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Somme Success: The Royal Flying Corps And The Battle Of The Somme 1916



Synopsis

High above the blood soaked trenches of the Somme during the Summer and Autumn of 1916, the Royal Flying Corps were acting out - and winning - one of the first great aerial battles of history. Even in those pioneering days of flying, primitive aircraft flown by brave young men were of significant military value. Before the battle, photographic reconnaissance aircraft from both sides were desperately trying to map the opposition's deployment. Artillery spotting aircraft were proving invaluable in directing devastating fire onto otherwise hidden targets. Bombing raids became a normal routine. Somme Success is a highly effective description of all facets of air operations of the period. It uses the voices and accounts of those who were there. It describes how the RFC met the Fokker scourge head on using DH2 single seaters and, later, the ubiquitous FE2B two seaters, of the type that German 'Ace' Max Immelmann was shot down by. Having conceded air supremacy to the RFC early in the offensive, the German Air Service launched an aerial counter attack during August and September. The elite scout squadron led by Oswald Boelcke raised the stakes and their Albatross single seaters proved superior to any allied aircraft. Richthofen then appeared on the scene and a new period of German supremacy began. This is a thrilling account of the dramatic events of the period and an insight into the 'glamorous' world of the Great Aces.

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Customer Reviews

Peter Hart's *SOMME SUCCESS*, published by Pen & Sword Books in 2001, is a taut, informative and wonderfully entertaining account of the air combats waged by RFC and German squadrons in the summer and autumn of 1916. Packed with first-person reminiscences and rare period photographs, it is a rare treat. After a brief chapter summarizing the development of air combat in the early war years, Hart describes the dramatic turn-around that took place over the Somme skies in 1916. Initial successes enjoyed by DH-2 and FE2b RFC units during the Somme offensive ended the 'Fokker Scourge,' resulting in British air superiority. Likewise, other RFC photo-recce and bomber units played increasingly effective roles in the ground war. Those successes came to a grim halt in August and September when German units, now equipped with Albatross fighters, reclaimed air superiority. *SOMME SUCCESS* is jam-packed with action and insight. Hart summarizes and analyzes the changing face of air warfare even as he recounts the unceasing dogfights between BE2s, FE2s, DH-2s, Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutters and Parasols piloted by Ball, Hawker and others and Fokkers, LVGs and 'Albatri' manned by Boelcke, von Richtofen, etc. Normally when a serious aviation book lacks an index, as *SOMME SUCCESS* does, I limit my rating to four stars. However, *SOMME SUCCESS* is one of the best written aviation titles I have ever read! It's clean, crisp and doesn't waste a word in its narrative. When you match that with the many rare vintage photographs contained in the book, you're talking five stars. Highly recommended. *****5,100 Helpful Votes!

Thus book chronicles the struggles of the Royal Flying Corps during the 1916 battle of the Somme. Thru contemporary letters, diaries, and combat reports supplemented by background material, Hart moves beyond the usual "Knights of the Air" narrative of fighter pilots/aces and their individual exploits. He stresses the role played by artillery observation and photo recon flights over the German line as essential components of the preparation for the offensive and the actual assault. The critical role played by these squadrons, often flying obsolete, almost defenseless two seat aircraft led to German efforts to destroy them, which in turn led to the development of the RFC's secondary mission of protecting them and the subsequent specialization of fighter squadrons. The diaries, reports, and letters introduce the reader to the young RFC aviators. The stiff upper lip required by their ethos makes it difficult for a contemporary reader to appreciate the wonder of flight and the fear and horror of aerial combat. The mind set is certainly not that of the post war

veterans/literati who wax eloquent on the uselessness of their endeavors and the wasteful loss of life. The WWI aviation enthusiast will find the ebb and flow of aircraft superiority and obsolescence interesting. The reader learns of the Fokker Scourge, the introduction of the pusher DH-2, and the appearance of Boelcke Jasta 2 and its game changing Albatros Scouts. Above all, the author and the airmen we come to know highlight the RFC decision to aggressively patrol over the enemy lines to direct artillery and photograph emplacements and the near certainty of death or serious injury to the aircrew. The author returns to the same correspondents throughout the book. A comprehensive account of each person's ultimate fate would have been helpful. In conclusion, the book and its two companion volumes stress the tactical and strategic role assigned to the RFC. I

This is one of several books by Peter Hart on the role of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in the First World War. It is extremely well written, and uses a wide variety of first-person accounts to reveal both the British and German perspectives on the real nature of early air combat, and the role it played in the overall strategy of the Western Front in 1916. Much more than aces and fighter vs. fighter combat, this book looks at the vital role played by reconnaissance, artillery observation and photographic planes in planning and carrying out one of the great battles of the war. A must read for anyone interested in the Great War in the air.

This is the definitive work on the air war supporting the Battle of the Somme in France 1916. Peter Hart, a respected historical scholar of World War I aviation, has written a magnificent volume, meticulously relating the story of the pilots of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) to their German opponents, their French allies and the war on the ground. He highlights the roles of Albert Ball, Max Immelmann and Oswald Boelcke in their contribution to the infant profession and tactics of aerial combat. A must read for any World War I enthusiast or historian. RG Head Brigadier General, USAF (Retired)

I found this book very interesting as it came from a different perspective to most other books on the Somme offensive that I have or have read. It was an insight into the very early days of flight and the exceptionally quick development of aircraft that would not have taken place except for the war. The rate of development would have been much slower, but was driven by necessity - from both sides. I would recommend it as an alternative read to the proliferation of material on the ground war.

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