

A collage of various WWI-era aircraft, including biplanes and a large bomber, flying in a cloudy sky. The aircraft are rendered in a detailed, slightly stylized manner, with some showing military markings like the Iron Cross.

THE

The Graphic History of Richthofen's
Flying Circus and the Air War in WWI

RED BARON



WAYNE VANSANT

author of *Normandy and*
Bombing Nazi Germany

THE RED BARON

**The Graphic History of
Richthofen's Flying Circus
and the Air War in WWI**

WAYNE VANSANT



ZENITH PRESS

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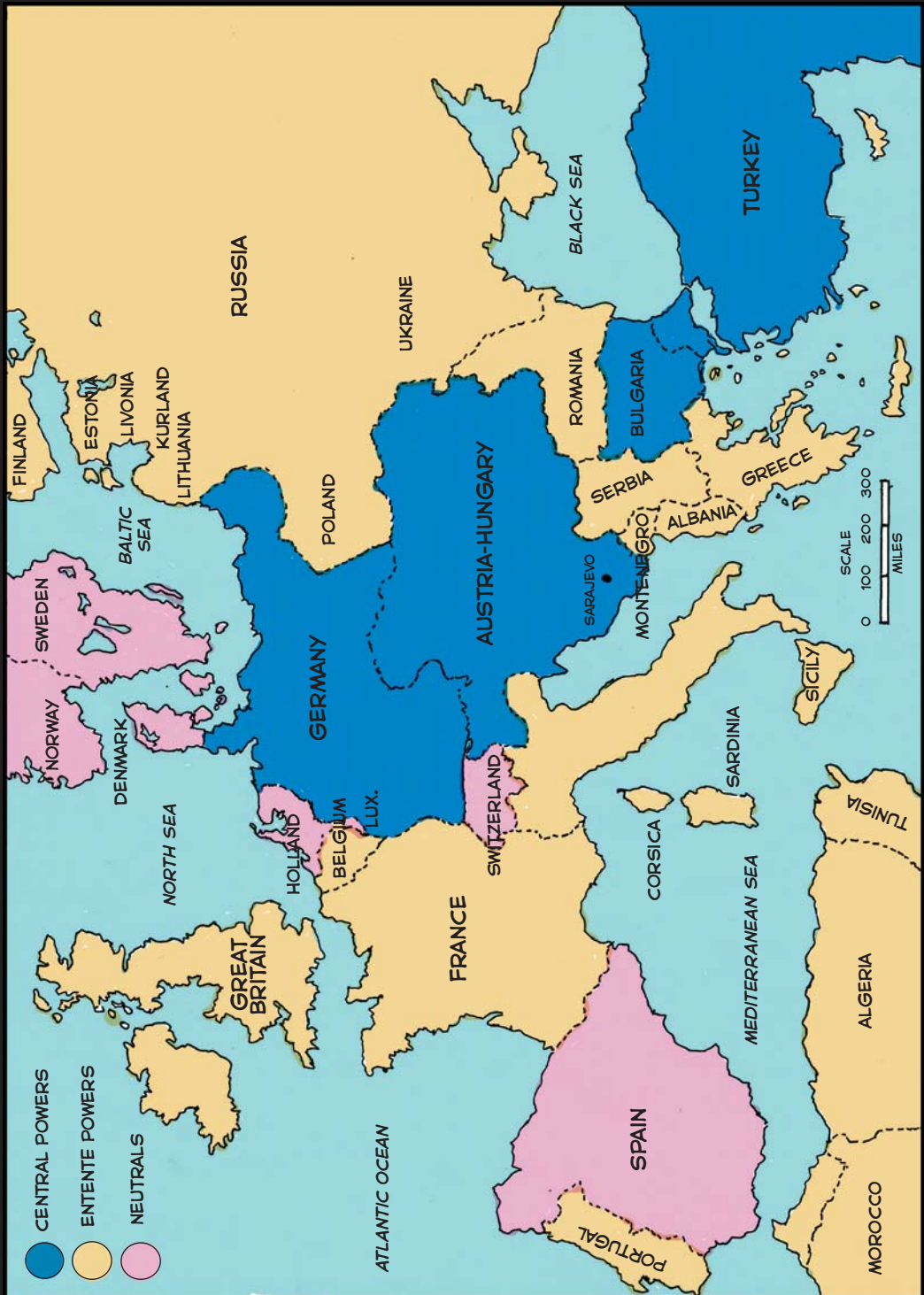
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EUROPE, CIRCA 1914





