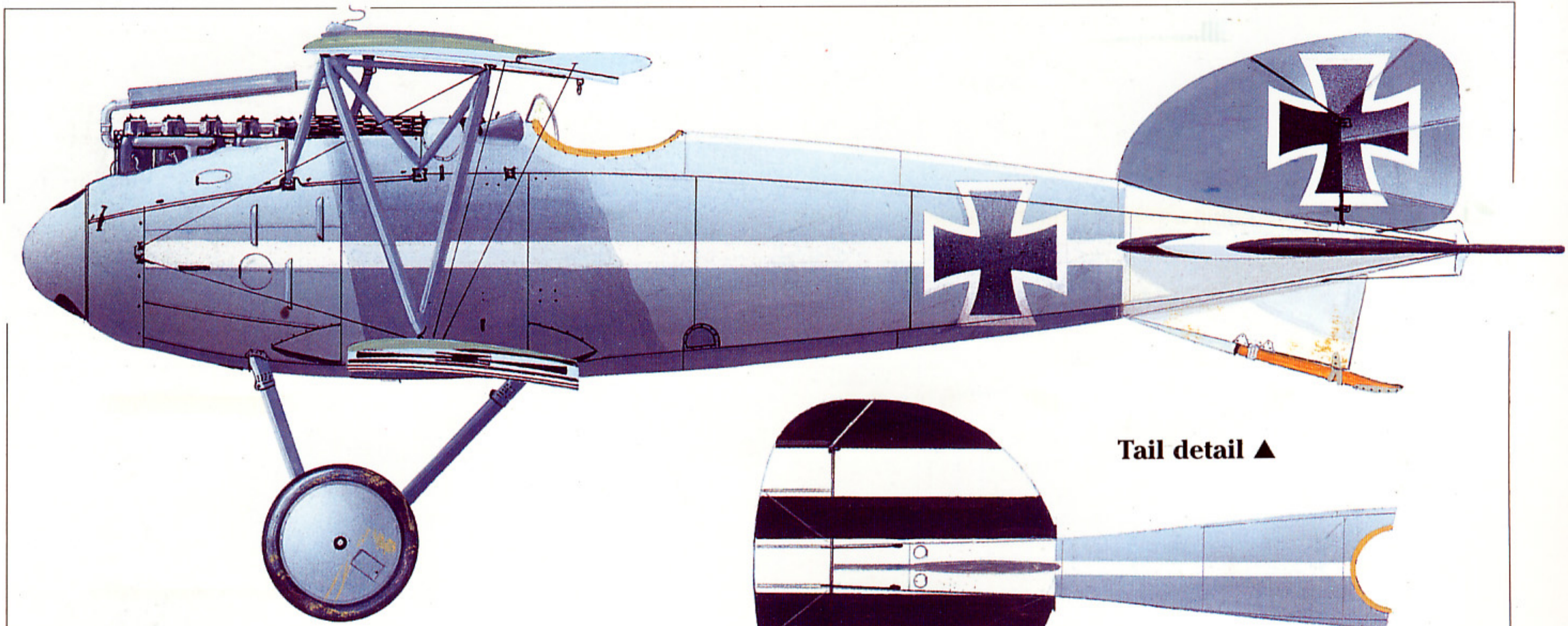


ALBATROS D.III

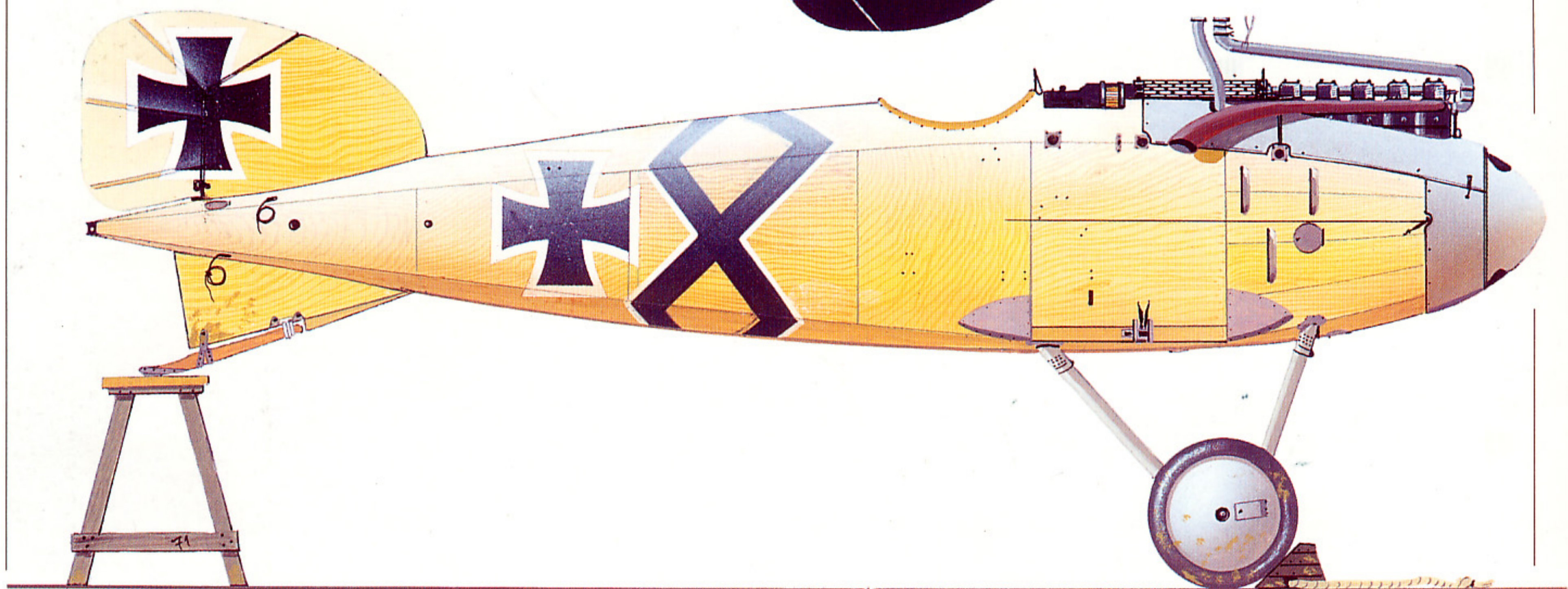
By P M Grosz



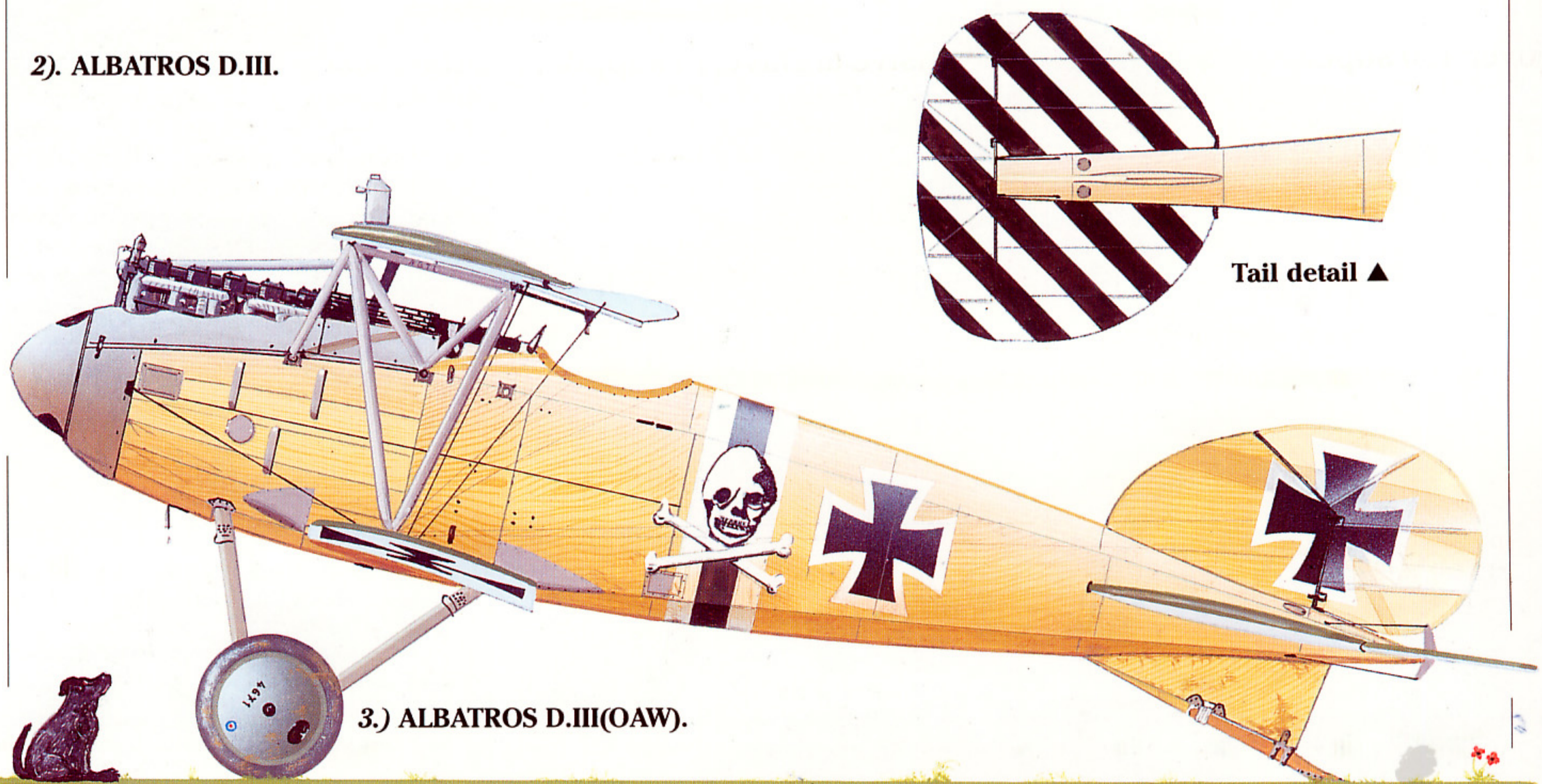
A WINDSOCK DATAFILE SPECIAL



1). ALBATROS D.III.



2). ALBATROS D.III.



3.) ALBATROS D.III(OAW).

ELLIE

Rivalling the Fokker D.VII in terms of popularity with WWI aeromodellers, the Albatros fighter family generates enormous interest, helped no doubt in some measure by the great diversity of colours and markings the various types embraced. Yet despite the yards of print devoted to these aircraft over the years, there is still much to discover, new facts and figures having emerged, so now old canards can be corrected, long-perpetuated myths set straight. The Albatros D.III formed the subject of our very first *DATAFILE*, published nearly 20 years ago, and with the 100th title in the series re-profiling the earlier D.I and D.II it now seems timely to revisit the first Albatros vee-strutter. To this end Peter Grosz has succeeded brilliantly in rewriting the history of the redoubtable Albatros, presenting fresh analysis of the wing failures that were to dog the fighter throughout its career. Here, too, are many new photos, totally revised scale plans and colour profiles which completely eclipse all previously published material. In your hands right now is the most authentic, comprehensive and accurate document ever produced on that classic German fighter of WWI, favoured mount of many top aces and scourge of Allied fliers in April 1917 - the Albatros D.III...

Ray Rimell, August 2003.



▲ 1

HISTORY

The Albatros D.III fighter rightfully deserves to stand among the great fighter aircraft of World War One by virtue of being the deadly instrument that in the hands of German pilots regained air superiority over the Allies in early 1917. The doleful necrology of victories amassed against courageous Allied airmen sent aloft in second-rate equipment has tended to overshadow the spate of wing failures experienced by the Albatros D.III in the field. These failures, and the attendant casualties of German airmen, will always be a black mark to stand against the impressive combat history recorded by this fine aircraft.

It all began with the appearance of the Nieuport 11 fighter on the Western Front. Albatros and *Inspektion der Fliegertruppen* (*Idflieg* - inspectorate of aviation troops) engineers, overly influenced by reports of the French fighters' combat prowess in Verdun skies, hoped to emulate its snappy performance by fostering a derivative, vee-strutted fighter - a configuration with which the

German aeronautical establishment lacked practical design experience. The result was the Albatros D.III, a sleek, high-performance aircraft to be sure, but with an Achilles heel. As soon as it was exposed to the rigours of combat, structural failure, directly attributed to sesquiplane wing configuration, haunted the Albatros D.III for much of its combat career. Structural investigations were begun immediately, but in spite of extensive wing loading tests, engineers and aerodynamic experts remained in the dark; indeed, the exact cause of failure was never determined.

The background

In the absence of official records, one must turn to secondary sources to determine the factors that governed the development of the Albatros D.III. In May 1916, the first D-type fighters, powered by 120-hp engines and armed with a single machine gun, were ordered in quantity from Fokker and Halberstadt. In this context, it is interesting to note that a few weeks earlier, on 15 April 1916,

Albatros already had demonstrated their new fighter design, the D.I (and most probably the D.II as well) powered by a 160-hp Mercedes D.III engine and armed with twin machine guns. Whether the new prototypes had been generated by an *Idflieg* specification or internally by Albatros is immaterial in light of the fact that Albatros engineers had produced a winning fighter with improved performance and hitting power compared to the 120-hp Fokker and Halberstadt D-types. ¹⁾

According to Albatros literature, it was the sturdy racers of 1914 (essentially

1). Albatros D.III 1922/16 was among the early production machines supplied to *Jasta 24* beginning December 1916. It is fitted with a second drag cable. A rear-view mirror can be seen on the centre-section.

