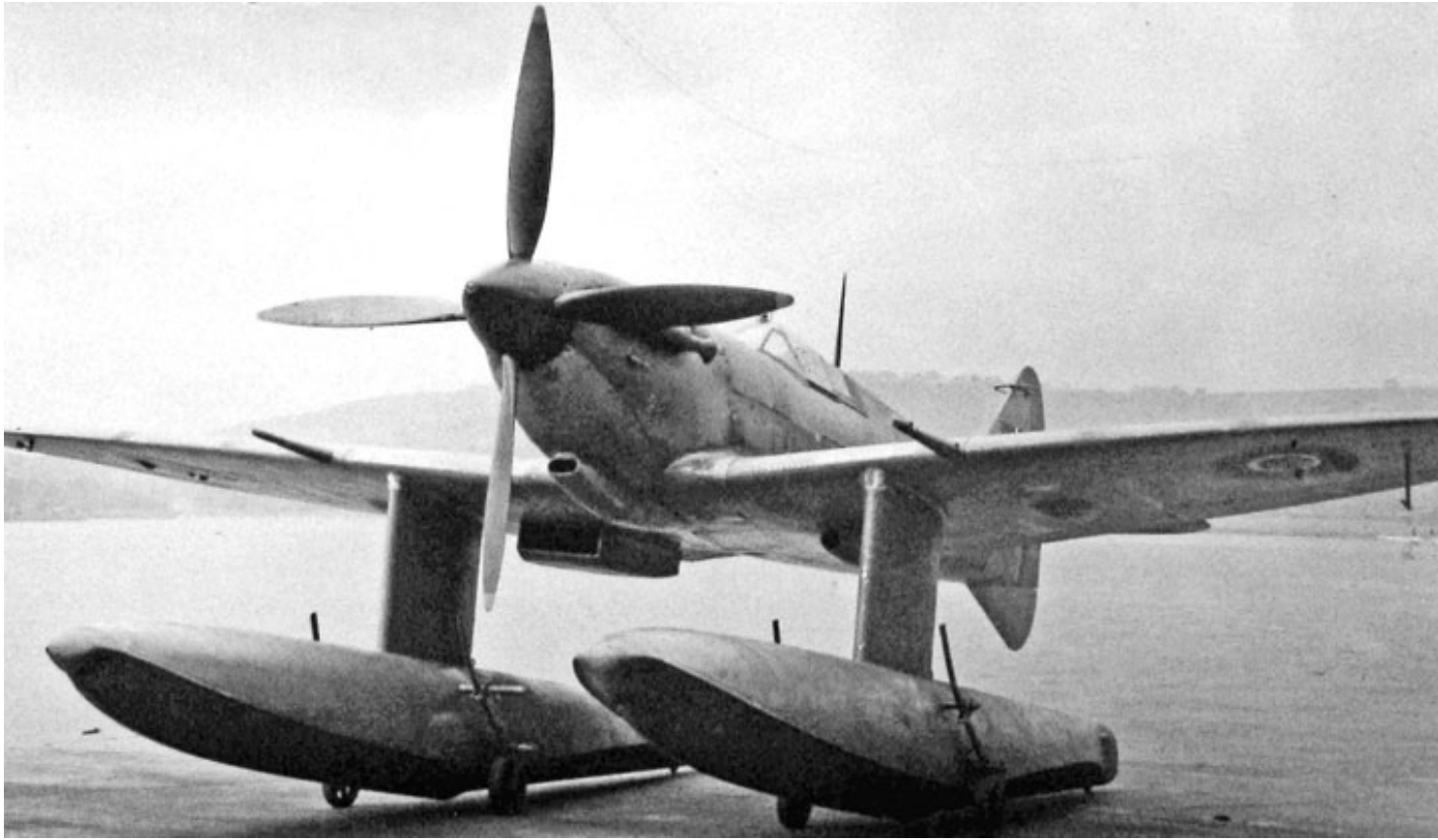


## Rhu's Spitfires with floats

Written by Donald Fullarton

Thursday, 03 January 2019 16:47 - Last Updated Friday, 04 January 2019 16:04

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ONE of the most distinguished pilots of his generation was posted to RAF Helensburgh — the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment — in February 1943.

After winning the celebrated 1927 International Schneider Trophy seaplane air race for Britain in a Supermarine floatplane, Flight Lieutenant Sydney Norman Webster's career in the Royal Air Force really took off.

He became a celebrity after winning in front of 200,000 spectators, with subsequent publicity in Pathe cinema news, newspapers, magazines and many public appearances.

So it was quite a contrast when he disappeared from the limelight on being posted to Garelochside.

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He had been promoted to Group Captain and appointed commanding officer of the highly secret flying boat base used by the MAEE.

He arrived at Helensburgh during a busy time for the establishment, as staff were testing Barnes Wallis bouncing bombs and other new bombs, as well as carrying out flying boat trials.

A review by the new C.O. of the set up at Helensburgh was ordered to cope with pressures of the war effort.

Webster's reputation went before him. The test pilots at Helensburgh had an affinity with their new commanding officer, who was 'one of them'.

His sleek mono winged Supermarine racer had been designed for him by R.J. Mitchell, who later designed the Supermarine Spitfire.

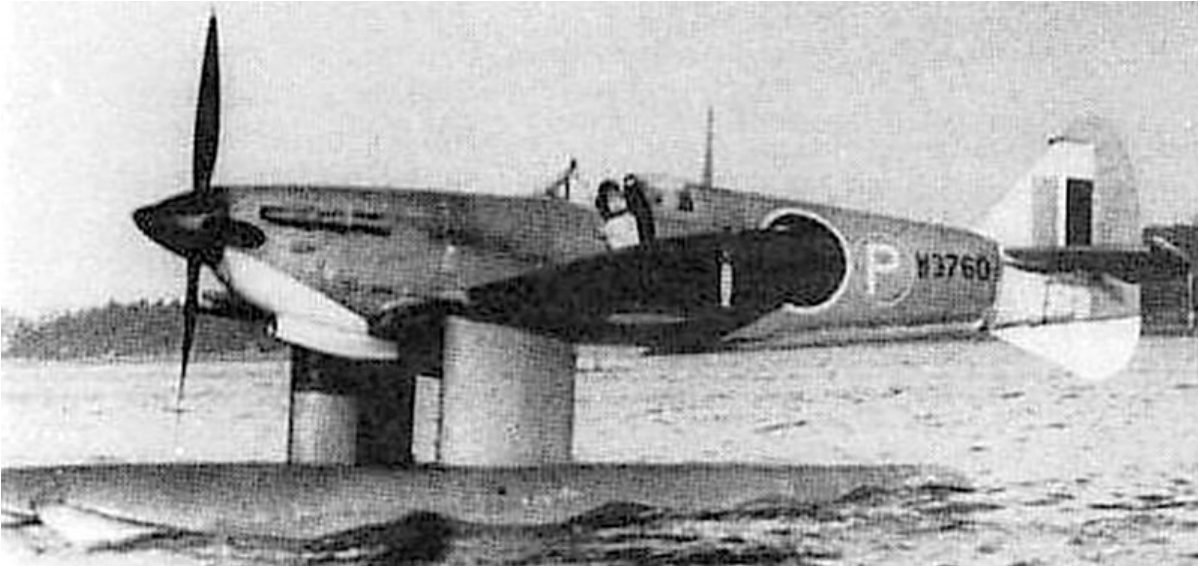


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