

WHO WAS THE FIRST TRIPHIBIAN?

A General's Remarkable Career

WHEN Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed head of the Commandos and given the title Chief of Combined Operations in April, 1942, he was wittily dubbed by Winston Churchill "the first triphibian." But there was a man in New Zealand the other day who should perhaps have prior claim to that romantic title. He is Major-General the Right Honourable Sir Frederick Sykes, a veteran of the first World War whose career has been as colourful and varied as Lord Mountbatten's, and which has in some respects curiously paralleled it.

As everyone knows, Sir Frederick, who was the founder of the Royal Flying Corps, has been touring Australia and New Zealand on a visit to local branches of the British Seamen's Society, of which he is a director and honorary treasurer. While he was in Wellington *The Listener* had the opportunity of obtaining some first-hand impressions of this remarkable man, who, as one of Britain's most versatile soldiers, has served with distinction in all three armed services.

Unlike Lord Mountbatten, who began as a midshipman in the Royal Navy, Sir Frederick started his career as a trooper in the British Army during the Boer War. In 1901 he gained a commission in the 15th Hussars, and served with that Regiment in India and South Africa. His early interest in aviation is shown by the fact that he won a ballooning certificate in 1904, learned to fly in 1910, and obtained his pilot's licence (being one of the first hundred to do so) in 1911. This was the beginning of a remarkable career in the service of his country.

Air Aid at Gallipoli

After becoming Commander of the R.F.C. in 1912, he was appointed Commander of the Royal Naval Air Service in the East Mediterranean in 1915, and in this capacity directed air aid to the Anzac landing at Gallipoli. By 1917 he was Deputy Director of the War Office, and at this time he was one of those responsible for founding the Machine Gun Corps and an offshoot of it which became the Tank Corps. In 1919, after taking active part in the Peace Conference, he became Controller-General of Civil Aviation, and was partly responsible for those early barnstorming flights to various outlying parts of the world—that of Ross and Smith to Australia, for instance—"just to show people it could be done," he explained with a smile. Later he became Chairman of the British Broadcasting Board (from 1923 to 1927), and was Governor of Bombay from 1928 to 1933. In 1934 he was appointed Chairman of the Miners' Welfare Commission, and now he has also taken the seamen of the world under his care.

What sort of man was he who had done so much and been responsible for so many of the things we now take for granted? *The Listener* first met Sir Frederick Sykes at a Press conference



SIR FREDERICK SYKES
A versatile soldier

in his hotel room, and before we met him we had in our minds a picture of a fire-eating soldier in Major-General's uniform adorned with pilot's wings and half a dozen rows of the decorations he has received from various countries. Perhaps we were a little disappointed as a result when we met the slight, mild-looking man in his worn grey suit who explained in a quiet voice the aims of the British Sailors' Society and the necessity for close co-operation between the Navy, Army, and Air Force in modern warfare.

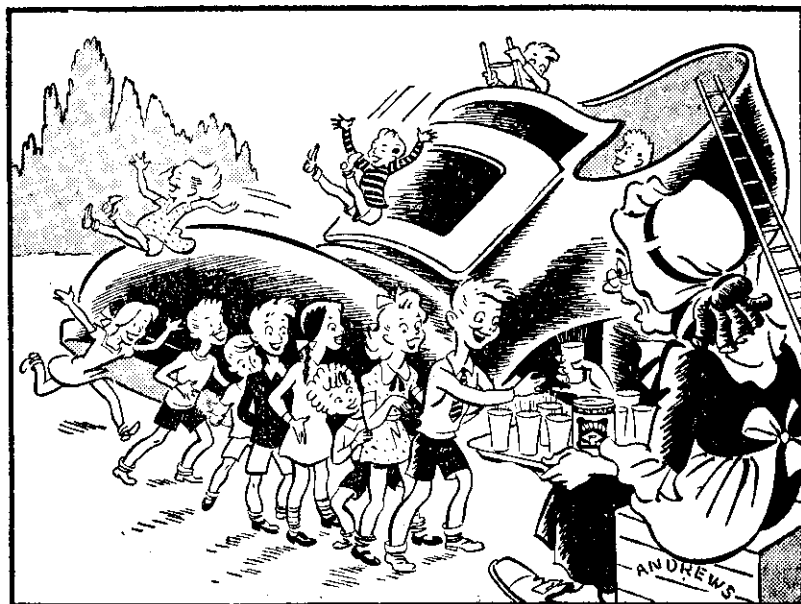
In appearance Sir Frederick resembles the 19th Century philosopher John Stuart Mill. He has the same long, scholarly nose, high forehead, and heavy lidded eyes, and behind his dry voice we could sense the power of a similar brilliant mind. We were, we realised, in the presence of one of the original back-room boys, a man whose life had been devoted to service for the British Nations, and also to the cause of humanity. "I have always believed in the British Empire as the bulwark of peace and freedom throughout the world," he said. It seemed to be a key-stone in his philosophy.

Two Radio Talks

"What do you think of modern developments in air communications from the small beginning of 1910?" someone asked.

Sir Frederick said he was not surprised. "I always believed in the future of aviation," he said. "The only thing was that most of the public did not believe it would develop, and that put a considerable check upon us at first."

Later we met Sir Frederick at the NZBS studios, where he was recording two talks—one will be broadcast over the main National stations this Sunday, April 18, and the other was heard in the 22B Diggers' Session last Sunday. In one recording he described the work of the British Sailors' Society, and in the other he gave some personal reminiscences of early flying days, the Gallipoli campaign, and the formation of the Machine Gun Corps and the Tank Corps.



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