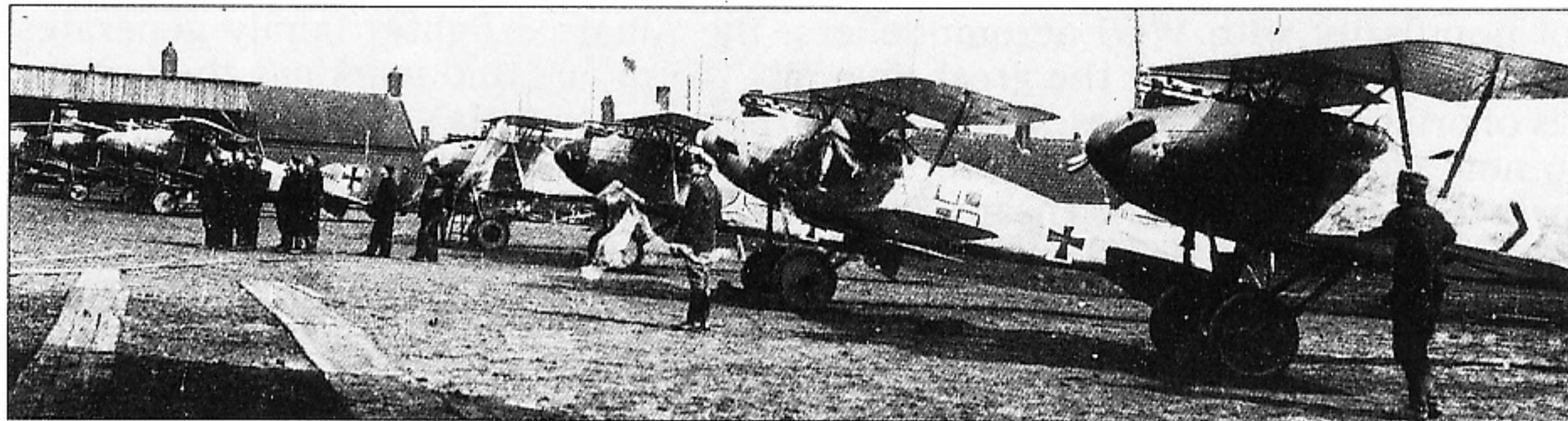
ON THE COVER:

Jasta 2 on the prowl...

Ltn. Friedrich Kempf (foreground), *Ltn. Hermann Frommherz* and *Ltn. Gerhard Bassenge* peel off to the attack. Personally-marked, these D.IIIs also bear their unit's distinctive tails. (Painting by Robert Karr)

UK price £21.00 (NET)

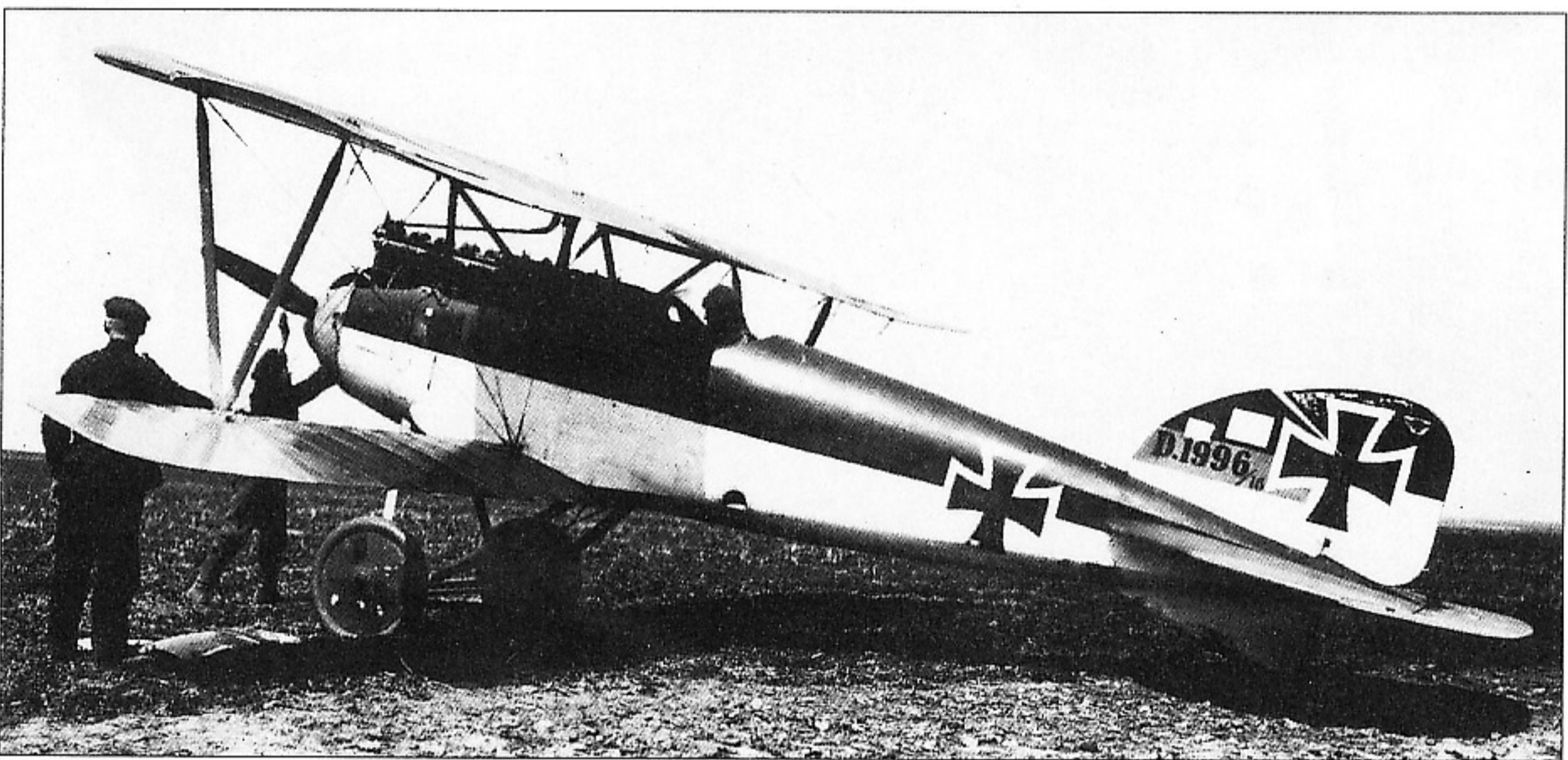
Felipe C. Miranda



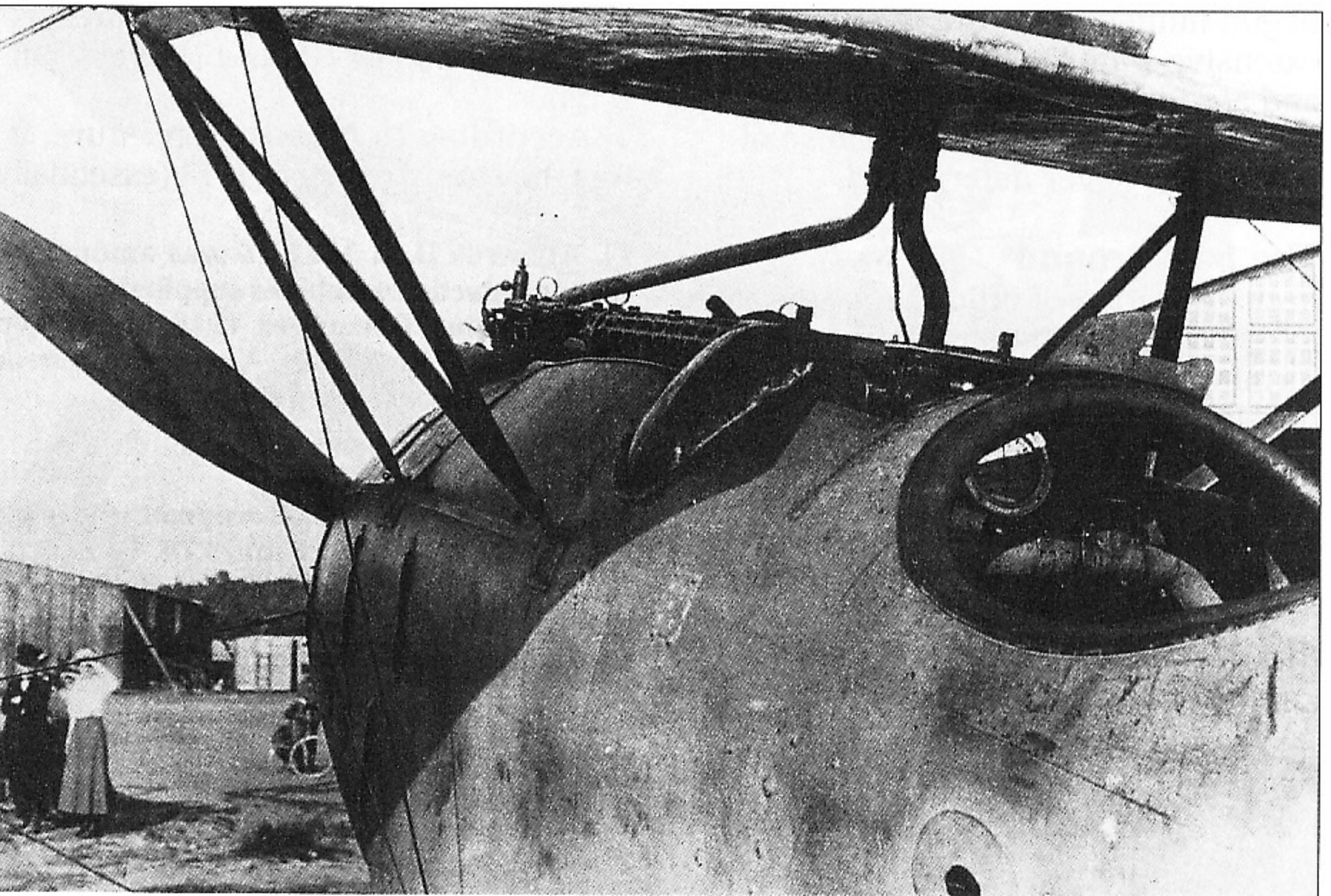
▲ 2



▲ 3 ▼ 4



▲ 5 ▼ 6



a B-type biplane fitted with single-bay wings of reduced span) which provided valuable engineering knowledge for the design of the Albatros D.I and D.II fighters. The single-bay cellule, in comparison to the twin-bay Fokker and Halberstadt fighters, reduced drag and was easier to rig and maintain in alignment. The ply-covered fuselage, invented by Albatros *Ober-Ingenieur* Hugo Grohmann in 1912, had gradually been perfected to permit the application of thin plywood sheets to compound curves, resulting in a very light, smooth and strong, semi-monocoque structure devoid of the customary internal bracing. The graceful streamlined fuselage and curved integral tail would characterise Albatros fighters throughout the war.²⁾

Developed and ordered into production in unison, the first Albatros D.I and D.II fighters arrived at the Front in August 1916. During the combat evaluation of the Albatros D.I, it quickly became apparent that the pilot's field of vision and target tracking was obstructed by the centre-section struts and the poor

2). Four Albatros D.III fighters of *Jasta* 12. The second is D.III 1958/16 flown by *Hauptmann* Paul Henning von Osterroht. The third in line carries a trefoil star. The field is shared with four Albatros D.II fighters parked in the distance.

3). *Leutnant* Herbert Pastor of *Jasta* 29 was the pilot of this Albatros D.III 1979/16 photographed on Wingene airfield.

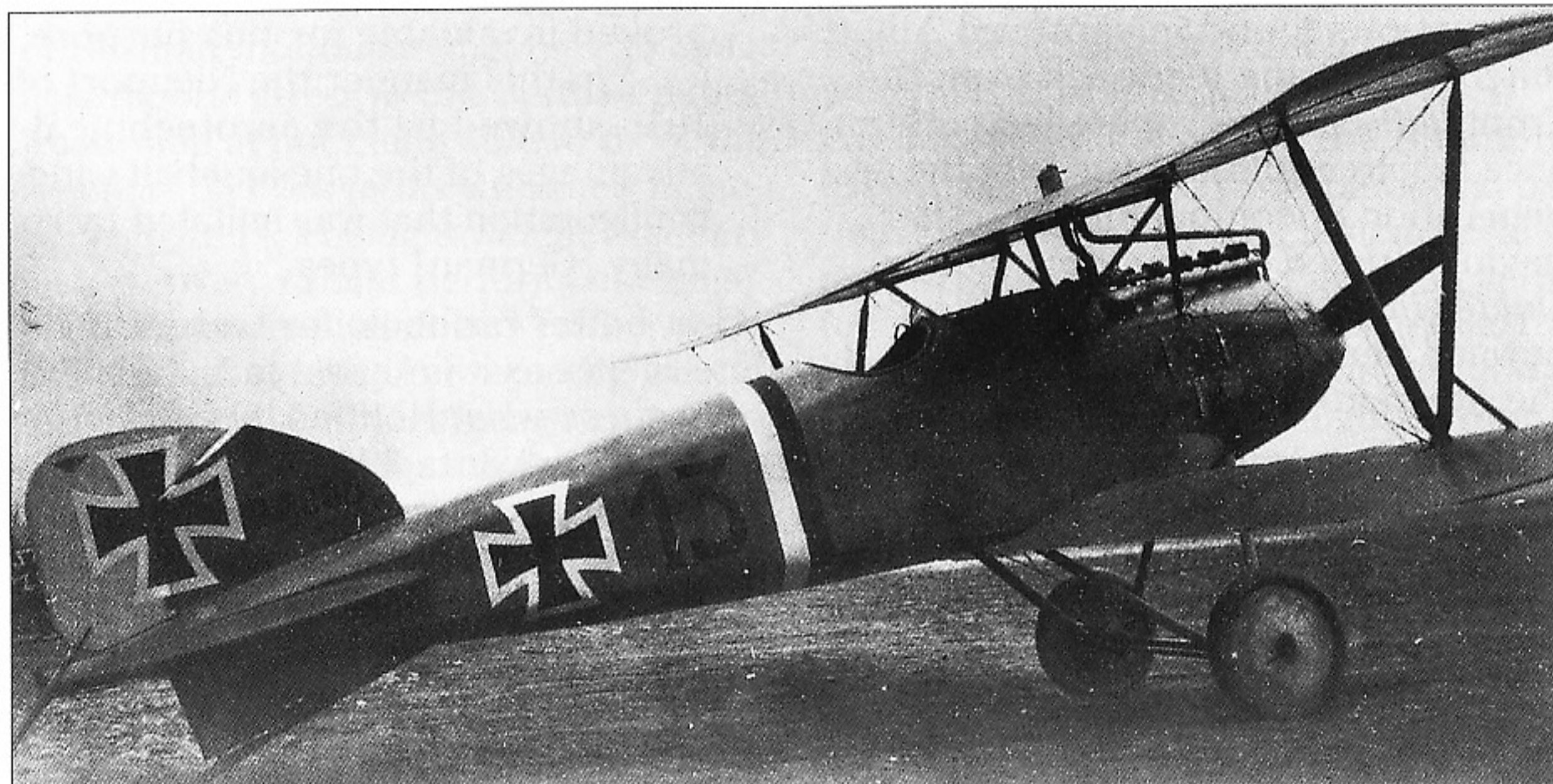
4). Albatros D.III 1996/16 was fitted with an automatic strip camera by *Leutnant* Rudolf Hohberg of *Flieger Abteilung (A)* 263. Presumably the light colour was to reduce visibility from below. The white squares on the fin may have been patches.