ON THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 4, 1914, THE IMPERIAL GERMAN ARMY OF KAISER WILHELM II, THE KING OF PRUSSIA AND THE LAST GERMAN EMPEROR, INVADIED BELGIUM AND FRANCE. THE FRENCH ARMY STOPPED THE GERMAN ADVANCE ON PARIS AT THE MARNE RIVER, AND FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS, THE MILITARY LINE FORMED BY BOTH SIDES OPERATED FROM A LONG MEANDERING NETWORK OF FORTIFIED TRENCHES THAT STRETCHED FROM THE NORTH SEA ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE FRENCH BORDER WITH SWITZERLAND.

ALONG THIS LINE—WITH GERMANS ON ONE SIDE AND THE FRENCH, THE BRITISH, AND THEIR ALLIES ON THE OTHER—SOLDIERS FOUGHT HUGE BATTLES INVOLVING HEAVY ARTILLERY, HUNDREDS UPON HUNDREDS OF MACHINE GUNS, BARBED WIRE, AND, TO THE HORROR OF ALL, POISON GAS. MILLIONS OF MEN FELL IN THESE TERRIBLE BATTLES, AND MILLIONS MORE WERE MAIMED OR DRIVEN INSANE BY THEIR EXPERIENCE IN THE WAR. MANY CALLED THIS EVENT, WHAT WOULD BE KNOWN AS WORLD WAR I, “THE WAR TO END ALL WARS,” BUT TO THOSE WHO LIVED IN THE MUD AND SQUALOR, IT SEEMED MORE LIKE THE WAR THAT WOULD NEVER END.

BUT IN THE SKIES OVER EUROPE, THE TWO SIDES FOUGHT ANOTHER WAR—A WAR OF GALLANT CHIVALRY AND KNIGHTLY HONOR—IN WHICH A MAN COULD FACE AN INDIVIDUAL ENEMY HE RESPECTED AND ADMIRER. HIGH ABOVE THE TERROR AND CHAOS ON THE GROUND, THE TWO OF THEM COULD SETTLE THE ISSUE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AS MEN CLAD IN SUITS OF ARMOR ONCE DID HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE.

THOSE WATCHING BELOW FOUND THE AIR WARS GRACEFUL AND BEAUTIFUL. AND THOSE WHO FOUGHT THEM LIVED BY SKILLS AND WITS HONED BY THEIR EXPERIENCES IN THE SKY. AS THE WAR TO END ALL WARS PROGRESSED, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ON THE GROUND AND IN THE AIR FOCUSED THEIR ATTENTION ON A BLOOD-RED PLANE THAT SEEMED TO DOMINATE THE BATTLES IN THE SKIES.

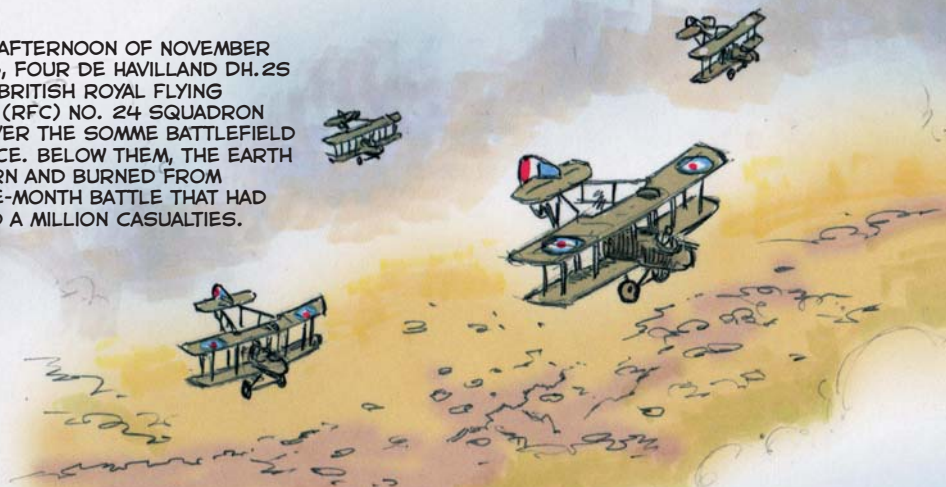
THE MEN ON THE GROUND REFERRED TO THE PILOT OF THAT BLOOD-RED PLANE BY MANY NAMES. HIS GERMAN COMRADES CALLED HIM “DER ROTE KAMPFFLIEGER” (RED FIGHTER PILOT). THE FRENCH USED THE TERM “LE DIABLE ROUGE” (RED DEVIL) OR “LE PETIT ROUGE” (LITTLE RED). TO THE BRITISH, CANADIANS, AND AMERICANS, HE WAS KNOWN AS “THE RED KNIGHT OF GERMANY” AND “THE RED BARON.”



