



C.B.S. SPACKMAN

47 Squadron RFC & 150 Squadron RAF, Part 1

by Mike Kelsey

Three Avro 504A's of 22RS at Aboukir. Spackman exclusively flew Avro 7962 whilst at 22RS in January–February 1917.

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Nearly all surviving pilots from the First World War were too old to fly on operations in the Second World War. However, many rose to senior rank and held important command positions during the latter conflict; two of the best-known being Keith Park and Raymond Collishaw. One such man, Basil Spackman, is much less well known. Among the reasons for his relative anonymity may be the fact that he was not an 'ace', and that his war flying in the First World War was conducted entirely in one of the 'sideshows' – the Macedonian Front. Nonetheless, Spackman had a remarkable military career, starting as a Private in the Norfolk Regiment and ending as an Air Vice-Marshal in the RAF.

The Imperial War Museum holds a collection of Spackman's private papers, although these mostly post-date the First World War and consist largely of administrative material from the interwar period. The one document which is from the First World War period is an important one though – Spackman's first flying logbook. This covers his flying training in Egypt and service with 47 Squadron RFC and 150 Squadron RAF, with a few later entries also.

The logbook is in the form of Army Book 425 – Pilot's Flying Logbook. In the book all flight entries are spread over two pages with the left-hand page having six columns for 'Date and Hour', 'Wind Direction and Velocity', 'Machine Type and No.', 'Passenger', 'Time' and 'Height'. On the right-hand pages are two columns: these being for 'Course' and 'Remarks'. The entries made by Spackman generally follow this format, although whilst under instruction he crossed out Passenger and substituted Pilot, then giving the name of his instructor. He also rarely made any entry in the column for 'Wind Direction and Velocity'. Occasionally the dates in the logbook are out of sequence, suggesting that Spackman had written the entries a few days in arrears. Nonetheless, the logbook generally corresponds well to the records of 47 and 150 Squadrons and whilst there are some differences these are

not of any great consequence.

The entries in the 'Remarks' column of the logbook contain a few useful nuggets of information about wartime flying which are more informative than the Squadron records alone. On a number of occasions these notes are not readily comprehensible to anyone unfamiliar with the Macedonian Front, but hopefully this article will help to explain these.



Charles Basil Slater Spackman

:via author

Early Life

Charles Basil Slater Spackman was born in the coastal village of Happisburgh, Norfolk, on 4 July 1895. He was the second of three children of the Reverend George Spackman and his wife, Edith (nee Slater). The family lived in Happisburgh until about 1900, after which they moved to Soley, a village situated between Happisburgh and Norwich. This came about when George, hitherto a curate, was appointed as the vicar of St. Bartholomew's Church in Soley.

From about 1905 to 1913 the young Spackman was educated at Lancing College, a public school in West Sussex. In his later application for a Commission in the Territorial Force he stated that he had spent three years in the Officers' Training Corps (OTC) at that College.

On 7 August 1914, three days after Great Britain had declared war on Germany, Spackman enlisted for four years in the Territorial Force and joined the 1/4 Battalion, The Norfolk Regiment. He was then aged 19. That same month he was mobilised with the Battalion in Norwich. From Norwich the 1/4 Norfolks moved to Colchester for training and then coastal defence duties. The Battalion remained stationed at Colchester until the spring of 1915.

Having enlisted as a Private, Spackman was promoted to Lance Corporal in November 1914 and then commissioned as an officer (Second Lieutenant) on 2 April 1915. Aside from any personal qualities he may have displayed, Spackman's middle-class background and membership of the OTC at a Public School probably facilitated his progress up the ranks at