

THE RED BATTLE FLYER

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MANFRED FREIHERR VON
RICHTHOFEN



CruGuru

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First German publication in 1917 under the title *Der Rote Kampfflieger*. English translation in 1918 by J. Ellis Barker under the title *The Red Battle Flyer*.

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Ekurhuleni, South Africa

Foreword

THE Red Battle Flyer is Freiherr Manfred von Richthofen's autobiography that mainly deals with his role as an ace fighter pilot in the First World War for the German forces. The name "The Red Battle Flyer" was freely translated from his German book "Der Rote Kampfflieger", which was first published in 1917 - this was before the term "fighter pilot" was coined. This book describes how he went from being a cavalry officer to an observer on board an aircraft, to a fighter pilot, and eventually to the best fighter pilot on all sides during the war. Von Richthofen provides gripping detailed descriptions of his and his comrades' exciting exploits as fighter pilots, but we also learn about the continued loss of comrades in death and the suffering of war.

Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen (2 May 1892 – 21 April 1918) was one of the most, if not the most, famous fighter pilots from World War One. He had 80 "kills" (successful air victories, i.e. enemy planes shot down) to his name – making him the most successful flying ace during the war. Von Richthofen was part of an aristocratic family with many well-known relatives. He was known as the "Red Baron", where the "Red" referred to the bright red colour of his Albatros biplane and later on his Fokker triplane and the "Baron" referred to his title of "Freiherr", which means Baron.

Von Richthofen's streak of "kills" continued after the publication of this book, but sadly he was killed on 21 April 1918 while flying over Morlancourt Ridge, near the Somme River in his beloved red plane. Until today there is much controversy over who actually fired the single bullet that had killed Von Richthofen – it could have been fired by a Canadian pilot or any one of three anti-aircraft gunners.

This book came about after Von Richthofen received a serious head wound in July 1917. He was grounded for several weeks and it was during his period of recuperation that von Richthofen - most likely with the help of a ghost-writer from a German propaganda unit - wrote this "autobiography". Although the Red Baron died before a revised edition could be prepared, he is on record as stating that the book was "too impudent" and that he was "no longer that sort of person".

Von Richthofen returned to active service in October 1917, but it is thought that his wound must have caused long-term damage, since later on he frequently suffered from post-flight nausea and headaches, and he also had a change in temperament. Furthermore, there exists a theory linking this injury with his eventual death, in the sense that he had lost some of his abilities of concentration.

Von Richthofen had grown to be such a legend in 1918 that it was feared that his passing away would be a blow to the morale of the German people. The Red Baron had certainly become a cult figure of hero-worship, industriously encouraged by official German propaganda machine. German propaganda also dispersed various fake rumours, such as that the British had started squadrons specifically to hunt him down, and that they were offering a large reward and an automatic Victoria Cross to any Allied pilot who shot him down. Passages from his correspondence and this book show that he may have at least half believed a number of these tales himself.

Nevertheless, this thrilling account of air fighting in the First World War allows us more than a glimpse into the mind and life of one of the most effective and skilled warriors of all time.

Preface by C. G. Grey

SOME time ago a Naval Officer who was engaged on particularly hazardous duty was discussing calmly the chances that he and his like had of surviving the war, assuming that it continued for several more years and that his particular branch of it increased its intensity. He wound up his remarks by saying, "The chief reason why I particularly want to survive the finish is that I'm so keen on comparing notes with our opposite members in the German Navy."

That is the answer to those who ask, as an important official gentleman asked recently, why this English translation of Rittmeister von Richthofen's book should be published. It gives our flying people an opportunity of comparing notes with one of Germany's star-turn fighting pilots, just as that excellent book by "Contact" gives the Germans the chance of gathering the atmosphere of the Royal Flying Corps as it was in 1916 and 1917.

"The Red Battle-Flyer" has evidently been carefully censored by the German authorities. Also it has possibly been touched up here and there for propagandist purposes. Consequently, although the narrative as it stands is extraordinarily interesting, the book as a whole is still more interesting on account of what one reads between the lines, and of what one can deduce from the general outlook of the writer. There is, perhaps, little to learn of immediate topical interest, but there is much that explains things which were rather difficult to understand in the past, and the understanding of such points gives one a line of reasoning which should be useful to our active-service aviators in the future.

When one makes due allowance for the propagandist nature of the book, which gives one the general impression of the writing of a gentleman prepared for publication by a hack journalist, one forms a distinctly favourable mental picture of the young Rittmeister Baron von Richthofen. Our old friend Froissart is credited with the statement that in his age of chivalry it was always impossible to inculcate into the German knights the true spirit of knightliness." Which seems to indicate that the practical German mind of those days could not understand the whimsicalities of the Latin ideas of chivalry, which - for example - bade a knight against whose shield an opponent "brake his spear" haul off out of the fight till the lance-less enemy unsheathed his sword and "drave into the combat" again. Probably the Hun of those days proceeded to stick his opponent in the midriff-wherever it may be - and so finished the fight.

