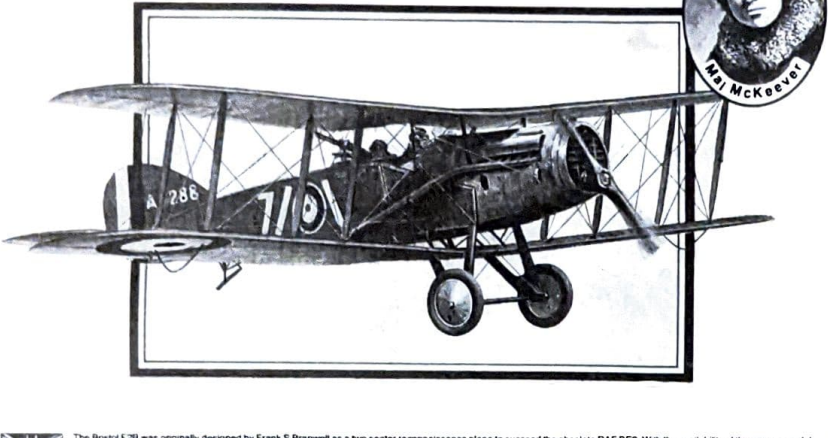


Major A.E. McKeever Bristol F. 2B 1917

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The Bristol F2B is été conçu par Frank S. Branwell en tant qu'avion de reconnaissance biplace destiné à remplacer le BE2 périmé de la RAF. Quand Rolls-Royce lança son moteur Falcon, plus puissant, Branwell saisit l'occasion qui se présentait et développa son modèle pour en faire un avion de chasse biplace. Le prototype F2A vola pour la première fois en septembre 1916. Les modifications apportées sur plans et au moteur aboutirent à la version définitive F2B.

Le F2B ne fut pas une réussite immédiate en tant qu'avion de chasse, car les équipages s'en servaient comme un biplace classique au combat, utilisant le canon arrière comme arme primaire et dédaignant les canons qui traient à l'avant. Mais les pilotes ne mirent pas longtemps à s'apercevoir que le F2B était solide, rapide et facile à manœuvrer et donc un changement de tactique se traduisait par l'emploi des canons avant comme armes offensives principales (comme dans un chasseur monoplace) et les canons arrière comme armes défensives ou secondaires, amena très vite de remarquables succès de combat aérien. Le Bristol F2B devint l'un des avions de chasse les plus performants de la Première Guerre mondiale: Envergure 11,96 m, Longueur 7,85 m, Vitesse 195 km/h à 1500 m, Plafond d'utilisation 1000 m. Armement: un Vickers et une Lewis.

Major A.E. McKeever

Le potentiel de cet avion a été puissamment réalisé par un jeune officier de l'armée canadienne, le lieutenant (par la suite Major) Andrew E. McKeever. Après son transfert de l'infanterie au Flying Corps en décembre 1916, il fut nommé à l'escadron 11 en mai 1917. Le 20 juin, il enregistra sa première victoire en abattant un Albatross allemand. Au cours des 18 jours qui suivirent, son observateur, le sergent (par la suite lieutenant), L. F. Powell, et lui déclarèrent avoir abattu 7 appareils ennemis. En novembre, il avait à son actif 29 avions ennemis dont 7 tombèrent sous le feu du canon de Powell) et un ballon d'observation. Décoré de la Military Cross avec palmes et promu capitaine, McKeever fut envoyé en Angleterre en janvier 1918 où il passa le reste de la guerre comme instructeur.

En deux occasions, l'équipe McKeever-Powell revendiqua 4 victoires au cours d'un même vol. Le 30 novembre 1917 fut l'une de celles-ci. Ce jour-là, les patrouilles de chasse de nos deux côtés étaient occupées car les armées terrestres allemande et britannique étaient en train de se livrer bataille. McKeever revenait par mauvais temps d'une reconnaissance de Cambrai quand il vit une formation de neuf avions ennemis, y compris sept chasseurs Albatros, sortir des nuages à sa droite. Sans hésitation aucune, McKeever attaqua et, presque immédiatement, abattit un avion ennemi. Dans le combat acharné qui suivit, le sergent Powell en abattit deux autres et un quatrième tomba alors sous le feu des canons avant de McKeever. Pour cela, McKeever fut décoré du DSO (Distinguished Service Order) et Powell, du DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal).

