

VERY RARE WW1 NO4 SQUADRON RNAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE EAST AFRICA JUNE 1915 – SEPT 1916 PHOTO, DOCUMENT AND MEDAL GROUP TO LEADING MECHANIC WHO PLAYED A ROLE IN THE SINKING OF THE KONIGSBERG IN JULY 1915, SERVED IN THE MAKTAU, TAUGA CAMPAIGNS, THEN SERVICE AT SEAPLANE STATIONS BACK AND THE UK AND COMMISSIONED IN 1918



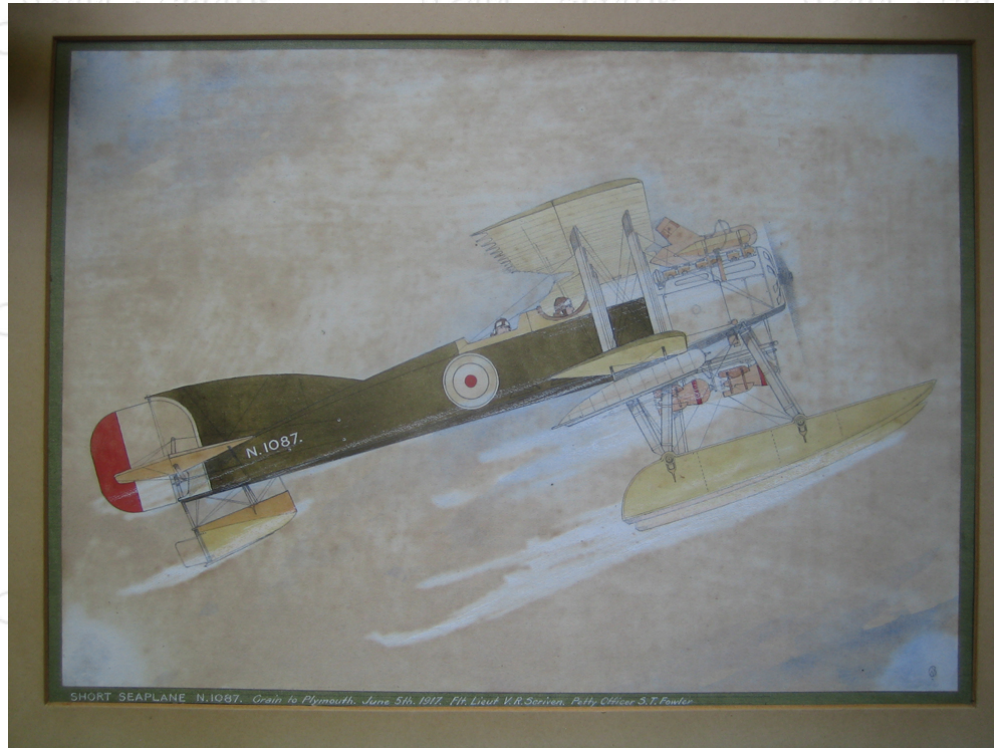
2nd Lieutenant Sidney Thomas Fowler (1871-1970) was born in Bexley, Kent, prior to his military service Fowler worked at Bexley Power Station but in May 1915 he joined the Royal Naval Air Service and was almost immediately sent to East Africa to join no 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS under the command of Flight Lieutenant John Tulloch Cull. As a 1st Class Mechanic, he played a small part in the sinking of SMS Konigsberg on 11 July 1915 in East Africa where he carried out work on one of the seaplanes which took part in the sinking of Konigsberg.

The photograph album and scrapbook included in the group contain a large number of rare photographs relating to this small expeditionary force sent to East Africa during Fowlers service there; June 1915 to September 1916. Photos include many officers and OR's who Fowler served with including Flight Commander Cull who was the pilot of one of the spotter planes involved in the attack and which crashed after it was hit by enemy fire. Both Cull and his Observer survived after being picked up by a small boat, an extensive eyewitness account of this action written by Fowler is included in the group.