5). Albatros D.III 2002/16 adorned with the circular orange markings of the Dutch air service. Piloted by *Gefreiter* Becker of *Jasta* 20, the fighter developed engine difficulties and was forced to land in the Netherlands on 19 September 1917. Interned, it was eventually purchased by the Dutch air service and designated AL211. It was scrapped in 1925.

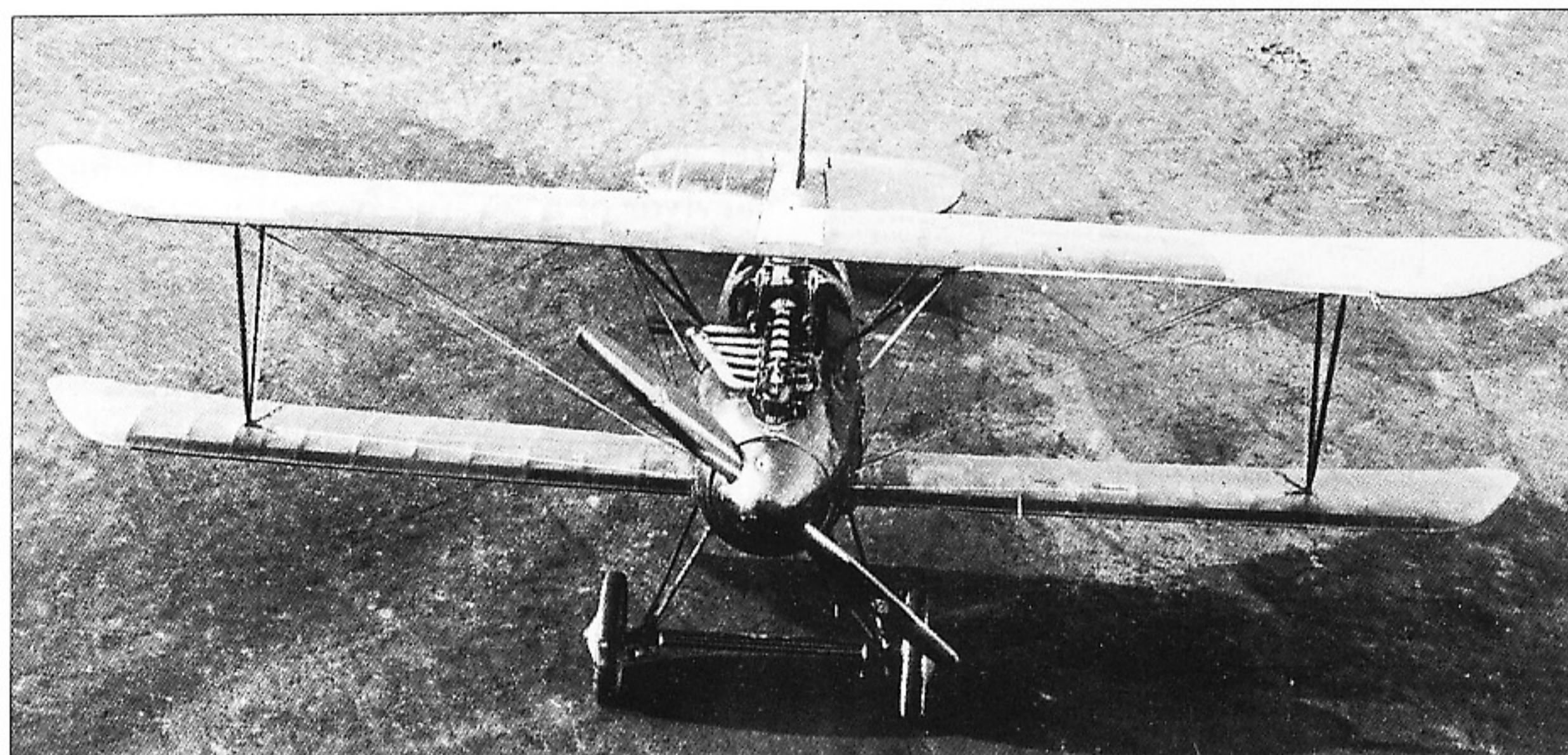
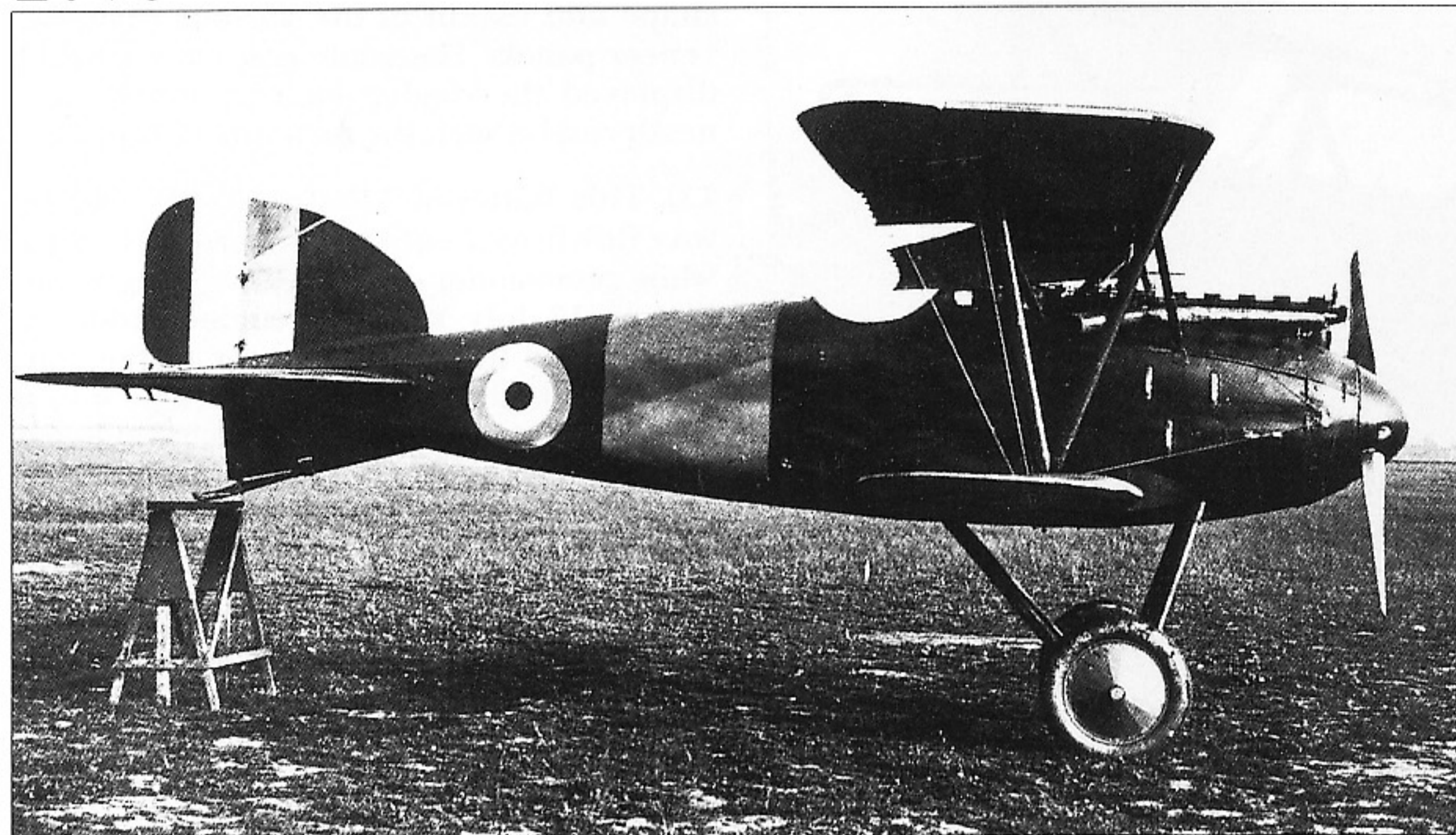
6). Albatros D.III 2002/16 in Dutch hands. Plainly visible is the 'bowl' cover over the machine-gun cartridge discharge. The wind-shield has been cut away to provide a clear view of the left aiming sights. Even when moved to one side, it is obvious the pipes leading to the centrally-mounted radiator obstruct the pilot's view. The opening in the fuselage may have been for the flare gun.

7). Albatros D.III 2008/16 was flown by *Jasta* 21. The supplementary lower wing brace is evidence that the lower wing was not behaving as designed.

8, 9 and 10). On 4 June 1917, *Leutnant* Georg Simon of *Jasta* 11 was taken prisoner when his Albatros D.III 2015/16 (*w/n* 1359) was downed by Captain C M B Chapman of No.29 Squadron RFC. Given the RFC captured aircraft designation G.42 and repainted with British insignia, the fighter was carefully evaluated by RFC experts. The uncluttered and sleek lines of the airframe are exemplary for the times.



▲ 7 ▼ 8



▲ 9 ▼ 10



placement of the upper wing. On the other hand, the Albatros D.II with its open, splayed centre-section and lowered upper wing enjoyed a perfect view forward and upward from the cockpit.³⁹ A similar centre-section structure would be used on the Albatros D.III fighter.

The arrival of the Halberstadt, Fokker and Albatros biplane fighters in August-September 1916 and grouping them in newly-established *Jagdstaffeln* operating in accord with the innovative fighter tactics developed under the aegis of Oswald Boelcke, helped to achieve fighter parity and slowly regain air superiority on the Western Front.

The Nieuport factor

The story of the Albatros D.III could be said to have begun in December 1915 when comparative flight tests were performed between a captured '90-hp Nieuport two-seater' (type 12) and an '80-hp Fokker' (E.I). German pilots found that the French biplane was 10 km/h faster and possessed superior manoeuvrability with both possessing the same rate of climb. The report stated that 'a big advantage of the Nieuport is that the pilot has a better field of view downwards than from the Fokker monoplane. The view above is only slightly restricted by the upper wing'.⁴⁰ The 'Nieuport myth' began to make inroads on the German aeronautical community, only to be reinforced at Verdun where the Nieuport fighters outperformed the Fokker monoplanes and took their toll. It was not long before captured Nieuport single-seat fighters became available for inspection and flight tests, further adding fuel to the fire. The graceful Nieuport 11 was lauded in staff reports for its all-round qualities. Hard-pressed German pilots, enduring the Fokker's sudden loss of effectiveness, raised a clamour for a competitive biplane fighter of their own.

Oswald Boelcke, the acknowledged father of German fighter tactics, in a critique written on 11 October 1916, had this to say about the German E-type monoplane fighters:

'The combat of a single German aircraft against several Nieuports has

proven in almost all instances to be totally hopeless. The enemy machines are so superior that the unequal combat almost always ends with the downing of the German machine'.⁵⁾

Of course Boelcke was aware of the biplane fighter's superior quantities. His *Jagdstaffel 2* had received its first Albatros D-type fighter on 1 September and five or six more on 16 September 1916.

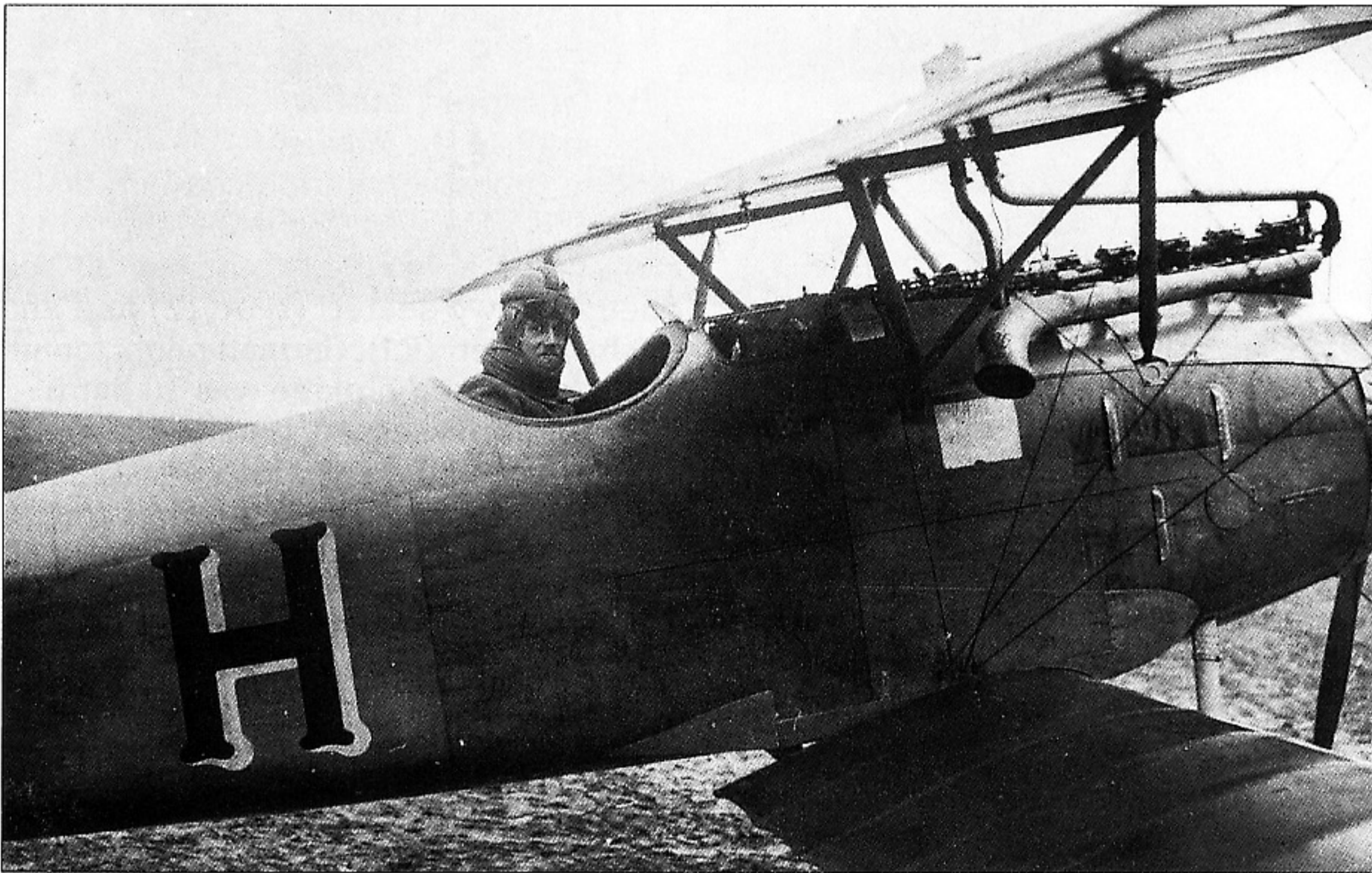
Throughout the war, *Idflieg* distributed among German manufacturers detailed engineering reports to apprise them of the newest structural and technical

innovations found in captured Allied machines. Using feedback from the Front, *Idflieg* issued upgraded performance requirements as a basis for the next generation of combat aircraft. After having studied the Nieuport fighter, *Doktor-Ingenieur* Wilhelm Hoff, a renowned German aerodynamic expert at the Adlershof test center, wrote:

