

THE DEATH OF THE RED BARON: Witnessed by Private Robert Budd Selth.

29/4/1971

The following is a transcript of a letter that Robert Budd Selth wrote to the Sunday Mail on the above date in reference to an article that had been published on the 24/4/1971. I don't know whether it was actually posted as he passed away shortly after.

The Editor,

The Sunday Mail.

Dear Sir,

Referring to the comments regarding Baron Richtofen in the Sunday Mail dated 24/4/71. Part of which read as follows: Among the ANZACS who march there must be many who would challenge a film The Baron, soon to be released which credits Canadian wheat farmer Capt. Roy Brown with his kill. I don't agree.

The following are the facts as seen by me. The 4th Australian Field ambulance were marching out of the line in the forward areas for a spell. About ten of us from "B" section were detached from the main column to march to a British Casualty clearing station at Bertangles, about six kilos distance. We had not proceeded far when we noticed several planes having what we called a dog fight fairly high up. Suddenly two planes broke away from the others. The German plane which was Richtofens chasing a British. They were travelling at an angle of about 45 degrees towards the ground. Richtofen was still at the rear and firing in front of him at the British plane, the pilot was not firing but suddenly darted his plane forwards and cleverly and luckily got away. The Baron went straight into the ground. We then continued our march to the C.C.S at Bertangles. Arrived there at lunch time.

Went on duty immediately after lunch. The first job Bill Male and I had to do was unload a motor ambulance. Sitting in the front was the driver and an orderly. The first thing the orderly said was we have got Richtofen on here. Bill and I unloaded and carried the stretcher with Richtofen and placed it on a table in the operating theatre. There were two of the hospital doctors present also a couple of high rank British Medical Officers, one might have been a Canadian and only one Australian named Col. Barber the A.D.M.S of the 4th Australian Division.

The unanimous opinion was that Richtofen was hit by a bullet fired from the ground.

There were only two marks on the body, where the bullet entered the body on the right side, passing through the heart in an upward direction and coming out in the left side of the chest. Richtofen was a little fellow not more than 5ft 4 inches; He was buried in the Bertangles Cemetery with full military honours by members of the Flying Corps.

Bill and I visited the grave a few days later. The propeller of the Baron's plane was at the head of the grave.

It was the only time I was ever detailed for duty at a CCS. We were there about a fortnight.