In the same true spirit of knightliness an Englishman knocks a man down and then stands back so that he can get up and have another chance, whereas a more practical person would take excellent care that his opponent never got up till he had acknowledged himself beaten. It is all a matter of the point of view, and largely no doubt a matter of education. However, making due allowance for the point of view, one finds surprisingly little Hunnishness in von Richthofen's manners or methods as set forth in print.

It is one of the accepted facts of the war that the German aviators have displayed greater chivalry than any other branch of the German services. It was a common occurrence for their pilots to fly over our lines in the course of their business, and, by way of variety from that business, to drop packets containing letters from captured British aviators, or the personal belongings of the dead. One gathers that these acts of courtesy have become less frequent of late, owing to the intensification of aerial warfare, but it seems that captured and killed aviators still receive the full courtesies of war from the German aviators, whatever may be the fate of prisoners in other hands afterwards.

It is not surprising therefore to find that, taking him all round, Rittmeister von Richthofen conveys to one the general impression that, *mutatis mutandis*, he is very like an English public school boy of good family. His egotism, as one finds it in the book, is the egotism of a young man who is frankly pleased with himself, but is more elated by his good luck than by his cleverness.

Taking him by and large, one rather likes von Richthofen and one fancies that most of the R.F.C. people who have fought him would be quite pleased after the war to sit at table with him and compare notes over the cigarettes and liquors, as my Naval friend wants to do with his pre-war friends of the German Navy. And there are unhappily not too

many of our present enemies of whom one would like to express such an opinion.

When one comes to read into the book one begins to find many interesting things about the German Army, and the war in general, as well as about the German Feldfliegertruppen or Flying Service. The German is not really a skilful censor. Just as certain portraits painted by an artist at Ruhleben conveyed by the expression of the faces a good deal that Germany would like hidden, so von Richthofen's book, though carefully censored, lets out quite a good deal of information.

The first thing that strikes one is that Germany's standing army at the beginning of the war was nothing like so perfect a fighting machine as we in this country believed. Although, like all the people with any sense in this country, the German Army knew that a war was coming, the officers and men seem to have set about their work in a singularly amateurish way, judging by the short section of the book devoted to the opening of the war on the Russian Front. And one is pleased to find that von Richthofen has the grace to laugh at himself and his brother-officers for their mistakes.

In some ways the soldiers of all nations resemble one another strongly. For instance, one finds in this book the same contempt for what the Germans picturesquely call a "base-hog," as the French have for the "embusque" and as the British frontline officer has for the young and able bodied officer who is "Something on the Staff." This obnoxious breed is the same in all armies, and must be clearly distinguished from the carefully trained and expensively educated General Staff Officer, who is very much of a specialist and is the very brain of the Army.

When we come to the purely aviatic portion of the book one finds more of the real von Richthofen and less of the cavalry officer. His honesty about his utter mental confusion the first time he went into the air recalls General Brancker's famous remark in his lecture to the Aeronautical Society when he said that no one ever sees anything at all during his first hour in the air owing to the hopeless confusion in his mind caused by the novel aspect of everything. Von Richthofen's description of his experience is about the best thing that has been written on the subject.

An interesting bit of information is disclosed in his description of his flight in a "Grossflugzeug," on September 1st, 1915. At that period little was known about twin-engined aeroplanes. The Germans were known to have tried them, but they were not a success. The only example known to our people - though probably there were actually several different machines - was commonly known in the R.F.C. as ... Wong-wong," on account of the curious noise made by the engines or air-screws when

they got ,”out of phase”- as an electrician might call it. This noise is now quite familiar to the inhabitants of Southeastern England as the characteristic note of the Gotha bombers.

Von Richthofen’s good judgment of fighting values, though he was then only an observer, and a novice at that, is shown by his disapproval of the twin-engined aeroplane as a fighting machine. It is also of interest to learn that at that period the Germans had tried an auto-lock device to hold the rudder of a twin-engined machine over to one side so that it would fly straight if one engine went out of action, an ingenious idea even if foredoomed to failure.

It is encouraging to find that though these twin-engined machines were in operation in September, 1915, the first bombing squadron so composed only came into action against defenceless Bucharest a year later. This shows that actually we in this country are not so very much slower in producing our new ideas, for our big Handley Page twin-engined biplanes first flew towards the end of 1915, and we began to use them regularly early in 1917- only a little more than a year later.

