



History 101 The Red Baron

Look at this! You can find *anything* in covers! Could you find, say.....Oh, I don't know.... *Manfred von Richthofen*?!! Yes, he, too, is

immortalized on matchcovers. And well he should....He was *the* top aviator in World War I, with an astounding 80 enemy aircraft shot down (America's own ace at the time, Eddie Rickenbacker, had 26).



Known as "The Red Baron" or "The Red Knight" because of the color of his plane, he was born in Germany in 1892. At the outbreak of the war he entered the aviation corps in January 1915, and was selected to become a member of the elite JASTA II. His first victory took place over Cambrai in France on 17 September 1916. After he won his sixteenth victory, he was promoted to commander, and two days later received the much-admired Pour le Merite Medal, the "Blue Max." From then on promotion and victories followed in rapid succession.

Having attained eighty confirmed victories in all manner of combat, it is ironic that he himself was shot down by an Australian anti-aircraft battery (debatable fact as to who actually shot him down) on 21 April 1918, at the age of 25. It happened while he was pursuing a fledgling British pilot in the skies over Vaux sur Somme, France, in a era of wooden and fabric aircraft, where 20 air victories assured a pilot legendary status and the coveted "Blue Max".



The British Royal Flying Corps rendered full military honors at the funeral of the leading ace of World War I. Von Richthofen, with his confirmed eighty victories, is still regarded as the ace of aces in the fascinating world of aviation.