

AIRCRAFT DESCRIBED No. 110
by P. L. GRAY

Albatros D III

ZAK 3 before serial on this D II signifies
use by Officers of the Central Control
Commission (ZAK)

IN THE AUTUMN of 1916, soon after the formation of the first newly inaugurated single scale fighter units (Jagdstaffeln) in the German air force, a waspish, bullet nosed fighter began to appear in the Jastas, as they were abbreviatedly termed. This sleek machine was the Albatros DI and was in marked contrast to the hotch-podge of Halberstadt DII's and DIII's and Fokker DII's, DIII's and DIV's with which they had formerly been equipped.

Powered with the excellent 160 h.p. Mercedes DIII and the standard twin Spandau machine-gun armament the Albatros could outfly and outshoot any of the contemporary allied types that it met. The main disadvantage of the type was that visibility was not exceptionally good from the cockpit, a serious shortcoming in any aeroplane, more so in a fighter. However, a slight re-design of the centre section strutting in which the former trestle type cabane was replaced by widely splayed "N" struts with consequent narrowing of the gap, resulted in the Albatros DII. The new arrangement brought the top wing down almost to eye level so that the forward and upward field of view was now almost completely unrestricted, inclination of head to either side gave good forward and downward view as the centre-section struts no longer converged to restrict this field.

Installation of the engine was particularly neat for the period and only the fore part of the cylinder block protruded from the fuselage shell. From the large spinner, the fuselage lines flowed harmoniously to slab-side, with a deeply curved top decking and a slightly shallower bottom decking; the whole tapering to a horizontal knife-edge at the rear. The fuselage was based on six spruce longerons with strong ply formers to which was pinned and screwed the thin plywood skin, resulting in an extremely strong structure. The panel immediately aft of the spinner and others adjacent to the cylinder block were of sheet aluminium, quickly removable to facilitate servicing.

Tail surfaces were of composite construction. The vertical fin was of wood built integral with the fuselage and also ply skinned. The tailplane, of almost semi-circular profile, was of wooden framing but fabric covered. To the small triangular underfin, also a ply skinned wooden component, was hinged a stout ash tail-skid. The horn-balanced rudder and one piece elevator were welded from light gauge steel tube and fabric covered.

Of orthodox construction, the wings were based on two main spars with steel tube compression members. Ribs were of ply, extensively fretted for lightness, to which was tacked the soft wood capping strips. False ribs were no more than slats of spruce, spaced between the main ribs and extending as far back as the rear spar. The ailerons—which had a slight inverse taper and broke up the near complete rectangular profile of the wing structure—were, like the other control surfaces, of welded steel tube and fabric covered. They were actuated by a crank lever at approximately mid-span. All interplane struts were of streamline section steel tube; centre section struts were also of this medium and welded to their "N" format. All bracing was of standard welded cable and no wires were duplicated.

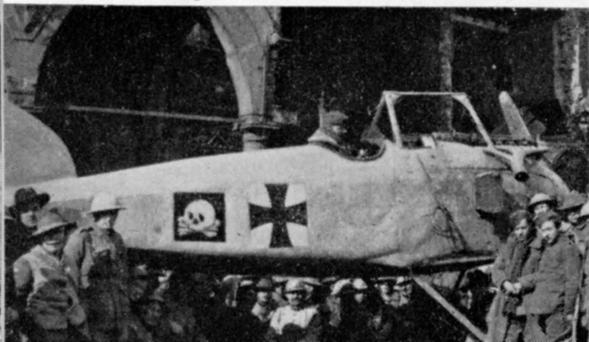
The undercarriage was a conventional vee type chassis of welded streamline steel tube tied together with a single spreader bar and with the rear legs cable braced. The axle was bound to the apices of the vees with elastic cord which also served as a shock absorber.

Clean lines of the Albatros DII were marred to an extent by the box-like Windhoff radiators on either side of the nose. An attempt was made to remedy this on the late production machines when a Teeves and Braun radiator was fitted in the upper wing centre-section in exactly the same manner as the Albatros DIII, by which it was soon to be succeeded.

Probably the best-liked German airman to fly the Albatros DII was the chivalrous Oswald Boelcke who commanded Jasta 2 and achieved a final score of some 40 enemy aircraft. He unfortunately lost his life in a machine of this type too when on October 28th, 1916 he collided with Erwin Böhme while both were diving to attack some British D.H.2's; Boelcke's aircraft broke up, Böhme managed to effect a safe landing.

Manfred von Richthofen fought a long duel with Major Lanoe G. Hawker V.C. on Albatros DII and D.H.2. respectively, on November 23rd. Hawker eventually succumbed to the superior Albatros speed and fire power and became von Richthofen's 11th victory. Although the Albatros had not the manoeuvrability of its rotary engined adversaries, it possessed the speed to attack when it held the advantage; and, perhaps even more important, to break off when expedient. The fire power of its twin machine guns was also able to destroy much more quickly than the single-gun with which the majority of its opponents were equipped.

Left, Prinz Frederick Karl of Prussia's Alb D I shot down near Lagnicourt-Vaux, 21/3/17. Right: 180 Austro-Daimler D II. Pics. by Heinz Nowarra and I.W.M.



Albatros D.II Sketchpage



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