

Manfred von Richthofen - Germany's World War I ace - flew a Fokker DR1 which was painted red. He was credited with shooting down victims 79 and 80 on the 20th of April, 1918.

The next day, the "Red Baron" was shot down himself over Vaux-sur-Somme (in northern France). It is believed he was shot from the ground.

Even the skilled pilot, he was able to land his plane, despite his injuries. Soon after the crash, his plane was stripped by souvenir hunters. It is said his last word was "Kaput."

This historic archival footage depicts von Richthofen's funeral (which took place on the 23rd of April, 1918).

Dr. Hennings Allmers, who has examined various archival records on the death of the Red Baron, notes the following regarding his final injuries:

On the evening of April 21, 1918, an inspection of the body by a Captain and a Lieutenant of the British Royal Army Medical Corps showed an entrance wound 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 his chest, about half an inch below the left nipple and about three-quarters of an inch external to it.

On April 22, 1918, the consulting surgeon and the consulting physician of the British 4th Army made a surface examination of the body. They found the wounds as described above "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". Thus ends the available medical record for the Red Baron.

The funeral, in this clip, was conducted by Commonwealth (not German) forces:

After his death he was first buried in a village churchyard at Bertangles near Amiens, France, with full military honours by the Commonwealth forces. Later the coffin was transferred to a War Graves Commission cemetery.

During the Weimar Republic, the Invalidenfriedhof in Berlin--the Prussian equivalent of the US Arlington National Cemetery--was to become his resting place by wish of the German government and veterans' organisations. On Nov 20, 1925, he was reburied there.

The German President Paul von Hindenburg as well as the Chancellor with nearly the whole cabinet were among the dignitaries present. Von Richthofen's reburial was seen as a symbol of homecoming that was appreciated by the many people whose loved ones were buried in foreign soil or missing in action.

In 1961 when the Berlin Wall was constructed, the Invalidenfriedhof was at the very edge of the demarcation zone in the Russian sector. It was only possible to visit the cemetery with special permission. For this reason von Richthofen's surviving brother, Bolko, who had been in charge of the transfer of the remains from France in 1925, got permission from the East German government to rebury the remains in the family burial plot in Wiesbaden before his death in 1971.

The reburial took place in 1975. The original grave marker is kept by the Jadgeschwader Richthofen in Wittmund, Ostfriesland.

When he died, Manfred von Richthofen was two weeks away from his 26th birthday. His autobiographical work - The Red Battle Flyer - is available online.

Credits:

Archival footage from the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces. (It is believed that Australian gunners were, at least in part, responsible for downing von Richthofen's plane.) Video online, courtesy Australian War Memorial Channel at YouTube.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Manfred-von-Richthofen-Death-of-Red-Baron>