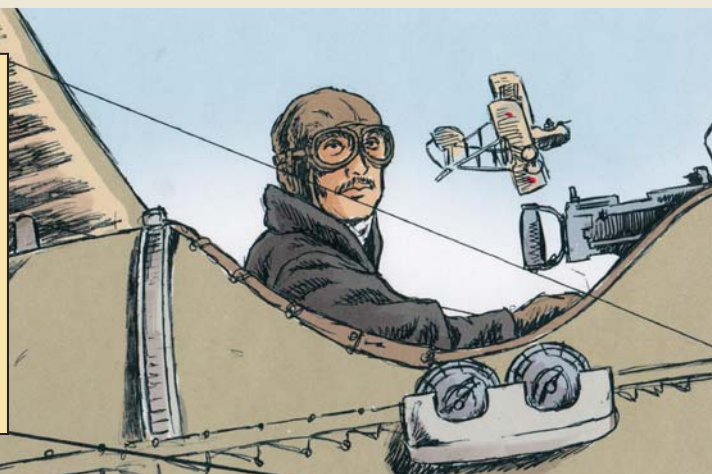
HUNTERS IN THE SKY



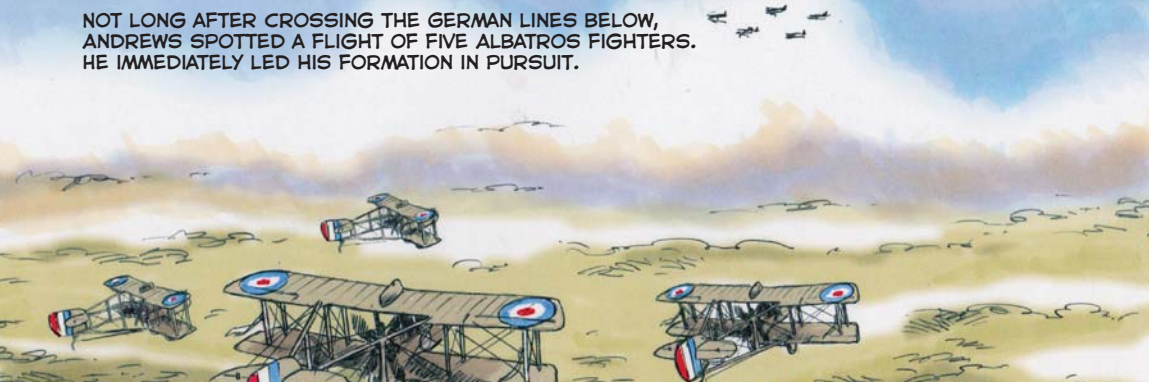
ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 23, 1916, FOUR DE HAVILLAND DH.2S OF THE BRITISH ROYAL FLYING CORPS' (RFC) NO. 24 SQUADRON FLEW OVER THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD IN FRANCE. BELOW THEM, THE EARTH WAS TORN AND BURNED FROM THE FIVE-MONTH BATTLE THAT HAD CLAIMED A MILLION CASUALTIES.