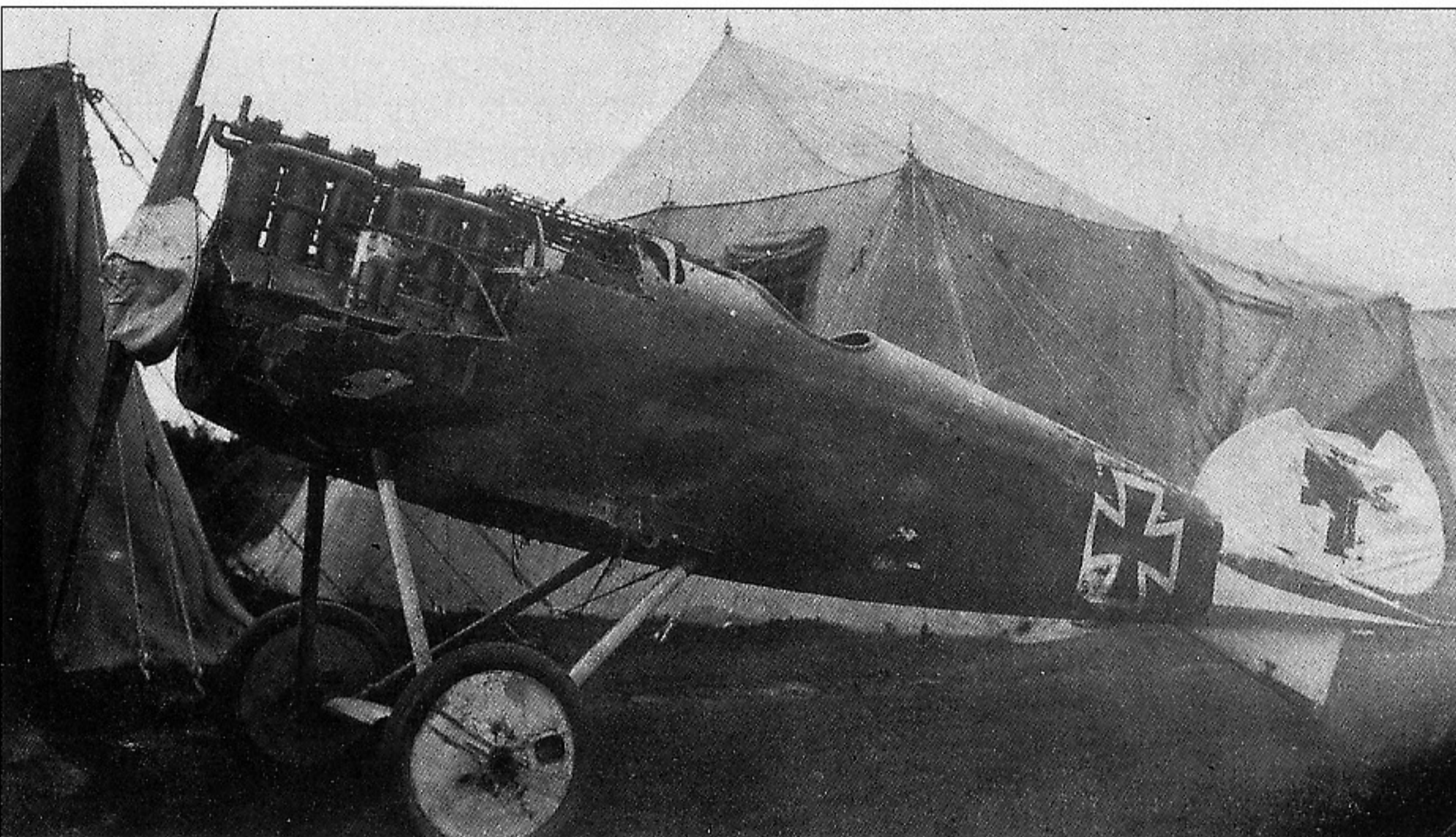
'Of wide-ranging importance were the results gained from comparing our aircraft with those of the enemy; this analysis showed us how to surpass him. The numerous captured aircraft

proved invaluable for this purpose. (. . .) In this manner the Nieuport of 1916 showed us the aerotechnical advantages of the one-and-half-wing configuration that was imitated by so many [German] types.'⁶⁾

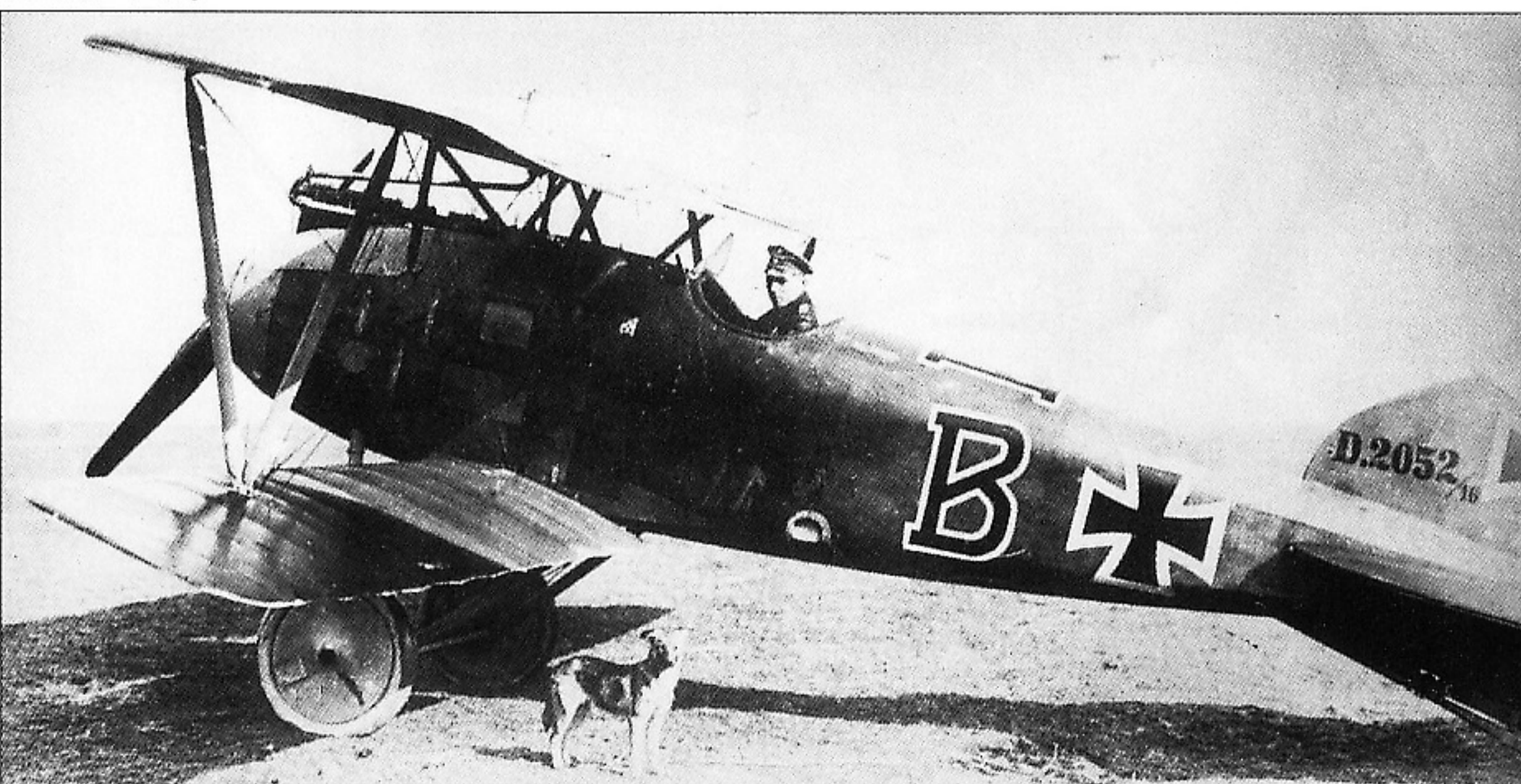
What better rationale for technical air intelligence as it is known today? We can only guess what Hoff meant by 'aerotechnical advantages.' Certainly the aileron control coupled with light weight gave the Nieuport fighter fast and positive flight response in comparison to the relatively sluggish wing-warping control



▲ 11



▲ 12 ▼ 13



11). *Leutnant* Hans Henkel of *Jasta 19* in his Albatros D.III 2022/16 at Le Thours in April 1917. The plain finish reveals the shape and extent of the various plywood veneer panels. The white placard probably displayed the rigging instructions. Underneath can be seen the airframe datum line.

12). This battered Albatros D.III 2049/16 was flown by *Leutnant* Hermann Göring while commander of *Jasta 27*. Göring wrote that on 16 July 1917 'the engine suddenly fell out and hung only loosely in the construction so that I immediately came into a spin. I landed the machine behind the 3rd line where I somersaulted'. The force of the crash has bent the rudder into a rounded OAW shape.

13). *Leutnant* von Budde and man's best friend proudly display the well-marked Albatros D.III 2052/16 of *Jasta 29*. The round step was seen on Albatros-built machines. The two-tone painting of the lower wing is interesting.

14). It appears that Budde pranged D.2052/16 while touching down on this mole-hill infested airfield.

15). Always reassuring to reflect being a survivor of a severe crash. Here *Leutnant* Pokrantz and *Leutnant* Budde survey the damage done to D.2052/16. The letter 'B' is repeated on the fuselage and the wing underside.

16). A snow-covered airfield provides a stark backdrop for Albatros D.III 2058/16 of *Jasta 29*. Who's in the mood for a diorama?

17). Albatros D.III 2063/16 undergoing a thorough Gallic critique by *les experts français*. Purportedly this machine was assigned to *Leutnant* Hugo Geiger of *Jasta 34b* in July 1917, but flown by another pilot when captured.

▼ 14



of German monoplane fighters. Extant field reports attest to the German pilots' frustration at not being able to meet the Nieuport on even terms with their monoplane fighters. The light-weight Nieuport also enjoyed a slight performance edge over the newly-introduced Fokker and Halberstadt D-types powered by heavy, water-cooled, in-line engines.

However, the Nieuport's narrow lower wing appears to impart no obvious aerodynamic advantage seen in light of today's aeronautical knowledge. The narrow, single-spar lower wing and fewer

wing-bracing cables reduced drag and weight. It is almost as if the French engineers had conceived the Nieuport essentially as a high-wing, parasol type, using the lower wing as a structural support member, cleverly given an aerofoil shape to provide a modicum of extra lift. The air-cooled, 80-hp Gnome rotary engine mated with a very light airframe resulted in excellent performance and manoeuvrability. The impression made by the Nieuport 11 on the German pilots and the aeronautical establishment was pervasive. Captured Nieuport airframes

were shipped to German aircraft manufacturers for study and, if not directly copied, at least the best features were adopted.⁷ The military flight test reports emphasised the excellent downwards visibility afforded by the Nieuport's narrow lower wing. In this context, it should be noted that the downward view from the Albatros D.II was regarded as 'especially poor' by fighter pilots. The unobstructed downward view, so important in air combat when searching and attacking from above, was, in this writer's opinion, the major reason for the adoption of the narrow lower wing and the veestrut configuration for the Albatros D.III fighter.

Enter the Albatros D.III

The influence of the Nieuport is reflected in a proposal made by the Albatros design bureau, led by chief engineer *Diplom-Ingenieur* Robert Thelen, assisted by the designers of the D.III, *Dipl.-Ing.* Rudolf Schubert and *Ingenieur* Gnädig. Albatros engineers suggested changing the official aircraft acceptance requirements. *Idflieg* reported on 6 August that:

