

The squadron, under the command of Sea Lieutenant, later Captain *de l'Escaille*, was stationed at Port Said.



Nieuport X.

From Source 6.

Nieuport X

Span: 8.75 m

Length: 12.35 m

Height: 3 m

Starting weight: 795 kg

Maximum speed: 120 km/h

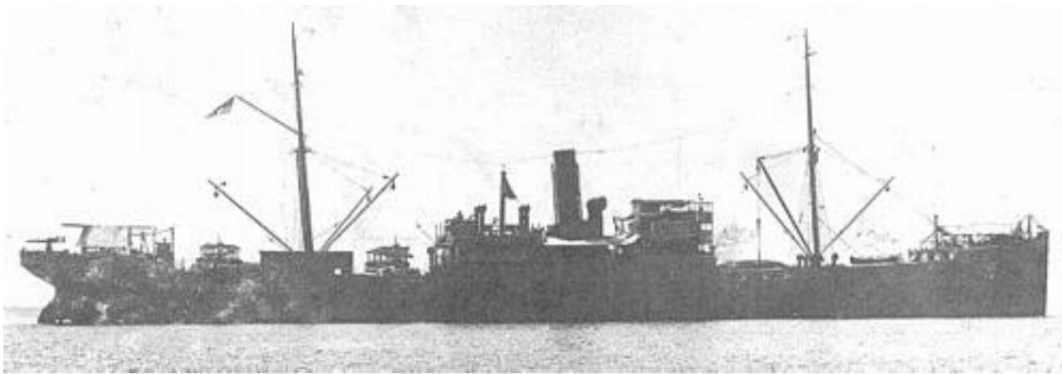
Data is primarily from Source 6.

The squadron had seven Nieuport hydroplanes flown by French pilots and with English observers.

The aircraft type was built 1913-1915.

SS AENNE RICKMERS and SS RABENFELS

The French seaplanes operated along the Turkish coast (Palestine, Syria and Anatolia) and operated from the motherships SS AENNE RICKMERS and SS RABENFELS.



SS AENNE RICKMERS, here as HMS ANNE.

From RN Seaplane Carriers & Tenders (World Aircraft Carriers List).

- SS AENNE RICKMERS (built 1911; 4,083 tons), originally belonged to Rickmers Reismühlen, Rhederei & Schiffbau AG. The vessel was interned in Port Said in August 1914, and taken over by the British authorities. SS AENNE RICKMERS was then deployed at the Dardanelles, and torpedoed 11 March 1915 and towed to Alexandria for repairs. Taken over by the Royal Navy as a cult tender on 5 August 1915 and renamed HMS ANNE the following day. In service to August 8, 1917; sold for civilian use in January 1918.
- SS RABENFELS (built 1903; 4,678 tons), originally belonged to Deutsche Dampfschiffahrts Gesellschaft "Hansa"). The vessel was interned in Port Said in August 1914, and taken over by the British authorities. SS RABENFELS was taken over by the Royal Navy on 12 June 1915 and renamed HMS RAVEN II in August 1915. In service until 10 July 1917 and then returned to the owners.

The ships could each accommodate two hydroplanes.

The Egyptian Flight / No. 30 Squadron Royal Flying Corps



BE2c.

From History in Illustration.

The French aircraft in Egypt operated together with the then unnamed British Air Force in Ismalia, which later became No. 30 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, later Royal Air Force.

In addition to the aircraft mentioned below, in December 1914, from India, another 1 was added. BE2a to the squadron. (Source 1)

The illustration shows the slightly later version BE2c, which appeared in 1915; Internet searches suggest that the machine from India may have been of the BE2b type [2](#).

30. Squadron's website (Source 7) summarizes the operations in Egypt 1914-15 as follows:

"30 Squadron's long history began at Farnborough, England in November 1914. The, as then, untitled unit sailed for Egypt commanded by Major SD Massey, accompanied by 3 officers and 37 NCOs and men. Arriving at Alexandria on 17 November they unloaded 3 Maurice Farman S.7 aircraft, collected 2 Henri Farmans from Heliopolis and then established a base at Ismailia where operations began [3](#).

