

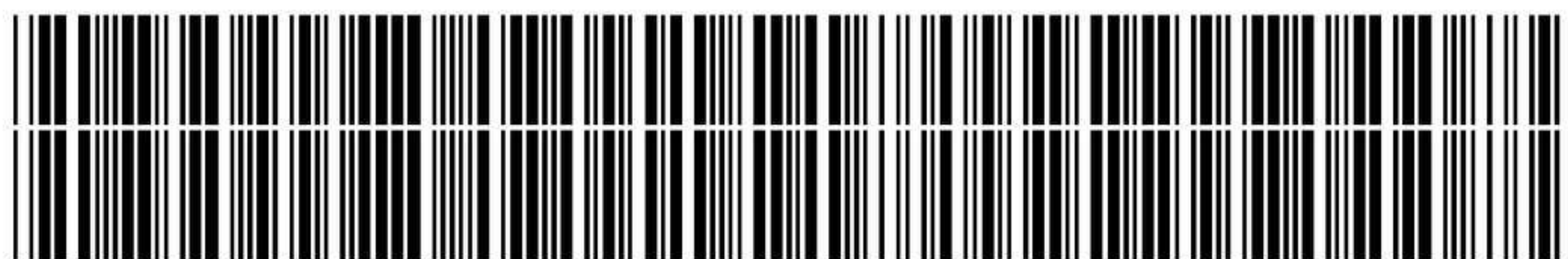
AWM38
Official History,
1914-18 War: Records of C E W Bean,
Official Historian.

Diaries and Notebooks

Item number: 3DRL606/270 Part 3/1

Title: Folder, 1918 - 1939

Comprises maps, diagrams, notes, journal articles and correspondence relating to the death of Baron von Richthofen.



AWM38-3DRL606/270PART3/1

101

Australia House,

Strand, London, W.C. 2.

5th May, 1931.

Dear Sir,

I have read with interest the article in the issue of the Army Quarterly on the great German airman Richthofen. In it, however, it is stated that although there was some dispute about the manner of his death, it is now accepted that he was shot down by Captain A.R. Brown, a pilot of a British aeroplane. If you will be good enough to read this letter I hope you will see that there is ample reason why I should not let this statement go unchallenged.

As the officer commanding the 55rd Battery, 5th Division, Australian Imperial Force, I am intimately associated with the claim that one of the two anti-aircraft Lewis guns of the Battery was responsible for the destruction of Richthofen. I was a close eye witness of the circumstances and as I had Richthofen's body brought from the aeroplane to my dugout before it was called for by an R.A.F. tender, there is no question of the identity of the airman.

Briefly the circumstances were these. On the morning of 21st April, 1918, we watched, from the Battery position, which was a very short distance on the western slope of the ridge which runs north between the Ancre and Somme, the air fight in the vicinity of Sailly-Laurette some two miles east of the battery, in which fight very large numbers of British and German aeroplanes were engaged. Whilst watching, a telephone message came from the Battery Observation Post, situated near the stone windmill on the north side of the Somme, about midway between the Battery and the air fight, that a British aeroplane and a red aeroplane which was pursuing it, were flying in the general direction of the Battery. In a very short time the aeroplane appeared in view flying low along the west-east valley of the Somme. Keeping on this general course brought them, owing to the right angle turn of the Somme to the south, close to the crest of the transverse spur on which we were stationed. At the time I estimated their height as 150 feet. The British Sopwith Camel was deviating to right and left for protection and the red plane was trying to keep dead on his tail. The Lewis gunners were standing to their two guns, which were mounted on posts and fitted with the A.A. ring sights, and as soon as the Sopwith Camel was clear of the line of fire the guns opened fire. Immediately the red triplane turned sharply to the north, became somewhat unsteady in its flight, then went about N.E., and hit the ground about 400 yards N.N.E. of where the Lewis guns were. There was no third plane in the vicinity - certainly not within a radius of at least 2,000 yards, in fact there were none to be seen nearer than the fight still going on over Sailly Laurette.

The plane which had been pursued, seeing he was no longer followed, and no doubt seeing the crash of the red plane, circled once round on about a 500 yard radius and then flew west.

As is known, corroborative medical evidence is to the effect that one bullet entered on the right side of the chest, was deflected by the spine, and left on the left side in the vicinity of the heart. With such a wound Richthofen could not have continued to pursue his intended victim, so it is plain that the wound was received just before the crash.

Two junior Air Force medical officers who examined the body were of opinion that the wound could only have been sustained from the air. This, which might be called circumstantial evidence, conflicts with the direct evidence of eyewitnesses on the ground that there was no third aeroplane present. Apart from the direct evidence disproving this theory, it would appear difficult, if not impossible, to say whether a bullet came from the ground or the air, considering the inclination of an aeroplane, especially a small fighting aeroplane, on the turn, and the fact that a bullet may be deflected by striking a portion of the aeroplane before hitting the pilot. Colonel G.W. Barber, D.D.M.S., Australian Corps, examined the body and he has placed on record that the wound was "just as would be sustained as result of a bullet from the ground whilst the machine was banking."

In his official report of the occurrence Captain A.R. Brown says he "Dived on large formation of 15-20 Albatross Scouts, D.S's and Fokker triplanes, two of which got on my tail and I came out. Went back again and dived on pure red triplane which was firing on Lieutenant I got a long burst into him and he went down vertical....." This report indicates that the aeroplane attacked was brought down near the main fight, since Captain Brown says he "went back again and dived on the enemy machine." Actually, as explained above, Richthofen crashed some 2 miles west of the main fight which was in the region of Saily Laurette. The statement that he "went down vertical" indicates a spin, or nose dive or something of that sort. Actually, as stated above, the plane was only about 150 feet up, and on ceasing to pursue the Camel, it only lost height gradually since it struck the ground about 400 yards away. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that Captain Brown somewhere near the main "mix-up" fired on some other plane which was pursuing a British plane and brought it down "vertical." His official report gives no indication of the locality where he shot the aeroplane down, beyond being near Vaux Sur Somme and it would also appear that he presumes the identity of the enemy pilot. Besides Richthofen, at least one other red triplane was brought down in the neighbourhood of Cerisy and no doubt Captain A.R. Brown brought down this one - or one of them - and has made a mistake in regard to place and identity of the enemy pilot.

Lieutenant F.J.W. Mellersh of the same quadron in a report says that he was forced to "return to our lines at about 50 feet. Whilst so returning a bright red triplane crashed quite close to me and as I looked up I saw Captain Brown's machine." Cerisy was on the German side of the lines so that, according to this statement, Captain Brown shot a red triplane down between Cerisy and our lines, whereas Richthofen crashed some 2 miles west of our front line.

The manner in which Richthofen met his death may be historically unimportant, but what is important is that no doubt should be cast on the accuracy of the official history. If by any chance the official history says that an R.A.F. pilot shot the great German aviator down, the tendency will be to doubt the accuracy of other narratives of events, at least in the minds of the hundreds - possibly thousands of eyewitnesses - who could see with their own eyes, that Richthofen was not shot down by one of our fighters.

I have in my possession messages of congratulation from Headquarters, Forth Army, Headquarters 5th Australian Division and most important of all Headquarters 9th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Australian Division, which occupied the sector and placed a guard on the wrecked machine a few minutes after it crashed. The 9th Infantry Brigade, with its hundreds of eyewitnesses would not have given the credit to a ground unit - incidentally of another Division - had an attack by a second British aeroplane taken place, and cast doubt on the claims put forward for the Lewis gunners.

Yours

Sgd. *L. C. Beavis*
Major, Australian Staff Corps

(O.C. 53rd. Bty. A.I.F. 1917-18.)

The Editor,
 Army Quarterly,
 William Clowes & Sons Ltd.,
 94, Jermyn Street,
 S.W. 1.

6740.

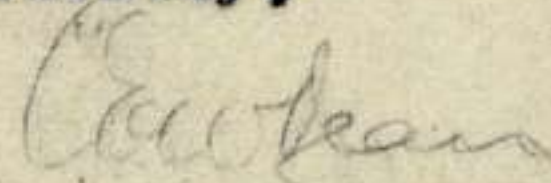
15 June 1931.

Defence Liaison Officer,
Commonwealth of Australia,
Australia House,
Strand,
London, W.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge, with thanks, the letter from Major Beavis concerning the death of Baron Richthofen, which you have sent me. Major Beavis's contentions are amply borne out by a mass of evidence of Australians.

Yours faithfully,



C.E.W. Bean

Official Historian.

5797.

9 May 1930.

J.S. Seccull, Esq.,
84, Beach Road,
Sandringham, Vic.

Dear Sir,

It has become necessary for me to obtain, as far as possible, definitely accurate details as to the death of Freiherr von Richthofen. I have numerous accounts from all sources, but it is a most difficult matter to disentangle them. I have for a long time been anxious to consult you on the point, but did not have your address. I understand that you were a member of the crew of the 53rd Battery which fired at Richthofen, and would therefore be a close spectator of the event. Although it is a long time past, I should be grateful if you could assist me as to the following matters:-

- (1) Who was the gunner on each of the two guns of your battery who fired the shots, and who afterwards came t along to Divisional Headquarters, where I think I saw them?
- (2) All accounts speak of two aeroplanes - (a) a fleeing British "Camel", piloted by Lieutenant May; (b) Richthofen's triplane, in pursuit of the Camel. Some accounts say that there was a third aeroplane (British) close on the tail of Richthofen; others say there was none within several hundred yards; others say none within a mile.

Would you kindly give me your recollections on these points?

Yours faithfully,

C.E.W. Bean

Official Historian.

84 Beach Road,
Sandringham,

28th May 1930.

Secull sends with this the original
repts of Lt J.C. Doyle, Lt A.D. Elles,
& Maj L.C. Beavis, signed by them
(in Doyle's hand writing).

No 59 & Gun W J Evans } were firing the 2 guns.
No 3801 Gun R Buie }
Bdr Secull, J.S., was in charge of the L Co.

all saw the fight & none mention any
third plane.

To C.E.W. Bean Esq.,

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 9th May

I have pleasure in supplying this information. The two gunners that reported to you at General Headquarters were gunners Evans & Buie. I should have gone on that occasion, but being the only N.C.O. in charge of the Lewis guns, it was not possible to do so. There has been much argument about this affair but undoubtedly the gun crew of the 53rd Battery brought him down. I was on parade the day Gen. Birdwood congratulated us, and we also received congratulations from the officers at H.Q. and other O.C.s who had a full view of the event. The following is a detail of the event :- My gun crew consisted of four men and on the morning of the event I was at the Lewis guns and at a distance of about four to ^{MILES} six away and at a great height a battle was going on between a number of British and German planes. After they had been in battle for about thirty minutes a British plane left the others chased by a German plane painted red. After many turns and dives the German plane got above and behind the British plane and started to force it down toward our guns. I called for the gunners then Buie took up No 1 gun and Evans took No 2. The guns were about five feet apart. After the planes had travelled about two miles they were still in the same position

Then the British plane passed direct over our heads at a height of about two hundred feet and directly behind it was the German plane flying at about three hundred feet. I could not give the order to fire until the British plane had passed over the guns owing to it being in the line of fire but as soon as it had passed the two guns opened fire. They only fired for a few seconds but it was a direct aim and we were firing a phosphorous bullet to every three ordinary bullets and so we could see our line of fire direct to the cockpit. The German plane at once turned to his right wobbled and within a few seconds crashed about three hundred yards away. I have stated that these two planes left the others and at the time of the crash there were no other planes within miles and if it had not been for our gunners the British airman would not have escaped as the German airman was firing and the bullets landed close to us at the gun. We carried the German Airman over to our battery and he laid outside my dugout until the following morning when the aircraft service sent and took him away. We were given the credit until it was found to be Baron von Richthofen but then the fuss began. I was called into my O.C. officer (Major Beavis) when Lt. May and his O.C. were present and were trying to claim the honour. But, I knew what sort of a plane he was flying and the position of his guns through being sent to a school of instruction on anti-aircraft. I asked him the position of his plane when the German crashed and he admitted to be in the above position then I asked him how he could fire backwards when his Vickers gun was a fixture on the left side of his engine and in front of him was a Lewis gun that could only fire to the left and right and direct above. This reasoning broke up the enquirey. I could not give credit to either gunner because both seemed

to be direct shots and it was over so sudden.

I am enclosing herewith the official statement made by three officers of the 53rd Battery. This statement was sent to Headquarters for a general report and was used at the enquirey which followed. Trusting this information will be of use to you,

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

Joseph Secull

✓ P.S. I would be glad if you would see that the official reports are returned to me as soon as possible. *JS*

*returned
4/6/30
Aed*

=====

5899.

