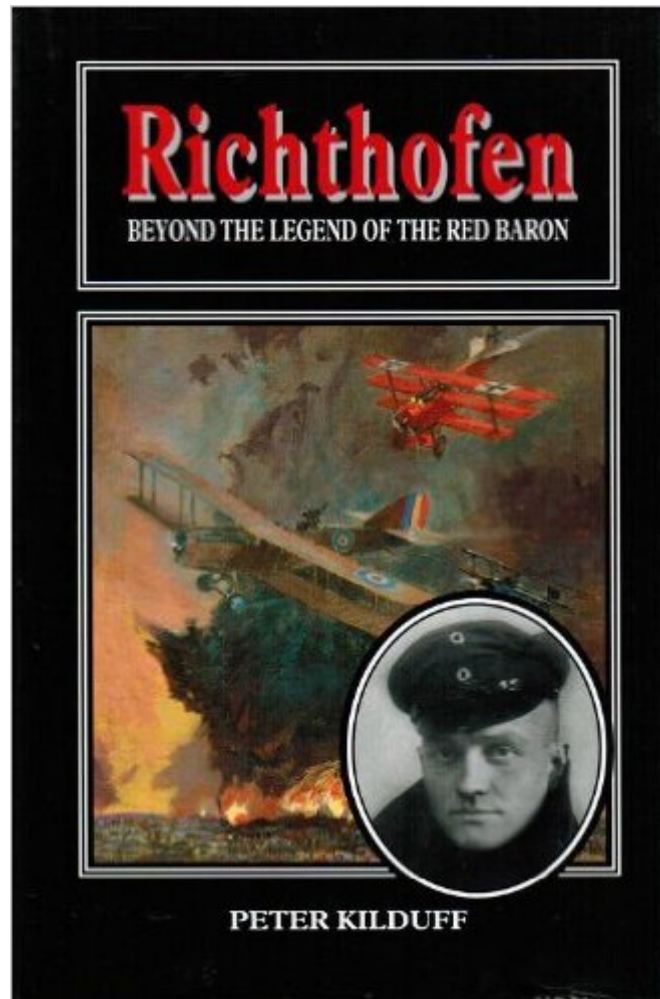


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Richthofen: Beyond The Legend Of The Red Baron



Synopsis

Using new research from East Germany, this is a biography of Baron Manfred von Richthofen, also known as the Red Baron, the celebrated flying ace of World War I. The book includes personal writings by the Baron plus new anecdotes and accounts from his contemporaries.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Prior to reading "Richthofen: Beyond the Legend of the Red Baron" by Peter Kilduff, the extent of my knowledge regarding the Red Baron was that he was Snoopy's arch-nemesis and that the name is used on a brand of frozen pizzas. In actuality, he was a very decent and honorable soldier (for Germany during WWI) who was credited with having shot down more enemy planes than any other flier during the war and a pioneer in military aviation tactics. When he was finally shot down and killed at the age of 25 (a young man in contrast to the grossly inaccurate depiction on the pizza box!) he had brought down 80 British and French airplanes, and was revered as a national hero in Germany and feared by his enemies elsewhere. And while the book does a very good job at documenting those he shot down (names, places, dates and times, plane ID #s), that part of it wasn't terribly interesting. In fact I had a hard time getting into the book until about the mid-point. Although I'm not particularly interested in aviation history, I still found it an interesting story and I enjoyed the insights into the man behind the legend. And I agree with the author that his moodiness and change in attitude toward the end of his life had less to do with the head wound he had previously suffered (as is posited on several websites I've since read) and more to do with the fact that he was suffering from "battle fatigue" or "combat stress." Or, as Richthofen's mother put it, "I

believe he has seen death too often."

The author treated the subject very well and cut through the myths and got to the real person as well as anyone who wasn't there at the time. A very good and interesting read for anyone who likes good history.

"Richtofen" purports to "use the newly released archives of the former East Germany" to add some detail to basic outline of Manfred von Richtofen's life. The book does justice to its subject; no doubt about that. The narrative has many first-person accounts, and copious footnotes. But for all that, there's frankly not much REALLY new here at all. Most of what is new is minutiae: this victory is not RE8 S/N 05638 but RE8 S/N 61645-type statements. The author does include the latest research on the Fokker Dr1 and demythologizes that aircraft at least. (Richtofen wasn't overly enchanted with it, contrary to legend, but the fighter he really wanted the DVI was not ready.) I was frankly surprised to see a serious gap in the research that I read while living in Germany. The Luftwaffe Surgeon-General pulled Richtofen's medical records out of the archives and made a possibly crucial psycho-physiological profile of him ca 1917/18. This profile concludes that his head injury sustained in 1917, was serious enough to permanently ground him (even at the time; German medicine in WW1 led the world). He also found evidence that the famous nurse who attended him, Kaetie Obersdorf was a compromise between the Surgeon-General's office and Richtofen/High Command. Finally, and most relevant for Kilduff's book, the profile's author proposes that chronic symptoms from the injury may have impaired Richtofen's judgement: leading to his fatal mistakes on 21 April 1918. If you have a casual interest in Richtofen or WW1 fighter aviation, this book might be worthwhile. Serious students/enthusiasts of Richtofen will learn nothing substantially new.

M. v. Richtofen may well end up being a boring Hero. Disciplined, methodical, practical...and opportunistic, The Red Baron's airplane and title were more exciting than the "real" man. Kilduff plays it for history, not drama. No sex scandals, no rakish behavior, no grandstanding, no arrogance - The Red Barron was simply a guy who decided to be good at his job of killing other people with his airplanes - at least that's how Kilduff records him. Based on history, Kilduff is probably right on, too. Nevertheless, don't let the warning of "dryness" scare away. Kilduff brings to light many interesting, periodic details that will tickle aviation, history and general readers alike. Surely, this book is worth buying - for self or as a gift. Just don't expect Sagittarius Rising - now THAT is a WW1 story (but no where near as legendary). Credit goes to Kilduff for telling it like it is. Thank you.

Mr. Kilduff's book is a thorough review of the facts, but I couldn't help but finding it a bit dry. Technically speaking, the book is very well cross-referenced and foot-noted, making it an easy quick-reference manual. But I felt it lacked personality. There's an over-emphasis on relating a chronological listing of dates, times, places, aircraft types shot down and serial numbers; and the heavy reliance on using German-language terms can bog the narrative down in places. I still find William Burrows' book RICHTHOFEN: A True History Of The Red Baron from 1969 to be an over-all better read. Mr. Kilduff's companion volume THE ILLUSTRATED RED BARON however, is excellent.

I found the book, Richthofen: Beyond the legend of the Red Baron to be a wonderful book. It was exciting and very interesting. Reading the letters in the book truly help the reader understand the man and the times he lived in. Lisa

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