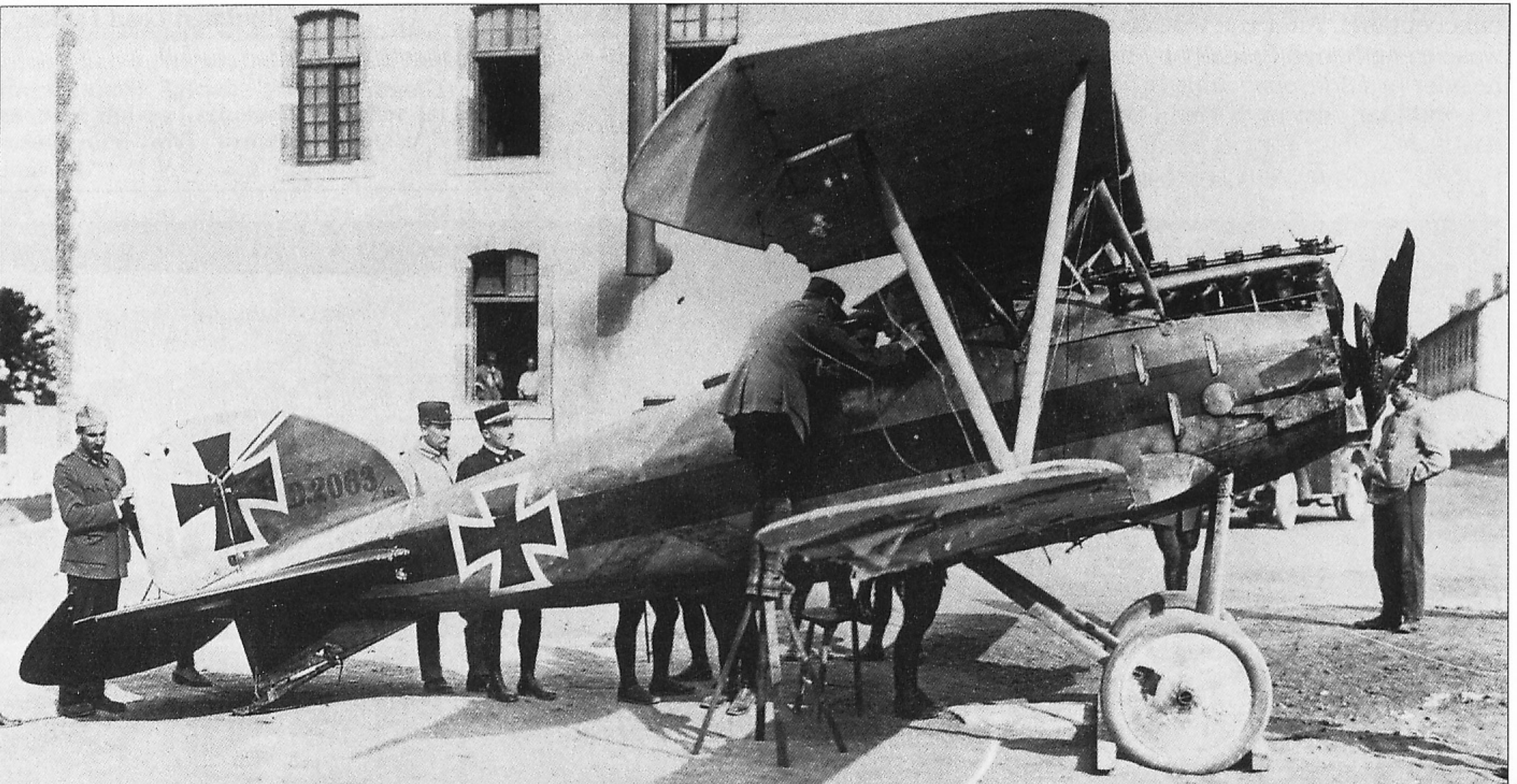
'The Albatros factory has made some worthwhile suggestions about aircraft construction. The trials with the Nieuport have shown that exceptional performance can only be achieved if the requirements are lowered. The [Albatros] factory has suggested lowering the useful weight specification. For example, the pilot [weight] should not be 100 kg but rather 80 or 85 kg. Furthermore a smaller quantity of ammunition; no pilot takes 1000 rounds into the air; the quantity of 350 rounds per gun would suffice. Already in this manner about 40 kg are saved. Similarly the fuel load could be reduced. As a result of these savings the structural weight could be appropriately lowered. The acceptance weight could be lowered from 900 kg to 750 kg. By this means the aircraft performance could be significantly enhanced.'



▲ 15



▲ 16 ▼ 17



It is obvious that Albatros engineers had studied the Nieuport's features in detail, surely interrogated pilots and perhaps even travelled to the Front to ascertain first hand what the latest buzz was.

By late July or early August 1916, the construction of the prototype Albatros D.III was underway at Johannisthal. Structurally, the D.III consisted of a D.II fuselage and tailplanes but was fitted with a Nieuport wing cellule of appropriately larger dimensions to accommodate the heavier, water-cooled 160-hp Mercedes D.III engine and twin machine gun armament. A comparison is in order: the Nieuport 11 had a loaded weight of 480 kg (which in today's world might be classified as an ultra-light aircraft!), whereas the D.III weighed 810 kg loaded, almost *twice* the Nieuport's weight.

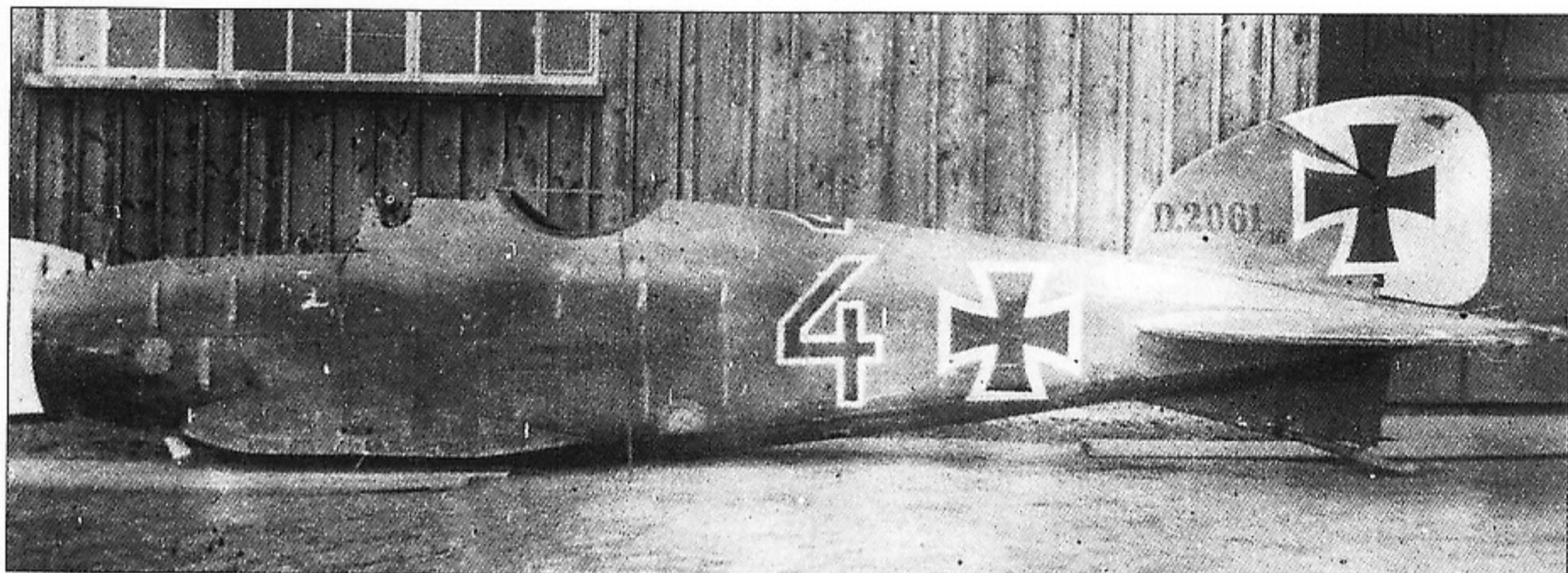
No records have been found to document the maiden flight of the Albatros D.III prototype, but this must have occurred in August or September 1916. The first official reference to the Albatros D.III appears on 22 September 1916 when a prototype airframe (D.388/16) underwent static load testing, a mandatory procedure for every new German aircraft.⁹⁾ All components - that is, wings, tail, controls, undercarriage and fuselage - were loaded to stipulated weight limits. For example the wings were loaded with sand bags to simulate four flight attitudes as defined in **Table 1**

As of 1916, the *Bau und Liefervorschriften* (BLV - construction and delivery regulations) specified that the wings of a fighter had to withstand the stipulated load factors shown above to obtain service acceptance.⁹⁾ Naturally these values differed for two-seaters and multi-engined aircraft. For example, bombers were not required to pass the inverted flight load test. *Idflieg* records show that load testing for case C (near vertical dive) was rarely performed probably because testing for case A (pulling out of a dive) sufficed.

The wing static load test performed on 22 September showed a value for case A of 4,49 and case B of 3,01, both unacceptable. After the wing assembly was strengthened (usually by installing heavier or additional cable bracing), a second load test performed the same day gave a value for case B of 3,46. The D.388/16 airframe was re-weighed on 29



▲ 18



▲ 19 ▼ 20

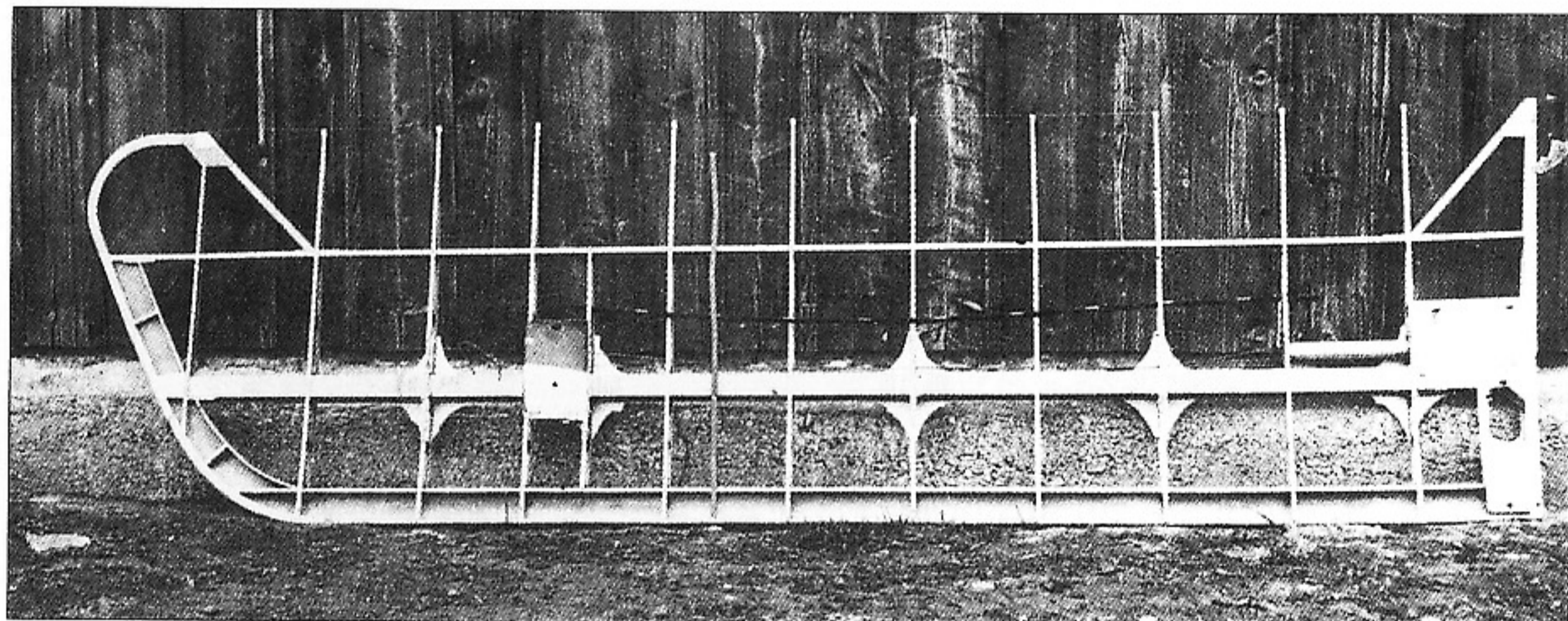
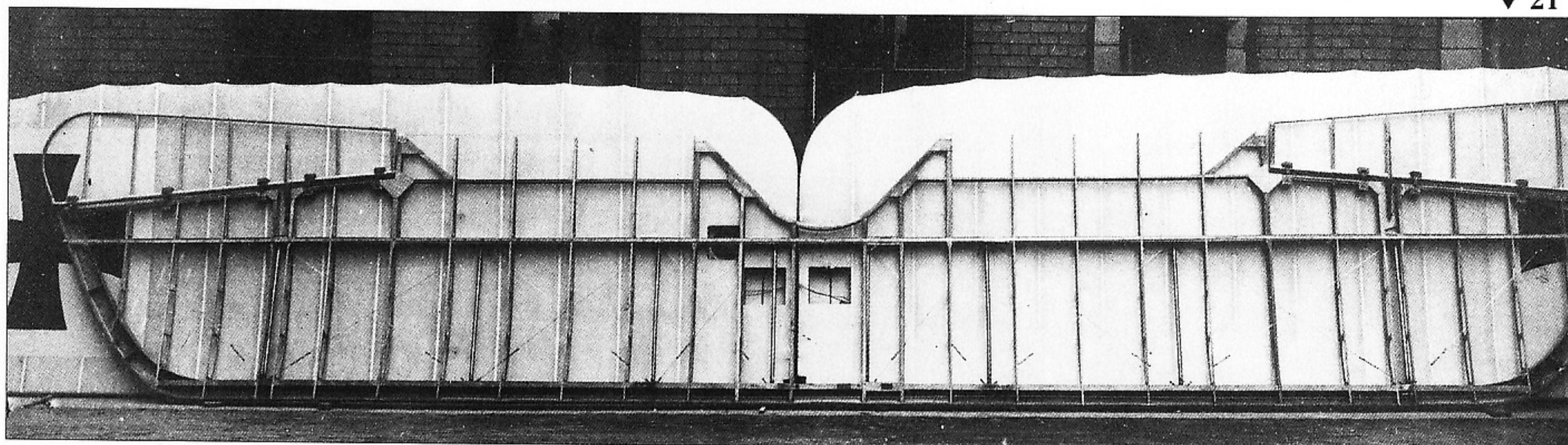
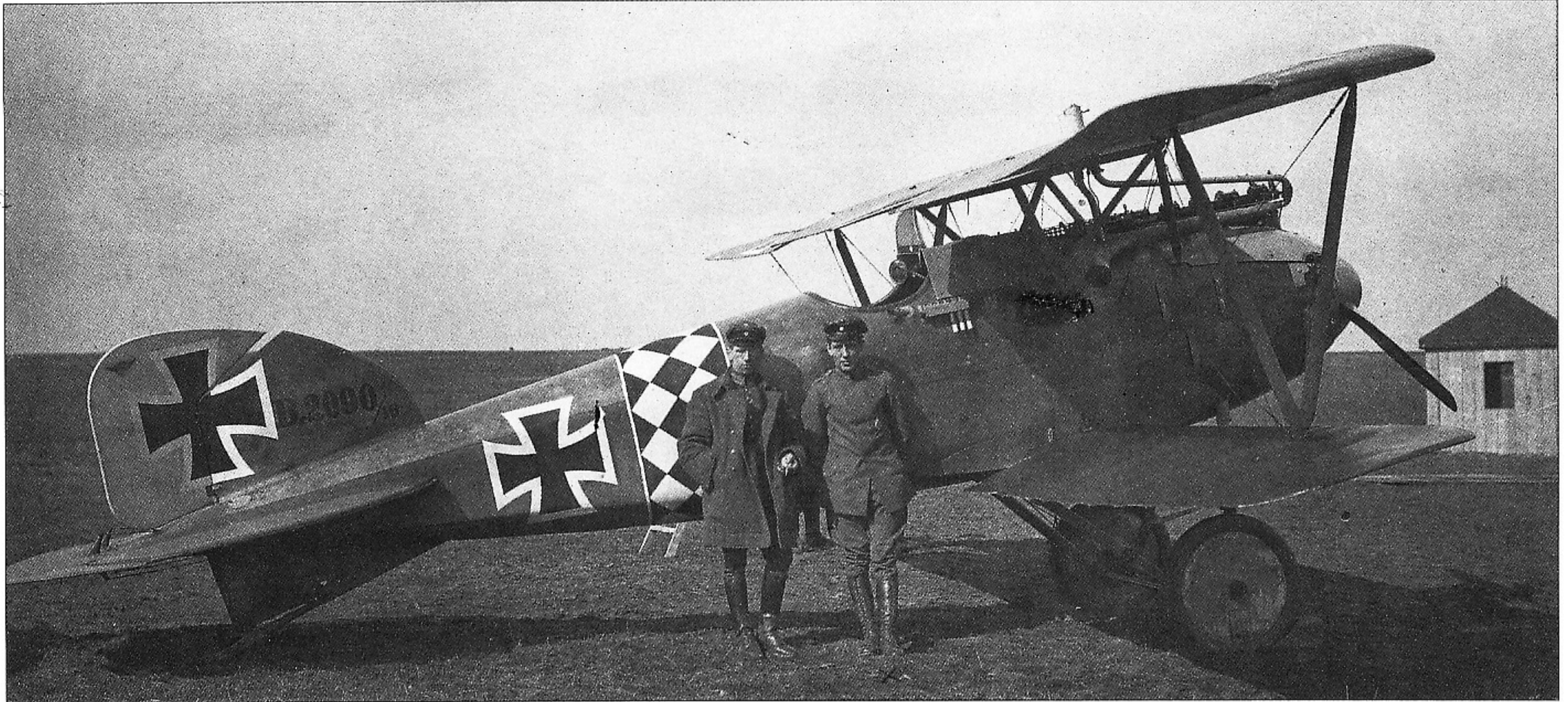