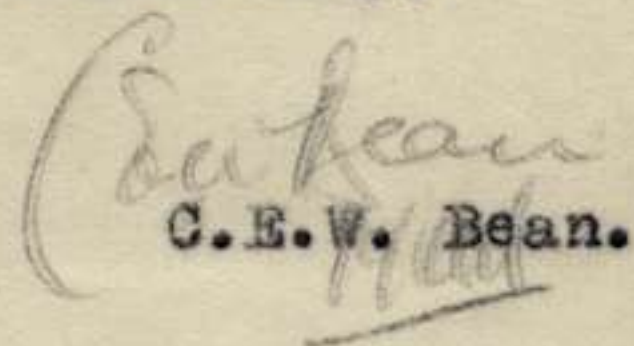
4 June 1930.

J.C. Doyle, Esq.,
Dungay,
Marwillumbah, N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

I have now received a letter from Bombardier Seccull saying that he was in charge of the two guns which brought down Richthofen, but was not actually firing either of them, and that the gunners were Evans and Buie. He forwarded with this letter the original statement from yourself, Lieutenant Ellis, and Major Beavis with ^{all} your signatures appended. The signature is yours all right. I have returned the statement to Seccull at his request. His address is 84 Beach Road, Sandringham, Victoria.

Yours faithfully,


C.E.W. Bean.

5901.

4 June 1930.

Dear Mr. Treloar,


RICHTHOFEN'S DEATH.

With reference to your letter of April 9 last, you will be pleased to learn that we have now tracked down the original statements made by Lieutenants Doyle and Ellis and Major Beavis.

Having learned of the address of ex-Bombardier Seccull, who had charge of the 53rd Battery's Lewis guns on the day Richthofen was brought down, we communicated with him, since Lieutenant Doyle persisted in saying that Seccull and Buie were the gunners concerned and not Evans and Buie. With his reply Seccull enclosed the original statements signed by the three abovementioned officers, a copy of which you sent to me on March 6. There is no doubt that Doyle's memory has slipped him up, for the signature is his all right.

We have, at his request, returned the original statements to Seccull, who lives at 84 Beach Road, Sandringham, Victoria. I shall accordingly include a letter for him with next month's batch of War Memorial letters.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. J.L. Treloar,
Australian War Memorial,
Box 214D, G.P.O.,
Melbourne.

Dungay,
Aburwillumbah.
21st July 1930.

Capt. C. E. W. Bean.
Victoria Barracks,
Sydney.

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to have put you to so much trouble re names of 53rd gunners concerned in the Richtofen case without any satisfactory result. That statement quoted would certainly settle any argument in the minds of any independent person, and Securt's statement re his part certainly should ^{be a} "K. O." but irrespective of signed statements etc my assertion & present statement stands.

It may interest you to know that the production of that statement at this late date has solved a puzzle which caused me many a heart-ache attempting to unravel during the latter portion of the war & the years which have elapsed.

After the Evans incident, I was asked by the O.C. why I had made a misleading statement which had implicated him also.

I replied more heatedly than sensibly that my statement was correct in every detail and as far as I was concerned personally, the incident was closed & consigned to the past.

doubters of my words to nether regions.

He responded with the information that if such were my word he would in the future know what value he should place upon any of my statements & being rather insulted and hurt. I sulked considerably.

It appears that I must have signed that statement (without reading it. I suppose) & the C. seeing my signature did the same unfortunately, and so sealed the case.

In any case the only loser in the deal was myself and it caused me a fair amount of inconvenience & humiliation at the time, unjustly as I thought.

Scowell of course could scarcely fight the signature of three officers could he? and it simply boils down to the fact that down the baby carrier in that I recommended. Scowell & Buie took them to Headquarters where there was already a statement signed by me to the effect that Evans & Buie were the gunners.

In any case it doesn't matter much does it? my only regret in the old affair being that inadvertently I placed the Major in a very awkward position re Evans & his actions.

Well Sir, closing this subject for ever, you'll agree that the only independent witness in the business made a number of mistakes, which all rebounded to himself.

Thanking you for your courtesy &

Thanking you every success from yours faithfully
A. J. Day

5987.

31 July 1930.

J.C. Doyle, Esq.,
Dungay,
Murwillumbah, N.S.W.

Dear Mr. Doyle,

Many thanks for your letter. I will have a private talk to Beavis, if I get the chance, before the volume is written, but unless he bears you out I am afraid we will have to adopt the official version. You see that everyone of the men you referred me to has given the other account.

Thanks for your good wishes,

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

TELEPHONE Nos.
F 2597.
F 2598.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

109
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"THE DIRECTOR."

T/AB.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL,

POST OFFICE BOX 214 D.

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IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE

No. 7/1/40 & 12/11/3205.

"They gave their lives. For that public gift they received a praise which never ages and a tomb most glorious—not so much the tomb in which they lie, but that in which their fame survives, to be remembered for ever when occasion comes for word or deed"

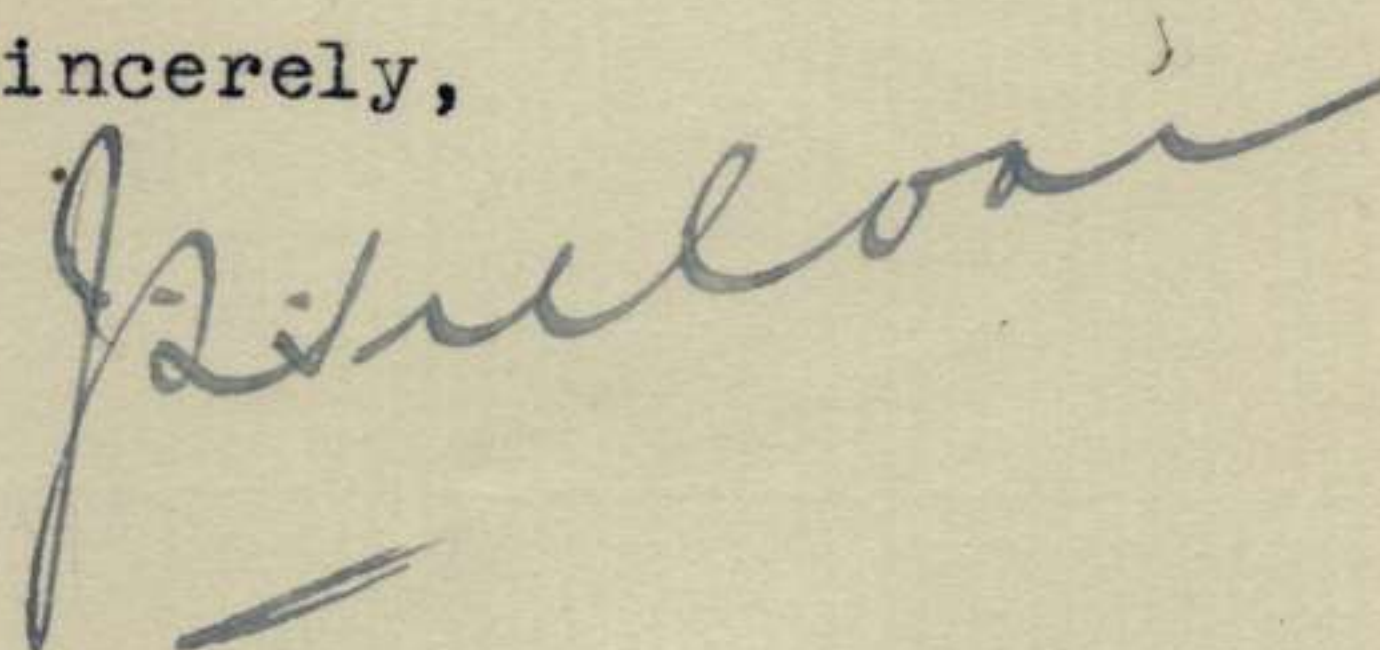
18th August, 1930.

Dear Mr. Bazley,

Richthofen case.

Thank you for your note of the 2nd August and for the correspondence with Mr. Doyle relative to the death of Richthofen. Copies have been made for our records and this correspondence is, in view of your request, being returned to you herewith.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. W. Bazley,
c/o Official Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
PADDINGTON, NSW.

140
14/10/29.

Capt. C. E. W. Bean
Official War Historian.
SYDNEY.

Dear Sir,

In the issue of 'The Reveille' dated September 30 which I have just received I notice a letter from you regarding the much discussed death of Richtofen. As I witnessed the whole of the affair and my memory is clear on the incident perhaps the following may be of assistance.

At the outset I would explain that I was commanding the 24th. Machine Gun Company which had 16 guns in the area forward of the hills at Corbie and the headquarters of the Company was in Corbie. I saw some chasing about among planes high in the air and then a sudden descent from a very great height of a scout British plane closely followed by the red triplane. No other machine was taking part in this private scrap after they had descended to at least 5,000 feet nor was any machine within firing distance of either of the planes once they had come to that level. Richtofen was so close on to the tail of the scout that it appeared to me as though he would ram the latter. I could not understand why Richtofen was not firing but it looked as though he was going to force a crash at a terrific speed. As the chase approached the lip of the hill east of Corbie and ~~at~~ the crash of the scout seemed inevitable the latter flattened out and shot over the lip of the hill and flew away very low in a northerly direction. Richtofen was fired on by Machine and Lewis guns but they ~~were~~ were unable to fire until the scout had got out of the line of vision. One of my machine guns under the command of Sergeant Popkin was the first to fire and as Richtofen was coming straight at him he presented a beautiful target and I am confident that it was Popkins burst of fire which shot Richtofen. No man could be more than of a very strong opinion as to which gun got Richtofen but from the position of Popkin's gun and the actual time of opening fire I am morally certain that Popkin did the trick.

Whoever it was that fired the fatal burst may never be decided but certain it is that it was not fired from the air unless it was fired when the scrap was going on at a great height.

*Popkin's own
story appeared
in the D.T.
of 18/1/28.
see book 251*

Acknowledged

110a

If such was the case then Richtofen must have been killed ~~and~~ when high up and his plane automatically followed the scout, which isn't done.

No. ~~The~~ No plane in the air accounted for Richtofen and although I am sure Popkin accounted for him there are other claimants, Lewis gun men, and they are equally sure that they fired the fatal burst.

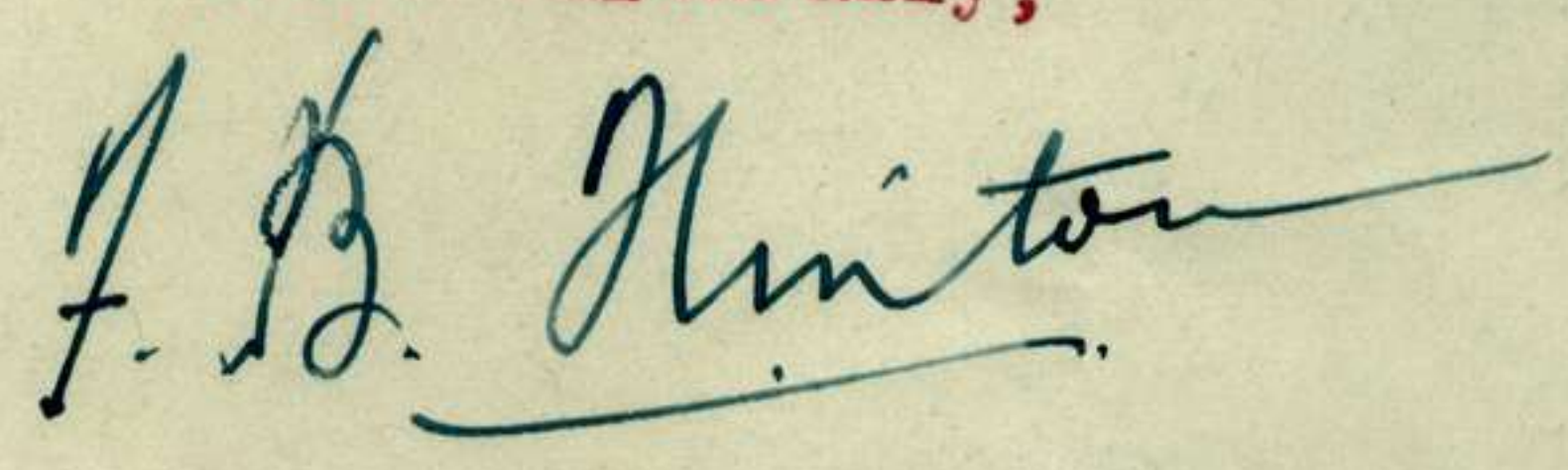
Immediately I had witnessed the scrap and the identity of the deceased had been established I returned to my Company Headquarters and by phone advised the Machine Gun Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Murray V.C. of the incident. The latter apparently did not take much notice of the fact and I can remember his reply on the phone, 'That's good. Tell him to go on shooting them, that's what he is there for'.

I should explain, and this is not for publication that Murray and I were not at any times friends and just at this time the breach was at its widest. However that's another story.