The similarity of aviators in all countries is shown by von Richthofen’s frank confession of blue funk when he made his first flight alone. That first solo is always the most anxious time in a pilot’s career. Another touch of that nature which makes all aviators akin is seen in his accounts of how he and other pupils under instruction used to fly off on cross-country training trips and suffer from opportune forced landings in the parks of their friends or in likely-looking estates. One imagined that this manifestation of “wongling” was an essentially English trick, and would not have been tolerated for a moment under the iron discipline of the German Army. In the early days of the R.F.C. this looking for opulent hosts used to be known sarcastically as “hunting for Jew-palaces.”

The state of affairs on the Russian front is well shown in the brief reference in the book. “Flying in the East is absolutely a holiday,” says the writer, who adds that there was no danger on the Russian front, except the danger of being massacred by the Russians if brought down by engine failure. From which one understands that the Russians did not approve of making prisoners of enemy aviators. Their “Archies” were apparently good, but too few to be useful, and their aviators practically did not exist. Which is rather what one ventured to surmise in print at the time, despite the magniloquent Russian communiqués. When one thinks of all the good British and French aeroplanes and engines which were sent to Russia one regrets the waste of material.

On the subject of air fighting, von Richthofen is always worth studying carefully. None will dispute his wisdom in laying stress on the importance of calmness in an air fight. We have lost many good fighting

pilots through their getting excited and dashing headlong into an unequal combat. He, or his editor, has been sufficiently skilful not to give away his pet method of attack. However, one gathers that he depended largely on his first rush for his results, rather than on a prolonged series of manoeuvres.

His dictum that "in air fighting results depend on ability and not on trickery," rather bears out this impression. Nevertheless he occasionally tells of a lengthy tussle with a particularly skilful enemy.

Such a story relates how that very gallant gentleman, Major Lanoe Hawker, one of the best loved and admired of the R.F.C.'s many gallant fighting leaders, fell. It would seem that Major Hawker's machine was outclassed rather than that he was beaten by superior skill. One is glad to find that von Richthofen pays a tribute to the bravery and ability of his enemy, and it is perhaps some slight consolation to those of us who knew Lanoe Hawker to think that he fell a victim to the Germans' best man and not to a chance shot from an unworthy foe.

It is rather curious that some time after emphasizing the fact that trickery does not pay in air fighting, von Richthofen should show how trickery does pay by describing his young brother Lothar's trick of pretending to be shot and letting his machine fall apparently out of control, so as to break off a fight with opponents who were above his weight. One is inclined to wonder how many optimistic young air-fighters have reported enemy machines as "driven down out of control," when in reality the wily Hun has only been getting out of the way of harm. The older hands in these days are not easily caught by such a trick, and the High Command refuses to count any victims so claimed unless the performance is verified by independent witnesses either on the ground or aloft.

Another point of interest in von Richthofen's fighting methods is that he states, that as a rule, he opens fire at 50 yards. Distances are hard to judge in the air. The pilot is more likely to underestimate them than otherwise, just as one does in judging distances at sea. But von Richthofen is probably as good a judge as any, and in this he seems to be stating a plain fact. In these days 50 yards is fairly long range. Some of our own crack fighters prefer 50 feet, if they can get into their favourite positions. Anyhow he shows the unwisdom of opening fire at 1,000 yards, as some inexperienced and excited machine-gunners are rather apt to do.

Von Richthofen's chaser squadron - or Jagdstaffel, as the Germans call these formations - was the first to be known as a "circus." The famous Boelcke squadron, although a fairly mobile body, the members of

which co-operated closely on occasion, never developed formation fighting to the extent that von Richthofen did.

His men, although, as the book shows, they went out periodically on lone-hand ventures, generally flew in a body, numbering any-where from half a dozen to fifteen or so. Their leader chose to paint his little Albatros a brilliant pillar-box red. The others painted their machines according to their fancy. Some had yellow noses, blue bodies and green wings. Some were pale blue underneath and black on top. Some were painted in streaks, some with spots. In fact, they rang the changes on the whole of the paint-box.

They flew wonderfully, being all picked men, and in a fight they performed in a manner which would have seemed impossible to the most expert aerial acrobats.

Also, the squadron was moved from place to place as a self-contained unit, so that it appeared wherever the fighting was thickest, or wherever British or French reconnaissance machines were busiest. It would be operating at Verdun one week. The next week it would be north of Arras. A few days later it would be down on the Somme. But as a rule it specialized on the British front. Wherever it pitched its tents it did its regular squadron performance, and followed it later in the day with lone-hand raids, or "strafing" flight by two or three machines at a time.