After the sinking of the Konigsberg, in August 1915, Cull's 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS, moved to Mombasa and September 1915 and the seaplanes were sent to Mesopotamia. Cull and the small number of men with him and two Caudron's moved inland to Maktau to help the Army in the Kilimanjaro area. Joining General Michael Tighe's forces, they, in very difficult country, not suited for aircraft, they were also pitched against the famed German General Lettow-Vorbeck. A description of 'The War in the Air';

'Such was the position when the Naval Air Service detachment arrived at Maktau in September 1915. Space inside the camp was scarce and a landing-ground was made outside,

explosives being freely used to blow up obstructing trees and ant-hills. The hangars, however, were erected inside the camp as the aeroplanes would otherwise be at the mercy of marauding enemy patrols. Before each flight the aeroplane was wheeled out of the camp down the main road to the landing-ground while an armed party beat through the surrounding bush to dislodge hostile snipers...'



In February General Smuts took over Command and Cull's men served in the Tanga Campaign. Also mentions in Fowlers diaries of Kilindini in April and Kilwa, Kiswani in June 1916. In May 1916, he was promoted Leading Mechanic

Further details on this RNAS expedition are noted later in this write up, though this group really needs to be thoroughly researched as I've only scratched the surface!

Posted back to the UK in September 1916 (as was Commander Cull), from October until Feb 1917, Fowler served at RNAS South Shields, having been promoted again to Petty Officer in December. RNAS Plymouth March 1917 to August 1918, promoted Chief Mechanic in June. Finally posted to Henley on Thames August to October 1918 and North Eastern Area mobile workshop October 1918 onwards. Fowler was Commissioned in October 1918 as squadron technical Lieutenant, in charge of engines.

During his service, Fowler was clearly working the majority of the time as a mechanic but from the painted picture, he clearly occasionally served as aircrew at times (as was not uncommon).

CONTENTS OF GROUP:

1) Fowlers medal group framed; 1915/15 Star 'F4655 S.T.FOWLER, A.W.I.RNAS', BWM/VICTORY 'F4655 S.T.FOWLER, P.O.M. RNAS' MID on Victory

2) Superb 19.5 x28cm hand drawn/watercolour painting of Short Seaplane No.1087 with Fowler and a Flight Lieutenant, the mount inscribed 'SHORT SEAPLANE N.1087. Grain to Plymouth. June 5th. 1917. Flt. Lieut V.R. Scriven. Petty Officer S.T. Fowler.', artist monogram lower right.



3) Rare Photo album with approx 130 photos, mainly relating to Fowler's service in East Africa. Starts with super large photo of Commander Cull RNAS in tropical kit (all other EA photos of personnel are wearing tropical kit). A brief description of the types of photos found in the rest of the album include: RNAS groundcrew aboard ship, ships marines, RNAS personnel Le Harve, RNAS wormwood Scrubs, on way to EA, landing in EA, Aden, war

ships, aircraft crash Mafia Island, RNAS on Laconia, Bressonneau hanger being put up, various of aircraft Mafia Island, aerial shot of the Konigsberg, seaplanes, camp at Mombasa, Zanzibar, rail transport, camp and aircraft Maftan, cavalry, Indian pioneers, rail crash, SA troops, Indian troops, RNAS Xmas 1915 at Maxtan, various campo life, working on aircraft etc large shot of Lt Watkins (pilot) and Major Keen (observer), next to Caudron, crashes, at Simba, more Aerial, HMS Hyacinth (RNAS) and Seven, 'Cull's bungalow at Chukwani Palace', natives, some super scenic shots of the plains and Mount Kilimanjaro, lion hunting party. Some photos a little faded and a small number very faded but majority very good.



COMMANDER CULL

4) Four small diaries for 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918. All partially filled as Fowler doesn't seem to have been concerned with keeping up to date every day ; notes are generally very short but are very interesting and can plot where he was and when. Details on many aircraft, flights etc. Particularly useful for research on his service in Africa. Konigsberg destruction etc. Clear he was where Cull was most of the time as he is mentioned a lot concerning flights etc.

