THE BROCK BULLET CLAIM

The Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors sat at No. 2, Queen Anne's Gate Buildings, Westminster, on June 30. Mr. Justice Sargant presiding, when amongst the claims was one on behalf of Mrs. Brock, widow of Commander Brock, of the Brock bullet, which was used in attacking and destroying Zeppelins.

Mr. Albert, a brother-in-law of the late Com. Brock, appeared on behalf of the claimant, and stated that the claim was brought on the definite instructions of Com. Brock, contained in a letter written a few days before he went to Zeebrugge, where he lost his life. It was due to his memory that there should be the fullest public recognition and acknowledgment of what was admitted to be a very valuable invention.

The Brock bullet had not been patented, and no one who knew the late Com. Brock would be the least surprised at that. He was glad to think that the State had unrestricted use of the invention. Apart from that, he was a man of many parts, and as soon as he had achieved success in one direction he turned his attention to another. Com. Brock had remarked that he had finished the Zeppelins, and he was going to do the same thing to the submarines. In 1916 a Conference awarded certain High Types of bullets, taking into consideration the perseverance of the inventor, the civil and military value, and the restoration of public confidence. That Committee decided that the Brock bullet was worth $33,000, and that the Pomeroy bullet was not worth anything.

Mr. Trevor Watson: It was agreed at that time that a Zeppelin should be taken at an arbitrary value of $70,000.

Mr. Albert referred to the history of the invention, and said that at one time he had found some means of countering an attack with the bullets then in use. The British Government had decided that one day the war was going to come to an end, and that a new armament was going to be issued, so they asked Com. Brock if he could do anything to deliver a hard substance, and when fire was traversed along the envelope, the Pomeroy bullet, to say the least, had a remote chance of hitting a hard substance.

It was a great misfortune that Lieut. Robinson was dead, but it was the one officer who had congratulated Com. Brock on his success in one direction. It was known quite well in Com. Brock's family that Lieut. Robinson and his squadron accepted as a fact that the Brock bullet had brought down the Zeppelin. It had been testified that the first trial of a German Zeppelin that were destroyed were attacked with guns whose drums were filled one-third with Brock bullets.

The orders placed by the Minister of Munitions for Brock bullets were 457,000 rounds. The Admiralty had ordered 105,000 rounds. The Military Wing ordered 200,000 rounds, and 497,000 rounds were delivered. They returned 30,000 rounds to Woolwich for disposal, as they considered that the Brock bullet was too sensitive. In 1916 the Zeppelins were not so very numerous, and our defence was not organised on a large scale. Attacking Zeppelins at night was in its infancy, and it was considered highly dangerous to order an aeroplane to attack a Zeppelin until they had got a good bullet to bring the Zeppelin down.

The Chairman: The Brock bullet was invented solely for the destruction of Zeppelins, and it was a bullet that was only required to home defence purposes.

Mr. Albert further pointed out that an aeroplane attacking a Zeppelin could not get closer than a certain distance, and what was wanted was a bullet that would function more or less at a safe range. The Buckingham bullet lighted at the muzzle of the gun, while the Brock bullet functioned on impact, and was both explosive and incendiary. The greatest moral and material damage was done to the enemy when it was proved that we possessed effective counter measures. He said that it was possible for an airmen to say which type of bullet was functioning when he fired a mixture of Brock, Pomeroy, and tracer bullets. If they could not say so in the case of the Brock bullet, it must be equally true in the case of the Pomeroy bullet, for which an award of $25,000 had been made.

Sir William Pope, Cambridge, giving evidence in support of the claim, said that in 1914 he met Com. Brock and discussed with him the question of the destruction of Zeppelins. The conclusion had been come to that the bullet then being used, the Pomeroy, was ineffective, and they formed the idea that the Germans had introduced some preventive device. What was really required was a bullet which would strike the fabric and blow a hole in the fabric of a foot in diameter, to permit the rapid escape of gas. It was quite clear that the bullet must be extremely sensitive. It had been testified that the Brock bullet must be the fact that the Military Wing had returned a large number of rounds. It was far too sensitive for the varied purposes of the Military Wing. As soon as the Brock bullet was introduced, positive results were obtained, and these could only have been obtained if the Brock bullet functioned as it was intended to function.

Col. Fellowes, R.A.F., said that he had been directly connected with the development of the bullets, and that at that time the Zeppelin menace was more a naval than an army business. As far as the bullets were concerned, the Buckingham bullet would have brought down a Zeppelin, but they did not know it at the time. The audience was not prepared to say that the Buckingham bullet would do it. He was under the impression that the Buckingham bullet was very much less sensitive than the Brock bullet.

The Chairman: Could one Brock bullet blow a hole in the fabric and ignite the gas at the same time?—Yes, I think one Brock bullet would destroy a Zeppelin.

The witness added that he did not think the Pomeroy bullet was sufficiently sensitive to blow a hole in the fabric.

Col. Forbes, of the Aircraft Armory Department, said that the order was issued to load the drums with both Pomeroy, and Buckingham bullets to give everybody one a chance. They were rather open-minded about it, he added.

The witness pointed out that, in reference to the statement that a pilot would not be able to distinguish a bullet functioning, he had been asked by the Admiralty for his opinion, and his reply was that if a pilot saw a Pomeroy and Brock explode together he would be able to distinguish them. He did not mean to infer anything more. There might be reasons which enabled a man to distinguish certain bullets.

Dr. R. W. B. Billinghurst gave evidence in regard to certain trials which were carried out shortly after the Cunliffe Zeppelin was brought down. A mixture of Pomeroy and tracer bullets did not prove effective, while Brock bullets alone fired a balloon after about six shots.

Mr. Trevor Watson, on behalf of the Admiralty, paid a warm tribute to the services rendered to the country by the late Com. Brock. Nothing in his life was more characteristic of him than the manner of his losing it. He had come to the conclusion that there was a German range-finder which was better than anything we had got, and he pleaded to be allowed to go to Zebrugge because it would it would help the country of finding out. It was while he was examining this range-finder on the Mole that he met his death.

The Chairman said that he thought the case was one that the Commission ought to deal with on its merits. The decision of the Commission would be announced to the Treasury in due course.