

UNQUESTIONABLY one of the classics among World War One aircraft, the Spad VII was the mount of many of the allied forces' best airmen. Readers who wish to learn more of the fascinating history of the early Spads, designed by Louis Bechereau, and Mark Birkigt's superb Hispano Suiza motor are advised to read J M Bruce's two articles published in *Air International* (May/June 1976). There one will read of the unorthodox Spad A-1s, 2s, 3s and 4s with the observer's nacelle perched precariously *ahead* of the tractor airscrew — fortunately for their pilots such types saw limited service. Despite these unsuccessful designs, they were significant in that they established some sound characteristics that were to be utilised in later designs.

Most notable of these various features was the distinctive form of interplane bracing that characterised the Spad fighter designs, a patent for this having been applied for as early as mid 1915. When the French General Headquarters decided that Birkigt's engine was to be used in powering fighters, Bechereau designed a completely new aircraft which provided the basis for one of the most successful fighters of the period. The result, the Spad VII, enjoyed a lengthy service with French and British air units and also by air forces of at least 12 other nations during, and after, the war.

The prototype Spad VII took to the air for the



Spad VII

The classic French WW1 fighter
drawn by I R Stair. Text by SM staff

first time in late April, 1916 and was powered by a 140 hp Hispano Suiza motor; it was fitted with a single Vickers machine gun (slightly offset to starboard) with synchronisation gear designed by Birkigt and the aircraft exhibited sufficient qualities for large orders to be placed. The French air force required over 260 of the type and initial deliveries commenced in early September. All told, over five and a half thousand Spad VII's were built in France by seven manufacturers with 100 Spad VII's built by L Bleriot (Aeronautics) and 120 by Mann Egerton and Co. Ltd. in the UK while the Russian *Aktsionernoye Obshchestvo Duka* company built a further 100.

The British contracts were for the RNAS and RFC respectively but the naval service gave up its Spads in return for the Sopwith Triplane (MAP Plan Pack 2741) then an order with the flying corps. Pilots found the Spad less manoeuvrable than the nimble Nieuports they had been used to but they quickly learnt to rely on the new machine's excellent speed and climb, its strength and its being a stable gun platform. In France the aircraft equipped numerous *escadrilles de chasse*, including the legendary SPA 3, *Les Cigognes* (The Storks) where such notable pilots as Guynemer and Dorme notched up many victories in the type.

From late 1916 the Spads went to Nos 19 and 23 Squadrons of the RFC and a few were also supplied to the Belgian *Aviation Militaire*. Others, some fitted 'in the field' with upperwing-mounted Lewis guns, went out to Mesopotamia with the RFC while others were scattered around various training establishments in the UK. Italy's air force also had a quota of Spad VII's and no less than five *squadriglie* were equipped with the aircraft. Among the celebrated Italian pilots who flew the Spad VII was Francesco Baracca and Ernesto Cabruna and both their aircraft are preserved in Italy to this day.

UK-based enthusiasts will know that the Thorpe Park group had a replica Spad VII on strength and that another replica (from the USA) has been loaned to the Duxford IWM collection for displays this year. But of all the extant Spads, whatever their origin, the most precious must be that housed in the *Armée de l'Air* academy in Salon-de-Provence, France, for this aircraft was once the mount of Guynemer himself and must be one of the most valuable relics of the Great War to survive.



Spad VII statistics

Powerplant (French built a/c)

150 hp Hispano Suiza 8Aa driving an Ebor, Intégrale or AB 723 airscrew. 180 hp Hispano Suiza 8Ab driving Levasseur Série 845, AB 755 Eclair or AB 765 Etoile airscrew.

Experimental installations of 200 hp Hisso. and 150 hp Renaults were also made.

Dimensions

Wing Span (upper) 7822mm (25ft. 8in.)
Wing Span (lower) 7573mm (24ft. 10 1/4 in.)
Length 6080mm (19ft. 11 3/4 in.)
Wing area 1785mm² / 192.137 sq. ft.)

