

THE FELIXSTOWE FLYING-BOATS . . .

plane manufacturing firm in the U.S.A. It was short-lived, however, owing to litigation by the Wright brothers for alleged infringements of their Wright patents.

Curtiss continued his work on his own. He had not lost his interest in building a hydro-aeroplane, and finally he succeeded in taking off from the water at San Diego, California, on January 26th, 1911. The first U.S. Navy aeroplane was a Curtiss A-1 seaplane which first flew on July 1st, 1911. Like the original Curtiss seaplane, the A-1 had a large central float; lateral stability on the water was obtained by buoyancy cylinders under the lower wing-tips. On July 8th wheels were added to the Curtiss A-1; they could be raised or lowered in flight, and in this amphibious form the aircraft was known as *Triad*. On July 10th Glenn Curtiss made what must have been the first flight of its kind in history: he took off from the land, raised *Triad's* wheels while in the air, and alighted on Lake Keuka.

The success of January 1911 had not been achieved without a great deal of hard work, for Curtiss had experimented with many types of floats and hydro-skis from November 1908 onwards. Having succeeded, he continued to develop the hydro-aeroplane, and to a man of his imagination it was a natural, though bold, step to develop the central float of the seaplane into a full-length hull which acted both as the aircraft fuselage and as a float. In doing so, Curtiss produced the world's first successful flying-boat, which made its first flight on January 12th, 1912.

This Curtiss boat had a simple, full-length hull of wooden construction, and was powered by a 60 h.p. engine which drove twin airscrews by a clutch and chain transmission. Apart from its ailerons, which were mounted in mid-gap, the Curtiss boat was of conventional appearance.

Again Curtiss did not stand still, and development of his flying-boats proceeded throughout 1912 and 1913. In 1913 he brought his latest boat to England; it was flown from Brighton beach by Mr. J. D. Cooper, who had learned to fly at the Curtiss school in America. The machine was housed in a hangar which had been put up by Mr. Magnus Volk to house seaplanes which had been giving exhibition flights at Brighton during the summer.

The exclusive British agency for the Curtiss flying-boat was acquired by the White and Thompson Co., Ltd., of Bognor, Sussex (which was to become, on October 4th, 1915, the Norman Thompson Flight Co., Ltd.).

Thus was John Porte brought into close contact with Curtiss products, for he had joined the White and Thompson company as test pilot in the autumn of 1913. Porte had remained with the British Deperdussin company until it broke up in August 1913, by which time he had acquired a reputation as a skilful and daring pilot. In the summer of 1913 he had been experimenting with a seaplane at Osea Island in Essex.

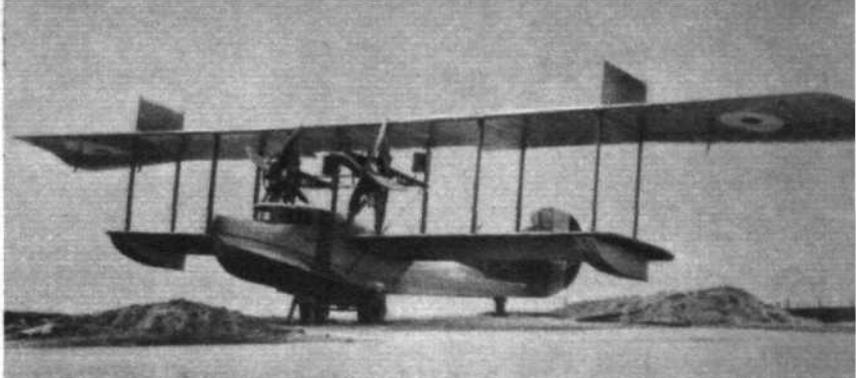
Porte's period of employment as the White and Thompson company's test pilot was brief, for in 1914 he went to America to join Glenn Curtiss. The great American designer had been commissioned by Rodman Wanamaker to produce a flying-boat capable of crossing the Atlantic; the aircraft was to be flown by Porte. Associated with Curtiss and Porte in the testing was Lt. John H. Towers of the U.S. Navy, who had first flown the Curtiss A-1 floatplane on July 6th, 1911, and had done much experimental flying with Curtiss hydro-aeroplanes throughout 1912.

Curtiss worked at record speed to complete the aircraft, which emerged in June 1914 as a handsome biplane, powered by two 90 h.p. Curtiss OX engines which drove pusher propellers. The power units were mounted in mid-gap, and there were two bays of interplane bracing outboard of each engine. The upper main-plane had long extensions which were braced by cables from king-posts, and it spanned 72ft. The hull was a boat-built structure with a single step and of fairly narrow beam; it was of wooden construction throughout, was planked overall with plywood, and embodied an enclosed cabin for its crew of two. The fin was a triangular surface of low aspect-ratio, and the rudder had a pleasing rounded outline; the tailplane was mounted high up on the fin.

This Curtiss Atlantic contender was named *America*. It was tested on Lake Keuka and performed well. Unfortunately it proved to be underpowered when fully loaded, and Porte was unable to coax it off the water. Work began at once on its modification to take more powerful engines.

But events had moved fatefully on the other side of the ocean *America* was destined never to cross, by air at least. On the 28th of that same June in which the big flying-boat was launched, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria, and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. The consequences of that tragedy are now history.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, August 4th, 1914, John Porte sailed for England, an England which by then was at war. On his arrival there he was at once accepted into the R.N.A.S., despite his disability, and before the end of August he was in command of the R.N.A.S. station at Hendon with the rank of squadron commander. Soon after his return Porte saw Captain (now Rear-



(Above) Standard Curtiss H.4. (Below, in descending order) Experimental hulls: No. 3545 (believed to be as modified by Porte); the "Incidence Boat"; No. 1231's Saunders-built hull; and an unknown experimental hull on an H.4; the boat on the right is a Porte Baby.

