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PLAN

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TEXTE

- 1 While German aviation in the First World War has been the subject of technical, mechanical, industrial, and military histories, a closer examination of the impact of aviation's rapid transformation on the men who flew during the war has remained under-explored. My dissertation examines aviation's influence on German cultural and social history between 1908 and 1925. Before the First World War, aviation was part of a larger landscape of a rapidly modernizing Germany. While some imaginative inventors and futurists viewed powered flight as either a transformative tool or a potential weapon of war, most Germans had little exposure to the airplane beyond the spectacle of the air show.
- 2 The outbreak of war in 1914 dramatically shifted aviation away from spectacle and speculation and into the new and unprecedented reality of armed conflict in the air. Germany's fliers initially served as aerial observers, noting troop positions in the war's frenetic opening weeks. As the Western Front stagnated into trench warfare by the autumn of 1914, military aviation, in concert with photography, became a method of gathering vital military intelligence. By the end of the year, aviation had compressed time and space, reordered the spatial arrangement of the battlefield, and transformed the human relationship with killing. The camera shaped the identity and iconography of the aviator both in public and in private photographs. The growing importance of military aviation also created a privileged space for

combat pilots to engage with, or ignore, the consequences of killing as aerial violence became commonplace. The new, modern experience of killing and dying in the air, intersected with older superstitions and cultural tropes to render this novel kind of violence knowable. The German general staff, too, became increasingly obsessed with killing in the air, and this fascination fed a new system for understanding the air war. Germany's regional identities were also reflected in aviation and directly influenced both the composition of the *Luftstreitkräfte* and the machines issued to its pilots. Aviators were again privileged in their use of cultural markers to signpost individual, regional, and national identities. The end of the war, however, shattered previous perceptions of war time, and left living aviators to struggle to make sense of a new present, while the nation's lost fliers were repurposed for contradictory social and political ends.

1. Introduction and Historical Discussion

- 3 My dissertation follows the cultural history of German aviation before, during, and immediately following the First World War. The advent of powered flight entered a complex historical narrative in Germany between 1908 and 1925. My research examines the ways in which powered flight was a disruptive experience for German aviators, and the ways those experiences were repurposed to produce the illusion of reassuring continuities in German popular culture. My work builds on previous histories of German social and cultural history written in the last quarter-century, while incorporating the influence of powered flight to elucidate both continuities and discontinuities within German culture¹. In doing so, I demonstrate the disruptive role that technology played in Germany, and how German culture responded to it.
- 4 The past five years have witnessed an intense production of new historical research regarding the First World War and its broader consequences. In addition to intervening in the historical question of the war's wider consequences, my dissertation builds on the original request for a wider and culturally sophisticated history of aviation, first made by James Hansen². The response to his call produced a body of literature focused on aviation's social, cultural, economic, political,

and military history. My dissertation contributes to this call by examining the ways in which powered flight shaped the culture of German aviators and how that relationship influenced broader cultural markers in German society. Consequently, my research employs multiple perspectives to go beyond the consideration of flight from a strictly military or industrial standpoint, to examine the ripple effect of aviation across social, cultural, gender, and geographic divides. In approaching my topic from the methodological tradition of the long nineteenth century, I frame aviation as a technology which contributed to an already rapidly shifting landscape³. From this perspective, the new discourses created around aviation, which utilized older cultural markers to make a new paradigm knowable, become apparent, and provide a rich space for new historical analysis.

2. Commentary on Source Material

- 5 My dissertation takes advantage of a rich and diverse document collection that includes published sources, squadron records, personal photo albums, and private diaries. These sources provide a fascinating dichotomy to works produced in the aftermath of the conflict. Given the social and political upheaval in Germany immediately following the First World War, no official comprehensive history of the conflict's aerial component was recorded, although individuals within the *Luftstreitkräfte* endeavoured to write their personal accounts of Germany's air war⁴. Even though popular works of semi-fictional autobiographies permeated the German book market in the late 1920s and early 1930s, these sources are somewhat problematic⁵. Consequently, I am mindful of my analysis of more difficult sources, most notably, the published autobiography of Manfred von Richthofen during the First World War. Richthofen's account was always meant for public consumption and the process of writing his book is not particularly well known. Therefore, rather than approach Richthofen's story as an accurate and unvarnished account of his experiences, I explore his writing from the perspective of authorial intent. In other words, I ask: what did Manfred von Richthofen, and his military commanders, want a popular audience to understand about the

air war? In posing questions such as this, I found an illuminating perspective on aviation during the conflict.