Further I should explain that Popkin's gun was mounted for anti-aircraft work at the time. Popkin is now postmaster at a small post office on the North Coast, his address I have lost.

Although this may sound rather disjointed and perhaps some of it irrelevant the facts are as stated. I would be pleased to forward any further particulars or answer any questions if they are forwarded to me.

Yours faithfully,



late Major.
Commanding 24th. Machine Gun Co

5044.

23 October 1929.

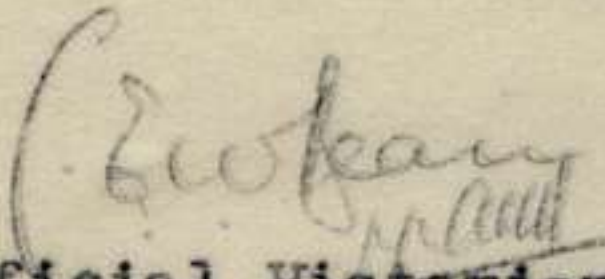
C.B. Popkin, Esq.,
Tyalgum, N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

In connection with the death of Baron Richthofen, I am anxious to secure precise information as to whether there were two or three aeroplanes involved. According to the account given by Captain A.R. Brown, R.F.C., who claims to have shot him down, Richthofen was closely pursuing a British scout, and Brown himself in a third machine was almost, if not quite, equally close on top of Richthofen. Brown does not claim to have shot Richthofen high in the air, but close to the ground, and his account therefore stands or falls by the question whether, when Richthofen was racing over the hills near Corbis on the 21st of April, 1918, there were three aeroplanes involved, or two.

As I understand from Major Hinton that you were on spot with your machine-gun and put a burst into the red machine, I should be grateful if you would let me have your account of the affair.

Yours faithfully,


Official Historian.

Lyulgan

29.10.29

Capt C. E. W. Bean

Dear Sir

In reply to your request herewith
find enclosed newspaper clipping of my story of the
'death of Baron. Richtofen

There were only two planes involved there was
no third plane in the picture otherwise he would
have at least hovered round to see what sort of a
job he had done see he had nothing to fear

I am also enclosing a copy of Tent D. Frasers
Report which he sent to me

I would like you to return these papers when you have
finished with them

Yours faithfully
C. E. W. Bean

NEWSPAPER CUTTING SENT BY SERGT. POPKIN.

That Vickers machine-gun was fired by Sergeant Popkin. This is his story as told to the writer, who at the time was with the 7th Infy. Bde. in the sector to the left, and who, from reports at the time, has always been convinced that an Australian machine-gunner brought the German ace down.

"I was in charge of four Vickers guns on the bank of the Canal between Saily le Sec and Corbie," says Digger Popkin, "and had a gun mounted for anti-aircraft defence. About 11 o'clock and British and German squadron started a battle in mid-air. Presently two planes separated from the rest and headed for our lines, flying over Saily le Sec. They came straight along the canal towards my gun position. I immediately got into position and waited.

"On came the planes, the Britisher in front and about 60 feet in the air. They were so close together that I had to wait for the Britisher to pass. Then I opened up on the German machine.- a red triplane. I fired about 80 rounds and he immediately turned at right angles to my position and banked to clear the top of the ridge on the left of the canal looking towards the line. He then turned round and flew straight towards my gun. I opened fire again and gave him another 80 rounds. The plane started to dive, described a half-circle, and crashed into the ground on top of the ridge near a quarry, and facing Bonnay.

"I immediately rushed up the hill and on arrival a couple of minutes after the crash found the wrecked plane surrounded by infantry officers who would not allow anybody to touch it. However, I stepped in and wrenched a piece off one of the wings for a souvenir. About an hour later an intelligence officer of the 11th Brigade came and took my regimental particulars and told me who I had shot down. About 6 o'clock the same evening a liaison officer of the 52nd Battalion, with his report written out, saw me and he also took my regimental particulars to support my claim. The colonel of the 52nd also supported my claim, but owing to the report from my company going in a week after the incident, I am afraid I got very little consideration. ~~Anyone wishing to verify these statements~~

"Anyone wishing to verify these statements," concluded Digger Popkin, "can do so by getting in touch with Captain F. Watts, late of the 24th M.G. Company, and now residing at Byron Bay, who was in charge of the section at the time; also Captain Crouch of Waverley and Major Hinton, M.C., who, I think, lives in Sydney also."

Sergeant Popkin pointed out the absurdity of the claim of Captain Brown, the English airman whom Richthofen chased, that he brought the German down. With fixed machine-guns which fire through the propeller, it seemed impossible that he could have done so, as the German was ~~was~~ pursuing him and kept on his tail all the way. Mr. W.J. Warneford, formerly an officer of the 3rd Australian Flying Squadron, who was sent to salvage the machine, and to recover Richthofen's body, says that from an examination of the remnants of the German machine, he concluded that Richthofen's gun had jammed, and that Richthofen, being a very smart and dare-devil pilot, still kept on the tail of Capt. Brown's machine. Apparently, the Englishman was lucky to escape.

Richthofen, who had brought down 80 planes, was buried with military honours behind the British line. A large number of British fighting men and aviation officers, as well as Americans stationed at a neighbouring aerodrome, attended. Mechanics of an Australian aviation squadron had constructed a coffin, on which they placed a plate giving the aviator's name, rank, and other data.

The Baron was buried under a hemlock tree, and the squad fired the last shots across the grave. The grave was covered with flowers - Australia's tribute to a gallant foe.

EYEWITNESS'S ~~NEW~~ STORY.

Broken Hill, Monday.-The argument on the death of Baron Richthofen, the German ace, has now shifted to Broken Hill. E.C. Rawlings, who says he was an eyewitness of the air duel, declares the German plane was shot down from the ground. Both planes were down with thirty feet of the ground, the British airman apparently looking for a landing. His gun was not working and it appeared as though the weapon had jammed, or that he had run out of ammunition. Then came a burst of machinegun fire, and the German machine crashed. He is certain gunners from the ground brought him down.

5045.

23 October 1929.

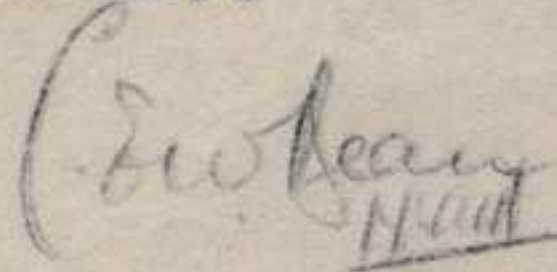
Captain H.W. Crouch, M.C.,
26, Wentworth Avenue,
Sydney.

Dear Sir,

In connection with the death of Baron Richthofen, I am anxious to secure precise information as to whether there were two or three aeroplanes involved. According to the account given by Captain A.R. Brown, R.F.C., who claims to have shot him down, Richthofen was closely pursuing a British scout, and Brown himself in a third machine was almost, if not quite, equally close on top of Richthofen. Brown does not claim to have shot Richthofen high in the air, but close to the ground, and his account therefore stands or falls by the question whether, when Richthofen was racing over the hills near Corbie on the 21st of April, 1918, there were three aeroplanes involved, or two.

As I understand that you were a witness of the whole affair, I should be grateful if you would help me to settle the matter finally.

Yours faithfully,



Official Historian.

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CHAMBER OF
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ALL CARS AND TRUCKS ARE STORED AND DRIVEN AT CUSTOMERS' RISK. NO RESPONSIBILITY IS ACCEPTED FOR LOSS OR DAMAGE BY FIRE.

26th October, 1929.

Mr. C. E. W. Bean,
Official Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
PADDINGTON.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 23rd inst., I regret to have to inform you that I was not an eye witness of Baron von Richthofen having been shot down. I inspected the plane immediately after it was shot down and was convinced at the time that our machine gun (24th M.G.Co.) actually shot him down as the two planes passed over this gun. The Artillery machine gun was farther away from the actual line of flight of the two planes. I never heard at all of the third plane (Capt. Brown R.F.C.) at the time that Richthofen was shot down. There were only two planes, Richthofen's and the plane Richthofen was pursuing. Richthofen was not being pursued. Possibly Capt. Brown's plane had previously fired on Richthofen's, but when Richthofen singled out the British plane which he was pursuing Captain Brown's plane was out of the fight.

Could you please have advice sent me as to what volumes of the A.I.F. official History are available, where they can be purchased and if any concessions are allowed A.I.F. members.

Yours faithfully,

H. W. Crouch

late Capt. & adj. 4 M.G. Bn.

*Acknowledged
29/10/29*

5046.

23 October 1929.

Captain F.R. Watta,
Condong,
Tweed River, N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

In connection with the death of Baron Richthofen, I am anxious to secure precise information as to whether there were two or three aeroplanes involved. According to the account given by Captain A.R. Brown, R.F.C., who claims to have shot him down, Richthofen was closely pursuing a British scout, and Brown himself in a third machine was almost, if not quite, equally close on top of Richthofen. Brown does not claim to have shot Richthofen high in the air, but close to the ground, and his account therefore stands or falls by the question whether, when Richthofen was racing over the hills near Corbie on the 21st of April, 1918, there were three aeroplanes involved, or two.

As I understand that you were a witness of the whole affair, I should be grateful if you would help me to settle the matter finally.

Yours faithfully,

Edward Mann
Official Historian.

118
P. O. Condang.
Tweed River.
N. S. W.
19. 11. 29.

C. E. W. Beant Esq.

Dear Sir

Re yours No 5046 of
23rd Oct. I'm very sorry for
delay in answering, which I
must explain was unavoidable.

I must emphatically state that
there were only two planes
the British Scout plane pursued
by Richthofen seeing that both
planes passed directly over the
machine gun handled by Sgt. Popkin
at a height not more than
100 feet. I could not have failed
to have noticed the 3rd machine
if it had been in the
vicinity. Sgt. Popkin allowed the
British plane to pass & then fired
on Richthofen who made a right
swing and then came back to
the gun & this time at a
lower height when Popkin fired
about 200 rounds at him and

2.

Richthofen again swung round to the right + just managed to clear ridge and crashed. I can assure you that there was no one else had a chance to bring him down because there was no other guns close enough except mine.
 Hoping that this will help

I remain

yours faithfully

JRWatts
 Capt

To Capt. Bean with compliments R. St. John 119
rec

Who saw Richtofen crash - Who crashed him?

I was concerned in the incident referred to in the recent par. in the "Reveille".

I was an artillery observation officer on the southern bank of the Somme when I saw Richtofen chasing one of our planes.

It will be remembered that the southern bank of the Somme arose sheer 200 feet higher than the opposite side, therefore, directly the planes arrived on the southern side, they were naturally lower than when flying over Hamlet or Corbie.

Richtofen was very close to the hunted plane when I first noticed him and his machine gun was in action. I left post to see end of combat and noticed Richtofen suddenly lose control of his machine. A third plane was certainly there but not close enough to engage with Richtofen.

Every Lewis gun - one of which was attached to each battery and there were three brigades of artillery along the railway line between Bonnay and Corbie - were potting at Richtofen and everyone claimed the honor of eventually bringing him down.

I took bearings with a prismatic compass in an endeavour to determine who brought him down and concluded that the honour belonged to the Lewis Gunner of the 53rd Bty. Evans, I think, his name was.

I was ordered to submit a report to Divisional Headquarters. Later, General Hobbs sent a letter of congratulation to Gunner Evans of the 53rd Bty.

This Digger, in my opinion, was manning the only gun within range of Richtofen and in a position to bring the airman down at the time he lost control of his machine. I can definitely state that Richtofen was shot from the ground.

(SP) SAS QUINLAN L.
14th FEB

ADDRESS:
CO. REPATRIATION DEPT.
SYDNEY.

=====

5079.

30 October 1929.

J. Quinlan, Esq.,
c/o Repatriation Commission,
Box 3994 V V, G.P.O.,
Sydney.

Dear Sir,

The editor of "Reveille" has sent me on your letter concerning the death of Richthofen. The point in which I am particularly interested is the presence of a third 'plane. You mention that one was there, but not close enough to engage with Richthofen. I do not know whether your memory would still retain the details, but I should be grateful if you could tell me whether the third machine was, to your recollection, in any way apparently concerned with Richthofen; whether it was within, say, 100 yards or 400 yards of him, at the same height, or flying in the same direction; or did you receive the impression that it had been engaged with him? Do you remember its type, or whether it flew over the spot where Richthofen crashed? Any light on these points would be valuable.

I interviewed the Lewis gunners shortly after the incidents and have their statements, but they only concern the actual end of Richthofen.

Yours faithfully,

(E. W. Bean)
1929

11921.
c/o Repatriation Dept.,
SYDNEY.
1st November, 1929.

