



Sopwith Century

IN the old days aircraft were usually known by the names of their creators—Wright, Blériot, Fokker, and many others including a young fellow called Sopwith (below). He was known as Tommy, the Germans' name for all their British foes.

In the First World War Tommy and his associates—one by the name of Hawker—made fighters called Sopwith 1½-Strutter, Pup, Triplane, and Camel.

Nothing tightened the Hun's grip more than the sight of a Sopwith. Dread was that name in the embattled



Below: Nearly 100 years after Sopwith's birth on January 18, 1888, Alexander Skeggs, 2½, of Hitchin, England, represents the youngest aviation generation. He turns from his Concorde book to look at the "LATEST SOPWITH" advertisement in *Flight* for August 7, 1914. This issue was published on the outbreak of the first air war, in which Sopwith aircraft excelled. Alex identifies the Tabloid as a Tiger Moth. We may hope that the Concorde and Tiger Moth qualities of not shooting or bombing people, and of excellence and enthusiasm, will characterise the aviation of future generations



clouds of France. Camels got more kills (1,294) than any other fighter, in skies where life was as brief as beside the Somme below. One claimed the Red Baron. At dawn on the old Royal Flying Corps field at Bertangles, you may see the ghost of a Camel climbing east to fight Fokkers. Biggles is romantic schoolboy fiction, but his Camel is historical fact.

How pugnacious the "little popping firecracker" looks (inset left) with engine, guns, fuel, and pilot hunched dynamically together for the tightest turns, spins, loops, and flicks. Sopwith led the company which designed this supreme fighter of the first air war.

Little more than 20 years later, having recruited a fellow called Camm (centre, left), he led the company which designed the Hurricane, the fighter which shot down the most Huns in the Battle of Britain (1,000).

Should you require further credentials before giving this man a job, he taught father of the RAF "Boom" Trenchard to fly; he won many races and records as a pilot, including a still unbeaten 9sec from feet on grass to start-up and airborne; one of his seaplanes won the Schneider Trophy for Britain; as a yachtsman he nearly won the Americas' Cup twice; and as a pilot he survived several terrific crashes, including spinning in from a great height.

He will be 100 on Monday. Here he is (left) in 1986 with his eternal creations the Pup and (inset) the Camel. Happy birthday, Sir Thomas, from everyone in the world of aviation. We are proud and grateful to be linked with its earliest days by your life and immortal name.

Roger Bacon