

# FE2b 5206

## Ltn Frankl's 6th Victory



by Paul R. Hare

'Fighter Mark 1' serial 5206, as the Royal Aircraft Factory's FE2b was officially designated at the time, was one of a batch of fifty machines (5201-5250) built by Boulton and Paul Ltd, of Norwich on contract No.94/A/136 and, as built, was fitted with 120-hp Beardmore engine No.205/WD/1275. Following inspection and testing, it was taken on RFC charge on 8 January 1916. 5206 had initially been allocated to the Expeditionary Force but this was changed before the machine was delivered and it was re-allocated to 20 Squadron, being formally taken on squadron charge on 20 January 1916.

20 Squadron had been formed at Netheravon from a nucleus drawn from 7 Reserve Squadron on 1 September 1915 under the command of Captain (temporary Major) C.W. Wilson MC and, for training purposes, was initially equipped with an assortment of BE2c, Curtiss and Martinsyde types. Soon moving to Filton, near Bristol, the squadron was initially intended to have two flights of RE7s and one of the 'Fighter Mk 1' (FE2b), but it was then decided that, since it was intended to work as an escort/reconnaissance squadron, it was to have three flights of FE2bs, gradually receiving its allotment as they became available. On 23 January 1916, it went over to France, taking six FEs and six BE2cs, the latter to be exchanged for FEs by the 1 Aircraft Depot on arrival at St-Omer, thereby making it the first squadron to be fully equipped with the type. These new machines were taken on charge between 24 and 26 January, and by 28 January the squadron established itself at Clairmarais, where it was to remain for some time, beginning operations in February as part of the XI Wing. The squadron scored its first combat victory on 7 February 1916, with others soon following, but suffered its first loss at the end of the month.

On 21 May 1916 three FE2bs from 20 Squadron, which was now under the command of Major G.J. Malcolm from 27 Squadron who had taken over in March, were sent out to escort two BE2cs on a reconnaissance mission to photograph the defences around Lille. One of the three 'Fees' was 5206 which was flown, on this occasion, by Captain C.E.H. James MC, with 2Lt H.L.C. Aked as his observer/gunner.

Charles Ernest Hilton James was born in 1894 and attended Christ's Hospital School from 1904 to 1911. Commissioned into the Border Regiment as a Second Lieutenant; he was attached to the Welch Regiment and served with them on the western front where he was twice mentioned in dispatches before transferring to the RFC and learning to fly in a Maurice Farman at the Birmingham Military School where he qualified for Royal Aero Club Pilot's Certificate No.1751 on 14 September 1915.

He was gazetted as a Flying Officer on 1 December 1915 and joined 20 Squadron, being one of those officers chosen to fly

to France on 23 January 1916, the remainder of the Squadron's personnel, along with its motor transport and other equipment, travelling by sea.

James was involved in a flying accident on 4 February 1916 when flying FE2b 5643 over to 15 Squadron. Attempting to take off again after making a forced landing the machine hit a tree and both he and his passenger, 2Lt H. Dickenson, were injured, although both fully recovered.

In March 1916 he was appointed as a flight commander and was promoted to temporary captain whilst so employed.

On 21 April, when he was flying 6361 with 2 Lt George Exley in the front seat, they were in combat with two enemy aircraft and the machine was damaged, so made a forced landing on Ypres racecourse and the FE was destroyed by shellfire. James and Exley were unhurt and returned to their squadron.

Henry Leslie Cautley Aked hailed from Harrogate in Yorkshire where he was born in 1896. He was educated at Radley College which he represented at cricket, making

*Charles Ernest Hilton James*

*:RAeCT 1751*

