

GAZETTEER OF BRITISH FLYING SITES IN FRANCE, BELGIUM AND GERMANY 1914-1920

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When the personnel of Nos 2, 3, 4 and 5 Squadrons flew to France in the middle of August 1914, it is unlikely that any of them thought they would operate from 14 different aerodromes in the next 31 days. In a number of cases, the aerodromes were used for less than 24 hours, so it is no surprise that no-one produced a plan or took photographs. Thankfully, Major Robert Brooke-Popham's notebooks survive and they have been invaluable in the quest to produce a listing of all the aerodromes used by the Australian Flying Corps (AFC), Royal Flying Corps (RFC), the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) and the Royal Air Force (RAF) in Belgium, France and Germany during the First World War. The aerodromes used by the American squadrons of the Northern Bomber Group have also been included as they were closely linked to the British Air Services. This Gazetteer cannot be 100% accurate and comprehensive, but every effort has been made to use all reliable sources. Where there is uncertainty, this has been highlighted in the text. Further information or corrections would be appreciated.

The information for the Gazetteer has come from many sources, but the prime source of reference has been the files in the National Archives including AIR 1/6A/4/55 (Notes on Administrative Matters, 1914) and AIR/1/1127/204/5/2135-2138 (Reports and Correspondence on Aerodromes in France) which contain lists of aerodromes with grid references and plans. Information has also been taken from many publications including Jeff Jefford's outstanding book, *RAF Squadrons*, a number of autobiographies, the website and atlases of the French group, *Anciens Aerodromes*, and the book, *Les Escadrilles de l'Aeronautique Militaire Francais 1912-1920*. Where available, aerial photographs have proved invaluable – the RFC/RAF photographed German aerodromes while the Germans photographed British and French aerodromes. Images have been found in the RAF Museum, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and through eBay although, frustratingly, many photographs have no indication of location (or North) printed on them and thus have taken time to identify.

Mapping

For the first year of the war, the RFC employed the War Office's 1:100,000 maps supplemented by locally purchased French 1:80,000 military maps. These could only provide a general location but, by late 1915, the RFC was able to use the BEF's new, squared, 1:40,000 maps to provide more precise coordinates. Thereafter, the RFC employed both the 1:100,000 and 1:40,000 maps for operational purposes. Because the 1:100,000 series covered a wider area (including Holland and

Germany), the majority of the RAF's aerodromes occupied during the advance of 1918 were only allocated a 1:100,000 reference (within a five mile by five-kilometre rectangle). Wherever possible, however, the gazetteer provides the location of individual aerodromes using both systems.

The 1:100000 scale maps have been used to show locations and are included as A2 size inserts to the journal. Three basic colours have been used: yellow for sites from which RNAS/RFC/RAF/AFC/USAS/USN units operated, pink for aerodromes which were either taken up or earmarked as reserve sites but not used and green for headquarters. The original base maps required some cleaning up.

Where possible, the actual boundaries of flying sites have been marked but boundary information is not available in all instances. Where information is missing, a lozenge shape, in either yellow or pink, has been used. The absence of boundary information often coincides with a lack of concrete information about the exact site. In such instances, the most likely site (often the top of a spur) has been shown. The map section next page shows examples of the symbols used.

The 1:40000 scale maps were divided into lettered squares with sides of six kilometres. Kilometre squares, in this case H1-H36 were then further sub-divided into four, e.g. H6a, H6b, H6c & H6d.

The co-ordinates for the 100000 scale maps can be seen on the examples provided as inserts to show locations.