Table 1 - BLV load requirements for aircraft

Case (Fall)	Definition	Stipulated Load Factor
A	pulling out of a dive (<i>Abfangen</i>)	5,0
B	gliding (30% angle) flight (<i>Gleitflug</i>)	3,5
C	near vertical dive (<i>Sturzflug</i>)	2,5
D	inverted flight (<i>Rückenflug</i>)	3,0

▼ 21





▲ 22 ▼ 23

September which is a good indication that further wing tests were in the offing but details are lacking. The fin, rudder, tail-plane and elevator, all tested on 3-4 October 1916, exceeded the minimum load requirements by a substantial margin.

18). *Leutnant* Fritzsche of *Jasta* 29 climbing into his Albatros D.III 2061/16. In evidence are the rear-view mirror, the large centrally-mounted tachometer below which can be seen the robust machine-gun support.

19). After a landing crash, Fritzsche's D.2061/16 was dismantled for repair. The fuselage section at the lower wing juncture shows the single, rectangular spar attachment point.

20). The stripped lower wing of D.2061/16 is interesting because it shows an example of rib reinforcement that did not appear in the official *Idflieg* reports.

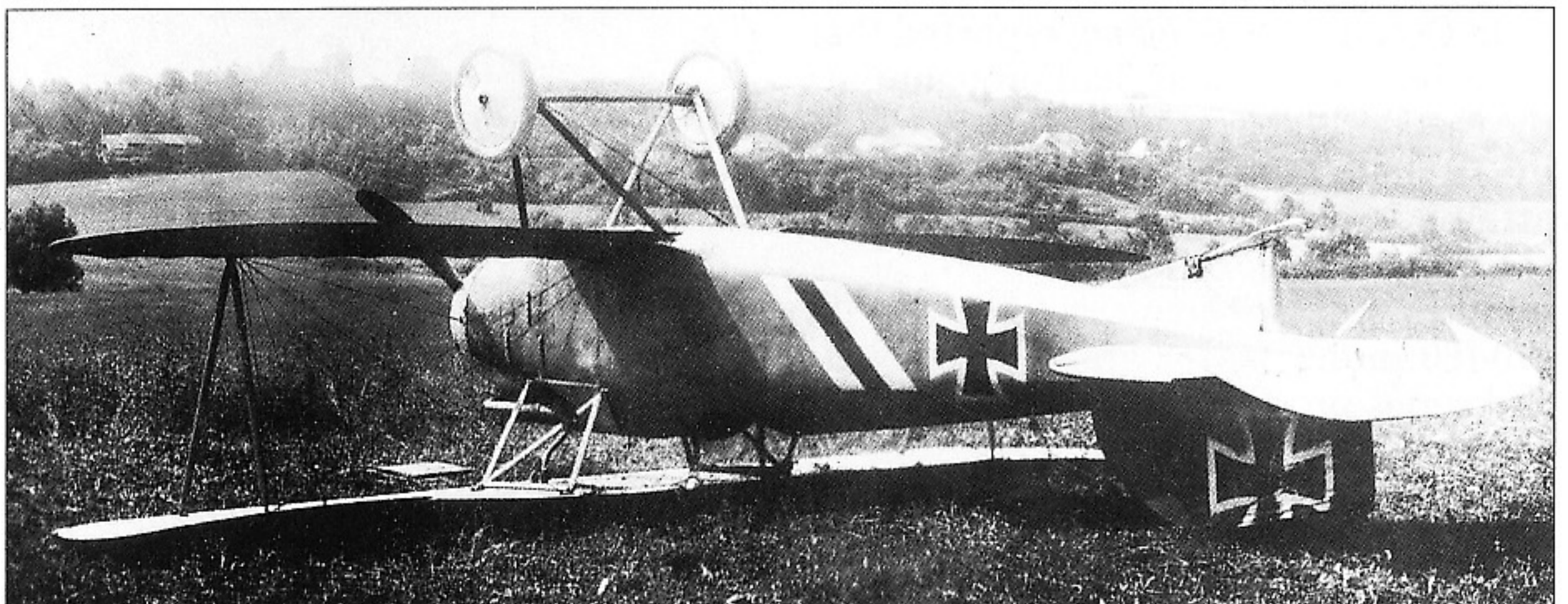
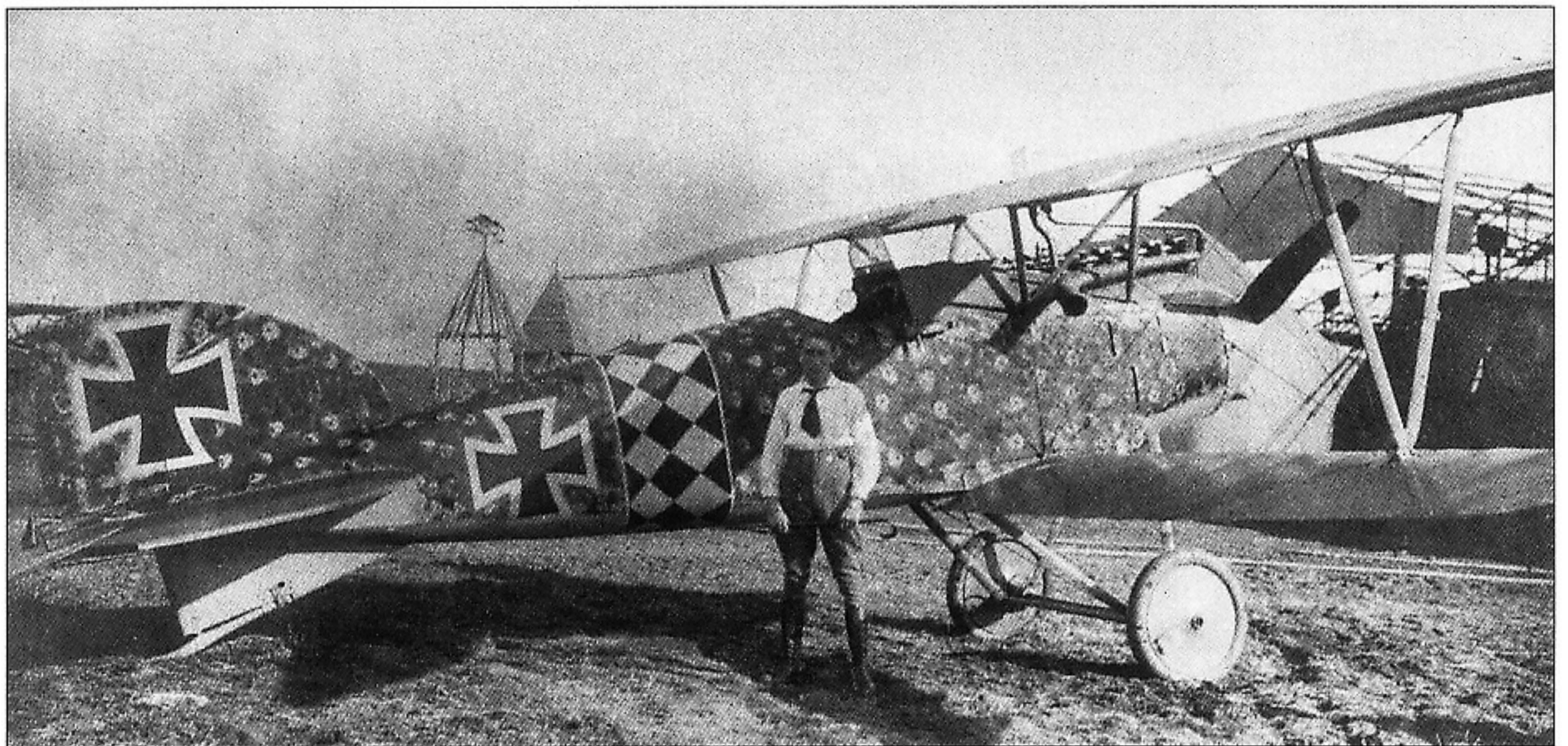
21). The bare upper wing of D.2061/16 provides a clear view of the inner structure.

22). *Leutnant* Fritz Jacobsen (on right) of *Jasta* 31 with his Albatros D.III 2090/16. Of interest are the high windscreen, the flare cartridge holder and the protective plate at the side of the machine gun.

23). One wonders what Jacobsen had in mind when he decorated D.2090/16 in this spectacularly garish 'pheasant eye' or 'mottled flowers' scheme. Again the large windscreen and protective plate are unusual.

24). Landing on unprepared or soft fields led to many somersaults, including this unarmed Albatros D.III 2095/16.

25). The much photographed and peripatetic Albatros D.III 2096/16 'Vera' was flown by *Leutnant* Friedrich-Wilhelm Wichard of *Jasta* 24 and captured on 21 April 1917, possibly downed by *Escadrille* Nieuport N.78. A gift of the French government, 'Vera' was one of the five foreign aircraft obtained when McCook Field in Dayton, Ohio began operations. As shown here 'Vera' carrying the McCook number P 13 was exhibited at the Aero Show in New York City in February 1919.



▲ 24 ▼ 25





▲ 26 ▼ 27

During the undercarriage load test (dates not given), the axle and rear undercarriage strut failed. These items were strengthened before combat approval was granted.

Since it was customary for *Idflieg* to require three examples of each new aircraft (one for static load testing, one for flight evaluation and one spare), it is believed that the other two Albatros D.III prototypes were numbered D.387/16 and D.389/16. The three D.III prototypes came from a blanket order of 12 prototypes (D.380-391/16) placed in June 1916 which included the Albatros D.I and D.II.

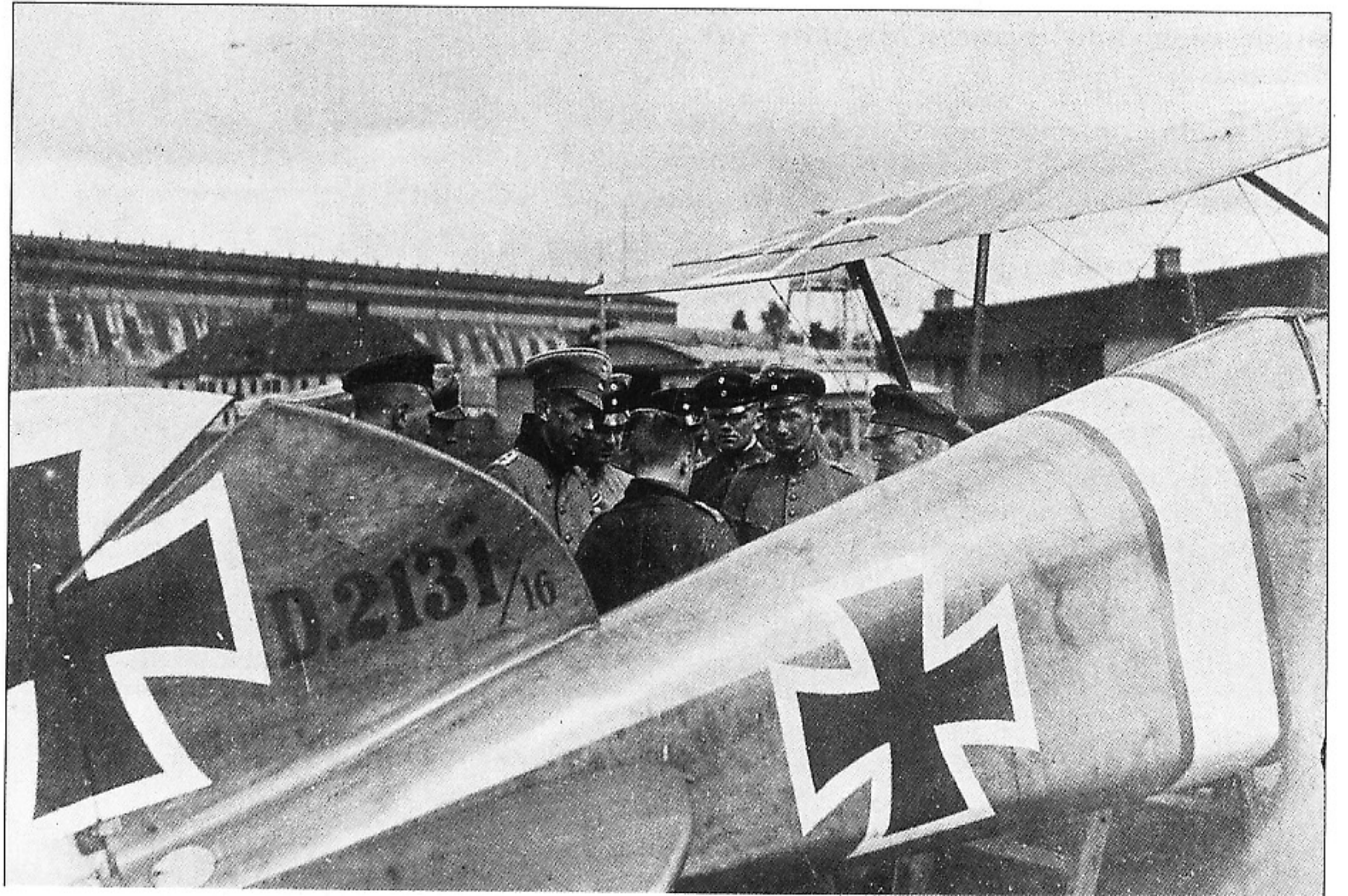
In October 1916, *Idflieg* reported that the Albatros company 'had brought out the Nieuport biplane as the D.III. Powered by a 160-hp Mercedes, the D.III had attained very good performance, reaching 5000 metres (16,405 ft) in 24 minutes. Top speed attained was about 170-180 km/h (106-112 mph). Static tests and series production are being accelerated'.

