

Racing Ace - The Fights and Flights of Samuel 'Kink' Kinkead DSO DSC* DFC*.
By Dr Julian Lewis
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Reviewed by Roger Green, Principal Reviewer, U K Defence Forum
Julian Lewis is the well-known MP for New Forest East and it is within his constituency that 'Kink' Kinkead is commemorated at Calshot and Fawley. Lewis is a strategist, an award-winning author for his military essays and an authority on strategic defence issues. This book recording the exploits of 'Kink' Kinkead is the result of extensive and detailed research that is evident from the lengthy list of sources. Although Kinkead's life is the central theme of the book, it actually takes up comparatively little of the text. What Lewis has done, and done very well, is to use the events of the time to describe the circumstances, events and politics surrounding Kinkead's life that he either played a part in shaping or had an impact on him. As Lewis himself admits at the outset an account of the life of Kink Kinkead was no easy story to write. Kinkead was a self-effacing officer who shunned self-promotion; he kept neither personal records of his Service life nor any personal letters or photograph albums. As a consequence the reader is taken through Kinkead's story largely through the eyes and writings of his colleagues as well as information gleaned from official sources and squadron histories. His impressive list of decorations, unusual in itself for a junior officer, gives a clue as to the ability of this young airman whose all too-short life came to an abrupt end on the 12th March 1928 at the age of 31 whilst attempting to break the World Airspeed Record. Despite Kinkead's qualities of leadership and courage, this is not a 'Biggles' style story but rather the story of an unassuming young man who was valued as a friend and colleague by those fortunate to know and serve with him. Kinkead was born in 1897 in South Africa to an Irish Protestant father and a Scottish mother. His school records in South Africa show he excelled at sports and became a Troop Sergeant in the School Cadets. Leaving school he was an apprentice civil engineer but there is no evidence to show why he decided to become an airman. In 1915 Kinkead moved to England where he enlisted in the Royal Navy Air Service. For the majority of Kinkead's short but illustrious career the author has to rely on official records and the memoirs of those who flew alongside him in combat or who were involved in the Schneider races. Inevitably as Lewis acknowledges, some memories of events recalled some thirty years or more later are sometimes in conflict and the timelines are often confused. Kinkead's exploits that showed him to be a truly remarkable pilot started in the various campaigns of the Eastern Mediterranean where he was initiated into air combat. It also encouraged his resourcefulness and ingenuity as higher HQ direction to the naval air squadrons was often minimal and they were largely left to resolve their own armament, logistic and transport problems. The combat reports and memoirs of that time show that he had a good tactical brain for air fighting that resulted in an increasing number of victories. In depicting the role Kinkead played in both the Mediterranean and Western Front campaigns Lewis has shown how tenuous were the organisations that had developed within the Admiralty and War Office for using aircraft in war. The deficiencies in British military aviation were recognised and in 1916 General Smuts was tasked to look into the overall organisation and direction of aerial operations. Smuts recognised that aircraft would cease to be ancillary to naval and military operations and that they would be used for independent operations. The War Cabinet accepted his recommendations in August 1917 and an Air Ministry was established with Lord Trenchard being withdrawn from France and appointed as the first Chief of Air Staff. It was the result of the consequent reorganisation with Naval Air Squadrons transferred to the RAF that Kinkead became an RAF officer. By the time of the Armistice, Kinkead had been decorated four times for gallantry having achieved 33

confirmed victories on the Western Front.