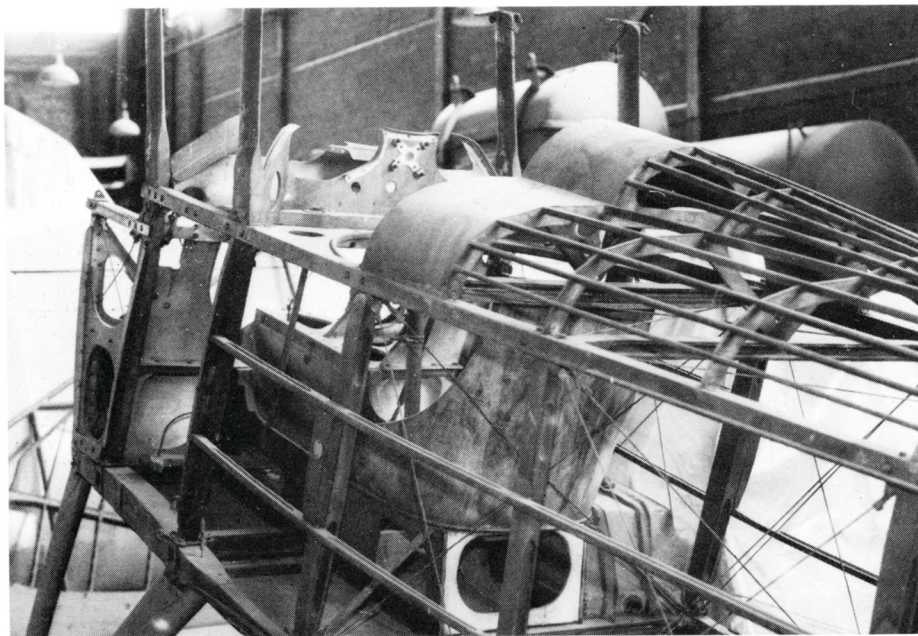
Armament (French built a/c)

One 0.303in. (7.7mm) Vickers machine gun with 500 rounds, Birkigt interrupter gear and Le Chrétien optical sight. Some machines also had a pair of 10 kg (22lb.) Anilite bombs mounted on racks

Top, a camouflaged Spad VII. This is S3281 of *Escadrille Spa 99* with that unit's white Pegasus motif well in evidence. Note division line of upper and lower colours at the nose.