Capt. C.E.W. Bean,
Official War Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
SYDNEY.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your communication of 30th October, 1929 I have to advise you that naturally an incident of this nature, viz. the death of Richtofen leaves a lasting impression and my memory is quite clear regarding the occurrence.

The third plane was flying at a much greater height than Richtofen, who as I stated in my letter to "Reveille" was exceptionally low and who appeared to be intent upon finishing the hunted plane. His Machine Gun was in action until just prior, say 200 to 300 yards before his crash.

The ~~third~~ plane was at that time practically over Corbie Church, was flying in the same direction as Richtofen and the hunted plane, but was, in my opinion, from 800 to 1200 yards distant and in addition, was hundreds of feet higher. From my observations at the time of the occurrence, I can only repeat that undoubtedly the German Ace was shot from the ground. There may be an element of doubt regarding which Lewis Gunner actually brought him down, but there is no doubt he was not shot by the third airman.

I did not receive the impression that the third plane was engaged with Richtofen, on the contrary I was quite sure it was not in range. It did fly over the spot where Richtofen crashed, but I cannot remember what type of plane it was. I don't know that I took any notice of that phase.

Yours faithfully,

Josephus

Townsville



Star Limited

Townsville, 30th October.

Captain Bean,
Sydney.

Dear Sir/,

We recently published the enclosed cutting from a Sydney paper, and now enclose a letter which we have received in reply, that may be of interest to you.

We remain,

Yours faithfully,

"TOWNSVILLE EVENING STAR"

Per.

MANAGER.

Acked

The "Star"

is the
Oldest and
Most Widely
Circulated
Evening Paper
North of
Brisbane.



THREE 'PLANES

DEATH OF RICHTHOFEN

Wireless Station.
Townsville.
18/10/29

Historian's Question

The Editor
"Star"
Townsville

Who shot down Richthofen, prince of German aviators and leader of the famous Circus Squadron?—an Australian machine gunner or a Canadian airman?

cutting taken from your paper
information may be of interest

morning of April 21st 1918
I still have in my possession
messages which were handled
the 3rd Australian Division
Although I do not claim to
was quite close to where
piece of his plane and made
A message passed through
that "Captain Von Richthofen
Brigade Anti Aircraft section
the fight, it appeared to
chasing led him into the
However the official message
ground, and the only time
twelve months ago when
it was the British Airman
majority who replied to the press
the ground machine gunners,
argument then. The above
over which I think was about
would appear very strange
Australians if Richthofen
Airman who was also in the

That question is raised by the A.I.F. war historian (Cap. C. E. W. Bean) in "Reveille" the official organ of the N.S.W. branch of the R.S.L.

Capt. Bean asks for precise information from anyone who saw the flight which ended in Richthofen's death.

"According to Capt. Brown, the Canadian airman, Richthofen was closely pursuing a British scout, and Brown himself was almost equally close on top of Richthofen," says Capt. Bean. "Brown does not claim to have shot Richthofen high in the air, but close to the ground and his account therefore stands or falls by the question whether Richthofen was racing over the hills near Corbie on April 21 1918, there were three aeroplanes involved or two."

ice to the attached
st, the following
quite clearly the
chthofen met his death.
ry taken from Official
whilst attached to
the fight, my division
down and I secured a
after the fight.
onal Commander stating
by the 13th Australian
ation gained just after
whom Richthofen was
was given a lot of credit.
shot down from the
I was in Brisbane about
the press. Some stated
but I think the
he was brought down by
and that is why I did not enter into the
soon after the fight was
and it
the Canadian

Trusting that the above information

may be of some value to yourself and Captain Bean,

I am
Yours faithfully,

A. S. Moore

1274

DONALD L. FRASER
PROPRIETOR

Balmoral Colliery

COLLIERY: FRASER SIDING, BLACKWATER PHONE No. 2
TOWN OFFICE: CRAIGILEE HOUSE, ROCKHAMPTON PHONE 1116
Box 206. G.P.O.

4th November 1929. 19

Capt. C.E.W. Bean,
Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
SYDNEY.

Dear Sir,

re "Richthofen's death".

Sergt Popkin has forwarded me your letter dated 23rd Oct. in which you asked him whether there were two or three planes involved at the time of Richthofen's death.

I was 11th Infty. Brigader Intelligence Officer on the 21st April 1918, and saw the shooting down of Richthofen. I wrote up the incident within an hour of Richthofen's death, and I have no doubt in my mind whatever that Popkin shot him down.

Richthofen was right on the tail of the British plane with no other plane within a mile, and I consider that Captain Brown must be confusing some other incident that happened on the 21st April, with the shooting down of Richthofen.

A great many air fights were in progress in which I should think thirty or forty planes were involved over the front lines, but that was over 3,000 yards east of J.19c. 75.63.

I will be pleased to assist you to clear this matter up if you can make use of any information that I have.

Yours faithfully,

Donald L. Fraser

(copy)
125

11TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE.

Reference Sheet 62D.N.E. 1/20,000.

Description of the shooting down of Cavalry Captain BARON von RICHTHOFEN, the famous German Aviator at 10.45 a.m. on 21st. April, 1918.

At about 10.45a.m. 21st instant I was in the wood at J. 19.c. 75.63. and saw two aeroplanes approaching flying Westward directly towards the wood, at a height of about 400 feet above level of River SOMME over which they were flying.

I had noticed that the leading machine had British markings, just as it reached edge of wood and immediately afterwards heard a strong burst of M.G. fire coming from direction of South East corner of the wood.

Immediately afterwards the red painted enemy machine appeared overhead flying very low and *(this line obliterated in my copy)* 200 feet from the ground.

I lost sight of the British machine as my attention was concentrated on the enemy plane which was flying as if not under complete control, being wobbly and irregular in flight, it swerved North, then Eastwards, rocking a great deal and suddenly dived out of sight, the engine running full open.

I ran out of the wood and over to where it had fallen about 200 yards away alongside BRAY - CORBIE Road in J.19.b.40.30. About six men reached the wrecked plane before me.

I immediately undid the airman's safety belt and got assistance to pull him from the wreckage, but he was quite dead, and was considerably cut about the face as was apparently shot through the chest and body.

As a large number of men were collecting I requested Captain Adams, 44th. Battalion, A.I.F. to place a guard over the plane to prevent looting and to disperse the crowd, as the spot was open to enemy observation and I feared we would be shelled.

A guard was duly placed over the machine and the crowd dispersed.

I searched the dead airman taking his papers and personal effects which consisted of a few papers, a silver watch, gold chain with medallion attached, and a pair of fur lined gloves. I gave them to Captain Hilliary of 11th Brigade Staff, who took them down to our German speaker, Corporal Peters, who on investigation gave the identification of the famous German airman BARON von RICHTHOFEN.

I reported this to General Cannan and Third Australian Division promptly.

On General Cannan's direction I went out to get particulars of the Machine Gunners who had brought the plane down, and found Sergeant Popkin, of 24th Aust. M.G. Company at his anti-aircraft M.G. at J.23.b.3.7. (approx) (SOMME Valley).

At this time I was not aware that any other M.G. had been firing at this plane. I congratulated Sergeant Popkin on his successful shoot, but afterwards found out that two A.A. Lewis Guns belonging to the 53rd Battery A.F.A. had also fired at this plane when it was directly over my head, but the noise of engine prevented my hearing the shooting.

The 53rd Battery Lewis Gunners probably assisted in sealing the fate of this airman, as he apparently flew right into their line of fire. However, I am strongly of opinion that he was first hit by Sergeant Popkin's shooting as he was unsteady from the moment of that first burst of fire.

The airman's body was afterwards taken in charge by Officers of the A.F.C. and the wrecked plane salvaged by them after dark.

x. Donald Fraser
Brigade Intelligence Officer.
11th Australian Infantry Brigade A. I. F.

BONNAY, 21st April, 1918.

Map Reference. Sheet 62D. N.E. 1/20,000.

A. J. M.

1126

"IONA," ST. GEORGE'S ROAD, TOORAK, S.E. 2
U 2052.
22 WILLIAM STREET, MELBOURNE, C. 1.
CENTRAL 8292.

SIR JOHN MONASH.

7th October, 1929.

Capt. C. E. W. Bean,
Official War Historian,
Department of Defence,
Victoria Barracks,
SYDNEY, N.S.W.

My dear Bean,

In "The Reveille" of September 30th 1929 is reproduced a letter from you asking for certain information regarding the death of Richthofen.

In this context, I am sending you herewith copy of a letter which I wrote some 15 months ago to Major Treloar, and which it is just possible you may not yet have been told about.

My recollection of the documents referred to in my letter to Treloar is that Donald Fraser's statement goes a long way towards clearing up the matter.

Should you not have been already made aware of this correspondence by Treloar, I feel sure that, on a note from you, he will make these documents available to you.

Kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

John Monash

(Enc.)

(C O P Y)

1127
30th July 1928.

Major J. L. Treloar,
Director, Australian War Memorial,
Exhibition Building,
MELBOURNE.

Dear Major Treloar,

You are doubtless aware of the controversy which every now and then crops up on the question of "who killed Richthofen". This incident occurred in my Divisional area, and I myself saw the plane not long after it came down, but I cannot, from personal knowledge, add anything useful about the incident. Sir Brudenell White has told me that he was himself a spectator of the whole incident, although some distance off.

In enclosed envelope you will find certain interesting papers bearing on this matter, beginning with a scurrilous article in an American or Canadian newspaper called "Liberty" in which one Brown claims to have brought down the "Red Falcon" from the air, and in unmeasured terms accuses the Australians of stealing the credit from him, incidentally abusing the senior officers concerned.

I referred the whole matter to Brigadier-General Cannan, who, after some delay, procured for me an interesting extract from the "Rockhampton Bulletin" covering a precise and detailed statement by Mr. Donald Fraser, who was the 11th Brigade Intelligence Officer at the time, and saw the whole affair.

I send you the whole of these papers in the envelope herewith, because I imagine that the War Museum is the best permanent repository for them. May I suggest that you let Captain Bean know of the existence of this material in case he wishes to have access to it in connection with the history of that part of the war?

With kind regards,

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) JOHN MONASH

128

T/FMG.

TELEPHONE NOS.
F 2597.
F 2598.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS
"AUSWARMUSE."

COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO
"THE DIRECTOR."

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
7/1/40.
NO.

"They gave their lives. For that public gift they received a praise which never ages and a tomb most glorious—not so much the tomb in which they lie, but that in which their fame survives, to be remembered for ever when occasion comes for word or deed"

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL,
POST OFFICE BOX 214 D,
EXHIBITION BUILDINGS, MELBOURNE.

15th October, 1929.

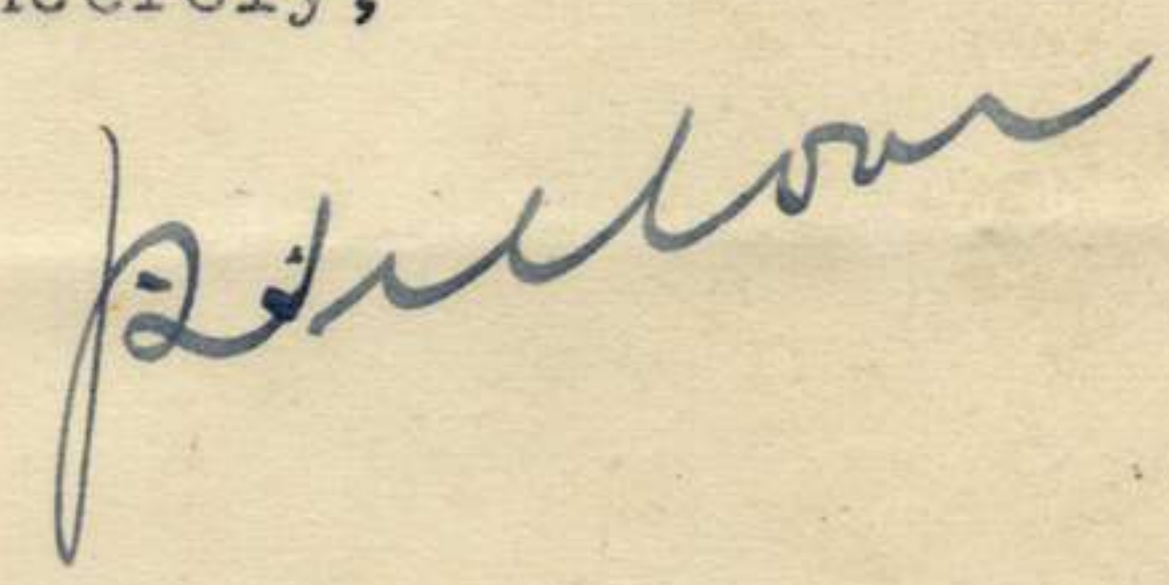
Dear Mr. Bazley,

With reference to your letter No.4974 of the 11th October relative to certain Richthofen papers received by the War Memorial from General Monash, under cover of a letter dated 30th July Sir John forwarded to the Memorial a copy of an article by A. R. Brown which appeared in "Liberty", 17th December, 1927, a typed extract from a letter dated 17th July, 1928, from Brigadier-General J. H. Cannan, and the cutting from the Rockhampton Bulletin referred to in your letter.