Lewis devotes a chapter to one of Kinkead's most challenging periods of his life that came with his next posting to 47 Squadron in 1919. Lewis recounts the confused political situation that developed regarding British troops in Murmansk and Archangel towards the end of the war and the series of decisions taken by the Cabinet that resulted in a British Military Mission of volunteers being despatch to southern Russia in support of the anti-Bolshevik forces. 47 Squadron was part of that Mission. The story of this campaign is drawn mainly from memoirs unofficially published in 1923 and recollections from members of the mission written some 40 years later. It was such a politically sensitive mission that 47 Squadron was officially disbanded days after it deployed and was known thereafter as either 'A' Squadron, or 'A' Detachment RAF Training Mission. Kinkead excelled in this theatre both in air combat and in support of the White Russian ground forces. The Squadron had little support and as records show it survived principally on its own initiative. The War Diary records that at one stage they were in action for 11 consecutive days with Kinkead prominent in the action. It was at the beginning of this period that Kinkead lead a formation of Camel fighters that dispersed a Red Russian cavalry division that had turned the left flank of the Caucasian army. For this and other similar attacks Kinkead was awarded the DSO. The defeat of the White Russians saw this Training Mission come to a chaotic end with Kinkead leading the survivors of the squadron out of Russia on foot after the train they were using was destroyed in a collision.

Kinkead's combat service finished with his longest tour on active duty in Iraq as part of the counter-insurgency campaign, this time with 30 Squadron. There are few records that reflect Kinkead's contribution to this campaign but Lewis provides an insight into the inter-Service clashes on strategy that dominated this campaign. The Army commanders were not prepared to recognise the capabilities of air power in this vast region but it was clear that the air strategy was the key to the success in Iraq.

The next challenge that Kinkead faced could not have been more different and was to test his resourcefulness and physical capacity to the limit. He was serving as a staff officer in Cairo when the government announced support for two long-distance flights, one of which was from Cairo to Cape Town and back. Although Kinkead did not take part as one of the pilots involved, Lewis has demonstrated the importance of Kinkead's role in this project. Kinkead's responsibility was establishing support for the northern section of the route, from Cairo to Southern Sudan. This was a monumental task of transport and logistics that took him away from Cairo for over 6 months during which time he covered more than 5600 miles. The government at this time was concerned that the UK could not afford to enter into the international competitive air races that had seen the Americans win the Schneider Trophy races at Cowes in 1923. These 'show the flag' flights were intended to be the start of the UK gaining status in international aviation as the country's post-war financial situation improved. Although the government officially backed the development of new racing seaplanes, Trenchard was not so easy to convince that the RAF should enter a team of its own.

Lewis relates in some detail the UK development of these racing seaplanes and the formation of the RAF High Speed Flight with the ultimate aim of competing in the Schneider races. The formation of this flight was subject to much official debate as to whether the government should lead or leave it purely to private initiative under the auspices of the Royal Aero Club. As Lewis recounts it became obvious that for a British entry to stand a chance of success that it had to be substantially supported by the government. There was much comment at the time by the air correspondents of the leading British newspapers that encouraged interest by the public at large. He also records the machinations that occurred within the ranks of the RAF to ensure that Kinkead joined the High Speed Flight, despite not

being among the original selection of pilots. This latter part of the book provides an authoritative account of the development of high-speed flight from both Felixstowe and Calshot. It records the design frailties of both aircraft and engines and their performance in the Schneider Trophy races where the Americans and Italians were both formidable competitors. This leads inevitably to Kinkead's association with the Supermarine S5 and the belief that it could achieve the world speed record by exceeding 300 knots. As there are many records in existence that document this final period of Kinkead's life, the book takes the reader almost hour-by-hour through his last days waiting at Calshot for the right conditions. When they did come and Kinkead got airborne to attempt the world record - disaster struck and despite all the eye witnesses and subsequent inquiries, the reason for the fatal crash into the Solent was never discovered. The Coroner's inquest recorded a death by misadventure.

This book provides a fitting tribute to the life of one of Britain's greatest pilots who has been largely erased from the national memory. It also provides an authoritative and detailed account of the military issues and politics of the campaigns in which Kinkead fought, as well as the story of the High Speed Flight and Kinkead's participation that led to the UK becoming the outright winner of the Schneider Trophy. The book is exceedingly well researched and despite being largely factual, it is written in an easy style that will appeal to both the aviator and the military historian.

(Dr Julian Lewis has agreed to become a member of the international panel of the U K Defence Forum, a fact of which Roger Green was unaware when he reviewed the book)