The D.III fighter's performance and flight characteristics, evaluated at Adlershof during September and October, surpassed expectations. *Idflieg* responded by underwriting the largest aircraft production contract to date when it purchased 400 D.III fighters in October (see **Table 5**).

This was not only a confirmation of the fighter's growing role in air warfare but also accounted for the rapid increase in fighter units and the high aircraft wastage on the Western Front. The *Fliegertruppe* demand for replacement aircraft was prodigious. The *Kommandierender General der Luftstreitkräfte (Kogenluft* - commanding general air services) reported on 1 May 1917 that the monthly expenditure (wastage) from all causes totalled 540 D-types (single-seat fighters) and 400 C-types (two-seaters). At the time, the German aircraft industry was delivering between 700 to 800 aircraft

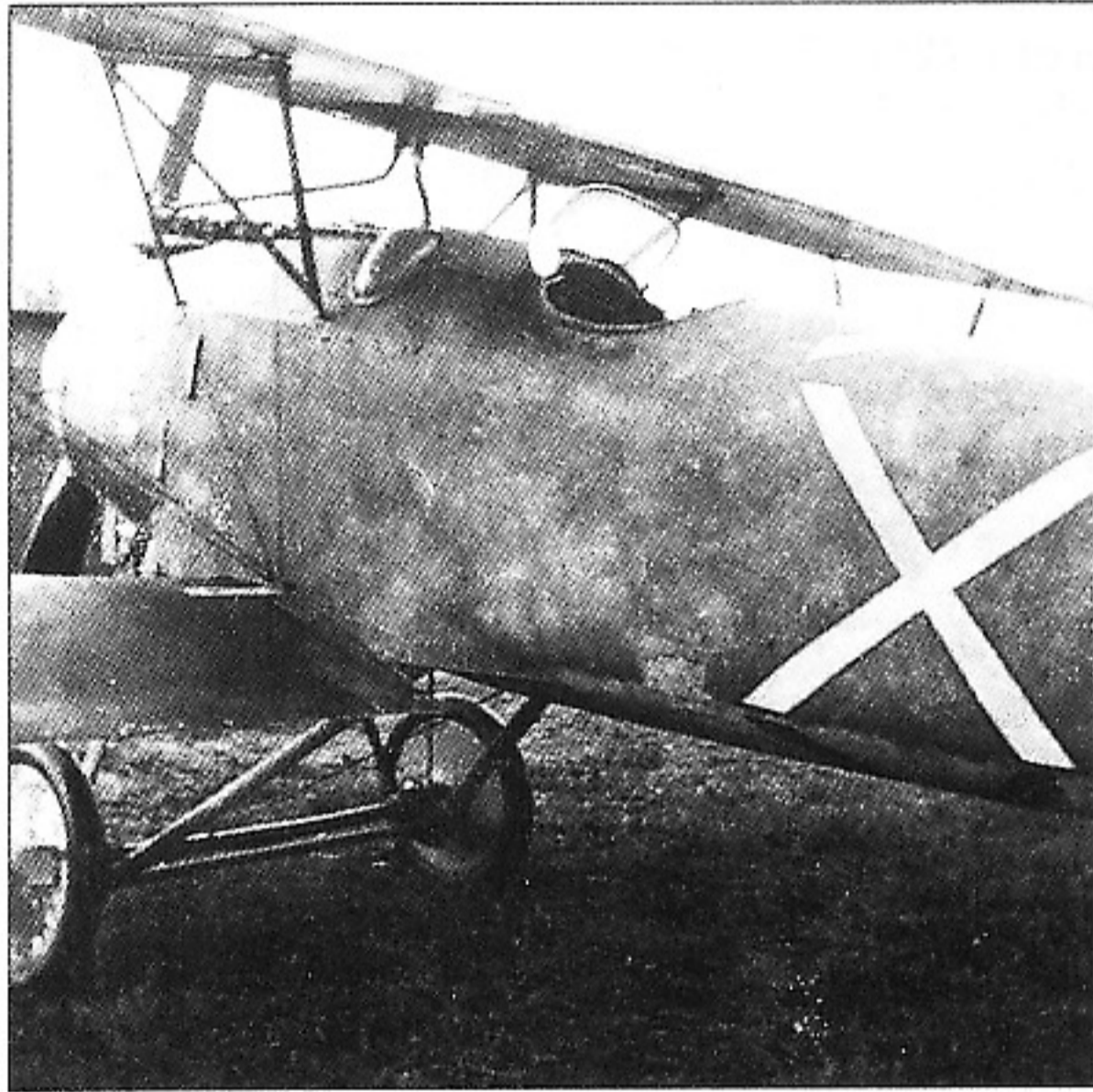


▲ 28 ▼ 29





▲ 30 ▼ 31



26). Albatros D.III 207-/16 with 1918 markings was photographed on 1 June 1918 and was possibly serving as a trainer at the time. It is fitted with additional wing support braces and a second drag cable attached to the lower cowl section.

27). Albatros D.III 2114/16, being serviced by a mechanic, sports an intriguing paint job.

28). Taken at the *Jagdfliegerschule Valenciennes* (fighter school), the photograph of Albatros D.III 2118/16 was labelled 'a lucky landing'.

29). *Leutnant* Ernst Udet (without cap) of *Jasta* 37 debriefing at Metz provides a nice view of the tail section of Albatros D.III 2131/16. The plywood covered tail fin was integral with the fuselage structure.

30). This thoroughly camouflaged Albatros D.III 2167/16 was flown by *Leutnant* Wölker of *Jasta* 31. He is the man in the middle. On the left is *Leutnant* Kaus. The camouflage is similar to the one applied to an aircraft of the same unit shown in *photo No.23*.

31). Albatros D.III 2167/16 of *Jasta* 31 showing the letter 'X' repeated on the light-coloured fuselage side. The large wind-screen is noteworthy.

32). Looking into the rear-view mirror is *Leutnant* Wölker with a bandaged chin in the cockpit of Albatros D.III 2167/16. Barely visible is a small support brace holding the radiator pipe.

33). Commander of *Jasta* 12, *Oberleutnant* Adolf Ritter von Tutschek might be posing for a Sanke postcard in front of Albatros D.III 2274/16. The 1914-style iron crosses on a white field were used probably because the aircraft was largely painted black.



▲ 32 ▼ 33



per month with an additional 350 repair aircraft becoming available.

The Albatros D.III arrives at the Front
In December 1916, about four months after the introduction of the Albatros D.I and D.II, the first Albatros D.III fighters off the production line were transported to *Armee Flug Parks* for distribution to operational units. By month's end, a total of 13 D.III fighters

was available for pilot orientation and combat evaluation. For example, *Jagdstaffel* 24 received the first three Albatros D.III fighters on 21 December. By the end of February 1917, the front-line complement numbered 137 aircraft. As *Jagdstaffel* pilots became acquainted with the D.III, they waxed enthusiastic; it was easy to fly, free of nasty traits and exhibited excellent performance. *Leutnant* Rudolf Nebel of *Jasta* 5 reported that 'the

D.III was faster than the D.II and much better in a climb. This is all the more remarkable because the Albatros D.II is already superior to all enemy types.' The aviation commander of the 4th Army reported that 'the Albatros D.III is easy to fly and superior to all aircraft at the Front.' Forming the component of new *Jastas*, the growing numbers of Albatros D.III fighters augured a black future for the Allies.

However few newly-introduced aircraft are entirely free of problems and the Albatros D.III proved no exception. The tailskid proved weak, requiring reinforcement of the tail section. The undercarriage had to be beefed-up as well. When firing incendiary rounds (Adler B ammunition), premature muzzle bursts and blast particles caused damage to the engine and water ducts. Firing tubes and metal panels were installed for protection. Pilots complained that the water duct leading from the engine to the centrally-mounted aerofoil radiator interfered with gun aiming.¹⁰⁾ After at least

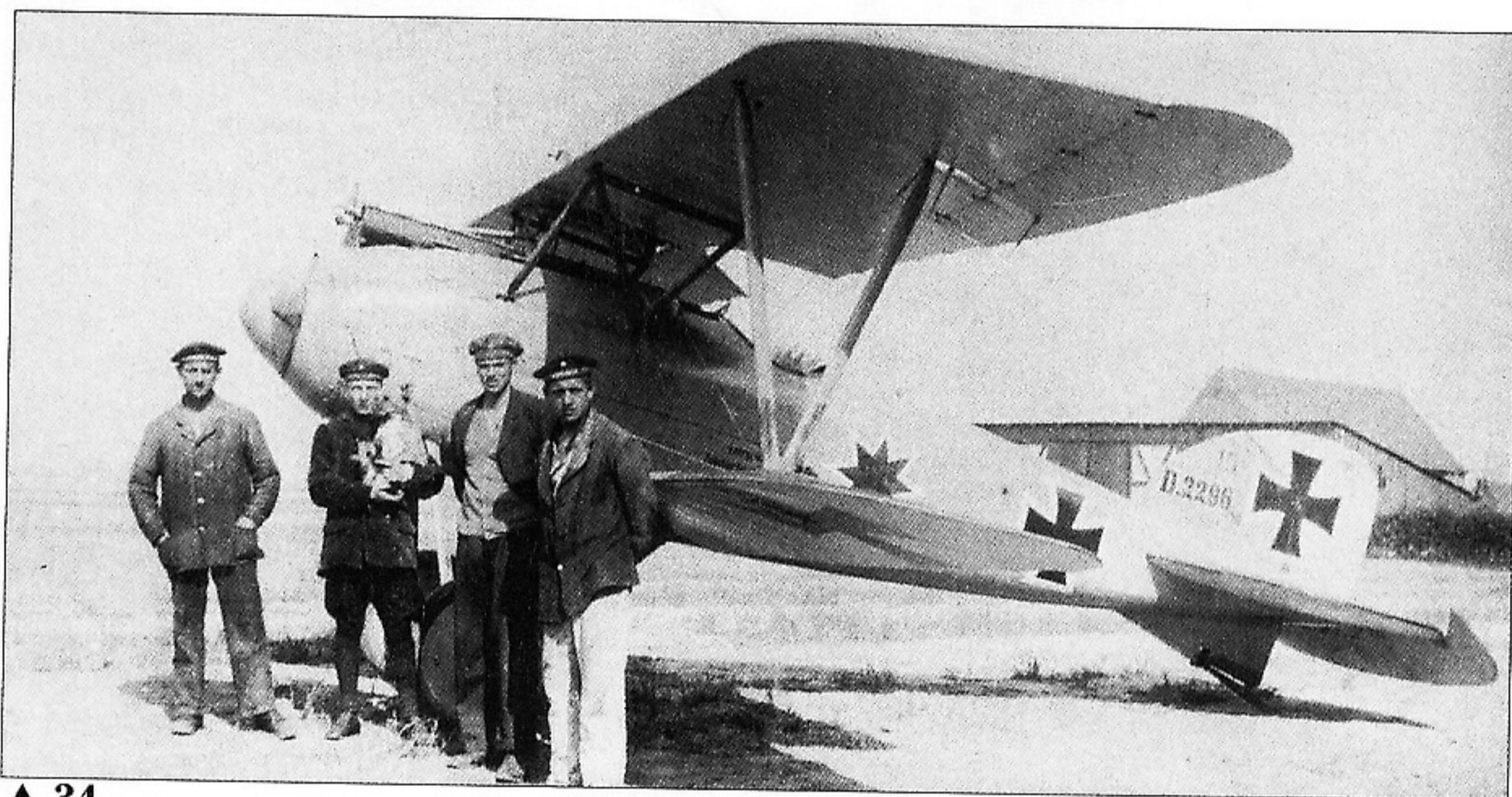
306 fighters had been delivered, the radiator was offset to starboard thus removing the obstructive water ducts from the field of vision. (Photographs show that the switch from central radiator to offset radiator occurred between airframes D.2215/16 and D.2252/16.)

With the advent of warmer weather on 29 April, four *Jasta* 24 fighters were forced to return 10 minutes after take-off because the water began to boil over. It was thought that the cooling airstream did not flow freely around the radiator tubes. However, the installation of metal air deflectors failed to eliminate overheating. Since the Albatros D.II aerofoil radiator was one-third larger, *Jasta* 24's resourceful technical personnel installed one in D.III 2269/16 with complete success, proving that a larger or more efficient radiator was the answer. The cooling problem finally was resolved with the arrival on 4 June of two Albatros D.III fighters fitted with new Daimler radiators having hexagonal cooling tubes.