With a letter dated 1st August, 1928, I forwarded to Mr. Bean a copy of the acknowledgment which I sent to Sir John and also described the papers which we had received from him. In that letter I stated that I understood Mr. Heyes had forwarded to Mr. Bean the article from "Liberty". I am now sending herewith a copy of the extract from Brig.-General Cannan's letter and of the cutting from the Rockhampton Bulletin.

Is the controversy regarding the death of Richthofen springing to life again?

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. W. Bazley,
C/o Official Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
PADDINGTON, N.S.W.

(C O P Y).

31/7/28.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER OF BRIG.-GENERAL J. CANNAN.

17th July, 1928.

"When in Rockhampton last week I fortunately encountered Lieut. Donald Fraser who was my "intelligence officer" at Brigade Headquarters at this time. His report was published in the "Rockhampton Bulletin" of Tuesday, 24th January, 1928, and I have secured a copy from him and it is now enclosed herewith. I entirely concur in this report of his.

If I was rude to this chap "Brown" you can readily understand the reason. I never could be amiable and agreeable to anyone who tried to take credit for some "deed" he did not perform."

... ..

C O P Y.EXTRACT FROM ROCKHAMPTON BULLETIN.

RICHTHOFEN.

WHO SHOT HIM?

A First Hand Report.

Mr. Donald Fraser, who was the Brigade Intelligence Officer, 11th Australian Infantry Brigade, A.I.F., writes under date the 23rd instant :-

In view of the wide interest and many paragraphs on the subject of the famous German airman, Baron Von Richthofen, I am enclosing herewith a copy of my report on the occasion of his being shot down.

Personally, I have no doubt as to whom the credit should go of finishing the career of this great airman. I was so placed that I had a full view of the whole occurrence and I wrote the official Brigade report within an hour of the incident.

I obtained the identification, reported it to General Cannan of 11th Infantry Brigade, and to 3rd Australian Division, took charge of wrecked plane, unstrapped and withdrew Richthofen's body from the wreckage and placed a guard on the machine, and I feel that I am in a better position to make a correct report than any other person, although there must be hundreds of men who saw the actual incident.

I have always considered that to Sergeant Popkin, of the 24th Australian Machine Gun Company, any credit should go, although it is possible that the Lewis Gunners of the 53rd Australian Field Artillery may have contributed in bringing him down.

Regarding the claim of Capt. Brown, a Canadian airman in R.F.C., as reported from Washington by Australian cable service, dated December 22nd, 1927, Capt. Brown claims to have shot Richthofen down in an air fight, and I am quite certain his story is absolutely without foundation. There were only two planes in the vicinity - one being Richthofen's, who was in close pursuit of a British plane, only about

50 yards separating them, and this British plane was absolutely at Richthofen's mercy and would have been shot down within a few seconds had the German airman not been killed. It was quite impossible for the pilot in the pursued plane to have shot at his pursuer, in the position as I saw them.

Captain Brown's plane was not even sighted by any of those who saw Richthofen's death, and it has been conclusively proved that Richthofen died instantly as the result of a bullet through the heart, so that it is apparent that Brown has drawn wholly on his imagination in his desire for notoriety.

The report sent in by Lieut. Fraser is dated Bonnavy, April 21st, 1918, and is as follows :-

Australian Infantry Brigade.

Reference Sheet, Corbie, 1/20,000.

Description of the shooting down of Cavalry Captain Baron von Richthofen, the famous German aviator, at 10.45 on 21st April, 1918 :-

At about 10.45 a.m., 21st instant, I was in the wood at J.19 75,63 and saw two aeroplanes approaching, flying westward, directly towards the wood, at a height of about 400 feet above level of River Somme over which they were flying.

I had noted that the leading machine had British markings, just as it reached edge of wood and immediately afterwards heard a strong burst of M.G. fire coming from direction of south-east corner of the wood.

Immediately afterwards the red painted enemy machine appeared overhead, flying very low and unsteadily, and probably not more than 200 ft. from the ground.

I lost sight of the British machine, as my attention was concentrated on the enemy plane, which was flying as if not under complete control, being wobbly and irregular in flight. It swerved north, then eastwards, rocking a great deal and suddenly dived out of my sight, the engine still running full open.

I ran out of the wood and over to where it had fallen, about

200 yards away alongside Bray-Corbie-road. About six men reached the wrecked plane before me.

I immediately undid the airman's safety belt and got assistance to pull him from the wreckage, but he was quite dead, and was considerably cut about the face, and was apparently shot through the chest and body.

As a large number of men were collecting, I requested Captain Adams, 4th Battalion, A.I.F., to place a guard over the plane to prevent looting, and to disperse the crowd, as the spot was open to enemy observation and I feared we would be shelled.

A guard was duly placed over the machine and the crowd dispersed.

I searched the dead airman, taking his papers and personal effects, which consisted of a few papers, a silver watch, gold chain with medallion attached, and a pair of fur-lined gloves. I gave them to Captain Hilliary, of 11th Brigade Staff, who took them down to our German speaker. Corporal Peters, who, on investigation, gave the identification of the famous German airman, Baron von Richthofen.

I reported this to General Cannan and Third Australian Division promptly.

On General Cannan's direction I went out to get particulars of the machine gunners, who had brought the plane down, and found Sergeant Popkin, of 24th Australian M.G. Company, at his anti-aircraft M.G. location.

At this time I was not aware that any other M.G. had been firing at this plane. I congratulated Sergeant Popkin on his successful shoot, but afterwards found out that two A.A. Lewis gunners belonging to the 53rd Battery A.F.A. had also fired at this plane when it was directly over my head, but the noise of engine prevented my hearing the shooting.

The 53rd Battery Lewis gunners probably assisted in sealing the fate of this airman, as he apparently flew right into their line of fire. However, I am strongly of opinion that he was first

hit by Sergeant Popkin's shooting, as he was unsteady from the moment at that first burst of fire.

The airman's body was afterwards taken in charge by officers of the A.F.C. and the wrecked plane salvaged by them after dark.

Acknowledged

"Wynfield"¹³⁹
Chidlow
West Australia.
Jan 23rd, 1930

Captain Bean
War Records Dept

Dear Sir

A short time ago I read a paragraph in the "Sunday Times" Perth stating you wished to hear from anyone who saw the fight in which Baron Richthofen the German aviator was killed. I did not intend to enter into any controversy regarding this but after reading the most inaccurate ^{account} given by Mr Floyd Gibbons in his book "The Red Knight of Germany" I decided to write and state exactly what I saw.

I was an observer attached to the 11th Brigade H.Q. and had an observation post on the high ridge on the North of the Somme near the bend in the river, close to the Bray-Corbic road, there was a wood ran ~~along~~ from the road along the ridge for a

short distance, and my C.P. was near the eastern end of the wood.

The hill side was very steep from the river and about 250 feet high to the C.P., and there was a machine gun crew (Maxim) stationed at the bottom almost straight below where I was.

The fight ^{between "the Death's Circus" and our planes} started near Sully-le-Sec, and I was watching it for some time, I saw one machine brought down, and then my attention was taken off them to have a look over the German lines about Sully Lamette. Whilst watching I noticed the sound of planes coming a nearer and ~~looked~~ ^{looking} out along the Somme saw the two planes coming down the valley at a very low altitude, Captain Brown's plane in the lead and Von Richtofen in his ~~own~~ ^{own} triplane close behind him.

They came along on a level with the C.P. and almost straight over the machine gun crew, I got my rifle ready and had a shot at the engine of Von Richtofen's plane as he went past, not a hundred yards behind Captain Brown and on a level with him he was so close behind, that the Sgt machine gunner

opened ~~up~~ up as soon as Captain Brown had passed (when I was speaking to the gunner, afterwards he said they were so close together that he could not fire at Richtofen until Captain Brown had passed.)

I thought the gunner had got him as he gave a swerve to the right when the gunner opened on him, but he straightened out again and went on after the English plane.

I saw him cross the Bray - Corbie road and heard the Lewis guns from the Batterys firing he then went out of my sight behind the wood.

He must have turned to the right when he crossed the road, as he had gone in a semi-circle round the wood over the valley on the other ^{West} side of the Bray Corbie road and back to crash on the eastern side of the road and close to it between the wood and a brickworks about a quarter of a mile further along the road.

I heard the machine crash but did not see it, I could not leave my O.P. to go over to it at once, but a few minutes afterwards the Brigade S. C. came and asked me to go over with him to try and obtain

Any papers found must
have been taken from him
before the search

identification, when we arrived over to the
machine. Von Rostofen had been killed out,
I went over him to find something to identify
him, there were no papers at all on him and
no identity disc, I took a grey silk neckerchief
from round his neck with initials on it, also
a white handkerchief from his pocket with
initials, the main article for identification
was a watch I took from his pocket engraved
with the German Arms and initials, I believe
it had been presented to him by the Kaiser.
The Intelligence Officer took the articles
with him, he said they would have to
go to Divisional H.Q.

I have seen several statements as to his wounds,
I saw them whilst going over him.

One wound was on the left jaw the bullet had
entered under the jaw, ^{near the chin} close to the jaw bone and come
out again over the jaw bone only about an
inch and a half from where it entered, this
wound I positively believe was caused by
the Sgt. Machine gunner firing from almost
straight on at him and caused him to
swear:

He also had wounds across his chest,
 I did not notice the exact place where
 the bullets had come out from there.
 He had one hurt that would have killed
 him even if the bullets had not, and
 that was his neck was broken, I remember
 this quite well because his head rolled
 about so much when I sat him up, that
 I felt at it, and you could almost turn
 his head right round.
 I am surprised this has not been mentioned
 before, as it would give the lie to the
 statement that he was shot after he
 landed.

~~His~~ ^{neck} must have been broken when he crashed
 as his machine was smashed almost to
 pieces.

Another thing I have not seen mentioned
 is, that his machine crashed up against
 one of those heaps of mangels or beeps
 that the French farmers have in their
 fields, stacked and covered with earth.
 The Intelligence Officer there with the
 11th Brigade was named either Lieut Fletcher
 or Finer I forget which, if you ~~do~~ could

find him he could tell you about the searching and the wounds.

After the search we went down to see the Sgt Machine gunner, to tell him who the aviator was, as it was thought he might have brought him down, the gunner's name was rather an unusual one, I do not remember it now.

It is claimed that Captain Brown brought down the aviator, I fail to see how he could have done so, as he was not firing at all, he had his back to the following machine and was going all out, he would have had to turn right around to fire, I consider that would have been dangerous for him flying at such a low altitude and at high speed where there were trees and a high bank just in front of him.

I could not see the Lewis gunner from where I was, but from reports I saw afterwards I think they have the best claim to have brought Richthofen down.

I hope this letter will be of use to you and help to settle up the controversy over Richthofen's death
Yours faithfully
G. Sowerbutts

5194 G. SOWERBUTTS (M.M.)
44TH BATT A.I.F.

"Kia Ora,"
Cooper Street,
Cootamundra. Dec 9 1929

Dear Charlie,

I read in the September & October copies of Reville that you were trying to obtain further evidence with regard to the death of Baron von Richthofen.

Memory is a fickle thing - mine at any rate - but the following "clue" may be worth following up. On the night that he was killed (April 21st 1918.) it is my belief that Colonel Barber, A.D.M.S. 4th Aust. Div. said in the mess that he, or one of his M.O.'s, had examined the body of the aviator, and that there were 4 or 5 bullet wounds, the point of entry of which was the anterior part of the chest, and the point of exit at the back of the neck & shoulder. This evidence if it could be confirmed would prove conclusively that he was shot from in front, and from below on the ground.

It would appear that a machine gunner, with a Vickers or a Lewis, had caught him with a burst of fire.

I have just returned from Hobart, where I went for a two weeks visit to see Matt, and on the

"Kia Ora,"

Cooper Street,

Cootamundra.

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way through Melbourne, both going & coming, spent several enjoyable hours reviewing old acquaintanceships — General Barber, Colonel Miles, Col. Laverack, Col. Whitlam, Major Steele etc. Unfortunately I did not get my copies of Reville until my return, and so did not ask General Barber if my memory was at fault.

Would you like me to write to him, or will you do so?

I also spent three quarters of an hour with General White at the New Zealand Loan office, and if your ears did not hear during most of that period, there is nothing in that legend.

I simply could not persuade the General to say one adverse thing about you — not that I tried very hard!

