

11th AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE.

Reference Sheet 62D. H. E. 1/20,000.

Description of the shooting down of Cavalry Captain BARON von RICHTHOFEN, the famous German Aviator at 10.45 a.m. on 21st. April, 1918.

At about 10.45a.m. 21st instant I was in the wood at J.19.c. 75.63. and saw two aeroplanes approaching flying Westward directly towards the wood, at a height of about 400 feet above level of River SOMME over which they were flying.

I had noticed that the leading machine had British markings, just as it reach edge of wood and immediately afterwards heard a strong burst of M.G. fire coming from direction of South East corner of the wood.

Immediately afterwards the red painted enemy machine appeared overhead flying very low and (this line obliterated in my copy) 200 feet from the ground.

I lost sight of the British machine as my attention was concentrated on the enemy plane which was flying as if not under complete control, being wobbly and irregular in flight, it swerved North, then Eastwards, rocking a great deal and suddenly dived out of sight, the engine running full open.

I ran out of the wood and over to where it had fallen about 200 yards away alongside BRAY - CORBIE Road in J.19.b.40.30. About six men reached the wrecked plane before me.

I immediately undid the airman's safety belt and got assistance to pull him from the wreckage, but he was quite dead, and was considerably out about the face as was apparently shot through the chest and body.

As a large number of men were collecting I requested Captain Adams, 44th. Battalion, A.I.F. to place a guard over the plane to prevent looting and to disperse the crowd, as the spot was open to enemy observation and I feared we would be shelled.

A guard was duly placed over the machine and the crowd dispersed.

I searched the dead airman taking his papers and personal effects which consisted of a few papers, a silver watch, gold chain with medallion attached, and a pair of fur lined gloves. I gave them to Captain Hilliary of 11th Brigade Staff, who took them down to our German Speaker, Corporal Peters, who on investigation gave the identification of the famous German airman BARON von RICHTHOFEN.

I reported this to General Cannan and Third Australian Division promptly.

On General Cannan's direction I went out to get particulars of the Machine Gunners who had brought the plane down, and found Sergeant Popkin, of 24th Aust. M.G. Company at his anti-aircraft M.F. at J.23.b. 3. 7. (approx.) (SOMME Valley).

At the time I was not aware that any other M.G. had been firing at this plane. I congratulated Sergeant Popkin on his successful shoot, but afterwards found out that two A.A. Lewis Guns belonging to the 53rd. Battery A.F.A. had also fired at this plane when it was directly over my head, but the noise of engine prevented my hearing the shooting.

The 53rd Battery Lewis Gunners probably assisted in sealing the fate of this airman, as he apparently flew right into their line of fire. However, I am strongly of opinion that he was first hit by Sergeant Popkin's shooting as he was unsteady from the moment of that first burst of fire.

The airman's body was afterwards taken in charge by Officers of the A.F.C. and the wrecked plane salvaged by them after dark.

X. *Amala P. Tracy*

Brigade Intelligence Officer.
11th Australian Infantry Brigade. A.I.F.

BONHAY, 21st April, 1918.

Map Reference. Sheet 62.D.H.E. 1/20,000.

A. J. H.