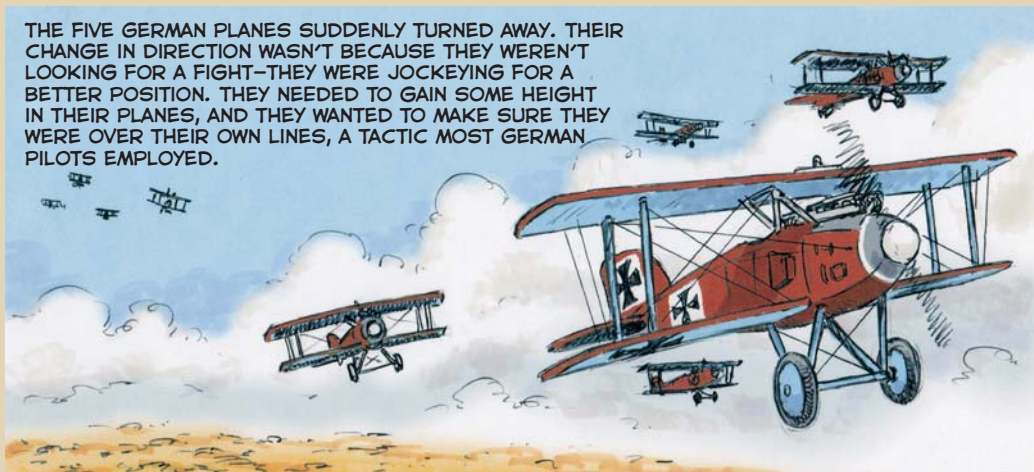
CAPTAIN J. O. ANDREWS LED THE PATROL, BUT THAT AFTERNOON MAJ. LANOE G. HAWKER COMMANDED THE 24TH SQUADRON. HAWKER, A SKILLED AND DARING PILOT, HAD ALREADY DOWNED NINE GERMAN PLANES AND HAD RECEIVED THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER AND THE VICTORIA CROSS, THE HIGHEST MILITARY HONOR IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE. HE WAS A GREAT PILOT . . .



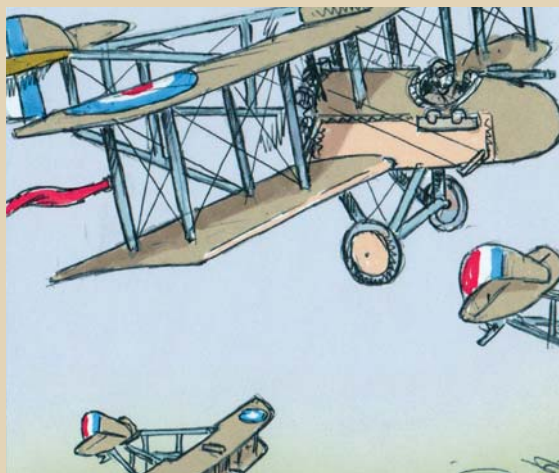
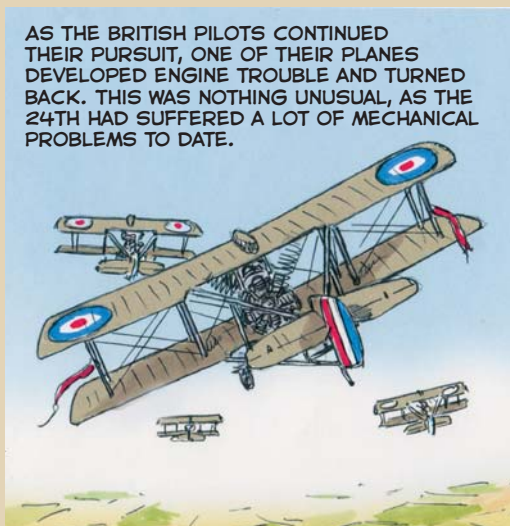
NOT LONG AFTER CROSSING THE GERMAN LINES BELOW, ANDREWS SPOTTED A FLIGHT OF FIVE ALBATROS FIGHTERS. HE IMMEDIATELY LED HIS FORMATION IN PURSUIT.



THE FIVE GERMAN PLANES SUDDENLY TURNED AWAY. THEIR CHANGE IN DIRECTION WASN'T BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T LOOKING FOR A FIGHT—THEY WERE JOCKEYING FOR A BETTER POSITION. THEY NEEDED TO GAIN SOME HEIGHT IN THEIR PLANES, AND THEY WANTED TO MAKE SURE THEY WERE OVER THEIR OWN LINES, A TACTIC MOST GERMAN PILOTS EMPLOYED.