5) Superb large scrapbook file with 89 photos (almost all East Africa service) and a large number of letters and documents relating to Fowlers Service, especially East Africa;

a) Original Map of East Africa, dated 1st Oct 1915 S T Fowler RNAS

b) Large number of photos, almost all from Fowlers service in East Africa, though starting with a shot of RNAS Plymouth, one of Fowler and a Scottish soldier and one of Fowlers sister who was a nurse in France. Photos then move onto East Africa; very good shot of a Voisen III with crew in tropical uniform (as with all the following of crew etc), super large photo of Lieutenant Cull, leader of the No. 4 RNAS Expeditionary Force, photos of Caudron's, hangers, work on aircraft (Caudron's, Voisen's, BE's), movement of unit through the jungle, some really good shots of aircraft lined up on the plains, parades, travel by rail, un crating aircraft, some amazing scenic shots, war ships, aerial shots, artillery teams, good number of RNAS ground crew group and single shots, work on aircraft engines, Union troops arriving at Maxtan Feb 1916, Armoured car etc etc. Places named include Zanzibar, Tieta Hills, Nairobi, Maxtan, though many photos in Africa not named. A small number of photos a little faded.

c) Programme for Theatre in Nairobi

d) Two RNAS EAST AFRICA passes for Fowler signed by Lieut Cull, Sept 1915

e) Two similar pass but RFC, Sept 1915

- f) Plans for Bessonneau aircraft hanger (photos of this in album), Maktou E Africa Jan 1916
- g) Remittance receipt for Fowler on HMS Hyacinth (RNAS), March 1916
- h) Various period newspaper cutting relating the RNAS expedition and the Konigsberg
- i) Programme for Zanzibar War Society performance
- j) Various RNAS engineering bulletin's; engine pics/plans etc
- k) A number of London Gazette Supplements and one full copy of the Gazette. These are the ones that detail Fowler
- l) A letter from the then Group Captain Cull to Fowler in 1934 and a small newspaper clipping regarding Cull and the Konigsberg
- m) A letter dated March 1915 from 'Flight'(first Aero Weekly), in reply to a letter Fowler made to them about joining the air service!
- n) A May 1916 letter sent to Fowler at Mombasa from Bexley Council Electrical and Tramways; where Fowler worked before joining up. Letter mainly talks about mundane issues at work back in the UK
- o) A similar letter but dated Feb 1917 and to Fowler at Seaplane Station South Shields, regarding Fowler deciding to stay on in the service, even though his civilian job meant he was exempt for service if he wished.
- p) A number of photos taken of the machines at Bexley and Fowler with work colleagues.
- Q) A number of loose photos; Fowler and Caudron EA, Fowler and Scottish soldier, 2 of Fowler, mechanics and an aero engine, Ground crew EA, two of Fowler and RNAS on ship on way to EA, Portrait signed photo of another mechanic in EA.
- r) A number of other papers/docs etc
- s) The entries from Fowlers 1915 diary have been transcribed by a previous owner of the group



- 6)** large clip folder containing a large amount of documentation;
 - a) Résumé of Fowlers working and military career 1899-1920
 - b) Fowlers original RN/RNAS record of service (copy of this in National Archives)
 - c) Fowlers original RAF record of service (copy of this in National Archives) – both the above rarely seen originals.
 - d) A number of London Gazette Supplements and one full copy of the Gazette. These are the ones that detail Fowler.
 - e) Original letter from the Admiralty regarding the issuing of Fowlers MID emblem.

