

HEINZ NOWARRA

The Imperial Russian Flying Corps in World War One

In 1914 Russian Military Aviation consisted of the Army Flying Corps, which was under the command of the Aviation Section of the Imperial General Staff, and the Naval flying units, which were not as yet completely organized. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the post of Field Inspector General for Aeronautics and Aviation was created and all military aviation placed under this organization. This command, under Grand Duke Admiral Alexander Michailovitch, established its headquarters at Kiev.¹

The Russian Flying Corps had at the outbreak of the war over 244 aircraft (of some ten different types), 289 aircraft motors, 12 airships (of which, characteristically, only three were ready for action), and 46 captive balloons. The personnel of the Russian Flying Corps consisted of some 200 officers, of whom all but a few were commissioned.

The Corps Aviation Squadrons, similar to the German Feldfliegerabteilungen,² were supplied by and received replacements from three aviation companies located at St. Petersburg, Warsaw, and Kiev. These corresponded somewhat to the German Flieger-Ersatzabteilungen.³ Each squadron consisted (on the books) of four line aircraft and two reserve aircraft. Besides the Corps Aviation Squadrons there was the independent heavy bomber group "Eskadra Wosdushnykh Korablei", equipped with Sikorsky "Ilya Mourometz" aircraft. This unit was commanded by Major General M. W. Schidlowski. After the October Revolution (1917) Colonel G. G. Gorschkov took over the command. The huge four motored aircraft of this unit were designed by Igor Sikorsky and built by the Baltic Waggonfabrik (Russko-Baltiiski Zavod) in Riga. The quality of the construction of these, the first four motored bombers in the world, is well illustrated by a battle between one of these giants and Fl. Abt. Nr. 21. Participants in this battle who are still living today, state that it took seven aircraft of Fl. Abt. Nr. 21 to force the Sikorsky down, and in the battle three of the German aircraft were badly shot up.

Although Russia had over 244 aircraft at the outbreak of war, only 145 were with the combat units, the rest being in training units. By the end of 1914, the combat aircraft strength had been increased to 209. By concerted efforts at home and by purchases from the Allies (during the war some 900 aircraft were delivered to Russia by the Allies) it was possible to raise the

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strength of the Russian Flying Corps to 553 aircraft by the end of 1915 (359 combat aircraft, 194 trainers) and to 724 by the end of 1916.

The increasing disorganization of the Russian military forces is well illustrated by the fact that the 1039 military aircraft on hand in February 1917, only slightly over half (545 aircraft) were at the front. On the other hand, the magnitude of Russian losses in aircraft is demonstrated by a few simple figures.

Aircraft on hand April 1914	244
Built in Russia April 1914 to November 1917	4700
Aircraft supplied from England and France	900
Total Russian aircraft in W. W. I.	5844
Aircraft on hand November 1917	1039
Aircraft lost during the war (both combat and training)	4805

If, one assumes that the aircraft losses at the training schools were about 33%, then the figure for aircraft lost in action would be about 3200 machines. At best there were only about 500 to 600 German and Austrian aircraft opposing them.

The flying personnel of the Russian Flying Corps were trained principally at the Air Corps flying schools, however many were also trained at the Imperial Aero Club and the Imperial Aero Club of Odessa. Also many pilots were trained in the French schools at Pau and Cazeau. At Kiev there was a school for observers.

After 1915 special fighter units were organized. The final organization consisted of four fighter groups.

Fighter Group 1	Commander: Cavalry Captain A. A. Kasakov
Fighter Group 2	Commander: Captain E. N. Kruten
Fighter Group 3	Commander: Captain F. A. Semitan
Fighter Group 4	Commander: Staff-Captain Kulwinski ⁴

The individual Russian pilots were, however, in no way inferior to those of the other nations, friend or foe. Foremost of the Russian fighter pilots was undoubtedly Cavalry Captain (Rittmeister) Kasakov (later a Major in the English service) with a score of 32 victories in the air. Unfortunately, due to later events in Russia, 14 of his victories could not be confirmed. Frigate-Captain (Naval) Alexander Prokofiev Severski through his 13 victories, won the right to be numbered among the elite of Russian fighter pilots. Captain Evgraph N. Kruten, commanding fighter group two, was likewise an "ace" with his seven or eight enemy planes destroyed.