When one considers the harlequin colouring of the machines, their acrobatic flying and their "two shows a day" performances from their one-week pitches, it follows logically that the humorists of the R.F.C. simply had to call the squadron "von Richthofen's Travelling Circus."

Since then the word has acquired a meaning of its own among flying men. It connotes practically any special formation organized for the purpose of hunting enemy aviators, and consisting of picked men under a specially skilful leader. It need not necessarily be more mobile than any other squadron, and it need not indulge in freak colourings, though in the nature of its work, its flying must be acrobatic. The British "circuses" are in these days superior to the German circuses, because our machines are now at least as good as those of the Germans, and so our men, who have always been of higher average quality than the German aviators, have a fair chance of proving their skills.

Of those of von Richthofen's circus mentioned in the book, Schäfer was the first to be killed. Before the war he lived in London, to learn English, working in an office in the city, when so inclined, but mostly spending his time on the river, or in sport. Those who knew him say that he was a pleasant lad and a good sportsman.

Voss was the next to go, after what has been described by those who were in it as one of the most gallant fights of the war. On a Fokker

triplane with a French le Rhone engine - evidently an experimental machine built for quick manoeuvring - he fought single-handed a patrol of six of our people, when he could have broken off the fight and have got away by abandoning an inferior companion. He was a brave man and a most brilliant pilot. His flying and shooting in his last fight are said to have been marvellously clever. None admire his brave cry more than those who fought him.

Others of the "circus" have fallen since then, and the present "Richthofen Jagdstaffel" is probably constituted very differently from that band of high-spirited desperadoes which was evolved from the original Boelcke squadron, and helped to build up the fame of von Richthofen. There is none of the old R.F.C. who would not cheerfully kill what is left of the "circus," and there is probably none who would not gladly shake hands with the survivors after peace is declared. They are worthy enemies and brave men.

This little book gives one a useful insight into the enemy's methods, and more than little respect for at any rate some of those whom we are at present endeavouring to kill.

C. G. GREY,

EDITOR, *The Aeroplane*,

1918.

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1 MY FAMILY

THE members of my family - that of Richthofen - have taken no very great part in wars until now. The Richthofens have always lived in the country; indeed, there has scarcely been one of them without a landed estate, and the few who did not live in the country have, as a rule, entered the State service. My grandfather and all my ancestors before him had estates about Breslau and Striegau. Only in the generation of my grandfather it happened that the first Richthofen, his cousin, became a General.

My mother belongs to the family Von Schickfuss und Neudorf. Their character resembles that of the Richthofen people. There were a few soldiers in that family. All the rest were agrarians. The brother of my great-grandfather Schickfuss fell in 1806. During the Revolution of 1848 one of the finest castles of a Schickfuss was burnt down. The Schickfuss have, as a rule, only become Captains of the Reserve.

In the family Schickfuss and in the family Falckenhausen - my grandmother's maiden name was Falckenhausen - there were two principal hobbies: horse riding and game shooting. My mother's brother, Alexander Schickfuss, has done a great deal of game shooting in Africa, Ceylon, Norway and Hungary.

My father is practically the first member of our branch of the family to become a professional soldier. At an early age he entered the Corps of Cadets and later joined the 12th Regiment of Uhlans. He was the most conscientious soldier imaginable. He began to suffer from difficulty of hearing and had to resign. He got ear trouble because he saved one of his men from drowning and though he was wet through and through he

insisted upon continuing his duties as if nothing had happened, wet as he was, without taking notice of the rigor of the weather. The present generation of the Richthofens contains, of course, many more soldiers. In war every able-bodied Richthofen is of course, on active service. In the very beginning of the present war I lost six cousins, and all were in the cavalry.



CAPTAIN BARON VON RICHTHOFEN

I was named after my uncle Manfred, who, in peace time, was adjutant to His Majesty and Commander of the Corps of the Guards. During the war he has been Commander of a Corps of Cavalry.

My father was in the 1st Regiment of Cuirassiers in Breslau when I was born on the 2nd of May, 1892. We then lived at Kleinburg. I received tuition privately until my ninth year. Then I went for a year to school in Schweidnitz and then I became Cadet in Wahlstatt. The people of Schweidnitz considered me as one of themselves. Having been prepared for a military career as a Cadet, I entered the 1st Regiment of Uhlans.

My own adventures and experiences will be found in this book.

My brother, Lothar, is the other flyingman Richthofen. He wears the *Ordre pour le Mérite*. My youngest brother is still in the Corps of Cadets and he is waiting anxiously until he is old enough to go on active service. My sister, like all the ladies of our family, is occupied in nursing the wounded.