I have had several courteous letters from Mr. Kelso, asking for photo films, diaries etc. These I sadly have not answered. In the first place we have been "up to our necks" taking over a practice (Dr. Mason & I bought out the late Dr. Brennan) and secondly I did not have anything to send him, as what I had was in Hobart.

"Kia Ora,"
Cooper Street,
Cootamundra.

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With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,
Duncan.

While in Tasmania, I went through a large drawer filled with old letters, maps & souvenirs, and as soon as I can I will send any to him that may be of use. — I do not know that anything will be, but am only too glad to help & let him decide.

In the young keen platoon commander days I kept a brief record of every man in the platoon, I do not suppose that sort of thing would be any good, or company rolls etc. would they?

Then there is another idea I wish to discuss with you with regard to the Memorial at Canberra, but I have taken up too much of your valuable time with this screed already.

How is Mrs Bean, will you please give her my kind regards, and also Cootamundra is not far from Canberra, and if at any time you are visiting the Federal Capital, Marion and I would be delighted to put you up, one or both, for as long a visit as you can spare us.

Arthur arrives from Malay by the Marella about Dec 23. Bobbie (Bridges), his wife, and family have been staying in Hobart with Mabel for 8 months. When she arrived there she had two daughters, but the son she is, Bill, has since put in his appearance.

Sutherland
12/12/29

BARON VON RICHTOFEN.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir,—Having read of the discussion as to the number of 'planes about at the time, I looked up my diary, in which I find the following, on Sunday, April 21, 1918:—

"Saw Baron von Richtofen's 'plane shot down by a Lewis gun. He was chasing, and had nearly got, one of our 'planes, but came too low, and was shot before he could rise again."

I distinctly remember the occasion, as they both flew directly over my head, no more than 50 feet from the ground, and about 100 yards apart. This was on the south bank of the Ancre, between Bonnav and La Neuville. The 18-pounders were on the hill just to the south. The 'planes were going upstream, and at the moment they passed over me the Baron appeared to have seen the guns and realised where he was, abandoned the chase, and made a bee-line for his base. As he turned towards the hill every machine-gun within half a mile fired at him. He crossed the hill very low at the southern end, and went straight down on the other side. I waited to see him rise again, and as he did not reappear, I knew that he had been brought down.

I have no doubt that the Lewis gunner stationed at the south-western (Corbie) end of the artillery line was the one who brought him down. With his gun mounted on a post as an anti-aircraft gun, the conditions in the gunner's favour were perfect, with such a huge target coming straight at him, and so close to the ground. He just could not miss.

I am also quite sure that there was no other 'plane within shooting range, or even in sight at the moment.

The British airman who so narrowly escaped, if still alive, must still feel the thrill of that chase, knowing who was pursuing him in the big red 'plane.

I am, etc.,

M. COOK,
ex-Lieutenant,
9th Field Coy. Engrs.

Narrormine, Dec. 9.

Brisbane Daily Mail
2/1/28

LEWIS GUNNER'S WORK

Morley Hadgraft writes on the subject of the death of the German Ace:

I saw Baron von Richtofen after he was taken from his machine, and he was photographed as he lay dead on the ground. His hair was cut close to the scalp, and his body was mottled, which, it was said at the time, was the result of being shot through the heart, but I did not actually see the wound.

I well remember his machine tumbling immediately an Australian Lewis gunner opened fire from a nearby ridge. Therefore, I fail to agree that the British pilot could have shot him down when he was actually being pursued by Richtofen. The guns on the British machine were mounted along the fuselage, and could only be fired through the propeller—being timed with the engine.

Mr. E. A. Tardent, late 42nd Battalion, writes from Hillcrest-avenue, Wynnum:—

There seems to be great diversity of opinion as to who brought down Richtofen, and so far the infantry, the artillery, the transport, and machine gun sections have claimed the honour, but no one has yet heard from the regimental cooks. They might have poisoned him with gas from the bully beef stew.

As far as I can remember of the affair, and I viewed part of the Australian fusillade from near the chalk pit at Sailly le Sec, and added my bit of gunfire, too, Richtofen's circus came up from the south, and when over Sailly le Sec Richtofen's machine detached itself from the rest and went after one of our old busses that was peacefully keeping an eye on the German line.

Platoon 15—that was my mob—was doing the fifty-fifty act with some old wine that we had salvaged from the musty cellars of Sailly le Sec, and about half the mob got going at Richtofen

with the rifles, while the other half drank heartily.

I did not shoot Richtofen, because I am only a second-class shot, but Tom O'Brien, now of Sandgate police, Freddy Unwin, of the Post Office, or Tom Corbett, of Bulimba, or, in fact, any one of my mates who swelled the chorus of rifle fire may have been the one that got him. If we did, he flew a long way after he died, for he came to earth near the brick chimneys at Bomay.

The truth of the matter is that a couple of Australian divisions were all within rifle shot, and all having a go at Richtofen's aeroplane, so I think it would be unwise for any digger to lay claim to have done this little job on his own. And seeing that the Tommy's now claim a share, and they had a few units in the vicinity, either our shooting was very bad or Richtofen's luck very good, until one of the many thousand sniping enthusiasts got in on him with a stray bullet or two.

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International Press - Cutting Bureau,
329, High Holborn, London, W.C. 1.

Extract from

DAILY Mail
Brisbane, Queensland

JAN 1928

Date

BARON RICHTOFEN

FAMOUS GERMAN ACE

196 WHO BROUGHT HIM DOWN?

Mr. T. W. Thomas, late 209th Squadron, Royal Air Force, writes from Rosalie:—

Sir,—Recent cablegrams from London, forwarding facts disclosed by a clerk in the records branch, bear out the statements I made in my last letter regarding the killing of Baron von Richtofen, the German ace.

As to Mr. W. J. Lawler's criticism of the picture published in The Daily Mail, what he and others fail to realise is that there was a machine above as well as below Richtofen. Had he not been killed first he would have got his man without doubt, as his guns were in perfect order when examined after the crash.

It seems strange to me that each eyewitness claims a different hero, but there was only one—Captain Brown, and this has been proved and recorded, as any one may see in the statements from the official records office, London.

MR. BEAN'S ACCOUNT.

Cabled reports from England indicate a revival of the controversy as to who was responsible for the death of Captain Baron von Richtofen, the German ace, who was brought down in Flanders on April 21, 1918 (says the Sydney Morning Herald).

According to Mr. L. J. Bain, curator of the Australian War Museum, General Salmond, who was in command of the Air Forces, agreed that the credit would be equally divided between the Australians and the Royal Air Force. That the former have a strong claim to the honour is indicated by a dispatch on the subject by the official correspondent with Australian Imperial Forces in France, Mr. C. E. W. Bean.

Mr. Bean reported that about 11 o'clock on the morning of April 21 a German and a British aeroplane, which had been participating in a battle between two fleets over the German lines, along the Somme and the Ancre, swooped low over a position where there were two Lewis guns of the 53rd Battery. The German aeroplane was pressing the British desperately close, and was firing short bursts from a machine gun. When about a hundred yards from the nearest of the Lewis guns the German aeroplane was sufficiently clear to enable the British guns to fire at it without risk of hitting the British airman.

"Both guns fired a burst," the despatch adds. "The German aeroplane the next instant wavered unsteadily to one side, banked, veered in a sharp circle to the left, then hit the ground about 400

yards away from the Lewis gunners. An officer standing by clearly saw the fragments of wood or metal flicked from the machine when the burst was fired."

Richtofen's wrecked machine, being an Air Force prize, was given to the squadron whose aeroplanes had participated in the action, but not before it had been stripped of much of its equipment.

The compass, "joy stick," steering chart, one of the Baron's flying boots, and his pilot's certificate, with other documents of an interesting nature, are on exhibition at the War Museum.

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TELEPHONE NOS.
F 2597.
F 2598.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS
"AUSWARMUSE."

COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO
"THE DIRECTOR."

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL.

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
NO. 7/1/40.

"They gave their lives. For that public gift they received a praise which never ages and a tomb most glorious—not so much the tomb in which they lie, but that in which their fame survives, to be remembered for ever when occasion comes for word or deed"

POST OFFICE BOX 214 D.

EXHIBITION BUILDINGS, MELBOURNE.

26th August, 1930.

Dear Mr. Bazley,

Memoranda concerning death of Baron von Richthofen.

We have recently received from Mr. Maxwell, certain correspondence and data giving details concerning the manner in which the late Baron von Richthofen met his death. The records were made available by the Air Branch, Historical Section, to the Australian Liaison Officer, Air Ministry, London. Copies of the records in question have been made and are attached hereto. There is no need to return them.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. W. Bazley,
c/o Official Historian,
Victoria Barracks,
PADDINGTON, N.S.Wales.

C o p y.

Historical Section
(Air Branch),
Committee of Imperial
Defence,
Audit House,
Victoria Embankment,
LONDON, E.C.4.

5th July, 1930.

Ref. 36084/30/A.H.B.

Dear Palstra,

Occasional requests are being received for details concerning the manner in which the late Baron von Richthofen met his death and it is felt that some of these should have been more appropriately addressed to your Government. I am therefore sending you copies of all the available evidence in this Branch, in the hope that it may be of use to your historical section.

Yours sincerely,

J. MORRIS.

F/Lieut. W. Palstra, MC., BA.,
Australian Liaison Officer,
Air Ministry,
Austral House,
KINGSWAY, W.C.2.

COPY EXTRACT FROM R.A.F. COMMUNIQUE No. 3.

DATED 24/4/1918.

April 21st.

Enemy Aircraft.

"Capt. M. von Richthofen, who is credited
"by the enemy as having brought down 80 Allied machines,
"was shot down and killed behind our lines near Corbie
"by Capt. A. R. BROWN, No. 209 Squadron."

Copy extract from AH.No. 209/40/17.

Annexe to 5th Brigade Summary of Work,
dated 22/4/18.

COMBATS.

1. About 11 a.m. yesterday morning, Captain Brown, D.S.C., whilst on High Offensive Patrol, near Vaux Sur Somme, dived on a triplane which was firing on Lieutenant May. It had followed Lieutenant May down to about 500 feet. Captain Brown fired a long burst into it and it went down vertically and was observed to crash by Lieutenant May and Lieutenant Brown.

A Lewis gunner from the ground claimed to have brought down this machine, but on examination of the body by three Medical Officers, it was definitely determined that the pilot could not possibly have been shot from the ground on account of the position of the bullet wound.

The pilot of this machine was Captain Rittmeister Baron von Richthofen.

X X X X X X X

Copy extract from A.H. File No. 21/13/506.

In the Field. 22nd April, 1918.

We have made a surface examination of the body of Captain Baron von Richthofen and find that there are only the entrance and exit wounds of one rifle bullet on the trunk. The entrance wound is on the right side about the level of the ninth-rib, which is fractured, just in front of the posterior axillary line. The bullet appears to have passed obliquely backwards through the chest striking the spinal column, from which it glanced in a forward direction and issued on the left side of the chest, at a level about two inches higher than its entrance on the right and about in the anterior axillary line.

There was also a compound fracture of the lower jaw on the left side, apparently not caused by a missile - and also some minor bruises of the head and face.

The body was not opened - these facts were ascertained by probing from the surface wounds.

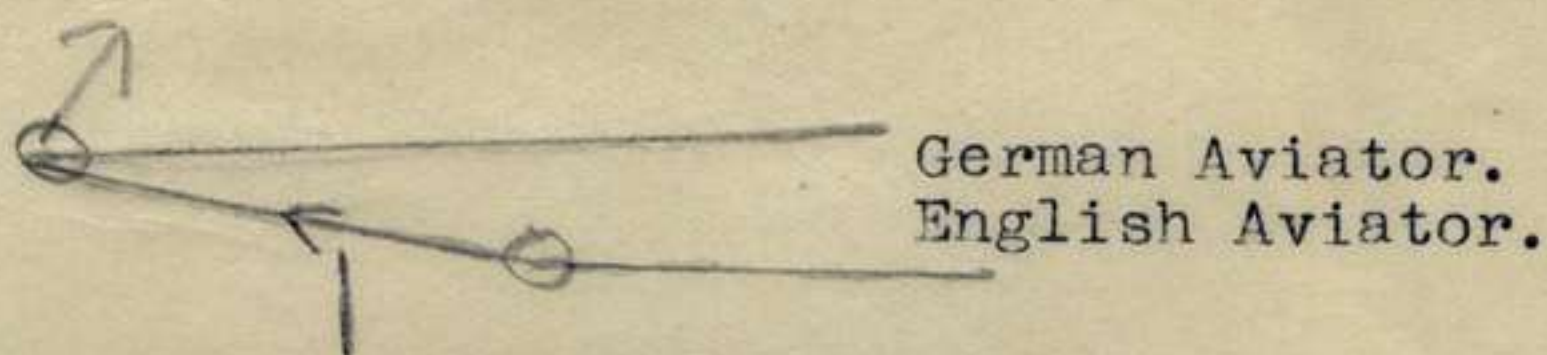
(Sgd.) Thomas Sinclair,
Colonel A.M.S.
Consulting Surgeon IV Army,
B.E.F.

