

FSL PHILIP KENNING FOWLER

His Service in the Aegean



by Paschalis Palavouzis

PHILIP FOWLER, the son of James Southey and Elizabeth Minnie Fowler and known to his friends as Phil or *Shorty*, was born in Cheltenham, in the Manawatu region, New Zealand on 10 June 1895. At the age of 21, after he had been educated at several schools in the region and worked as an apprentice motor mechanic at Fielding, he decided to leave his native country and travel to England, to join the Royal Naval Air Service. Thus, on 7 January 1916, he boarded the SS *Remuera* at Wellington and eventually arrived at Plymouth after a long journey via Cape Horn, Montevideo and Tenerife. Upon arrival, he presented himself at the Admiralty and stood before a RNAS committee, which found him fit for service. On 30 April 1916, he reported to the training facility at Crystal Palace as a Probationary FSL¹. After a months hard training under a Royal Marines sergeant major,² he was transferred to Eastbourne to begin initial flying training.

He flew on Maurice Farman Shorthorns, Avro 504Bs, Curtiss JNs, Bleriot XIs, BE2cs, with both 75hp Renault and 100hp RAF engines, and received his RAeC Certificate No 3285 with effect from 26 July 1916. He was then passed to the Gunnery School at Eastchurch and to East Fortune on 14 September 1916. On 25 October, he received orders to report to Mudros on the Aegean island of Lemnos, home of 2 Wing RNAS. He managed to leave England only on 4 December 1916, due to the delayed issue of his passage orders and he finally reached Mudros during mid December. During the last week of the year he completed 1hr 17min on practice flights around the aerodrome there. On 24 December, he experienced his first flight in a Henri Farman F.27. His logbook entries for that first week are as follows and each entry comprises date, wind direction/speed (not always given), aeroplane type (by abbreviation) and number, crew (for 2-seaters), time, height and remarks:

24.12.1916: NE1: H.F.27 3910: Solo: 15min: 1200ft: Round aerodrome, first flight on H.F.

24.12.1916: SE2-4, H.F.27 3910: Solo: 20min: 1200ft: Round aerodrome, practised landings.

24.12.1916: SE2-4, H.F.27 9138 (RAF): Solo: 10min: 1500ft: Round aerodrome, practised landings.

26.12.1916: N4: B.E.2c 8332: Solo: 20min: 6000ft: Round aerodrome, practised landings.

29.12.1916: N1-2: B.E.2c 8332: Solo: 12min: 3000ft: Round aerodrome, practised landings.

Total solo for week 1hr 17min: Total time solo 34hr 18min: Total time in air 45hrs 40min.

Then, just before the end of the year, Fowler left Lemnos for the island of Thasos, approximately 50 miles to the north. Thasos aerodrome, set up in late May 1916, housed A Squadron of 2 Wing RNAS, tasked with the strategic role of disturbing the German-Bulgarian supply route to the Struma Front and, at the same time, exercising control of the NE Aegean, along

with D Squadron at Stavros, on the mainland, and C Squadron at Imbros, further to the east.

Fowler had his familiarization flight round the aerodrome in a HF. F27 on New Year's Day. However, although his first flights at Thasos involved Henri Farman bombers – he even flew a bombing mission against the railway bridge at Yenikieui (now Stavroupolis) on 5 January – he quickly moved on to Bristol Scouts, becoming a scout pilot for the rest of his service in the Aegean. Proud of his achievement, he obviously mentioned it in a letter to his parents, part of which found its way to the *Free Lance*,³ (the local newspaper): *Flight Lieut. Phil Fowler, of Fielding writes that he is now in charge of a new scouting-plane, and he has painted it black and yellow, the Fielding football [club] colours, and christened it "Kia Ora". Lieut. Fowler was one of the wing forwards in the British football team at Salonika. Among the aircraft he flew at Thasos were Bristol Scouts C 3037 and 3040, both fitted with 80hp Le Rhone engines and Bristol Scouts D 8995, 8997 and N5396, all powered by the 100hp Gnome Monosoupape (he referred to them as 'mono*

Fowler's photograph for his RAeC Certificate, No.3285, awarded on 26 July 1916. The RAeC record card gives his date of birth as 10 June 1895.