MY LIFE AS A CADET

As a little boy of eleven I entered the Cadet Corps. I was not particularly eager to become a Cadet, but my father wished it. So my wishes were not consulted.

I found it difficult to bear the strict discipline and to keep order. I did not care very much for the instruction I received. I never was good at learning things. I did just enough work to pass. In my opinion it would have been wrong to do more than was just sufficient, so I worked as little as possible. The consequence was that my teachers did not think overmuch of me. On the other hand, I was very fond of sport. Particularly I liked gymnastics, football, and other outdoor amusements. I could do all kinds of tricks on the horizontal bar. For this I received various prizes from the Commander.

I had a tremendous liking for all risky foolery. For instance, one fine day, with my friend Frankenberg, I climbed the famous steeple of Wahlstatt by means of the lightning conductor and tied my handkerchief to the top. I remember exactly how difficult it was to negotiate the gutters. Ten years later, when I visited my little brother at Wahlstatt, I saw my handkerchief still tied up high in the air.

My friend Frankenberg was the first victim of the war as far as I know.

I liked very much better the Institution of Lichterfelde. I did not feel so isolated from the world and began to live a little more like a human being.

My happiest reminiscences of Lichterfelde are those of the great sports when my opponent was Prince Frederick Charles. The Prince gained many first prizes against me both in running and football, as I had not trained my body as perfectly as he had done.

I ENTER THE ARMY. (EASTER, 1911)

OF course, I was very impatient to get into the Army. Immediately after passing my examination I came forward and was placed in the 1st Regiment of Uhlans, "Emperor Alexander III." I had selected that regiment. It was garrisoned in my beloved Silesia and I had some acquaintances and relations there, who advised me to join it.

I had a colossal liking for the service with my regiment. It is the finest thing for a young soldier to be a cavalry man.

I can say only little about the time which I passed at the War Academy. My experience there reminds me too much of the Corps of Cadets and consequently my reminiscences are not over agreeable.

I remember that once one of my teachers bought a very fat mare, an amiable animal, whose only fault was that she was rather old. She was supposed to be fifteen years old. She had rather stout legs, but she jumped splendidly. I rode her frequently, and her name was Biffy.

About a year later, when I joined the regiment, my Captain, von Tr---, who was very fond of sport, told me that he had bought a funny little mare, a fat beast, who jumped very nicely. We all were very interested to make the acquaintance of the fat jumping horse who bore the strange name Biffy. I had quite forgotten the old mare of my teacher at the War Academy. One fine morning, the animal arrived and I was astonished to find that the ancient Biffy was now standing as an eight-year-old in the Captain's stable. In the meantime, she had changed her master repeatedly, and had much risen in value. My teacher had bought her for \$375, as a fifteen-year-old, and von Tr- had bought her a year later, as an eight-year-old, for \$850. She won no more prizes for jumping, in spite of her renewed youth, but she changed her master once more and was killed in action in the beginning of the war.

I BECOME AN OFFICER. (AUTUMN, 1912)

AT last I was given the epaulettes. It was a glorious feeling, the finest I have ever experienced when people called me Lieutenant.

My father bought me a beautiful mare called Santuzza. It was a marvellous animal, as hard as nails. She kept her place in the procession like a lamb. In course of time I discovered that she possessed a great talent for jumping and I made up my mind to train her. She jumped incredible heights.

In this enterprise I got much sympathy and co-operation from my comrade von Wedel who won many a prize with his charger, Fandango.

We two trained our horses for a jumping competition and a steeplechase in Breslau. Fandango did gloriously. Santuzza also did well by taking a great deal of trouble. I hoped to achieve something with her. On the day before she was to be put on the train I wished once more to jump all the obstacles in our training ground. In doing so we slipped. Santuzza hurt her shoulder and I broke my collar-bone.

I expected that my dear fat mare, Santuzza, would also be a quick runner and was extremely surprised when she was beaten by Wedel's thoroughbred.

Another time I had the good fortune to ride a very fine horse at a Sports Meeting at Breslau. My horse did extremely well and I had hopes of succeeding. After a run of about half the course I approached the last obstacle. At a long distance I saw that the obstacle in front was bound to be something extraordinary because a great crowd was watching near it. I said to myself: "Keep your spirits up. You are sure to get into trouble!" I approached the obstacle, going full speed. The people about waved to me and shouted that I should not go so fast, but I neither heard nor saw. My horse jumped over and on the other side there was a steep slope with the river Weistriz in front. Before I could say knife the horse, having jumped, fell with a gigantic leap into the river and horse and rider disappeared. Of course, I was thrown over the head of the animal. Felix got out of the river on the one side and I on the other. When I came back, the weighing people were surprised that I had put on ten pounds instead of losing two pounds as usual. Happily no one noticed that I was wet through and through.