The unit was engaged on reconnaissance duties, patrolling the Sinai desert in search of parties of Turks intent on blowing up banks of the Suez Canal. When discovered, these parties were dispersed by dropping 20lb bombs on them by hand. Thereby, on 27 March 1915, Captain H. Reilly, RFC, was credited with dropping 30 Squadron's first bombs, the unfortunate recipient being a Turkish Camp at Bir-El-Mir.

The unit received retrospective notification in August that as of 24 March 1915, it was to form part of 30 Squadron. Other units that would form the remainder of the squadron were already in action in Mesopotamia.

Operations in Egypt continued until November 1915 when the Squadron's aircraft were handed over to 14 Squadron, and in December its personnel embarked for Mesopotamia, where it was to become 'C' Flight on 27 December 1915."

About the operations

The English squadron was stationed at Ismalia, but a field airfield at Kantara (Qantara).

The machines' practical flight time was not very long and long-range operations over the Sinai Peninsula required temporary landing sites to be built east of the Suez Canal so that the planes could be refueled. The longest flight carried out by British aircraft - after the Turkish attack - was 440 km, but here the machine was also equipped with an extra fuel tank.



Royal Flying Corps, c. 1914.

Drawn by Harry Payne.

The French planes were not much better off, but thanks to aerial reconnaissance, the British were able to follow the Turkish advance.

Postcards from Series II of 'Regimental badges and their Wearer', No. 8491, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons 'Oilette', issued during the First World War.

The following is printed on the back of the card:

"The Royal Flying Corps is one of the youngest offspring of the British Army, and at the same time one of the most popular, as a good supply of recruits, both officers and men, are never lacking. As a new corps, of course, its badges are equally new, but significant. The RFC is the universal cap badge bronze for officers, brass for men. The "wings" cannot be obtained until a pilot's certificate has been earned. Now all pilots are officers."

Series 8491 includes the following cards, all with corps/regimental insignia and a figure in khaki uniform:

- Royal Army Medical Corps
- Army Ordnance Corps
- Army Service Corps Royal
- Flying Corps Seaforth
- Highlanders

Closing

The Commander-in-Chief in Egypt, General Sir John Maxwell expresses his great satisfaction with the efforts of the French squadron, which proceeded without loss of any kind. (Source 8)

Captain de l'Escaille's further efforts are described in *La Marine Francaise en Mer Rouge pendant la Premiere Guerre Mondiale* by Henri Labrousse (Institut de Stratégie Comparée).

Sources

1. *History of the Great War, Military Operations Egypt & Palestine, Volume I, From the outbreak of war with Germany to June 1917* by Lieutenant General Sir George Macmunn and Captain Cyril Falls, HSMO, London 1927.
Can be borrowed from the Royal Garrison Library, catalog number 426261.
2. Rickmer's Line (The Ship List).
3. Hansa Line (The Ship List).
4. RN Seaplane Carriers & Tenders (World Aircraft Carriers List).
5. History 1914-1923 (No. 269 Squadron, Royal Air Force).
6. Édouard de Nié Port (Nieuport) (1875-1911) (The Pioneers: An Anthology).
7. History 1915-2003, No. 30 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF Lyneham).
8. Sir John Maxwell's Egypt Despatch (The Long, Long Trail).

Per Finsted

Notes:

1) Campinas was a French mother ship for hydroplanes, equivalent to English SS Aenne Rickmers and SS Rabenfels. See [French Navy of WW1, Battleships, Cruisers, Seaplane Carriers, Part 1 \(Navies of World War 1\)](#). The main page [Navies of World War 1](#) provides, among other things, information about the naval operations in i.a. Mediterranean Sea.

2) On the history of the aircraft, see [Royal Aircraft Factory BE2 \(Wikipedia\)](#).

3) The aircraft types are reproduced in No. 30 Squadron, Royal Air Force (Air of Authority), click on Aircraft and Markings.