

COLORADO MILITARY HISTORIANS

NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 2015



Der Fokker Eindecker

Ending the Fokker Scourge

The War in the Air

Fall 1915 - Spring 1916

by Jeff Lambert

By the Fall of 1915, the Great War had seen its first anniversary. The lines on the Western Front were well established, with little change foreseeable. The war at sea had become a stalemate and held little promise for making a decision. Only the war in the air showed any opportunity for either side to militarily influence the fortunes of Europe.

Beginning as a sideshow in 1914, with only minor combat abilities, the aircraft of both sides had developed by Autumn 1915 into weapon systems with a potential of affecting the strategic outcome. The great difficulty of mounting a machine gun and all of its necessary accoutrements-- ammunition and a gunner to fire it-- was largely solved by this time. Engines powerful enough and airframes strong enough to lift all the weight required were now on-line. The principal problems remained, however-- how to design an aircraft capable of gaining air superiority over the enemy.

The best speed and climbing ability was found in the single-seat scout types, almost always of tractor configuration. With the motor and airscrew in the front, this is the standard form we are familiar with today. The trouble was that the arc of the propeller right in front prevented the use of a forward-firing machine-gun. Several methods were tried, including mounting the machine-gun to fire at an angle (not very satisfactory), mounting the machine gun on the top wing to clear the propeller arc (much better, but still of limited utility) and even moving the engine and propeller to the middle of the aircraft (!) and placing the gun and gunner in a "pulpit" at the front of the machine (!!). Armoring the propeller blade itself proved effective, and gave the first aircraft able to engage the enemy by aiming the whole plane instead of swiveling the gun around independently, eliminating the need for a second crewman and allowing the use of lighter, faster and more maneuverable single-seat scouts. The method was not reliable, however, and inevitably resulted in losses in aircraft and pilots.

The British Royal Flying Corps, supplied mostly by the Royal Aircraft Factory, avoided this problem by relying on the "pusher" design, with the engine and propeller mounted in a nacelle behind the crew, giving a wide field of fire to the front. The first airplane designed specifically to carry a machine-gun into battle was the Vickers FB5 "Gunbus".

Other pusher designs were also used, eventually culminating in the nimble Airco DH2 and its less successful cousin the RAF FE8.

The Germans, meanwhile, turned to the invention of a Dutchman, Anthony Fokker. He built and demonstrated an interruptor gear which stopped the firing of a machine gun whenever the propeller blade was in front of the muzzle. It was rapidly approved and put into use on a light monoplane, armed with a belt-fed Maxim-type machine gun. Although underpowered, the Fokker "Eindecker" proved to be deadly in combat against the largely obsolete designs of the Allies.

The British press began to report on the dominance of the Fokker and to push for the development of better scouts. This was partly a political move, as a faction of Parliament wished to break the monopoly of the Royal Aircraft Factory in supplying the Flying Corps and force it to accept more independent designs, as the Royal Naval Air Service did. Nevertheless, the reductions in the morale and effectiveness of the Allied air services were quite real and threatened to influence the outcome of the war.

Allied losses to the "Fokker Scourge" in the Autumn of 1915 rose precipitously. In the hands of innovative fliers like Max Immelman and Oswald Boelke the Eindecker made life for Allied aircrews very risky and statistically short. Problems developed in the Allied air corps in morale and discipline, while Immelman and Boelke ran up their scores and their reputations. The RFC responded by issuing orders that all reconnaissance flights were to be escorted by at least three other aircraft, effectively reducing the size of the air force and limiting its ability to deliver information to the army. The Germans had attained air superiority for a while. Fortunately for the Allies, the German command became concerned that the secret of the interruptor gear would become known if a fighter were ever captured, so they forbade flights behind enemy lines. Who knows what might have happened had the Germans pressed their advantage?

The Allies, of course, already knew about the interruptor gear, since Fokker's was not the only design in development. Their own efforts were concentrated on a different type of "synchronizer" using hydraulics. No matter what approach was used, however, the synchronizer was still somewhat unreliable and reduced the cyclic rate-of-fire of the gun. Rightly or wrongly, it was also blamed for a distressingly high rate of "jams" which led to the British preference for unsynchronized Lewis guns well into 1917.

As 1915 turned to 1916, two developments on the Allied side began to swing the pendulum away from the Germans. First, the British began to develop better pusher designs, resulting in the FE2 and the DH2. The FE2 was a 2-seater, like the Gunbus, but faster and with a second gun originally intended for the pilot. In practice, it was used by the observer to fire over the airplane's tail, by precariously standing on the edge of the cockpit! This was done without safety harnesses or parachutes, by the way. The

DH2 was finally delivered to the front in December 1915. It was relatively fast and much more maneuverable than the Eindecker. It was a single-seater, with a fixed Lewis gun in the nose (it could elevate up and down, mainly for the ability to change ammo drums, but the traverse was limited to zero). Interestingly, the Germans already had a copy, having captured the prototype in July!