- 6 My research also draws on archival material from the *Deutsches Museum* as well as the *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv: Kriegsarchiv*, both located in Munich. The *Deutsches Museum* provided a wealth of background knowledge in First World War aviation and, notably, houses the private photo and scrap book albums of German aviators. Most notably, the museum has the photo album of Peter Supf, a German aerial observer who wrote extensively about the history of the German air service in the First World War. His album chronicles his experiences from mobilization in 1914 until the end of 1917 and provides a unique opportunity to employ a close source analysis of photographic material. The Bavarian War Archive houses the squadron records of several units, including fighter squadrons on the Western Front. Most interestingly, the archive houses the complete archival record of Bavarian reconnaissance unit 304b, which served in Palestine, along with the personal files of its commanding officer, Franz Walz.
- 7 The *Bundesarchiv* in Freiburg, contained thousands of pages of military documents from the First World War, including hundreds of pages of correspondence and reports within the *Fliegertruppe* and the *Luftstreitkräfte*. Of the most interest to my research, Freiburg contains a typed copy of the private war diary of Rudolf Berthold, whose writing provides remarkable insight into the first-hand experiences of a German aviator who was profoundly changed by his experiences in the First World War. Berthold's diary was never published and, subsequently, has remained an underutilized historical source. I also employ the weekly reports to the general staff of the air service, as well as the personal files of other German aviators like Ernst Heß, whose career is documented from his education at *Gymnasium* up to the telegram notifying his mother of his death in aerial combat in December 1917. Finally, I make use of historical spaces, most notably the airfield located outside of Munich, called *Oberschleißheim*. The airfield was home to the Royal Bavarian Flying Corps during the First World War and, with the archival research of the *Deutsches Museum*, has been rebuilt to model its Great War appearance.

3. Chapter Outline / Approaches and Methodologies

- 8 My dissertation is organized into five chapters which explore the different ways that aviation shaped German history between 1908 and 1925. Chapter One explores the social and cultural conversations surrounding German society as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. Germany was a dynamic, new, and uncertain society exploding with industrial capacity and echoing the sentiments of the rest of Europe in its desire to expand its empires across the globe. Within that dynamic environment, the image of powered flight captivated the German popular imagination and baffled its leaders and military planners.
- 9 Chapter Two examines the transformative influence of photography on aviators and aviation. The stagnant nature of the war, combined with the miniaturization of photographic technology coincided to give the embryonic airplane extraordinary agency. The airplane, which could not effectively bomb enemy positions in the early months of the conflict suddenly became a vital intelligence gathering device to military planners and strategists. The camera, too, became a mode of self-expression as reconnaissance crews frequently made use of squadron dark rooms to develop images of friends and comrades. The portable camera allowed fliers to create albums documenting the conflict from formation to armistice. Here too, aviators were a privileged class, having access to the mode and mean of creating and storing photographs during an ongoing conflict.
- 10 Chapter Three investigates the ways in which aviators understood and experienced violence from a privileged space. The airplane transformed the ways in which violence and suffering could be inflicted on the human body. The very experience of flight, that of exposing flesh and bone to previously unexperienced height and speed, was viewed as an inherently violent experience, one that imposed suffering even in the best of conditions. The nature of flight, that of operating structurally unstable machinery with no means of escape, also meant that flight could kill the aviator at any moment. Violence in the air expanded beyond the mere act of flying at altitude to include the ability to inflict pain and suffering on other bodies in other aircraft. The advent

of machine guns allowed hostile fliers to open fire at one another and created a more direct means of inflicting and suffering violence. An entire system of gathering knowledge grew around the concept of shooting down other aircraft and, as a result, gave rise to a spoils system which actively encouraged this destruction over all other aerial activity. Eventually, the specter of shooting down enemy machines in ever greater numbers blinded even military planners to the original and most important requirement of military flight - that of winning the war on the ground. Consequently, aviators, through the attention paid to killing in the air, and to the privileged way that act was valued, viewed their actions as more important than others. Consequently, I explore the ways in which aviators experienced killing from an intensely privileged perspective.

- 11 Chapter Four explores the ways aviation served as a means of expressing and understanding regional and national identity. Germany's recent unification meant that its regional kingdoms still sought active means of maintaining autonomy. Bavaria is the strongest example of the consequences of regional autonomy within the larger Reich. Its stubborn determination to keep its air service independent led its military planners to make disastrous decisions regarding the construction and procurement of military aircraft. The dependence on local factories created a situation where aviators in Bavarian squadrons received under-performing or outright dangerous machines. The lived consequences of this decision were spelled out in the diary of German aviators like Rudolf Berthold, who nearly lost his life in a crash at the controls of a poorly made Bavarian copy of a French aircraft. Regional identity was also embedded in the mentalities of aviators, and placed within a larger, more flexible discourse of national *Heimat* culture. By examining the roots of these regional narratives, a clearer picture of the world views of Germany's aviators comes to light. Those views shaped their perception of the war and had very concrete consequences in how they framed and made sense of their role in the conflict. Again, the role of privilege shapes the experience of the aviator, providing them the space, time, and means to build expressions of regional and national identity at the front.
- 12 The latter half of this chapter takes the lessons of regional identity and extrapolates those traits to the Middle East, where Bavarian reconnaissance units served in Palestine during the conflict. Here, we

see the outward projection, not of regional identity, but broader tropes of German nationalism in an alien land. The conclusion then, is that regional identity serves to differentiate populations in like-area lands like the Western Front, whereas truly foreign lands tends to impel populations to reach back to find national traits to reinforce their sense of self. Even the military planning documents of squadrons like 304b “Pascha” were imbedded with German nationalism, racism, and a heightened sense of superiority over the local populations where they would serve.