Copy extract from A.H. File No. 21/13/506.

We examined the body of Captain Baron von Richthofen on the evening of the 21st instant. We found that he had one entrance and one exit wound caused by the same bullet.

The entrance wound was situated on the right side of the chest in the posterior fold of the armpit; the exit wound was situated at a slightly higher level nearer the front of the chest, the point of exit being about half an inch below the right nipple and about three quarters of an inch external to it. From the nature of the exit wound, we think that the bullet passed straight through the chest from right to left, and also slightly forward. Had the bullet been deflected from the spine the exit wound would have been much larger.

The gun firing this bullet must have been situated in roughly the same plane as the long axis of the German machine, and fired from the right and slightly behind the right of Captain Richthofen.



We are agreed that the situation of the entrance and exit wounds are such that they could not have been caused by fire from the ground.

Sngd. G.C. GRAHAM,
Capt. R.A.M.C.
M.O. i/c 22nd Wing, R.A.F.

Sngd. G.E. Downs,
Lieut. R.A.M.C..

In the Field.
22/4/18.

Copy extract from AH.204/214/8.

209 R.A.F. Sopwith BR.

April 21st, 1918.

B.7270.

10.45 a.m.

Two Vickers Sy. Guns.

62, D.Q.2.

Captain A.R. Brown, D.S.C.

H.O.P.

5,000 feet.

Engagement with red triplane.

Time, about 11-00 a.m.

Locality, Vaux sur Somme.

Fokker Triplane, pure red wings with small black crosses.

- (1). At 10.35 a.m. I observed two Albatros burst into flames and crash.
- (2) Dived on large formation of 15 - 20 Albatros Scouts D.5's and Fokker triplanes, two of which got on my tail and I came out.

Went back again and dived on pure red triplane which was firing on Lieut. May. I got a long burst into him and he went down vertical and was observed to crash by Lieutenant Mellersh and Lieutenant May.

I fired on two more but did not get them.

(Sgnd.) A.R. BROWN.
Captain.

(Sgnd.) C.H. BUTLER,
Major.
209 R.A.F.

Copy extract from AH.No. 204/214/8.

Sopeith B.R.

April 21st, 1918.

B.6257.

10.45 a.m.

Two Vickers Syn. Guns.

Near Cerisy.

Lieutenant F.J.W. Mellersh.

H.O.P.

7,000 feet.

Fokker Triplanes.

I followed Captain Brown down into a large formation of Fokker triplanes and Albatros D.5's. A dog fight ensued and I managed to get on the tail of a triplane, with a blue tail. I fired about 50 rounds into him when he turned and I got a long burst into him when he was turned up. The triplane then dropped his nose and went down in a vertical dive. I followed, still firing, and saw the machine crash near Cerisy.

The other triplanes then dived on to me and I was forced to spin down to the ground and return to our lines at about 50 feet. Whilst so returning a bright red triplane crashed quite close to me and as I looked up I saw Captain Brown's machine.

(Sgnd.) F.J.W. Mellersh.

Lieutenant.

Copy extract from File No. 204/214/8.

Sopwith B.R.
D. 3328.

April 21st, 1918.

10.45 a.m.

Two Vickers Syn. Guns.

62 D.Q.

2/Lieut. W.R. May.

H.O.P.

7,000 feet.

Single seater Fokker Triplanes, blue camouflaged wings.

Attacked large formation of about 15 - 20 machines.

Engaged one E.A. firing bursts head on into engine, he went over and dived down. I was unable to observe result as a second machine attacked me from behind.

I fired at a second machine but without result. I then went down and was attacked by a red triplane which chased me over the lines low to the ground. While he was on my tail, Captain Brown attacked and shot it down. I observed it crash to the ground.

(Sgnd.) W.R. May.

2/Lieut.

(Sgnd.) C.H. Butler.

Copy extract from File No.204/214/8.

Sopwith B.R.

April 21st, 1918.

B.3858, B.3338, B.7200.

10.25 a.m.

Two Vickers Syn. Guns.

as stated below.

Captain O.C. le Boutillier
Lieut. Taylor & Foster.

H.O.P.

(1). 12,000 ft. (2) 7,000 feet.

(1) I observed 2 Albatros two-seaters over Le Quesnel. Lieutenants Foster, Taylor and myself fired on one when he burst into flames and crashed at Beaucourt.

(2) Engaged Fokker triplanes over Cerisy (about 15 - 20 machines) and fired about 100 rounds at a mottled coloured one but did not get him. Also fired on red triplane which was shot down by Captain Brown and crashed over side of lines.

(3) After coming out of the engagement with the Fokker triplanes Lieutenants Taylor and Foster dived on three two-seaters close to Albert. Both got in good bursts and E.A. dived away east. Owing to the fact that 5 E.A. scouts appeared above and that our ammunition was all used up, we had to break off the combat without decisive result.

(Sgd.) O.C. le Boutillier,
Captain.

(Sgd.) C. H. Butler.

Copy extract from AH. No. 21/k3/1885.

Extract from War Diary of 14th Australian F.A. Brigade
for April.

21/4/18."Aircraft very active. An enemy plane
was brought down by Lewis gunners of
53rd Battery, the pilot who was killed
proved to be Capt. Baron von Richthofen."

Extract from War Diary of Headquarters, 5th Australian
Divisional Artillery for April, 1918.

21/4/18."The 53rd Battery, 5th Australian
Divisional Artillery, brought down German
Airman Captain von Richthofen."

X X X X X X X X

Deutsches Generalkonsulat

4 Bridge Street,
Sydney 10th June, 1930.

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J.Nr.1027.

The Editor
The "Reveille"
Wingello House,
Angel Place
S y d n e y
=====

S. S. I. L. A.
N. S. W. BRANCH
11 JUN 1930
RECEIVED

Dear Sir,

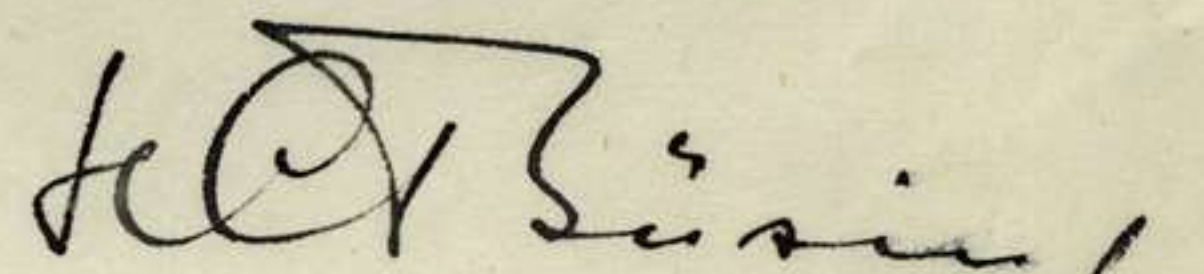
Referring to your letter of the 20th January and our conversation over the telephone I herewith beg to hand you a rough translation of what I have received from the Reichsarchiv regarding career and death of Richthofen.

As stated in the final clause of the said memorandum the cause of Richthofen's death can only be ascertained by referring to the records of the post-mortem examination held upon his body.

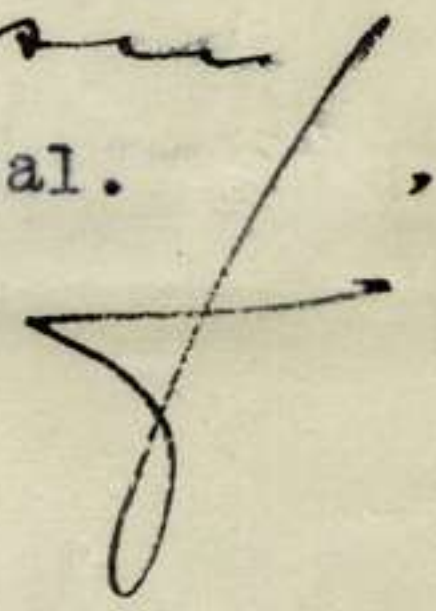
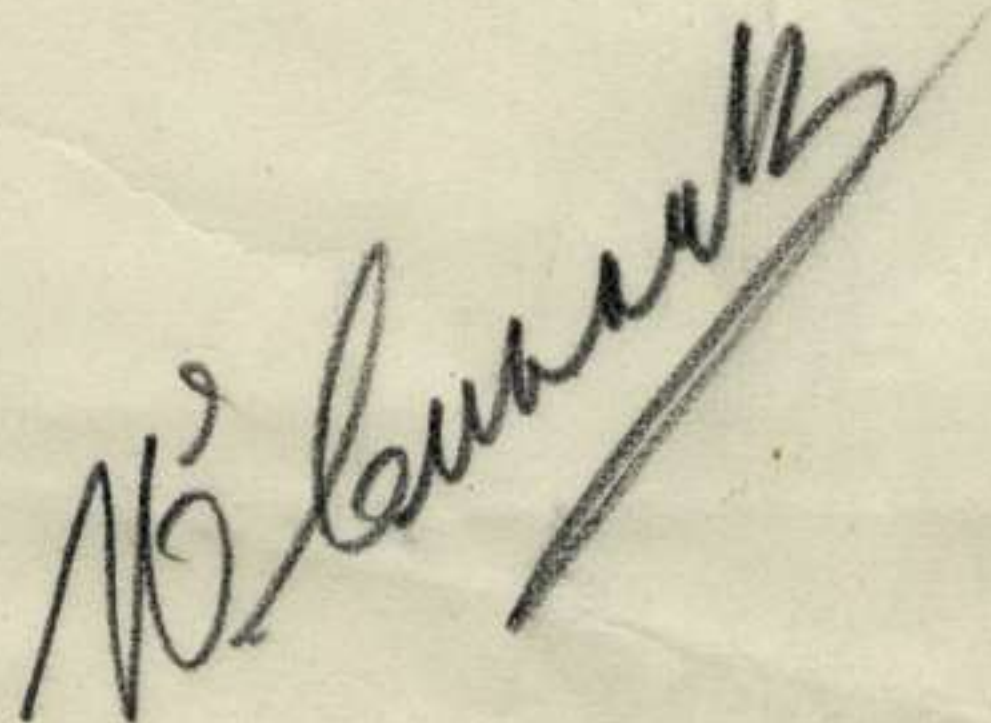
Should you intend to extend your inquiry to the British War-Office concerning this matter, I should be very much obliged if you would let me know the result.

Trusting that my efforts have been of assistance to you, I beg to remain

Yours faithfully,



German Consul-General.



Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen was born in Breslau, on the 2nd of May, 1892. His father was then Premier Lieutenant with the Regiment of Leibkürassiere. Richthofen was instructed by private tutor up to his ninth year of age, then went to school at Schweidnitz. Follow eight years in the Corps of cadettes. November 1912 he became Lieutenant at the regiment of Ulanen Nr.1.

After the outbreak of the war he served in the cavallery, first against Russia, later on the western front. In May 1915 he changed over to the Air-Force and accompanied the advance of Mackensen in Russia as observer. From February 1916 he was a pilot himself and joined Kampfstaffel 8 of Kampfgeschwader 2. On the 24th of August 1916 he was transferred to the newly formed Jagdstaffel 2 where he obtained his first successes under the instruction of the famous Boelcke. After his 16th victory in the air he was made leader of Jagdstaffel 11 and was distinguished by the order "Pour le mérite". On the 22nd of March 1917 he was promoted Premier Lieutenant and on the 8th of April 1917 already became Rittmeister (captain) by preference. On the 30th of June 1917 he took over command of Jagdgeschwader 1 which according to his advice had been formed out of Jagdstaffeln 4,6,10 and 11.

Richthofen has brought down 80 enemy machines, before he was killed himself on the 21st of April 1918.

In

In appreciation of his outstanding personal performances and his supreme services rendered to hunting aviation from May 1918 Jagdgeschwader 1 was called Jagdgeschwader Freiherr von Richthofen Nr.1.

Four different parties claim to have brought down Richthofen: The Australian machine gunner W.I.Evans, 53rd battery, 14th brigade of Australian Field-artillery, two machine gunners of a battalion 11th brigade Australian Infantry, the Canadian captain Brown of the British 209th (Camel-) squadron and one of the crew in the aeroplane of an Australian R.E.8-Squadron, which was chased by Richthofen.

