

CONCEPTION 1911 - 1914

Exactitude has long been a military quality and hence the official date of the Squadron's formation is listed as 15th October 1914; however, the truth is rather more complicated and intertwined with the career of its first CO.

Arthur Murray Longmore was born in 1885 in Australia, and by 1910 was a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. During this year, as he admitted in his autobiography, he spun a coin to decide whether he should attend a lecture on flying or spend a day hunting in the Blackmore Vale. The result embarked the young officer on a career as an aviator which ultimately led him to high command in the RAF of World War 2.

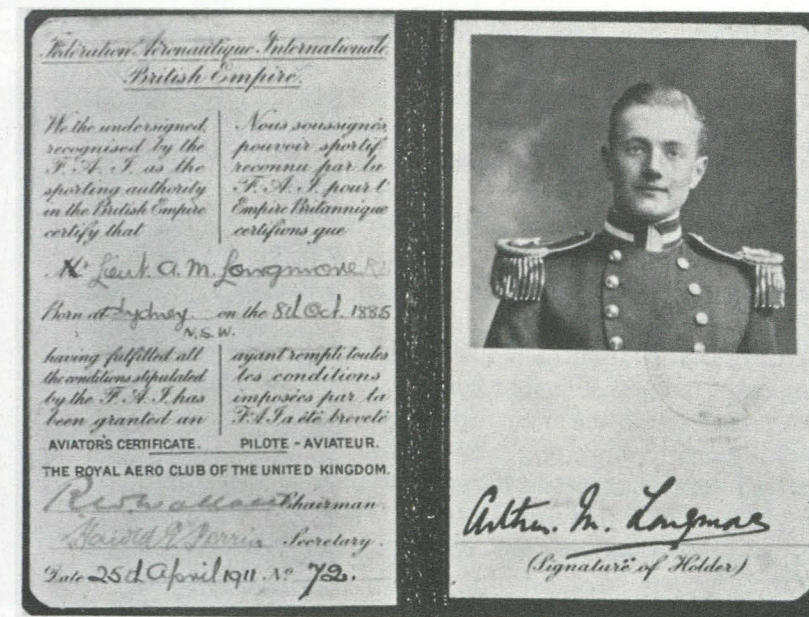
In 1911, to the disgust of his CO, he was selected for flying training with three other officers; Lt Charles Samson RN, Lt Reginald Gregory RN and Lt Louis Gerrard Royal Marines. The training began at Eastchurch in the Isle of Sheppey in March. The Admiralty showed little financial interest in the venture and it was left to the generosity of the Royal Aero Club and Messrs Short Bros to provide aeroplanes and instructors for the fledgling students.

The names of those involved in the enterprise, including those at Short Bros, read like a Who's Who of early aviation: Sir Frank Maclean, owner of the land at Eastchurch, Frank Hedges Butler, J.T.C. Moore Brabazon, The Hon C.S. Rolls, Oswald, Horace and Eustace Short, J.W. Dunne [works manager at Shorts], Richard Fairey and R.A. Bruce who built the Westland empire.

Horace Short provided ground instruction in technical subjects, often into the small hours of the night; his brother Oswald helped Longmore to experiment with air bags under the wooden undercarriage of a Short biplane for water landings. In the air G.C. Cockburn was their instructor, although the diminutive Maurice Farman Shorthorn allowed the student

only enough room to lean over his instructor's shoulder to feel the control column and merely to observe the use of rudder! Eastchurch itself was on a slope, with a dyke at the lower end with which Longmore had an early contretemps. Taking off downhill the Longhorn lifted sluggishly, only sufficient for the fuselage to clear the dyke; the undercarriage alas was left behind, but the pilots remained uninjured. After two and a half hours' dual instruction Longmore was allowed solo. After this there were three tests to pass for his Royal Aero Club certificate.

First, two flights around a figure-of-eight circuit between two poles about 500 yds apart; then a climb to 150ft followed by two landings within 50 metres of a specific point without use of the engine. Longmore watched his friend Samson take the test first, afraid that Samson would break the machine denying them both the chance to pass, but all went well and Arthur Longmore was issued with certificate No.72, under the authority of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale. The number of his certificate shows that he was the



Log book of Sir Arthur Longmore