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THE B.E.2 SERIES (PARTID

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HE B.E.2C was used by both the R.F.C. and the
R.N.A.S., and on almost every front. The first to go to
France was the solitary specimen taken over by the Air-
craft Park, and by March lOdi, 1915, there were still only
thirteen B.E.2Cs with the R.F.C. squadrons in the field. By the late summer of 1915, large numbers of B.E.s were being turned out, and 74 were on the strength of the R.F.C. in France on September 25th, 1915. In the early months of the war the equipment of most R.F.C. squadrons consisted of a mixture of several types of aeroplane, and it was not until April 15th, 1915, that the first squadron—No. 8—wholly equipped with B.E.2Cs arrived in France.

The B.E.2C fared no worse than any other type up to the autumn of 1915, and carried out its duties of bombing and recon-naissance without much trouble. Throughout the summer of 1915, however, fighting in die air became an increasingly frequent feature of the war, and in this respect the B.E.2C was soon out-classed. When the Fokker monoplanes with their synchronized Spandau machine-guns began dieir depredations towards the end of the Battle of Loos, the B.E.'s fate was sealed. Immelmann's victory log almost amounts to a catalogue of destroyed B.E.s: of the sixteen Allied machines shot down by him before the Batde of the Somme, at least six (and possibly nine) were B.E.s.
In combat, the B.E.2C was well-nigh defenceless and helpless. The observer occupied the front seat, and could fire a gun effec-tively only in a rearward direction. Normally, the observer was the gunner, and had a single Lewis gun for which several sockets were provided, on eidier side of and behind his cockpit. In com-bat he was obliged to move the gun from mounting to mounting, an undertaking which drew this comment from a B.E.2C pilot of 1915: "... swinging that gun around from mounting to mounting, hanging on whilst I did the wildest of turns, keeping a cool head in an emergency, demanded from the observer the qualities of an acrobat, a strong man, and a juggler."*
There was no British interrupter or synchronizing gear avail-able, and if the pilot wanted to do any shooting he usually had to content himself widi a Lewis gun mounted on the side of the fuselage, pointing outwards at an angle so that the bullets missed the airscrew. This mounting was devised in the summer of 1915, by Capt. L. A. Strange, then of No. 12 Squadron. To fire the gun the pilot had to fly crabwise, and it is almost superfluous to add that accuracy was not of a high order. Various arrange-ments of assorted weapons were fitted to the B.E.2C in makeshift fashion and in efforts to provide effective defensive armament. One machine of No. 4 Squadron carried as many as four Lewis guns; on the other hand, several crews discarded even the more usual single Lewis, preferring the slightly increased performance of the unarmed B.E. to an ineffective weapon. A far more desperate device was that fitted to his B.E.2C by an officer of No. 6 Squadron. It consisted of a lead weight lowered on a steel cable from a small winch in die cockpit: with it he attempted to manoeuvre above his enemy and entangle the cable in the German machine's airscrew. Fortunately for himself he never succeeded in his object.
Apart from difficulties with armament, the B.E.2's inherent stability proved to be a disadvantage, for it deprived the aircraft of the manoeuvrability so vital in combat. By the end of 1915, the B.E.s were forming an alarmingly large proportion of the "Fokker fodder" of die time, but no attempt was made to modify or withdraw the machine, or even to suspend production. Atten-tion was dramatically focused on R.F.C. casualties by Mr. Noel Pemberton-Billing, who, in a bitter speech in the House of Com-mons on March 21st, 1916, attacked Factory machines in general and the B.E.2C in particular, saying that R.F.C. pilots in France had been "rather murdered than killed."

A judicial committee was set up to investigate these charges, but did not deliver itself of its findings until December 1916. In general, die charges were found to be not proven, and in the meantime the B.E.s plodded on: bombing, observing, and trying to fight, always widi considerable losses.
As a bomber, die type was frequently flown as a single-seater, when two 112-lb bombs or one 112-pounder and four 20-pounders could be carried. Many R.N.A.S. B.E.2Cs had a bomb rack fitted externally directly under the engine, and some had the front seat faired over completely. Two B.E.2Cs of No. 4 Squadron, R.F.C., made the first British night raid of die war on die night of 19th/20di February, 1916. They were flown solo by

* From "Wind in the Wires," by D. Grinnell-Milne.

THIS is the second instalment of Mr. Brace's article on this famous—

or, as many who flew them would say, notorious—series of machines designed by the Royal Aircraft Factory. Part I was published in our issue of April 2nd.

Capt. E. D. Horsfall and J. E. Tennant, and their objective was Cambrai Aerodrome.
In other war areas, particularly where there was litde or no aerial opposition, the B.E.2C gave good service. In the tropical heat of German East Africa, No. 26 Sqn. performed many valu-able reconnaissance flights, particularly those by Capt. G. W. Hodgkinson and Lt. L. Walmsley, who took extra tins of petrol with them to top up their tanks in flight. By this means the B.E.'s endurance was increased to five hours. It is of interest to note that two of the B.E.2Cs used by this squadron were of R.N.A.S. type, and retained their original serial numbers. One such was No. 8424.

In die north of the African continent, Nos. 14 and 17 Sqns. flew B.E.s on operations in Egypt, and the type served in Pales-tine with No. 14 and No. 67 (Australian). The great heat pre-

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