1) The claim of the Australian machine gunner, W.I.Evans, was dealt with in an article of the Schlesi-sche Zeitung Nr.422 of 19.8.1928. The author, M.Ross-deutscher, Berlin, reproduces there in German translation a "Report of an eye witness" which was sent him from Western Australia. According to that report a German triplane of shining red colour has followed a British recognising machine and has pressed her down almost to the top of the trees. Then it goes on verbally:

everything
"Already, [^]seemed to be finished for the recognising machine which did not fire one single shot, when suddenly in my closest neighbourhood a shot was fired from an anti-aircraft gun, after which the triplane at once began to stagger and one moment later fell to the ground not far from the main road to Corbie and only

only about 300 to 400 yards from myself. Some of us run there at once and lifted the pilot out of the machine. He was dead, but did not seem to have suffered any injuries by the crash.

If Richthofen had really been killed by the Canadian Brown in the air-fight, how then could he have chased the recognising machine up and down the valley of the Somme afterwards as he has done? He did not find his death by the recognizing machine either, for her spotter had not fired one single shot. His rear machine gun was said to have been out of order and there was no opportunity at all to fire his front gun."

As to the statement saying that the deadly shot had come from an anti-aircraft gun, it may be mentioned that very likely a mistake has been made in Rossdeutscher's translation as in English both a canon and a machine gun are called "gun". From the whole wording it appears without doubt that it must have been a machine gun.

2) As regards the claim of the two machine gunners of a certain battalion of the 11th brigade Australian Infantry there is a report of captain Brown who equally claims to have brought down Richthofen, in an article "My Fight with Richthofen", which was published in the Chicago Sunday Tribune of 29.4.1928. According to his story he had heard that two Australian Infantry men had received a "distinguished conduct medal" for having brought down Richthofen, and went to the
staff

staff of the 11th Brigade Australian Infantry in company of his wing commander Cairns in order to clear up the matter. Brown reports the conversation with the Major commanding the section in question who had been called, as follows:

"That Australian major had his story pat. They had been watching the scrap, he said. They had witnessed the triplanes' attack on the R.E.8. Then they had seen the Camel's jump on the tripes and engage them heavily. After a terrific mixup, a red nosed Camel had broken loose from the fight and had been immediately dived on by an all red triplane. The pair of them, one chasing the other, had come closer, closer, closer; so close and so low at last that he had ordered his machine gunners to open fire on the enemy flyer.

They had, he said, barely got their guns concentrated when they brought him down.

"Were there any other red nosed Camels about?" asked Cairns.

"No", said the major. "There was just the one that was being chased. He flew right on." And he did not bat an eye.

I spoke only once.

"And what", I asked, "did the red nosed Camel behind the all red tripe do?"

The major hesitated, flushed, stuttered.

"He - he - b-but there was no red nosed Camel behind!"

I knew then that he lied. For, whether I had

or

or had not shot down Richthofen, he could not have missed seeing me, since he saw so much; for I was right on Richthofen's tail when he crashed.

But I made no comment. I was only a ruddy captain. The others were all field officers."

3) The claim of captain Brown.

Brown went off with Cairns after the conversation, which has been reported under 2) in order to inspect the aeroplane of Richthofen. When they came near the spot where the red triplane laid, they were notified by an Australian sentry that the inspection of the aeroplane was forbidden. Thereupon Brown went to the aeroplane alone. He describes the result of his investigation in that article word for word:

"Starting at the elevator, bullets had ripped their way along the fuselage; bullets fired from above and behind. Blood spattered the seat. There was a hole in it."

After having come back to Cairns Brown answered to his question as to what he had found:

"The Pilot of that plane was shot down from above and behind, not by the infantry and not by any R.E. There's only one way he could have been killed by infantry fire, and that is if he had been flying upside down for a considerable distance. We know he wasn't."

On Brown's proposal Cairns now wanted to cause a medical examination of Richthofen's body in order to forego every doubt by ascertaining the canal
of

of the bullet.

Next day Brown received news from Cairns, "that the postmortem had shown positively that Richt-hofen had been killed by a bullet in the heart which had come from behind."

Shortly afterwards, as Brown reports, there arrived also a telegram from the Head-quarters of the Royal Airforce signed by General Salmond:

"Very best congratulations to Nr.209 Squadron and Capt.Brown on bringing down the redoutable Von Richthofen."

A support of Brown's claim is further contained in an article "The Red Knight of Germany" by Floyd Gibbons, published in the Chicago Sunday Tribune of 1.4.1928. In that article Gibbons reproduces the statements of two comrades of Capt.Brown of the 209th squadron that is of Captain Oliver L e B o u t i l l i e r and Captain W.J. M a c k e n z i e . They both first describe in general the airfight between the 209th squadron and Richthofen's wing. Then Capt.Le Boutillier's report goes on:

"Then, after what seemed like endless hours of fighting, there was a momentary lull, and out of the corner of my eye I saw one of our machines heading for home. I recognized it as Lieut. M a y 's plane, one of Brownie's fight. Almost at the same moment I saw a bright scarlet German plane swooping down on him.

For a second I hesitated, wondering whether

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I should go after that German plane or stay in the dog fight. But Brownie had beaten me to it. I saw him dart out of the mixup and start after the scarlet plane.

The three planes, May's, the scarlet one and Brownie's, were headed for Sailly-le-Sec and were very low over the Australian trenches. Then, suddenly, the scarlet plane seemed to stagger, turn over - and it fell

When we got back, we found that no one was missing or hurt, although every plane had been badly shot up. As the scarlet machine had been a clear victory for Brown, I, with several others, confirmed the victory for him when we made our reports.

Then I heard that the scarlet plane had carried Richthofen."

Similarly Mackenzie describes the event:

"Just as I got over the lines I spotted one of our planes flying for home with a red plane after him. Behind the red plane was Brown. Something distracted my attention for an instant, but when I looked down again the red German plane was gone

We didn't know until several hours after we were struck that Brown had got Richthofen."

4) As regards the claim of the R.E.8 squadron, Brown reports in his article mentioned under 2), that on the 22nd of April 1918 a young Australian airforce-man came to him who called himself one of the crew of the R.E.8 which was chased by Richthofen, and who spoke as follows:

"Here's

"Here's what I'm getting at, Capt. Brown. I fired on the all red tripe, and I - I'd like to get credit for bringing him down. You have the only report on which credit will be given for it. But you've shot down lots of Huns. I've never shot down any yet. If you withdraw your report I'll get credit for it. Will you do that, Capt. Brown?"

Brown further reports that he was so disgusted by that demand that he cried out to the Australian pilot: "You young hound" and had him shown out by an orderly man.

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The aforesaid gives all the essential material regarding the death of Richthofen that is contained in the files of the Reichsarchiv. These partly diametrically contradicting statements of personally interested parties do without official documents not allow to decide as to who has brought down Richthofen.

Nevertheless if one compares the various statements the man in the R.E.8 can scarcely be considered to have effected Richthofen's defeat. For, in the report of an eye-witness mentioned under 1), it is said that the spotter of the recognising machine had not fired one single shot. It further results from the statement of the major of 11th Brigade Australian Infantry, that Richthofen, it is true, first chased a R.E.8, but then left her alone and attacked a Camel. Equally, the two comrades of Captain Brown, Le Boutillier and Mackenzie, confirm that Richthofen was

only

only shot down after he had attacked a Camel of the 209th squadron. This he would not have been able to do, if he had received a deadly wound by the crew of the R.E.8 before.

The whole matter can be cleared unobjectionably but by the result of the medical examination of Richthofen's body, which is mentioned by Brown. For, if, as Brown says, the deadly bullet has pierced the body and heart of Richthofen from above and behind, it can only have been fired by a single seater fighter ^{flying} close behind Richthofen's machine. In that case, the successful shot might have to be attributed to Capt. Brown who according to his own statement and that of his two comrades was the only one who attacked Richthofen's machine in the deciding moment.

As it may be taken for granted that so important a document as the report of the medical examination of Richthofen's body has been kept with the British war documents, an inquiry of the Department for the History of war in the air at the British War-Office may be recommended. The head of that Department is Captain Jones at the Committee of Imperial Defence, Audit House, Victoria Embankment, London E.C.4.

SIGNATURE.

EXTRACT FROM THE MELBOURNE "HERALD", 26/2/1930.

WHO KILLED RICHTHOFEN?

Sir,

I would like to state my version of the death of Richthofen. I was in the air on the morning of April 21, 1918, and happened to see the fight from a distance. I was not in the actual encounter, having instructions to attack stragglers. Suddenly a "Camel" - by the markings I saw it was Lieutenant May's - emerged from the melee and attempted to make for the cover of a ridge. A red Fokker triplane followed on May's tail, firing short rapid bursts. Captain Roy Brown, seeing May's predicament, followed the red Fokker and, closing up to a range of about 100 yards, fired a long burst from both guns. I could see his tracer hitting the cockpit of the Fokker. The German machine zoomed, banked steeply, and, obviously crippled, glided down to land between the Allied and German lines. He landed under control, so the machine was not damaged. After finishing my patrol I returned to the aerodrome and heard that the pilot of the red Fokker was Richthofen and that Brown had got him. The Australian Lewis gunners certainly hit the machine, but their bullets hit about two feet behind the pilot's seat. Any pilot who was in the air that morning will confirm this statement.

Yours etc.

L.A. MELLOR.
2/Lieut, R.F.C.

Caulfield.
Feb. 25.

EYEWITNESS'S ~~MY~~ STORY.

Broken Hill, Monday.-The argument on the death of Baron Richthofen, the German ace, has now shifted to Broken Hill. E.C. Rawlings, who says he was an eyewitness of the air duel, declares the German plane was shot down from the ground. Both planes were down with thirty feet of the ground, the British airman apparently looking for a landing. His gun was not working and it appeared as though the weapon had jammed, or that he had run out of ammunition. Then came a burst of machinegun fire, and the German machine crashed. He is certain gunners from the ground brought him down.

NEWSPAPER CUTTING SENT BY SERGT. POPKIN.

That Vickers machine-gun was fired by Sergeant Popkin. This is his story as told to the writer, who at the time was with the 7th Infy. Bde. in the sector to the left, and who, from reports at the time, has always been convinced that an Australian machine-gunner brought the German ace down.

"I was in charge of four Vickers guns on the bank of the Canal between Saily le Sec and Corbie," says Digger Popkin, "and had a gun mounted for anti-aircraft defence. About 11 o'clock and British and German squadron started a battle in mid-air. Presently two planes separated from the rest and headed for our lines, flying over Saily le Sec. They came straight along the canal towards my gun position. I immediately got into position and waited.

"On came the planes, the Britisher in front and about 60 feet in the air. They were so close together that I had to wait for the Britisher to pass. Then I opened up on the German machine.- a red triplane. I fired about 80 rounds and he immediately turned at right angles to my position and banked to clear the top of the ridge on the left of the canal looking towards the line. He then turned round and flew straight towards my gun. I opened fire again and gave him another 80 rounds. The plane started to dive, described a half-circle, and crashed into the ground on top of the ridge near a quarry, and facing Bonnay.

"I immediately rushed up the hill and on arrival a couple of minutes after the crash found the wrecked plane surrounded by infantry officers who would not allow anybody to touch it. However, I stepped in and wrenched a piece off one of the wings for a souvenir. About an hour later an intelligence officer of the 11th Brigade came and took my regimental particulars and told me who I had shot down. About 6 o'clock the same evening a liaison officer of the 52nd Battalion, with his report written out, saw me and he also took my regimental particulars to support my claim. The colonel of the 52nd also supported my claim, but owing to the report from my company going in a week after the incident, I am afraid I got very little consideration. ~~Anyone wishing to verify these statements~~

"Anyone wishing to verify these statements," concluded Digger Popkin, "can do so by getting in touch with Captain F. Watts, late of the 24th M.G. Company, and now residing at Byron Bay, who was in charge of the section at the time; also Captain Crouch of Waverley and Major Hinton, M.C., who, I think, lives in Sydney also."

Sergeant Popkin pointed out the absurdity of the claim of Captain Brown, the English airman whom Richthofen chased, that he brought the German down. With fixed machine-guns which fire through the propeller, it seemed impossible that he could have done so, as the German was ~~xxx~~ pursuing him and kept on his tail all the way. Mr. W.J. Warnsford, formerly an officer of the 3rd Australian Flying Squadron, who was sent to salvage the machine, and to recover Richthofen's body, says that from an examination of the remnants of the German machine, he concluded that Richthofen's gun had jammed, and that Richthofen, being a very smart and dare-devil pilot, still kept on the tail of Capt. Brown's machine. Apparently, the Englishman was lucky to escape.

Richthofen, who had brought down 80 planes, was buried with military honours behind the British line. A large number of British fighting men and aviation officers, as well as Americans stationed at a neighbouring aerodrome, attended. Mechanics of an Australian aviation squadron had constructed a coffin, on which they placed a plate giving the aviator's name, rank, and other data.

The Baron was buried under a hemlock tree, and the squad fired the last shots across the grave. The grave was covered with flowers - Australia's tribute to a gallant foe.

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