Après la guerre, Andrew McKeever revint au Canada. Tenu pour l'un des plus grands pilotes de biplaces de la guerre, il alla mourir le jour de Noël 1919 des suites de blessures reçues dans un accident de voiture.

Die Bristol F2B war ursprünglich von Frank S. Branwell als zweisitziges Aufklärungsflugzeug konstruiert worden, das die veraltete RAF BE2 ablösen sollte. Als jedoch der stärkere Rolls Royce "Falcon" Motor auf den Markt kam, erkannte Branwell, daß seine Konstruktion in ein zweisitziges Kampfflugzeug weiterentwickelt werden konnte. Der Prototyp der F2A wurde erstmals im September 1916 angesetzt. Veränderungen an Konstruktion und Motor führten zur endgültigen Ausführung der F2B.

Die F2B war als Kampfflugzeug nicht sofort ein Erfolg, da die Besatzungen sie im Kampf eher als herkömmlichen Zweisitzer flogen, sie verwendeten hauptsächlich das hintere Geschütz und ignorierten die vorderen vier Feuerwaffen. Die Piloten erkannten jedoch bald, daß die F2B stark, schnell und leicht manövrierbar war. Da die Taktik schnell geändert, die vorderen Geschütze wurden (wie bei einsitzigen Flugzeugen) als Hauptoffensivwaffe eingesetzt, die hinteren Geschütze als sekundäre Verteidigungswaffen. Dies führte schnell zu spektakulären Kampferfolgen. Die Bristol F2B wurde zu einem der erfolgreichsten Kampfflugzeuge des Ersten Weltkriegs. Spannweite 11,96 m, Länge 7,85 m, Geschwindigkeit 195 km/h bei einer Flughöhe von 1500 m. Betriebsgewicht 6100 m (20 000 kg). Bewaffnung: ein Vickers- und ein Lewis-Maschinengewehr.

Major A.E. McKeever

Das Potential dieses Kampfflugzeuges wurde am deutlichsten von einem jungen kanadischen Offizier, Leutnant (später Major) Andrew E. McKeever, demonstriert. Nachdem er 1916 aus der Infanterie zur Luftwaffe übergewechselt war, wurde er im Mai 1917 dem 11. Schwadron zugeteilt. Am 20. Juni erregte er seinen ersten Sieg als er eine deutsche Albatross beobachtete. Im Laufe der folgenden 18 Tage schoss er drei weitere Albatross, Fokker (Später Leutnant), L. F. Powell, weitere sechs feindliche Flugzeuge ab. Im November standen bereits 29 Flugzeuge und ein Beobachtungsballon auf seiner Liste (davon waren sieben von Powell abgeschossen worden). McKeever wurde mit dem "Military Cross and Bar" ausgezeichnet und zum Hauptmann befördert. Im Januar 1918 wurde er nach England versetzt, wo er bis Kriegsende als Ausbilder diente.

Zweimal erregte McKeever und Powell vier Siege bei einem einzigen Flug. Einmal geschah dies am 30. November 1917. Auf beiden Seiten waren Kampfflugzeuge, die zwischen den deutschen und britischen Armeen operierten. McKeever befand sich am schiefen Wetter auf dem Rückflug von einem Aufklärungsflug über Cambrai, als er eine Formation von neun feindlichen Flugern, darunter sieben Albatross-Kampfflugzeuge, an seiner rechten Seite aus den Wolken auftauchen sah. Ohne zu zögern, griff McKeever an und schoss fast augenblicklich ein Flugzeug ab. Im anschließenden Kampf schoss Powell zwei weitere Flugzeuge ab, und ein vierter fiel seinen vorderen Maschinengewehren zum Opfer. Für diese Taten wurde McKeever mit dem DSO und dem DCM-Gewehr für besondere Leistungen im Dienst und für herausragendes Verhalten ausgezeichnet.

Er wurde für seine Verdienste als "Military Cross and Bar" ausgezeichnet und zum Hauptmann befördert. Der eine der größten Zweisitzpiloten des Krieges wurde er nach Weihnachten 1919 an Verletzungen, die er in einem Verkehrsunfall erlitten hatte.

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