- 13 My final chapter examines the ways in which aviation influenced the very perception of time and space, as well as memory and mourning. Aviation fundamentally transformed the human relationship to time, an accessing the ways in which time was perceived by aviators has remained historically challenging. To access both the regimented sense of time created by military aviation, as well as the heightened moments of fear and peril, I employ ancient Greek concepts of time. Filtering the experience of military aviators through the prism of *chronos* and *kairos* fundamentally changes our perspective on how fliers understood time. Military aviation provided a regimentation and structure to time: morning, afternoon, and evening sorties framed their days, weeks, months, and years of service. It also contributed to the *chronos* of monotony of time dragging on. Aerial violence broke this sense of continuity with heightened moments of *kairos*, of moments of decision that ultimately resulted in life or death experiences. This sense of time is expressed both in public and private writings, as well as photographs of the period. The chapter then expands beyond the time of the living to the realm of the dead. Aviators again were privileged in the realm of loss - where squadrons went to extraordinary lengths to recover lost pilots to give them a proper burial - an experience not shared by their counterparts on the ground. The end of the war and the banning of flight within the country broke the continuity of war time and, for some, created a sense that the war never ended. As chaos and violence overwhelmed German society immediately after the war, many of its aviators took the streets to continue a fight that seemed to extend into perpetuity.

4. Broader Contribution to the Field

- 14 The goal of my work is ultimately to expand the history of aviation, not merely in its use as a technological invention, but as a force which shaped cultural conversations within society. Technology fundamentally altered the course of the twentieth century and changed the ways human beings interacted with, perceived, and eventually shaped the physical world around them. Aviation collapsed space and time, redefined central aspects of warfare, altered the human relationship to violence, and provided an elastic mode of expression to redefine meaning and memory during and after the First World War. The ongoing questions of how new technology shapes society and culture continues into our own time and serves only to further highlight the importance of studying the ramifications of technology in shaping the defining moments of the past.

NOTES

1 My work has been greatly informed by, among others, J. Morrow, *German Air Power in World War I* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); R. Wohl, *Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); P. Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and C. Kehrt, *Moderne Krieger: Die Technikerfahrten deutscher Militärpiloten: 1910-1945* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010).

2 See J. Hansen, "Aviation History in the Wider View", *Technology and Culture*. Vol 30, No. 3. (July, 1989): 643-656.

3 A substantial collection of works also informs my wider understanding of the First World War as a historical event. The most influential of these on my own research have been the following: See, H. Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004). For an overview of the contested history of the First World War's causes, see A. Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (London: Pearson, 2002). See also D. Fromkin, *Europe's Last Summer: Who Started the Great War in 1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

4 See G. P. Neumann, *Die deutschen Luftstreitkräfte im Weltkrieg* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1920).

5 These works, however, provide a fascinating space to compare works intended for a popular audience and draw them into conversation with private diaries.

RÉSUMÉ

English

My doctoral dissertation explores aviation's influence on German cultural and social history between 1908 and 1925. Before the First World War, aviation was part of a larger landscape of a rapidly modernizing Germany. While some imaginative inventors and futurists viewed powered flight as either a transformative tool or a potential weapon of war, most Germans had little exposure to the airplane beyond the spectacle of the air show. The outbreak of war in 1914 dramatically shifted aviation away from spectacle and speculation and into the new and unprecedented reality of armed conflict in the air. Germany's fliers initially served as aerial observers, noting troop positions in the war's frenetic opening weeks. As the Western Front stagnated into trench warfare by the autumn of 1914, military aviation, in concert with photography, became a method of gathering vital military intelligence. By the end of the year, aviation had compressed time and space, reordered the spatial arrangement of the battlefield, and transformed the human relationship with killing. The camera shaped the identity and iconography of the aviator both in public and in private photographs. The growing importance of military aviation also created a privileged space for combat pilots to engage with, or ignore, the consequences of killing as aerial violence became commonplace. The new, modern experience of killing and dying in the air, intersected with older superstitions and cultural tropes to render this novel kind of violence knowable. The German general staff, too, became increasingly obsessed with killing in the air, and this fascination fed a new system for understanding the air war. Germany's regional identities were also reflected in aviation and directly influenced both the composition of the *Luftstreitkräfte* and the machines issued to its pilots. Aviators were again privileged in their use of cultural markers to signpost individual, regional, and national identities. The end of the war, however, shattered previous perceptions of war time, and left living aviators to struggle to make sense of a new present, while the nation's lost fliers were repurposed for contradictory social and political ends.

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