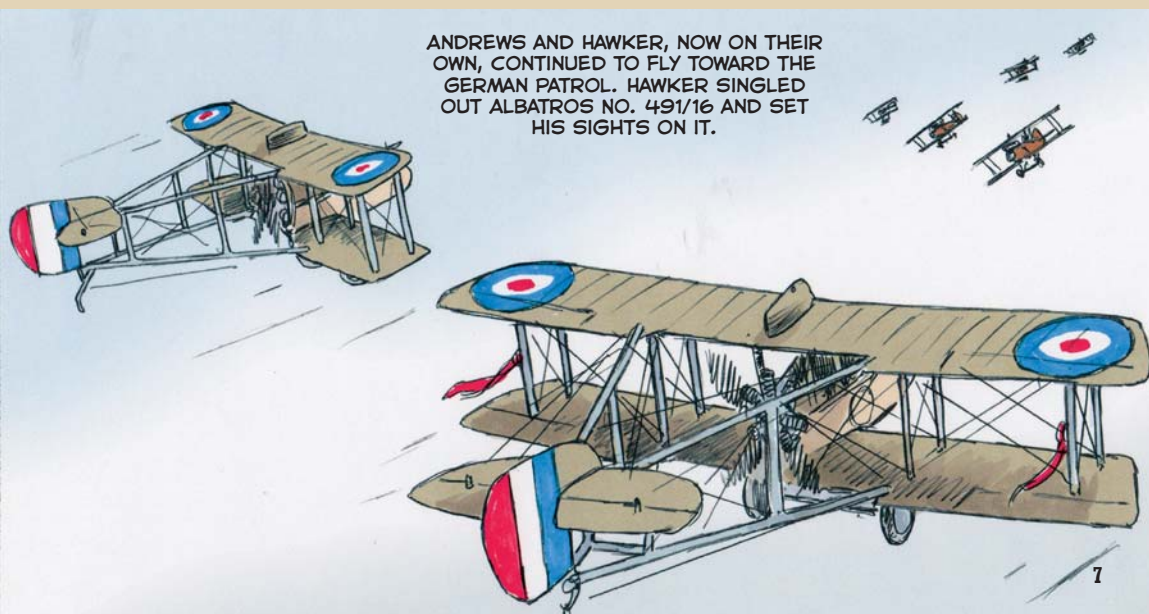


AS THE BRITISH PILOTS CONTINUED THEIR PURSUIT, ONE OF THEIR PLANES DEVELOPED ENGINE TROUBLE AND TURNED BACK. THIS WAS NOTHING UNUSUAL, AS THE 24TH HAD SUFFERED A LOT OF MECHANICAL PROBLEMS TO DATE.



THEN A SECOND PLANE'S ENGINE BEGAN TO SPUTTER, AND ITS PILOT TURNED BACK.

ANDREWS AND HAWKER, NOW ON THEIR OWN, CONTINUED TO FLY TOWARD THE GERMAN PATROL. HAWKER SINGLED OUT ALBATROS NO. 491/16 AND SET HIS SIGHTS ON IT.



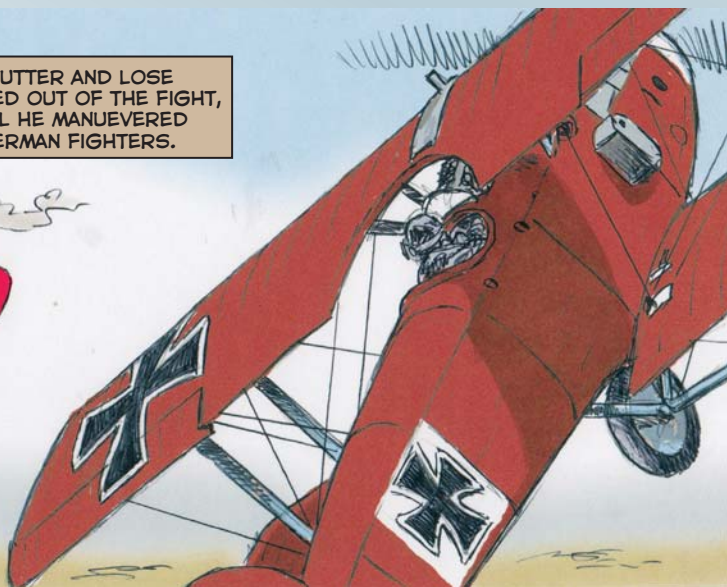
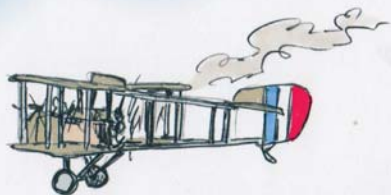


ANDREWS HAD ALSO PICKED OUT A GERMAN PLANE TO ATTACK, BUT NO SOONER HAD HE TAKEN UP POSITION BEHIND HIS INTENDED VICTIM . . .