The RFC also ordered the use of formation flying to better protect the important recon flights. Two-seaters were no longer allowed to fly over enemy lines without an armed observer. The two pusher types, combined with better tactics, soon turned the tide on the British sector of the front.

In the French sector, German air superiority led to an aerial blockade carried out by the Fokkers against the French. So successful was this that the German preparations for the battle of Verdun went undetected. The French response was the development of the Nieuport 11 "Bebe", a vastly superior fighter to the Fokkers. In addition, the French formed dedicated fighter squadrons as opposed to the Germans who committed their fighters in ones and twos. This was the predecessor and the impetus to the German "Jagdstaffeln" which came later and changed the air war yet again. But that would wait until the new Allied fighters and tactics finally ended the "Fokker Scourge" in the Spring of 1916, while the Germans anticipated the arrival of new and better fighter planes.

I will be hosting a Blue Max/Canvas Eagles game at this month's meeting set in the winter of 1915/1916. Aircraft in use will be Fokker E.III's, Albatros C.III's, AEG G.II's for the Germans and RAF BE2's, FE2's, Vickers FB5's, and Airco DH2's for the British. If you have 1/144 scale models of these planes, please bring them. You're welcome to join in even if you don't have any models, but if you bring your own you will be guaranteed a chance to fly it.

CMH January Scheduled Events

This table shows what events are scheduled for CMH. Next months Friday Night Fights (FNF) and the monthly meeting (MM) are listed. It is recommended to schedule your game for future meetings and will appear on this page.

Date	Meeting	Location	Start Time
January 8	FNF	TBD	7PM
January 10	MM	Baker Rec Center	12PM
January 15	FNF	TBD	7PM
January 22	FNF	TBD	7PM
January 29	FNF	TBD	7PM

TEG - Total Escape Games
6831 W. 120th Ave.
Suite C

Broomfield CO 80020 www.totalescapegames.com

FNF (TBD) may or may not occur due to a lack of a scheduled host/location.

Announced Games for the Monthly meeting:

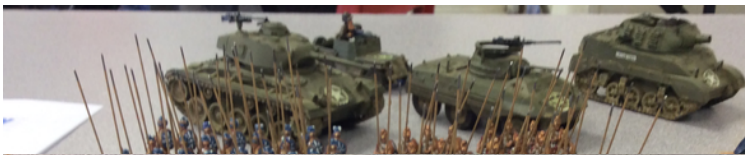
Jeff Lambert: WWI Aerial “Ending the Fokker Scourge”

John Owne: WWI Naval “Bombardment of Scarborough”



UNIT OF THE MONTH (Not Sponsored)

Member Name	Scale	Manufacturer	Era	Unit
Eric Elder	10mm	Pendracken & Homemade terrain	Renaissance	Turks & Sand Dunes
David Manley	28mm	Redoubt	Renaissance	Scottish Officers & Casualties
David Newport	15mm	Old Glory 15s	Ancients	Macedonian Phalanx
Terry Shockey	15mm	Musket Miniatures	AWI	Spanish Infantry
Hugh Thompson	1/56th	Bolt Action	WWII	U.S. Cavalry Troop
John Wharrier	1/56th	Bolt Action	WWII	M-5 Stuart Tank



GAME OF THE MONTH

Total Escape Games Sponsor



Member Name	Scale	Era	Rules	Description
Dan Gurule	28mm	Colonial	TSATF & Boilers and Breechloaders	Gunboat & Dhow
Dave Manley	28mm	Napoleonics	Sharp's Practice	Spanish Peninsula
Dave Neuport	15mm	Ancients	Field of Glory	Carthaginians vs Republican Romans
Joel Tompkins*	Micro Armor	WWII	Mein Panzer	Gates of Leningrad

***Denotes this month's winner**

Each month CMH members host games at the monthly meeting. This award is for the effort put out by the host.







Colorado Military Historians, Inc.

Colorado military Historians (CMH) is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote historical wargaming and the study of military history. Founded in 1965, CMH meets monthly on the second Sunday of the month, except in May when it is deferred to the third Sunday. The meeting starts at noon at the Baker Recreational Center, 6751 Irving Street (just a few blocks west of Federal Blvd), Denver CO. The club also hosts gaming at least one Friday night a month, called "Friday Night Fights" (FNF) at 7 PM. FNF will be held at several various locations. See previous schedule or view the website for latest information.

CMH maintains ties with numbers local, regional and national groups to help promote the hobby. CMH is governed by member-elected officers who serve on the Board of Directors (executive board). Terms are one year, with elections held at the May meeting. New members are accepted after attending three CMH functions and a vote of the membership. Dues are \$35.00 per year, payable in January. Members wishing to receive a snail-mail newsletter subscription must pay an additional fee of \$15.00 per year. Authors retain ownership of articles and graphics published. CMH reserves the right to edit or reject submissions to the newsletter.

One year Adult Membership: \$35.00
Half year Adult Membership: \$25.00
(For NEW members who join after June 30)
Family Membership: \$35.00 (one Adult an any
number of offspring)
Student Membership: \$20.00 (16 to 22 years old)



CMH Newsletter

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