

The Boy Airman: An Absolute Stranger to Fear

Richard Petty



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The life of many combatants in The Great War was often short and brutish. But there were choices for some. Taking to the air was an attractive alternative to the slime, stench and gore of the trenches. The prospect of flying in the Royal Navy, the Senior Service, Nelson's Navy, must have been irresistible to any adventurous teenager – the best aeroplanes on the best ships with the best sailors that ever existed – or so he might have been led to believe.

The Royal Naval Air Service was sorely tested, and not necessarily by the enemy. The casualties of the sea and its perils, and of accident and mechanical failure, were catastrophic. But this critical battle between young pilots in their infant flying machines and unpredictable events forged the pathway for our modern conceits of war – missiles, drones, giant aircraft carriers, weapons of space.

A hundred years ago a young pilot took illicit photographs with his pocket camera and left a personal account of his life at sea with his 'kite'. This book tells his story illustrated by his long-lost 'snaps'.

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