- f) A rare 1919 Award letter sending Fowler the ribbon for the BWM (ribbon on letter). This was sent in advance to the issue of the medal itself so It could be worn on his uniform.
- g) Naval prize fund letters
- h) Portrait photo of Fowler in his RAF Officers uniform
- i) Fowlers original RNAS/RAF certificate of service with covering letter. Details all service, promotions, awards etc.
- j) Envelope for and BMW/Victory ribbons
- k) A large number of other letters and documents regarding Fowlers War and Civilian service



7) Army Book 130, partially filled but also has a number of pages filled in by Fowler at a later date, giving an account of events leading up to and of the destruction of the Konigsberg and details of his non Wartime life.

8) Swahili Phrases book – clearly used in East Africa

9) Copied research includes:

a) Photocopies of chapter RAF book concerning Flying operations in East and South West Africa

b) Chapter from Blackwoods Magazine 1935 regarding the Konigsberg incident

c) Copies of the Official Air Ministry account (not released until 1966) of the operations leading to the destruction of the Konigsberg (large number of pages)

Also various other notebooks, Id's, newspapers etc relating to Fowler's civilian life

Also CD with some research including 'history of the War in the Air' Vol 3 that deals with East Africa. Group is heavy, weighing approx 14KG packed.

A really quite amazingly complete and rare group to one of the few men who served with the RNAS in East Africa during 1915 (especially). Photographs and documents relating to this expedition rarely come up for sale.

NO4 SQUADRON RNAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE EAST AFRICA JUNE 1915 – SEPT 1916

The following taken from 'The use of flight in the African campaigns of World War 1' by Dr Anne Samson;

<https://thesamsonsedhistorian.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/flight-in-ww1-africa-paper.pdf>

'...The result was 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS under the command of Flight Lieutenant John Tulloch Cull. With a contingent of 20 men and officers and two seaplanes, Cull left Tillbury Docks on 16 January 1915. The planes were of the Sopwith Type 807. They arrived at Zanzibar on 20 February and left almost immediately for a nearby island Niororo where they would be based. The local climate, thinner air in the tropics, played havoc with the flights – the Sopwith could only fly with a pilot and one hour of fuel and no bombs. The sun also played a part causing men to suffer sunburn and skin to peel off the floats of the planes resulting in them half submerging on landing. It was eventually discovered that half filling the floats with water when onboard and reinforcing the outer skins with metal plates made from flattened petrol cans helped. In March the squadron was moved to Mombasa where further trials could be undertaken and in April the squadron returned to Durban where new planes and personnel were met.

The new planes were three elderly Short Folders from the Isle of Grain. By 25 April, the first reconnaissance of the Konigsberg was undertaken with Cull at the controls of Short 122 and Leading Mechanic EHA Boggis as observer. Observations continued until June when two monitors, Mersey and Severn, arrived which could access the delta. Arriving with the monitors were further reinforcements and four planes (two Henri Farman and two Caudron) which were now based at Mafia Island. By the time the planes for attacking Konigsberg were ready, one Henri Farman and one Caudron had been lost. On 6 July the attack on Konigsberg began but with little success. The next attack was scheduled for 11 July. The Konigsberg was successfully disabled but both planes were lost, the last on landing back at Mafia.



The Konigsberg brought to bay, 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS was relocated to Mombasa where it was met by the arrival of two Caudrons and 3 Short seaplanes. The planes were offered to the Army which accepted. Leaving Mombasa on 8 September 1915, Cull, together with the new planes moved inland to Maktau to join General Michael Tighe's forces on 10

September. Commander Gordon who had taken command with the arrival of the monitors proceeded to Mesopotamia with the seaplanes. Cull had with him two Caudrons, two Bessonneu hangers, aviation spirit and stores. Their base was 10 miles away from the enemy camp at Mbuyuni. An airstrip of 200 by 200 yards was constructed outside the camp perimeter although the planes were brought in every night to prevent sabotage by the enemy. Before a flight took place, the area was screened for snipers and the aerodrome dragged for hidden mines. The weather here, too, played a major part in flight plans. Mist and low cloud affected early mornings whilst the heat caused turbulence. Hills presented a hazard when taking off and landing. In October 1915 another Caudron and spares was received together with a workshop lorry. A delivery in November brought the number of planes to six, one of which was wrecked soon after. The crew consisted of 13 men including two pilots.

