

*compiled by Mick Davis*



**V**ERY LITTLE HAS BEEN WRITTEN about this night-fighter design of 1917, basically because so little documentary evidence survives and also, possibly, because relatively few were produced and the role that it performed was not a glamorous one. My intention had been to produce a set of drawings of the machine, out of personal interest, because available drawings seemed inaccurate and didn't show all of the type's distinctive features. Research for the drawings turned up some useful information that I'd been previously unaware of.

Attempts had already been made to fit Hispano-Suiza engines into BE airframes. BE2c 2599 had been fitted with a 150hp Hispano-Suiza at 1 AD, St-Omer, as early as 30 March 1916, and was given lateral radiators of German origin. The machine was flown to England and with the RAF by 7 April, before moving to the CFS for trials later that month. BE2d 6289 was similarly modified at the RAF during December 1916 and most, if not all, the BE2cs supplied to Belgium, for the AMB, had their RAF1as replaced by 150hp Hissos that employed a circular style of frontal radiator.

Throughout its existence, the units of VI Brigade and its predecessors, the Home Defence Group and Home Defence

Brigade, had been seriously short of equipment and most units were, by summer 1917, operating either FE2bs or a miscellany of BE2c/e and BE12/12a machines. None of these were capable of reaching the altitude at which German airships then operated and were virtually incapable of intercepting the Gotha raids that had begun during May.

Whether these deficiencies were the reason for the BE12b's design doesn't seem to have been recorded, but, by September 1917, the RAF and the SARD, co-located at Farnborough and in a classic example of the left hand not knowing what the right was doing, were involved in the fitting of 200hp, geared Hispano-Suizas into BE12 airframes. It is known, however, that instructions were given for all such work to be transferred to the SARD and their machine was ready by 25 September. That machine was almost certainly B718 because, on 3 October, it was flown from Farnborough to the NARD at Coal Aston by Lt. E.H. Lawford, a SARD test pilot, who recorded B718 as *BE(12) 200hp Hispano-Suiza* and noted that the flight was OK and took 2hr 25min at 8300ft. It is assumed that it was sent as a pattern machine.

On 19 June 1917, 200 BE12s had been ordered to Contract AS.11453/17 from the Daimler Co Ltd and these machines were

*As one of the final 50 machines in the C3081-C3080 batch, C3237 should have been a BE12b but it was used as a BE12 and shows the characteristics of such machines in its batch; a vertical front edge to the cockpit opening and a deep engine cowling, similar to that on some Daimler-built RE8s. The photograph was taken at Orfordness, probably as a visiting aeroplane from Goldhanger.*

*:FAAM JMB/GSL 01796*