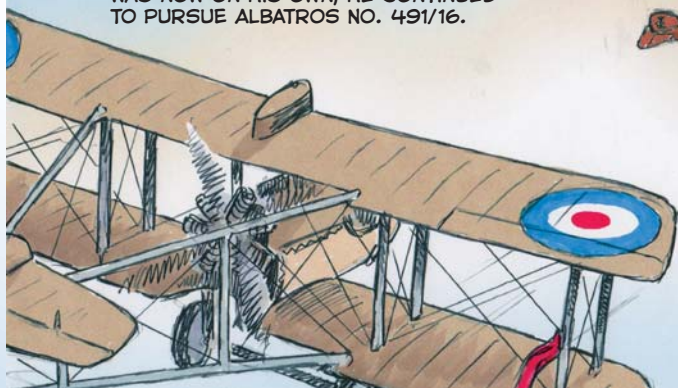


. . . WHEN ANOTHER ALBATROS "JUMPED" HIM FROM BEHIND AND SENT A STREAM OF BULLETS INTO HIS ENGINE.

ANDREWS'S MOTOR BEGAN TO SPUTTER AND LOSE REVOLUTIONS. HE WISELY DROPPED OUT OF THE FIGHT, FLYING IN A ZIGZAG PATTERN UNTIL HE MANUEVERED SAFELY OUT OF RANGE OF THE GERMAN FIGHTERS.



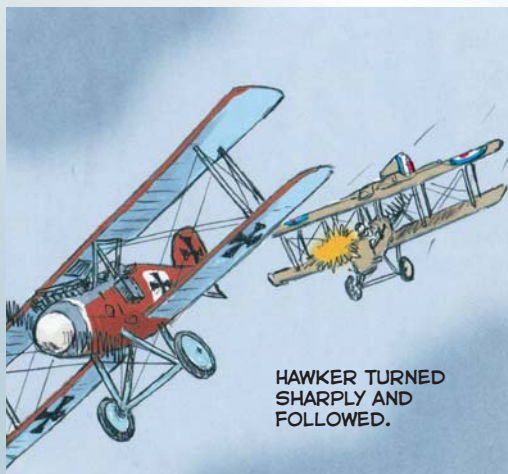
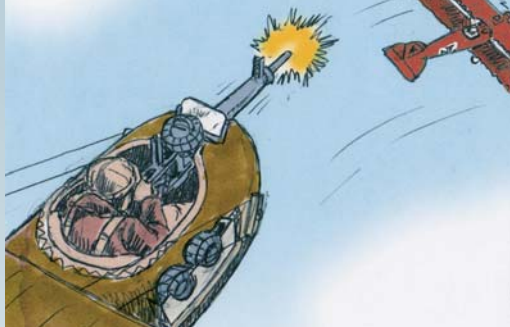
ALTHOUGH HAWKER REALIZED THAT HE WAS NOW ON HIS OWN, HE CONTINUED TO PURSUE ALBATROS NO. 491/16.



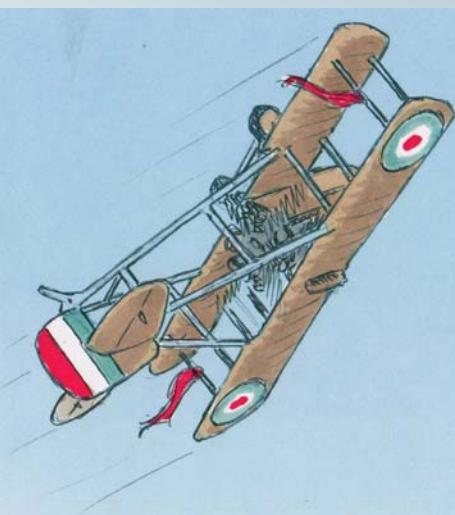


RATHER THAN FALL UPON THEIR OUTNUMBERED OPPONENT, THE FOUR UNENGAGED GERMAN FIGHTERS GAVE WIDE BERTH TO HAWKER AND HIS INTENDED VICTIM. WERE THEY AVOIDING THE POSSIBILITY OF A COLLISION IF THEY INTERVENED? OR WERE THEY ALLOWING THE TWO TO FIGHT IT OUT UNINTERRUPTED?

JUST AS HAWKER FIRED A BURST FROM HIS LEWIS GUN, THE GERMAN BANKED AWAY TO THE RIGHT, TRYING TO TURN BACK ON THE ENGLISHMAN'S TAIL.



HAWKER TURNED SHARPLY AND FOLLOWED.



THEY FLEW AROUND AND AROUND, WITH NEITHER ABLE TO GET THE OTHER IN HIS SIGHTS. IT BECAME DIFFICULT TO TELL WHO WAS CHASING WHOM.

