The Dover Airship Patrol by Norman Wilkinson

Norman Wilkinson

Sold

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REF: 83913

Height: 27.93 cm (11")

Width: 39.35 cm (15.5")

Description

A watercolour and gouache on board illustration of 3 SS airships on the nighttime Dover Patrol, over Denge by Norman Wilkinson.

The painting is signed 'Norman Wilkinson 18' towards the bottom left corner and below, by the edge is written 'Denge Kent'. Further information is given to the back of the board, although some words are difficult to be sure of, indicated by (?). There is a label giving the details of the scene: 'Dover Patrol, R.N.A.S. Airships., over (?) Denge March 11(?), Kent, SS 40A, SS 10 and Willows Airship, 1918.' Written in pencil to the board is '7, Over Denge Kent, Going South / West, Willow Airship, SS40, SS12, BLFT (?) Training, Belt (?), Capel, 1918'.

The Willows Airship, named after its inventor Ernest Willows, looks to be the largest and to the centre. The Welshman built his first non-rigid airship in 1905 and his last in 1913. No. 4, his penultimate airship, was made in 1912 and bought by the Admiralty to become HMA 2. It was further developed with a larger envelope balloon and a 3 man gondola replacing the 2 man one. The envelope design became the prototype for the SS class airships. Willow was probably not a RNAS designated name but it seems to have stuck with the Sea Scout (or Submarine Scout) airships and Wilkinson has marked both the gondola and rudder with a W. Above the Willow to the left is the SS 10 (also noted as the SS 12 in pencil) and below to the right is the SS 40, known as the Black Ship for its stealth camouflage. Wilkinson has painted more detail to the forefront of the background than many of his illustrations of planes and airships with what appears to be a half sunken wooden bridge, sign post and wrecked ship. He has caught the half-light well with his different hues of blues and greens. Dated 1918.

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