I had also a very good charger. The unfortunate beast had learned to do everything—running, steeplechasing, jumping, army service. There was nothing that the poor beast had not learned. Its name was Blume and I had some pleasant successes with him. The last prize I got riding that horse was when I rode for the Kaiser Prize in 1913. I was the only one who got over the whole course without a single slip. In doing so I had an experience which cannot easily be repeated. In galloping over a piece of heath land, I suddenly stood on my head. The horse had stepped into a rabbit hole and in my fall I broke my collar-bone. Notwithstanding the breakage, I rode another forty miles without making a mistake and arrived keeping good time.

2 THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

ALL the papers contained nothing but fantastic stories about the war. However, for several months we had been accustomed to war talk. We had so often packed our service trunks that the whole thing had become tedious. No one believed any longer that there would be war. We, who were close to the frontier, who were “the eyes of the Army,” to use the words of my Commander, believed least that there would be war.

On the day before military preparations began we were sitting with the people of the detached squadron at a distance of ten kilometres from the frontier, in the officers’ club. We were eating oysters, drinking champagne and gambling a little. We were very merry. No one thought of war.

It is true that, some days before, Wedel’s mother had startled us a little. She had arrived from Pomerania in order to see her son before the beginning of the war. As she found us in the pleasantest mood and as she ascertained that we did not think of war, she felt morally compelled to invite us to a very decent luncheon.

We were extremely gay and noisy when suddenly the door opened. It disclosed Count Kospoth, the Administrator of Ols. He looked like a ghost.

We greeted our old friend with a loud Hoorah! He explained to us the reason of his arrival. He had come personally to the frontier in order to convince himself whether the rumours of an impending world-war were

true. He assumed, quite correctly, that the best information could be obtained at the frontier. He was not a little surprised when he saw our peaceful assembly. We learned from him that all the bridges in Silesia were being patrolled by the military and that steps were being taken to fortify various positions.

We convinced him quickly that the possibility of war was absolutely nil and continued our festivity.

On the next day we were ordered to take the field.

WE CROSS THE FRONTIER

To us cavalry men on the frontier the word "war" had nothing unfamiliar. Everyone of us knew to the smallest detail what to do and what to leave undone. At the same time, nobody had a very clear idea, what the first thing would be. Every soldier was delighted to be able to show his capacity and his personal value.

We young cavalry Lieutenants had the most interesting task. We were to study the ground, to work towards the rear of the enemy, and to destroy important objects. All these tasks require real men.

Having in my pocket my directions and having convinced myself of their importance, through hard study during at least a year, I rode at the head of a file of soldiers for the first time against the enemy at twelve o'clock midnight.

A river marks the frontier and I expected to be fired upon on reaching it. To my astonishment I could pass over the bridge without an incident. On the next morning, without having had any adventures, we reached the church tower of the village of Kieltze, which was well known to us through our frontier rides.

Everything had happened without seeing anything of the enemy or rather without being seen by him. The question now was what should I do in order not to be noticed by the villagers? My first idea was to lock up the "pope"¹. We fetched him from his house, to his great surprise. I locked him up among the bells in the church tower, took away the ladder and left him sitting up above. I assured him that he would be executed if the population should show any hostile inclinations. A sentinel placed on the tower observed the neighbourhood.

¹ *Russian priest.*

I had to send reports every day by dispatch-riders. Very soon my small troop was converted entirely into dispatch-riders and dissolved, so that I had at last, as the only one remaining, to bring in my own report.

Up to the fifth night everything had been quiet. During that night the sentinel came suddenly rushing to the church tower near which the horses had been put. He called out, "The Cossacks are there!" The night was as dark as pitch. It rained a little. No stars were visible. One couldn't see a yard ahead.

As a precaution we had previously breached the wall around the churchyard. Through the breach we took the horses into the open. The darkness was so great that we were in perfect security after having advanced fifty yards. I myself went with the sentinel, carbine in hand, to the place where he pretended he had seen Cossacks.

Gliding along the churchyard wall I came to the street. When I got there I experienced a queer feeling, for the street swarmed with Cossacks. I looked over the wall, behind which the rascals had put the horses. Most of them had lanterns, and they acted very uncautiously and were very loud. I estimated that there were from twenty to thirty of them. One had left his horse and gone to the Pope whom I had let off the day before.

Immediately it flashed through my brain: "Of course we are betrayed!" Therefore, we had to be doubly careful. I could not risk a fight because I could not dispose of more than two carbines. Therefore, I resolved to play at robber and police.

After having rested a few hours, our visitors rode away again.