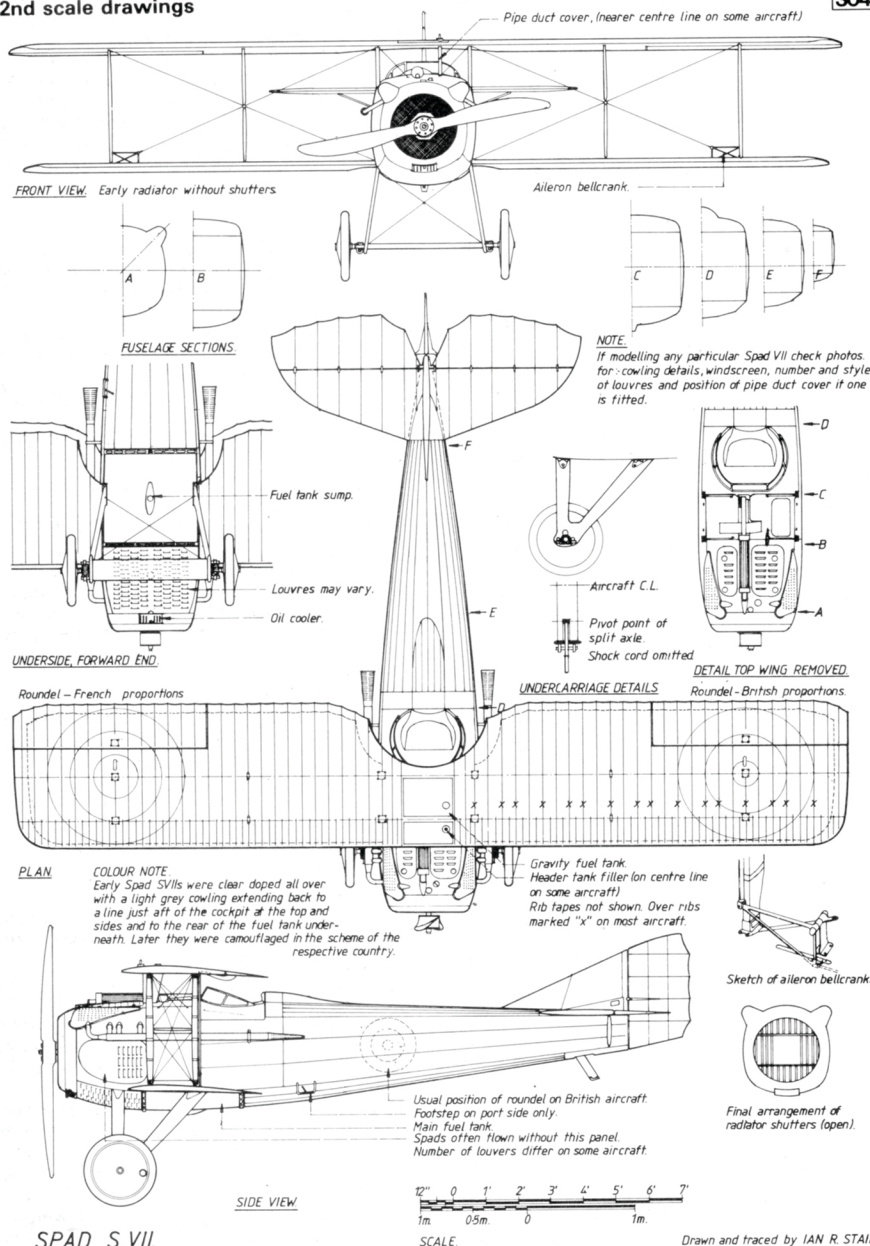
Above, Spad VII S1468 of *Escadrille Spa 93*. Points of interest include two fuselage numerals IX and XV, plus a five-pointed star on the upper starboard wing.

Photos: J M Bruce



1/72nd scale drawings

3044



on the rear undercarriage legs. *Le Prieur* rockets could also be carried on special launchers mounted on the intermediary interplane struts.

Colours

Spad VII's usually appeared in the yellow dopes developed by the French early in the war. Reference to contemporary paintings and existing fabric samples reveal a strong mid-yellow — almost an egg yolk on some samples. Exact shades, at this late date, cannot be too positively tied down but those quoted on the colour plate (inside back cover) are thought to be representative of the period.

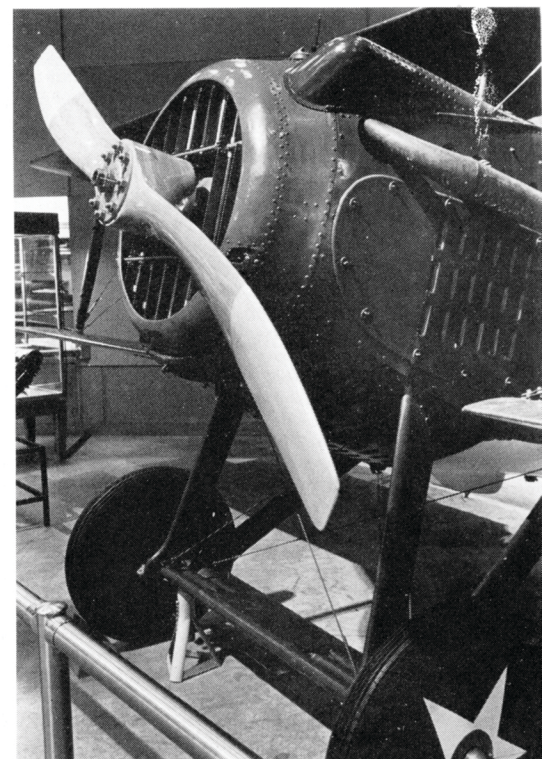
Later aircraft had their uppersurfaces painted in one of the five colour schemes adopted by the French air force and described in past issues of SM. French machines carried no roundels on their fuselage sides, instead a wide variety of squadron insignia was used. On some aircraft these motifs were repeated on the upperwings, and numerals, as well as tricolour stripes, were common additions for personal whim and easy identification.