Between 22 and 30 November 1915, 20 ratings and three pilots added to the ranks. A shortage of men resulted in Captain Carlo Bruno and Lieutenant Cherry Kearton being detached from the Army for service with the RNAS. On 2 February 1916, the first plane arrived at the advanced airfield at Mbuyuni which had been cleared of German forces. A kite balloon arrived in April but it is not certain whether it was used or not. On 12 May, 100 personnel relocated to Mbuyuni. The conditions being harsh, the Admiralty suggested the return of the RNAS men to Britain but Smuts refused and instead replacements of ten percent were sent out. At some stage, the RNAS squadron had split in two: 7 RNAS working upcountry and 8 RNAS from Zanzibar. In February 1916 when the RNAS moved to Maktau it met up with No 26 Squadron (RFC). The latter would support the main advance and the Voisins General van Deventer's move on Kondoa Irangi where an airfield would be set up. To assist this, Gallehawk, five mechanics and 1,000 porters walked the 200 miles over three weeks preparing another airfield at Lol Kissale on route. The airfields were ready by 29 May 1916 although the planes took a little longer to arrive as faulty maps led them astray. Two British planes were used to bomb Neu Moschi and also Handeni towards the end of 1915. On 18 December 1915, Capell based at Maktau recorded 'another plane fallen and come to grief, pilot uninjured; this leaves us five out of the eight we started with, it would appear they are most unreliable.'¹⁹ Another crashed on 30 December 1915 and again the pilot was unhurt.²⁰ On 27 January 1916, a plane returning from Oldorobo was brought down by the German infantry whilst another successfully bombed Taveta. After this, they were used to track the Germans when the ground forces lost contact and in 1917 they dropped propaganda leaflets amongst the German askari and porters. Two planes out of three arrived at Kondoa Irangi on 6 June and by 12 June the airfield had received 53 shells. This resulted in a temporary relocation to Salim for safety, Kondoa Irangi being reoccupied on 26 June. Another two planes, BE2Cs added to the force bringing a total of four planes by 18 July in the southern sector. Meanwhile, No 26 Squadron was based at Mbagui near the Tanga Railway. It received new aircraft during July 1916 – Henri Farmans which although underpowered were found to be more reliable than the BE2c. The squadron had a total of six aircraft. On 31 August the squadron moved to Morogoro with three serviceable planes and was based near Smuts' headquarters.

We return to Zanzibar where an RNAS unit was based from early 1915. In January 1916, when Air Mechanic Jack Furniss joined the personnel numbered approximately 150. The aircraft included four Voisin landplanes and four Short seaplanes. On 9 May 1916, No 8 Squadron left Mbuyuni for Mombasa and arrived at Zanzibar on 11 May before moving to Chukiwani seven miles south of Stone Town. The planes had to be moved by lighter as they were too big for the narrow streets of Stone Town. Some material, including 10,000 gallons of petrol, had to be swum to shore as the tide was out when the lighters arrived. The Squadron's role was to support the naval blockade of the coast, a length of 620 miles. The squadron consisted of carpenters, engineers, generals (who did everything), two writers, stores party and armourers. Their armoury contained 65 and 16 pound bombs, incendiaries, petrol bombs and darts. It was supported by the supply ship, Laconia, the kite balloon ship Manica and the Himalaya which had been sent from service in the Dardanelles. All three were equipped to

take seaplanes. A contingent of two planes, pilot and a dozen ratings would cruise the coast for about ten days. On 15 August 1916, 7 Squadron RNAS moved to Dodoma and on 12 August Cull and Gallehawk of 4 Squadron RNAS together with 34 ratings left for Cape Town. Squadron Commander FWI Bowhill from Mesopotamia took over from Cull and his, Bowhill's report here at Hendon is most insightful especially on the photography and storage of equipment...'