On the next day I thought it wise to change our quarters. On the seventh day I was again back in my garrison and everyone stared at me as if I were a ghost. The staring was not due to my unshaved face, but because there had been a rumour that Wedel and I had fallen at Kalisch. The place where it had occurred, the time and all the circumstances of my death had been reported with such a wealth of detail that the report had spread throughout Silesia. My mother had already received visits of condolence. The only thing that had been omitted was an announcement of my death in the newspaper.

An amusing incident happened about the same time. A veterinary surgeon had been ordered to take ten Uhlans and to requisition horses on a farm. The farm was situated about two miles from the road. He came back full of excitement and reported to us:

"I was riding over a stubble field, the field where the scarecrows are, when I suddenly saw hostile infantry at a distance. Without a moment's hesitation I drew my sword and ordered the Uhlans to attack them with their lances. The men were delighted and at the fastest gallop they

rushed across the field. When we came near the enemy I discovered that the hostile infantry consisted of some deer which were grazing in a nearby meadow. At that distance I had mistaken them for soldiers, owing to my short-sightedness.”

For a long time that dear gentleman had to suffer the pleasantries of the rest of us because of his bold attack.

TO FRANCE

WE were ordered to take the train in my garrison town. No one had any idea in what direction we were to go. There were many rumours but most of the talk was very wild. However, in this present case, we had the right idea: westward.

A second-class compartment had been given to four of us. We had to take in provisions for a long railway journey. Liquid refreshments, of course, were not lacking. However, already on the first day we discovered that a second-class compartment is altogether too narrow for four warlike youths. Therefore, we resolved to distribute ourselves. I arranged part of a luggage car and converted it into a bed-drawing room, to my great advantage. I had light, air, and plenty of space. I procured straw at one of the stations and put a tent cloth on top of it. In my improvised sleeping-car I slept as well as I did in my four-poster in Ostrowo. We travelled night and day, first through Silesia, and then through Saxony, going westward all the time. Apparently we were going in the direction of Metz. Even the train conductor did not know where he was going to. At every station, even at stations where we did not stop, there were huge crowds of men and women who bombarded us with cheers and flowers. The German nation had been seized by a wild war enthusiasm. That was evident. The Uhlans were particularly admired. The men in the train who had passed through the station before us had probably reported that we had met the enemy, and we had been at war only for a week. Besides, my regiment had been mentioned in the first official communiqué. The 1st Regiment of Uhlans and the 155th Regiment of Infantry had taken Kalisch. We were therefore celebrated as heroes and naturally felt like heroes. Wedel had found a Cossack sword which he showed to admiring girls. He made a great impression with it. Of course we asserted that blood was sticking to it and we invented hair-raising tales about this peaceful sword of a police officer. We were very, wild and merry until we were disembarked from the train at Busendorf, near Diedenhofen.

A short time before the train arrived we were held up in a long tunnel. It is uncomfortable enough to stop in a tunnel in peace time, but to stop suddenly in war is still more uncomfortable. Some excited, high-

spirited fellow wanted to play a joke and fired a shot. Before long there was general firing in the tunnel. It was surprising that no one was hurt. It has never been found out how the general shooting was brought about.

At Busendorf we had to get out of the train. The heat was so great that our horses almost collapsed. On the following day we marched unceasingly northward in the direction of Luxemburg. In the meantime, I had discovered that my brother had ridden in the same direction with a cavalry division a week before. I discovered his spoor once more, but I didn't see him until a year later.

After arriving in Luxemburg no one knew what our relations with the people of that little State were. When I saw a Luxemburg prisoner, he told me that he would complain about me to the German Emperor if I did not set him free immediately. I thought there was reason in what he said. So I let him go. We passed through the town of Luxemburg and through Esch and we approached the first fortified towns of Belgium.

While advancing our infantry, and indeed, our whole division, manoeuvred exactly as in peace time. All were extremely excited. It was a good thing that we had to act exactly as we had done at manoeuvres, otherwise, we should certainly have done some wild things. To the right and to the left of us, before and behind us, on every road, marched troops belonging to different army corps. One had the feeling that everything was in a great disorder. Suddenly, this unspeakable cuddle-muddle was dissolved and became a most wonderfully arranged evolution.

I was entirely ignorant about the activities of our flying men, and I got tremendously excited whenever I saw an aviator. Of course I had not the slightest idea whether it was a German airman, or an enemy. I had at that time not even the knowledge that the German machines were marked with crosses and the enemy machines with circles. The consequence was that every aeroplane we saw was fired upon. Our old pilots are still telling of their painful feelings while being shot at by friend and enemy with perfect impartiality. We marched and marched, sending patrols far ahead, until we arrived at Arlon. I had an uneasy feeling when crossing, for a second time, an enemy frontier. Obscure reports of francs-tireurs², had already come to my ears.