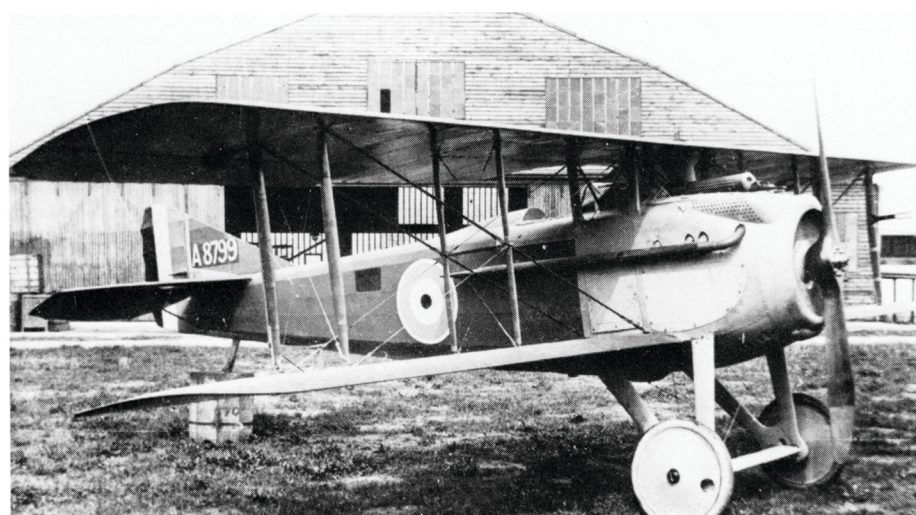
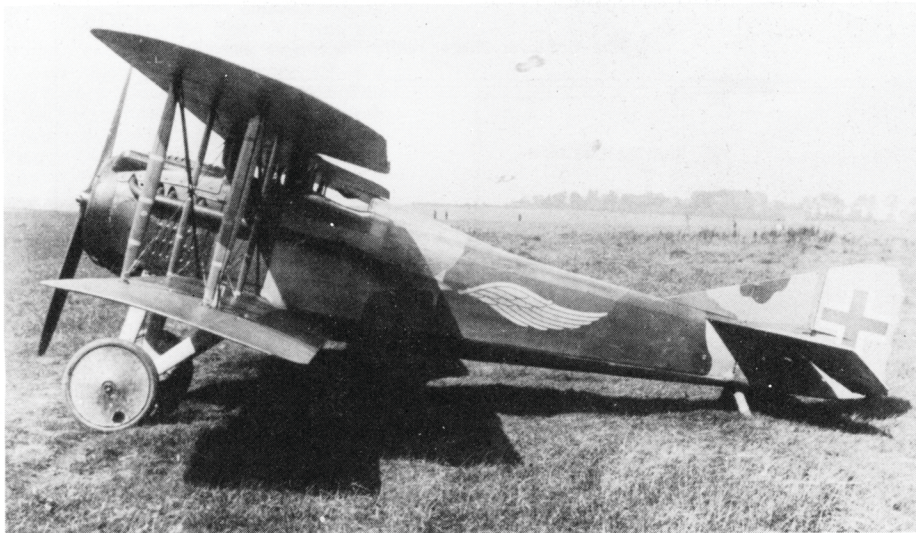
SPAD VII COLOUR PLATE APPEARS ON THE INSIDE BACK COVER

