

**Air Vice Marshal Sir Oliver Swann KCB, CBE, RAF (18 November 1878 – 7 March 1948), born Oliver Schwann, was a leading figure in the Royal Naval Air Service and senior commander in the Royal Air Force during the first half of the 20th century.**

*The first man actually to fly on British sea-water in an aeroplane appears to have been Commander Oliver Schwann, R.N., and the credit for building the first successful water-flying machines apparently goes to the Short brothers at Eastchurch. British sea-flying on the Service side is closely linked with the names of Captain [Murray Sueter](#), and the Indomitable four, Lieut-Commander [Charles Rumney Samson](#), Lieut. [Reginald Gregory](#) and Lieut. [Arthur Longmore](#), all of the Royal Navy, and Lieut. [Louis Gerrard](#), R.M.L.I. From the very first the efforts of the small band of enthusiasts who tried to establish Service sea-flying met with suspicion and even direct opposition.*

In 1910 Schwann was selected to assist Captain [Murray Sueter](#) who was conducting pioneering naval aviation work with airships. Later, Schwann bought an Avro landplane (at his own expense with support from friends) for £700 and fitted floats to it. Despite not having qualified as a pilot, Schwann managed to fly it off the water. Although Schwann crashed the aircraft, this was the first aircraft take off by a British pilot from salt water. In November 1912, after Schwann had qualified as a pilot, he was appointed Assistant Director of the Air Department at the Admiralty, making him deputy to Murray Sueter. Over the next two years Sueter and Schwann worked to establish the Royal Naval Air Service.

In 1914, just prior to the outbreak of World War I, Schwann was promoted to captain and assigned to port duties. The following year he was appointed captain of the aircraft carrier HMS Campania, a former Cunard liner that had been converted to carry a dozen aircraft. Later in the war, Schwann served as Officer Commanding the Orkneys Division.

In 1917 Oliver Schwann anglicized the spelling of his name to Swann.

With the establishment of the Royal Air Force in early 1918, Swann was transferred to the new service. He served as Deputy Chief of the Air Staff during the last months of the war and into 1919.

In April 1919 Swann was appointed Air Officer Commanding the Mediterranean District and the following year his command was redesignated as the Mediterranean Group.

On 1 June 1920, Swann was posted to become Air Officer Commanding Egyptian Group.

On his return to Great Britain in early 1923, Swann became Director of Personnel. Later that year his post was retitled Air Member for Personnel when Swann became a member of the Air Council with responsibility for personnel matters.

On 27 November 1923 Swann was appointed Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East. He held this post until late 1926 and he retired from the RAF in 1929.

During World War II, Swann was recalled to service as the Commandant of No. 1 School of Technical Training at RAF Halton. He retired from the RAF for the second time in July 1940 and afterwards worked as the Air Liaison Officer for the North Midland Region.

Swann died only three years after the end of World War II on 7 March 1948 at his home in Littleton, Guildford.

A detailed year-by-year record of appointments and geographical location can be found here:

<https://www.rafweb.org/Biographies/Swann.htm>