

Captured German Aircraft

Part 1

compiled by
Paul Leaman



THE SUBJECT OF THE GERMAN AIRCRAFT that were captured by British forces during the 1914-1918 war has fascinated many of us over the years. It has led to the compilation and publication of lists by a number of well known historians some of whom, sadly, are no longer with us. Most of these lists provide fairly brief details mainly just giving a date, type of aircraft, the location of capture and details of the victor and (sometimes) his aircraft. To my knowledge, the first such list appeared in *British Military Aircraft Serials* by Bruce Robertson published by Ian Allan. My 4th edition copy, published in 1971, covered the period 1911-1971. I got my next sight of this list when I bought what were then back issues of the original *American Cross and Cockade Journal*, Volume 10, Numbers 2 and 3 of 1969. These two articles, *German Aircraft - Down in British Lines: RFC/RAF 'G' Numbers* prepared by the late W.R. 'Bill' Puglisi were based upon Bruce Robertson's list but included photographs of many of the captured aircraft. This set me off on a very long search of the existing British records that could be studied in the Public Record Office, first in Chancery Lane, London and then, later, in the new custom-built buildings in Kew, London. The name also changed and the organisation became The National Archives.

Over the years that I have been trying to locate all the relevant surviving documents, I have found the staff there to be most helpful. Even so, looking for information on any particular German aircraft brought down and captured by British forces can be a very lengthy process; frustrating in many ways, but always fascinating. I have to say that, although the staff are always helpful, the filed documents themselves are not. Contemporary notes reporting the capture of a downed aircraft are often buried amongst other documents any of which can catch a researcher's interest and take him (or her) off at a tangent. It takes strong will-power to ignore such embedding documents and to stay focussed on the intended subject of the original search.

So, having started out on the quest, I decided that I would list any information that I found on each aircraft and include information on such things as details of engines, machine guns, propellers (composition and serial number), wheel tyres and anything else that was mentioned in the original paperwork. Thus, the list that I am now presenting is, as far as I am aware, more detailed than any previously published. I also hoped that the circulation of the relevant serial numbers could lead to the identification of previously unidentified surviving items.

Early on I decided that I would stick to the reports and official information that I found in The National Archive files and would not include any information published elsewhere that is not listed in the official documents, regardless of the source of that information. Over the years I have shared my findings with a number of other enthusiasts including Greg VanWyngarden and the late Peter Grosz and I have included

details of the German aircrew that Peter provided - and also his comments when his findings differed from mine.

Apart from the two early listings I have mentioned above I have also recently seen lists compiled by the following: Douglas T. Pardee, Colin A. Owers and Ray P. Sanger (from the book *Retribution and Recovery: German Aircraft and Aviation 1919 to 1922*, Lennart Anderson and Ray Sanger, published by Air Britain).

I must admit that, as a result of my decision to stick entirely to the information that I found in the existing original British reports, there are a number of empty spaces in the lists where I have not found any relevant information in the files. In some of other people's lists that I have mentioned above these blank spaces have been filled in by the insertion of the designation 'C-Type' but, while I agree that the aircraft that would have been listed may well have been a 'C-Type' aircraft by some manufacturer, I have found no record of them at all in the files - hence the blank spaces in my list. In fact, looking through the reports that I did find in the AIR1 series, there are very few 'A', 'B' or 'C' types listed at all.

The Beginning

Because the use of aircraft in war was something 'new' in August 1914, no formal official system for the recording of any 'enemy' aircraft captured existed. Indeed, it was some time into the war before an official British system came into being. The earliest instruction regarding this that I have been able to find is the RFC memorandum 1599/1/G signed by Lt Colonel R. Brooke-Popham of the General Staff and dated 22 December 1915.

As the war continued and the number of captured aircraft grew this instruction was revised a number of times and I include copies of each relevant document that I have found.

Because of the relative lateness of the birth of the official British list, a number of German aircraft that were captured during the 'gap' survived without any British numbering. In fact, although the official requirement for listing was stated in December 1915, a number of German aircraft came into RFC hands and continued their existence without formal recognition. One such aircraft was the well known Fokker E.III 210/16 that was the subject of trial flights by RFC pilots in France and, later, in the UK and the subject of official and other photographs.

Further, the list that I have produced includes, in the main, only the 'hostile aircraft' that were captured (or found) on the Western Front in France and Belgium. There were of course a number of such aircraft that came into British hands on other fronts, namely, in Italy and Palestine. I have seen photographs of these machines but have failed to find any official documentation that lists them. Surprisingly, the same can be said for those German aircraft and airships that were captured on British soil as a result of Home Defence activity although I have found records of some individual machines