I had been ordered to work in connection with my cavalry division, acting as a connecting link. On that day I had ridden no less than sixty-

² Literally "free shooters"- sometimes used to refer more generally to guerrilla fighters who fight outside the laws of war.

six miles³ with my men. Not a horse failed us. That was a splendid achievement. At Arlon I climbed the steeple in accordance with the tactical principles which we had been taught in peace time. Of course, I saw nothing, for the wicked enemy was still far away. At that time we were very harmless. For instance, I had my men outside the town and had ridden alone on bicycle right through the town to the church tower and ascended it. When I came down again I was surrounded by a crowd of angry young men who made hostile eyes and who talked threateningly in undertones. My bicycle had, of course, been punctured and I had to go on foot for half an hour. This incident amused me. I should have been delighted had it come to a fight. I felt absolutely sure of myself with a pistol in my hand.

Later on I heard that several days previously, the inhabitants had behaved very seditiously towards our cavalry, and later on towards our hospitals. It had therefore been found necessary to place quite a number of these gentlemen against the wall. In the afternoon I reached the station to which I had been ordered, and learned that close to Arlon my only cousin Richthofen had been killed three days before. During the rest of the day I stayed with the Cavalry Division. During the night a causeless alarm took place, and late at night I reached my own regiment.

That was a beautiful time. We cavalry men, who had already been in touch with the enemy and had seen something of war, were envied by the men of the other armies. For me it was the most beautiful time during the whole of the war. I would much like to pass again through the beginning of the war.

I HEAR THE WHISTLING OF THE FIRST BULLETS. (21-22ND AUGUST, 1915)

I had been ordered to find out the strength of the enemy occupying the large forest near Virton. I started with fifteen Uhlans and said to myself: "To-day I shall have the first fight with the enemy." But my task was not easy. In so big a forest there may be lots of things hidden which one can not see.

I went to the top of a little hill. A few hundred paces in front of me was a huge forest extending over many thousands of acres. It was a beautiful August morning. The forest seemed so peaceful and still that I almost forgot all my war-like ideas.

³ This seems to be a translator's mistake for kilometers, which would mean a little over 40 miles – in itself a sufficiently fine performance.

We approached the margin of the forest. As we could not discover anything suspicious with our field glasses we had to go near and find out whether we should be fired upon. The men in front were swallowed up by a forest lane. I followed and at my side was one of my best Uhlans. At the entrance to the forest was a lonely forester's cottage. We rode past it.

The soil indicated that a short time previously considerable numbers of hostile cavalry must have passed. I stopped my men, encouraged them by addressing a few words to them, and felt sure that I could absolutely rely upon every one of my soldiers. Of course no one thought of anything except of attacking the enemy. It lies in the instinct of every German to rush at the enemy wherever he meets him, particularly if he meets hostile cavalry. In my mind's eye I saw myself at the head of my little troop sabering a hostile squadron, and was quite intoxicated with joyful expectation. The eyes of my Uhlans sparkled. Thus we followed the spoor at a rapid trot. After a sharp ride of an hour through the most beautiful mountain dale, the wood became thinner. We approached the exit. I felt convinced that there we should meet the enemy. Therefore, caution! To the right of our narrow path was a steep rocky wall many yards high. To the left, was a narrow rivulet and at the further side a meadow, fifty yards wide, surrounded by barbed wire. Suddenly, the trace of horses' hooves disappeared over a bridge into the bushes. My leading men stopped because the exit from, the forest was blocked by a barricade.

Immediately I recognized that I had fallen into a trap. I saw a movement among the bushes behind the meadow at my left and noticed dismounted hostile cavalry. I estimated that there were fully one hundred rifles. In that direction nothing could be done. My path right ahead was cut by the barricade. To the right were steep rocks. To the left the barbed wire surrounded the meadow and prevented me attacking as I had intended. Nothing was to be done except to go back. I knew that my dear Uhlans would be willing to do everything except to run away from the enemy. That spoilt our fun, for a second later we heard the first shot which was followed by very intensive rifle fire from the wood. The distance was from fifty to one hundred yards. I had told my men that they should join me immediately when they saw me lifting up my hand. I felt sure we had to go back. So I lifted my arm and beckoned my men to follow. Possibly, they misunderstood my gesture. The cavalrymen who were following me believed me in danger, and they came rushing along at a great speed to help me to get away. As we were on a narrow forest path one can imagine the confusion which followed. There ensued a panic because the noise of every shot was increased tenfold by the narrowness of the path. The horses of the two men ahead rushed away and the last I saw of them was as they leaped the barricade. I never heard anything of