

McCudden's Pup: A7311

described by Mick Davis

J.T.B. MCCUDDEN's all too brief career as a fighting pilot began in July 1916, when he was posted to 20 Squadron and flew FE2bs. He was soon transferred to 29 Sqn and had considerable combat success on its DH2s. Posted to Home Establishment in late March 1917, McCudden was based at Joyce Green, where, in addition to acting as a fighting instructor for 18th Wing, he undertook instructional work with 10 Reserve (later Training) Squadron. That unit was partly equipped with DH2s and FE8s. The onset of the German daylight bombing campaign against London resulted in 10 TS exchanging bases with 63 TS from Ternhill. 63 TS operated some Sopwith Pups, more suited to joining in the battle against the Gothas than DH2s.

McCudden flew Standard-built Pup A7311 against the raid of 13 June 1917. A7311, at that time, was in the standard factory finish of PCI0 fuselage and upper wing and tailplane surfaces, with clear doped undersides and wheel discs.

As a training machine, the Pup had been un-armed but McCudden had it fitted with a Lewis gun, carried on the upper centre-section. A 'new' photograph reveals that it was fitted with the later style of Standard engine cowling, that with a small frontal radius and that a small spinner was attached to the propeller boss.

A7311 went to Dover for an overhaul. The reason for this is unclear; Dover was the base for the 6th Wing ARS but Joyce Green was in 18th Wing, whose ARS was at Northolt. A7311 re-emerged for collection on 7 July in a new colour scheme. McCudden had asked that its undersides be painted light blue, an effective camouflage for high flying machines. It was long assumed that the new colour was applied to the lower surfaces of the wings, tailplane and fuselage. Airfix even re-released their kit model in this guise.

The provision of the magnificent centre-spread, suggested by Eric Harlin, shows that the scheme was much more attractive than had been assumed. Eric's scan was not suitable for reproduction at double page size but Trevor Henshaw came to the rescue; he was in possession of an original print and provided the high resolution scan.

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McCudden, photographed in front of A7311 at Dover in June 1917.
:via G.S. Leslie

In this frequently published shot, McCudden stands beside A7311 in its original, unarmed guise, showing the adjustable tailplane fitted to early Pups, the large windscreen added by McCudden, and the Vickers gun magazine still in place. :CCI Archive

