

# RICHARD FITZ POWER

Sailor, Soldier, Observer, Pilot and Inventor

by Duncan Curtiss

**T**O DESCRIBE RICHARD FITZ POWER as a prodigious talent would be to understate his achievements somewhat: serving at various times in the Merchant Navy, Royal Artillery, Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force, he also turned his hand to a series of inventions in what spare time he had during the wartime years. But unlike many who survived the Great War, his greatest moments were yet to come. Among numerous claims to fame, Power filed more than one hundred patents in many countries during his lifetime, and a century after he put his first thoughts down on paper, a number of his creations are still in use.

He was born Richard Fritz Pauer on 9 April 1889 in Basford, Staffordshire, the son of Carl Wulbrand Pauer, a naturalised German wine merchant from Ahlden in Prussia. Mother Gertrude Mary Hardy would provide Richard with two brothers – Carl Jack (b.16 March 1886) and Gerald Otto (b.7 February 1891), and like Richard they were also born in Basford. According to the 1891 Census, the Pauer family was living at

St Ann's cottage in the village of Marchington in Staffordshire and obviously of some wealth, since they employed two domestic servants. By the time of the 1901 Census the family had moved to Woodgate, Uttoxeter and employed a domestic servant and a cook as well as providing accommodation for Gertrude's sister and a niece

In 1900, Richard began his secondary education at Uttoxeter Grammar School, moving from there to Denstone College. Denstone had been founded in 1868 as a purpose-built independent boarding school serving the Midlands, and was set in a 100-acre estate between Stoke-on-Trent and Derby.

Richard graduated from Denstone in 1906, and from then until the start of World War 1, he claimed to have, ...*gained rather useful Technical Education by various employment in all parts of the world, with the idea of acquiring knowledge of as wide a range of mechanical and scientific subjects, factory methods etc., as possible.*<sup>1</sup> Beginning a trend which would endure through wars and more peaceful times, he also, *commenced to produce various inventions.* To enable this all to happen, in January 1907 he signed on in Liverpool for two years of training with the Merchant Navy aboard HMS *Conway*<sup>2</sup> at a fee of £68 and 5 shillings per annum (£22 and 15 shillings



*Richard Fitz Power's RAeC Certificate photo, taken early in 1917 (his Certificate was dated 9 April 1917). He wears the uniform of the Royal Field Artillery, with his Observer's brevet on the left breast. He would have been aged 27.*

per term). For the duration of his course, he would be generally graded 'very good' in conduct, but only rated 'good' or 'fair' in application of naval subjects. Reflecting his academic leanings, his performance was always 'very good' in classroom subjects however. When he graduated in December 1908, his Extra Certificate was issued by Captain H.W. Broadbent with an 'excellent' conduct rating and 'very good' for ability.

Meanwhile, Pauer had been indentured as an apprentice with Chadwick, Wainwright & Co, a Mersey-based shipping company which was operating a fleet of large, rather antiquated sailing barques. He signed on to the 3-masted *Birkdale* (1483 tons displacement) as Senior Cadet Captain in Charge of Canteen on 17 November 1908.<sup>3</sup>

On 7 December 1911, marking the end of his apprenticeship, Richard Pauer was granted a *Certificate of Competency as Second Mate of a Foreign-Going Ship* by the Board of Trade. A renewal Certificate was issued on 12 September 1913, and of note, the 1911 Certificate

refers to him as 'Richard Fritz Pauer' while the 1913 renewal shows him as 'Richard Fritz Power'; it is assumed that his final change from 'Fritz' to 'Fitz' occurred around the start of the First World War. Then as now, there was no legal requirement to officially register a change of name and this seems to have been the case with Richard. It is however worth noting that his brothers Carl and Otto *did* decide to officialise their name changes by deed poll in April 1919,<sup>4</sup> as Charles Jack Power and Gerald Power, respectively. From as early as 1901 both had been using anglicised Christian names.

Richard returned to England from his life at sea in 1914, and following a term of training with the University of London's Cadet Corps he passed the entrance examination for acceptance as an officer cadet. He was gazetted to be temporary Second Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery effective from 24 May 1915<sup>5</sup> and was appointed as second in command of D Battery, 150 (County Palatine) Brigade. 150 Brigade comprised A, B, C and D Batteries, each with four 18-pounder guns and went on to join the 30th Division at Grantham on or around 13 August 1915. The Batteries embarked for France with the Division in November 1915, at which point 2Lt Power would also have joined the BEF there. Initially the 30th Division