Three women undertook the unusual tasks of being reconnaissance pilots. Countess Eugenie M. Schachovskaya, Countess Sophie A. Dolgorukaya, and NCO (female) Nadeja Dogterewa.

The aircraft of the Russian Flying Corps came from three sources: first, aircraft supplied from abroad; second, French aircraft of the firms Bleriot, Voisin, Morane-Saulnier, and Nieuport, built in Russia under license; and third, aircraft of Russian design built in Russia. Airframe manufacturers in Russia were:

"REUX" A. G.; J. A. Moller; Moskow

built Nieuports, Moranes, Farmans, and some Russian types, under license.

W. A. Lebedew A. G. St. Petersburg

built Deperdussins and Moranes under license and also some original designs.

First Russian Aviation Co.; S. S. Schtschetinin & Co. St. Petersburg

built Farmans and Nieuports under license and also produced the Grigorovitch Flying-boat.

Russian-Baltic Waggonfabrik (Coach Factory) Riga

built Farmans, Nieuports and Moranes under license and also produced the Sikorsky designs.

A. N. Sweschniltow; Kiev

built aircraft of their own design.

Tscherwonny Aircraft Co.; F. F. Tereschtschenko: Tscherwonnye Gouv. Wolhynien

built Farmans under license and also some of their own design.

W. W. Sljussarenko: Riga and St. Petersburg

built aircraft of their own design and spare parts.

F. F. Steglau: St. Petersburg

built aircraft of their own design.

Anatra Aircraft Co.: Odessa

built aircraft of their own design.

The only Russian firm producing aircraft engines was the "Motor" Machinery Factory at Riga-Sassenhof which produced engines designed by von Th. Kalep.

In closing, as a curiosity, there is the report that a giant aircraft weighing $5\frac{1}{2}$ tons (5000 kg) was developed by Slessorew. Whether this giant (named "Svjatogor") was a success or not, we don't know.

Notes

1. The post of Inspector-General here did not in any way resemble the inspector-General in the American services. It was here a staff position, and although this officer had command of training and supply for air units, he had no combat command over them. The post was more directly comparable to the present Chief of Aviation of the U. S. Army.
2. The Feldfliegerabteilung was the basic tactical unit of German aviation in W. W. I. Early in the war these were used primarily for reconnaissance and photography, etc. Later two pursuit type aircraft were added to certain Fl. Abt. for escort duty. These units were given numerical designations as "Fl. Abt. Nr. 62". In 1916 the fighter type aircraft were organized into special "Jagdstaffeln" (equivalent to Pursuit Squad-

rons) while most "army cooperation type units remained as Fl. Abt.

3. The Flieger-Ersatzabteilungen were actually flight training units which supplied replacement personnel to the front-line units (hence the name), equivalent to American basic or advanced flight training units. They were also designated numerically as "F. E. A. 7", etc.
4. These ranks have no equivalent in the American forces. The "Cavalry Captain" was equivalent to the German Rittmeister, but the Staff-Captain (Stabshauptmann) has no equivalent.

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The Ugly Duckling (continued from page 184)

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| S-38 | Pan Am purchased from Sikorsky for \$11,500. |
| Crashed at Havana, Cuba, on January 15, 1933. (Pan Am correspondence.) | |
| S-38 | Operated by the Andian National Corporation |
| and named "Ancol". Andian National is a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey. (Photo in 1930 Sikorsky brochure.) | |
| S-38 | Owned either by Bror G. Dahlberg or the Celotex Corporation about 1930. (Photo in the Sikorsky brochure.) |
| S-38 | Two S-38 types were still in use in 1941 by Sociedad Anonima de Navegacion Aerea in Argentina. There may have been more prior to 1941. (Photo on page 5b, <u>Jane's All the World's Aircraft, 1941.</u>) |
| S-38 | At least one S-38 type with Lloyd Aero Boliviano, in Bolivia, S. A. |
| S-38 | Igor Sikorsky flew this plane as far as the Panama Canal on a delivery flight to Chile in January, 1931. The government of Chile purchased the plane to be used by the Prince of Wales during his visit. (<u>The Story of the Winged-S</u> , by Igor Sikorsky, p.185; and Green and Fricker, <u>The Air Forces of the World</u> , p. 67.) |

S-38B

RX-10

Owner and c/n unknown.
See photo.

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