

DH 2 vs Albatros D I/D II: Western Front 1916 (Duel)

James F. Miller



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The advent and deployment of the Royal Flying Corps' Airco DH 2 in 1916 effectively eliminated the 'scourge' of aerial dominance enjoyed by the Fokker Eindecker monoplanes. Spearheaded by No 24 Sqn and led by Victoria Cross recipient Lanoe Hawker, the ungainly yet nimble DH 2 - with its rotary engine 'pusher' configuration affording excellent visibility and eliminating the need for a synchronised machine gun - had wrested air superiority from the Germans by the spring and then maintained it through the Battle of the Somme that summer. However, by autumn German reorganisation had seen the birth of the Jagdstaffel and arrival of the new Albatros D II, a sleek inline-engined machine built for speed and twin-gun firepower. Thus, for the remainder of the year an epic struggle for aerial superiority raged above the horrors of the Somme battlefields, pitting the manoeuvrable yet under-gunned DH 2s - which were also plagued by sundry engine malfunctions - against the less nimble yet better armed and faster Albatros D IIs. In the end the Germans would regain air superiority, three squadron commanders - two of whom were considered pinnacles of their respective air forces - would lose their lives, and an up-and-coming pilot (Manfred von Richthofen) would triumph in a legendary dogfight and attain unimagined heights fighting with tactics learned from a fallen mentor.



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