

Anthony Fokker Films Manfred von Richthofen and Other German Fighter Pilots at the Front in Belgium (1917)

Abstract

Dutchman A.H.G. “Anthony” Fokker (1890-1919) studied aircraft construction in Germany and founded his first aircraft factory in Johannisthal near Berlin at the age of 22. Fokker, who was also a trained pilot, often flew the aircraft he designed himself during test flights and flight demonstrations. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, he had established business contacts with the German military, which became the main customer for his aircraft once the war broke out. Fokker now began designing his aircraft according to the specific requirements of the German military's nascent air arm (the Fliegertruppen des deutschen Kaiserreichs, later the Luftstreitkräfte). In 1915, Fokker was granted German citizenship at the behest of the Supreme Army Command. This clip is taken from a film that Anthony Fokker shot in 1917 while visiting the front in Belgium to meet German military pilots who flew Fokker aircraft and obtain their feedback. Fokker himself can be seen in the film, wearing a suit and coat. As the film's title suggests, he was particularly interested in meeting Manfred von Richthofen (1892-1918), the most famous fighter pilot of the First World War, who was also known as the “Red Baron” because of the paintwork on his aircraft. Also seen in this clip is the future Nazi leader Hermann Göring (1:46 and 7:29), also among the highly decorated fighter pilots of the First World War. (Göring ended up commanding Richthofen's squadron several months after Richthofen had been killed in action.) In addition to footage of the aircraft (Fokker D.VII) and their pilots in action, Fokker's footage also documents the improvised airfields, as well as the everyday life of the pilots involved in the air war, seen swimming, playing with puppies (and even pet monkeys). While Zeppelins were still being used to drop bombs at the beginning of the First World War, the use of modern fighter planes quickly became a priority for all warring parties, primarily to intercept enemy aircraft that were spotting for artillery. Thus, the war significantly hastened the development of aviation technology; at 13:10, we see a Fokker Dr. I triplane. The film clip also shows a British tank (a Mark IV of the 12th Division at 5:12) knocked out by German artillery at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917.

When Germany was prohibited from building aircraft under the Treaty of Versailles after its defeat, Anthony Fokker initially returned to the Netherlands before emigrating to the United States in 1926.

Source

Source: Richthofen Film, camera: Anton H. G. Fokker, 1917. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 12635.
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/12635/673078>

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