Above, this photograph showing the fuselage structure of a preserved Spad XIII is included to show the basic construction design of these famous fighters. Note petrol tank under seat and cutouts for Vickers guns.
Photo: John Batchelor

Below, a preserved Spad VII, in spurious decor, on display at the USAF Airforce Museum, Dayton, Ohio, USA. Note style of engine cowling louvres and additional cooling vents and slots. Variations in these were wide so it would be wise to double-check photographs of a particular type before modelling it.
Photo: J A Tilley

Opposite top, Spad VII of *Escadrille Spa 86* in German hands towards the end of the war.
Photo: Ed Ferko via J M Bruce





Spad VII Models

Heller 1/40th scale. This particular kit may still be on general release in France but I'm doubtful. In any case I wouldn't lose any sleep over the model since, as one of Heller's earlier efforts, it was not handled well, rather crudely detailed, inaccurate in outline and its singular scale made it look out of place in any collection.

Airfix 1/72nd scale. This little kit is a much better proposition and, to my knowledge, has appeared in at least four different forms of packaging. The most recent shows a stirring painting, by Ken McDonough, of the aircraft rising over an aerodrome with a road winding into the distance. Happily the contents of the box more or less reflect the quality of the artist's work.

Comparison with photos, and the scale drawings appearing here, reveal the model to be accurate in most all of its major components. Outlinewise it's very close but the heavy rib detail is best removed altogether and light lines scribed onto the plain surface for a lighter, more realistic appearance, especially if trailing edges are refined by file at the same time.

The cylinder head fairings are a little flat on the upper part of the fuselage, so cut away and add new ones carved from scrap; tailplane components need drastic refinement and replacement from plastic card is to be considered. Study of the photos and drawings will reveal other areas that need adjustment and guide the modeller in adding extra detail.

Only one major fault can be levelled at this kit and it concerns all of the wing struts. First, they're too heavy and second, they're much too long giving the model an exaggerated wing gap. Replace them with stretched sprue of correct lengths and the model will take on a greatly improved appearance.

RLR

References

- Aerodrome Modeler* Vol. 3 No 2 p. 98
Aircam Aviation Series 9. Spad Scouts SVII-SXIII by J M Bruce. Illustrations by M P Roffe and R Ward.
Airfix Magazine, December 1972. *Fighting Colours 1914-1937* — Part 6. *French Fighters in British Service* by B Robertson.
Air Pictorial March/April 1966. The British Spads by W M Lamberton.
Air Enthusiast Quarterly No. 15. *The First Fighting Spads* by J M Bruce.
Air International May/June 1976. *The Spad Story* by J M Bruce.
Cross & Cockade Journal (US) Vol. 15, No. 1, 1974 pp 27-62/67-88.
Cross & Cockade Journal (US) Vol. 15, No. 4, 1974. Original Spad VII factory drawings.
IPMS USA Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1976. *Markings of the Lafayette Escadrille* by W Alexander.

Scale Models

- French Escadrille Markings 1914-1918* by N Witcomb. October 1972.
Spads on the Western Front by N Robinson. June/July 1980.
Henry Farré — War Artist by H Woodman. November 1980.

Second photo, left, bent Spad VII reveals wing structure and criss-cross tricolour bands on fuselage.

Photo: Jean Noël via J M Bruce

Next, A8799 a British Spad VII built by Bleriot and Spad of Addlestone. PC10 uppersurfaces, clear doped below with metal cowl panels, airscrew tips and wheel discs in pale grey.

Left, A8825 at Scampton in December 1917. In the cockpit is Lt. Alan Jerrard, later to win the Victoria Cross. Colours are as for A8799 but note natural metal cowl and cockpit panel, white centre disc on PC10 wheel cover and white/blue/white fuselage stripe.

Photo: Peter Liddle's 1914-1918 Experience Archives, housed within Sunderland Polytechnic