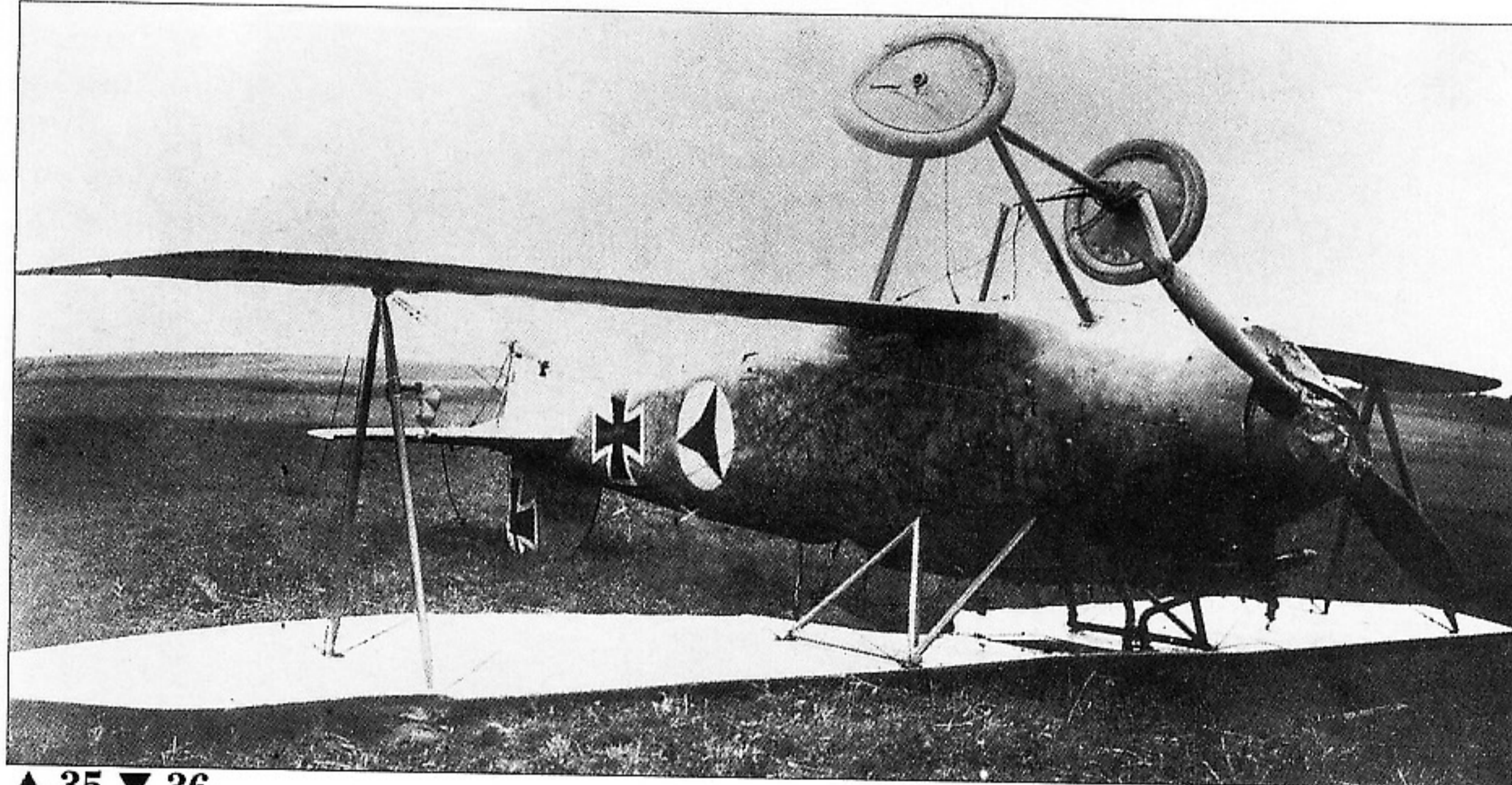
The wing failure syndrome

Yet the above problems were miniscule compared to the current wing failures that would haunt the Albatros D.III throughout its combat career. The increase of D.III fighters at the *Jasta* level was fairly rapid, rising from 13 D.III fighters on 31 December 1916 to 137 on 28 February 1917. The increase in number provided ample opportunity for pilots to expose the new D.III fighter to the stress and strain of fighting manoeuvres - always the final affirmation of combat maturity.

In view of the enthusiastic first reception accorded the Albatros D.III, it is shocking to learn that as early as 17 January 1917, *Armee Oberkommando* 2 reported: 'rib fractures and breakage of the leading edge on Albatros 1919, 1930, 1962 and 2002 as a result of turning manoeuvres and diving flights - the aircraft were able to land'. Only a few weeks after the first exposure to combat, it became patently obvious that something was seriously amiss with the wings of



▲ 34



▲ 35 ▼ 36

34). Several stalwarts of the I. *Marine Feld Jasta* with the Albatros D.III 2296/16. Of interest is the metal trough in front of the machine gun to protect the engine and airframe from muzzle debris.

35). This well-camouflaged Albatros D.III 23 - /16 has seen better days.

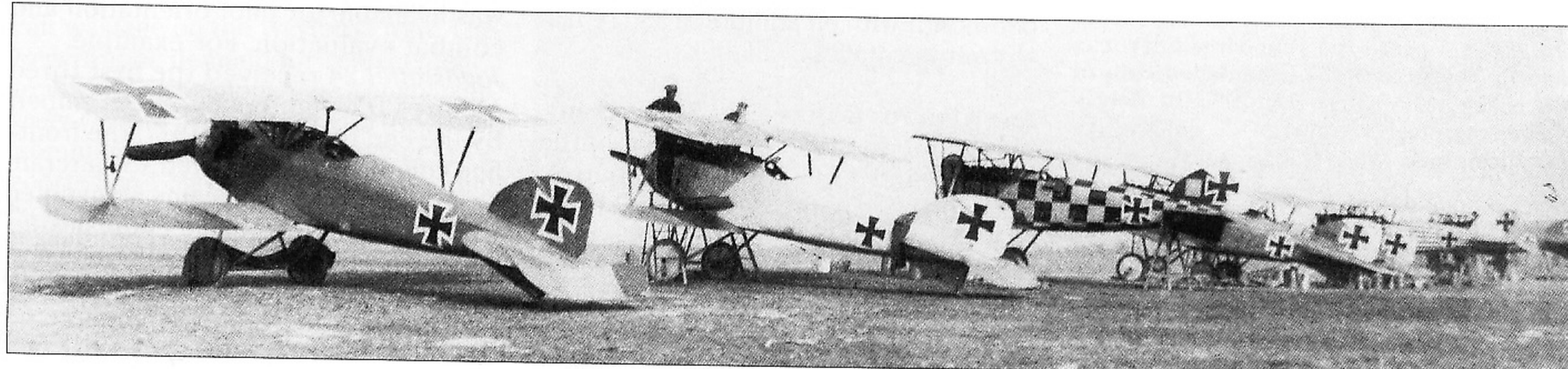
36). A colourful array of Albatros D.III fighters attached to *Jasta* 36. Fourth in line appears to be Albatros D.III 2228/16. One wonders if the bold chequerboard pattern was more than just a pilot's personal identification marking.

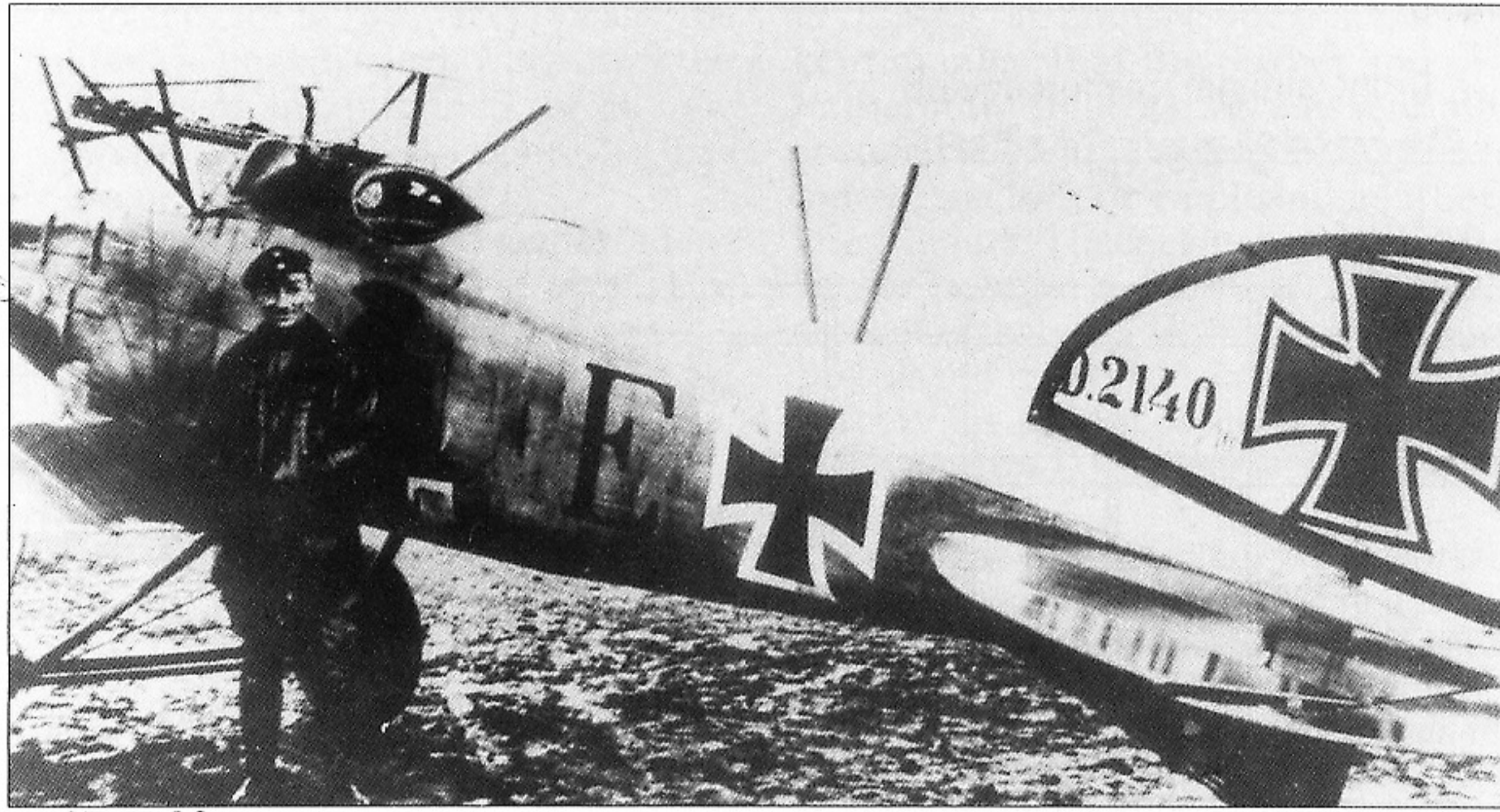
37). This Albatros D.III 2140/16 was flown by *Leutnant* Paul Ergbuth of *Jasta* 30.

38). A pristine, unarmed Albatros D.III 606/17 photographed on 10 July 1918 illustrates many features: the offset radiator, the wing strut braces, the second drag cable and a rather unusual *Balkenkreuz* treatment. It was probably a communication machine flown by a *Fliegertruppe* staff officer.

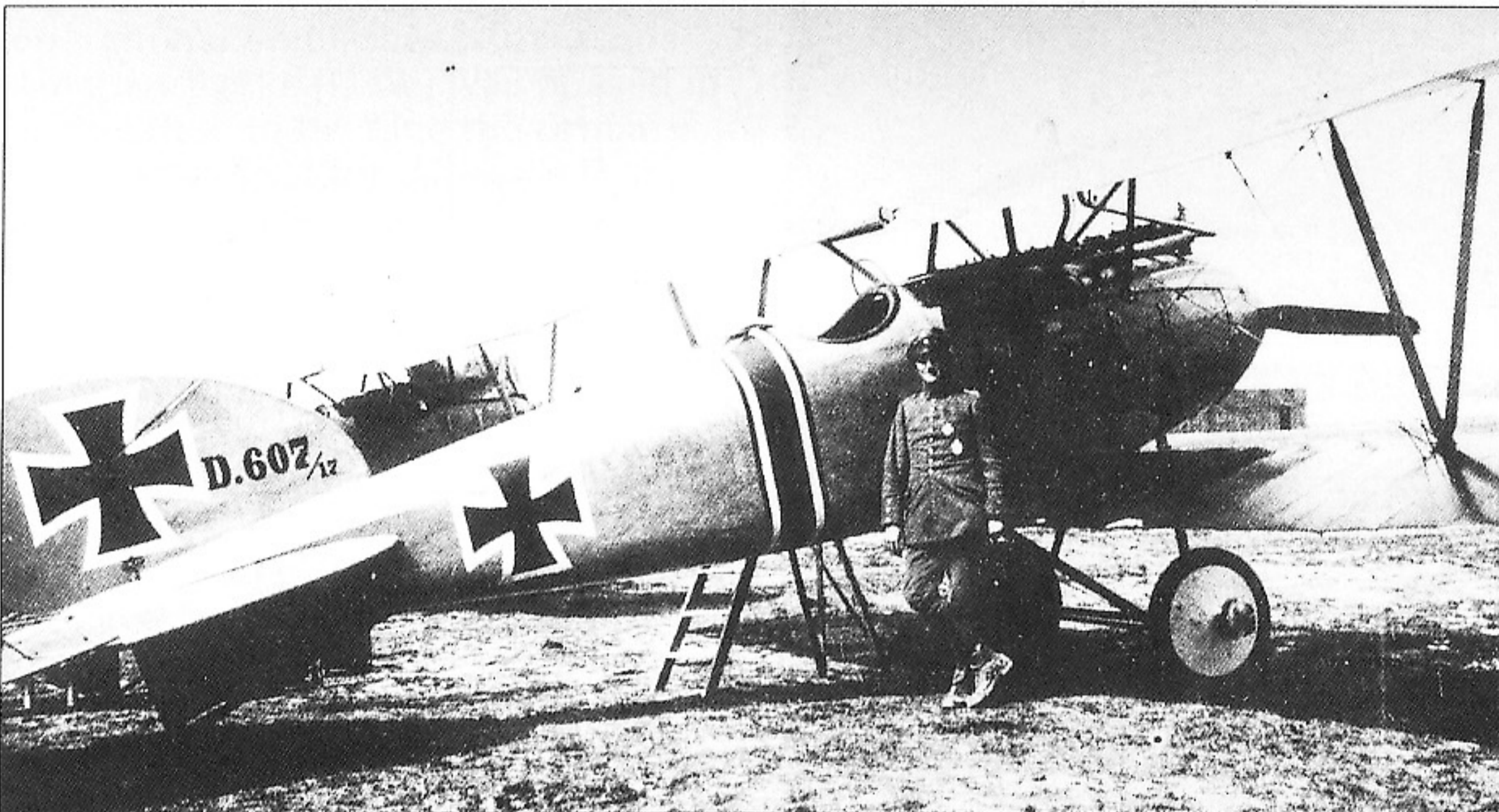
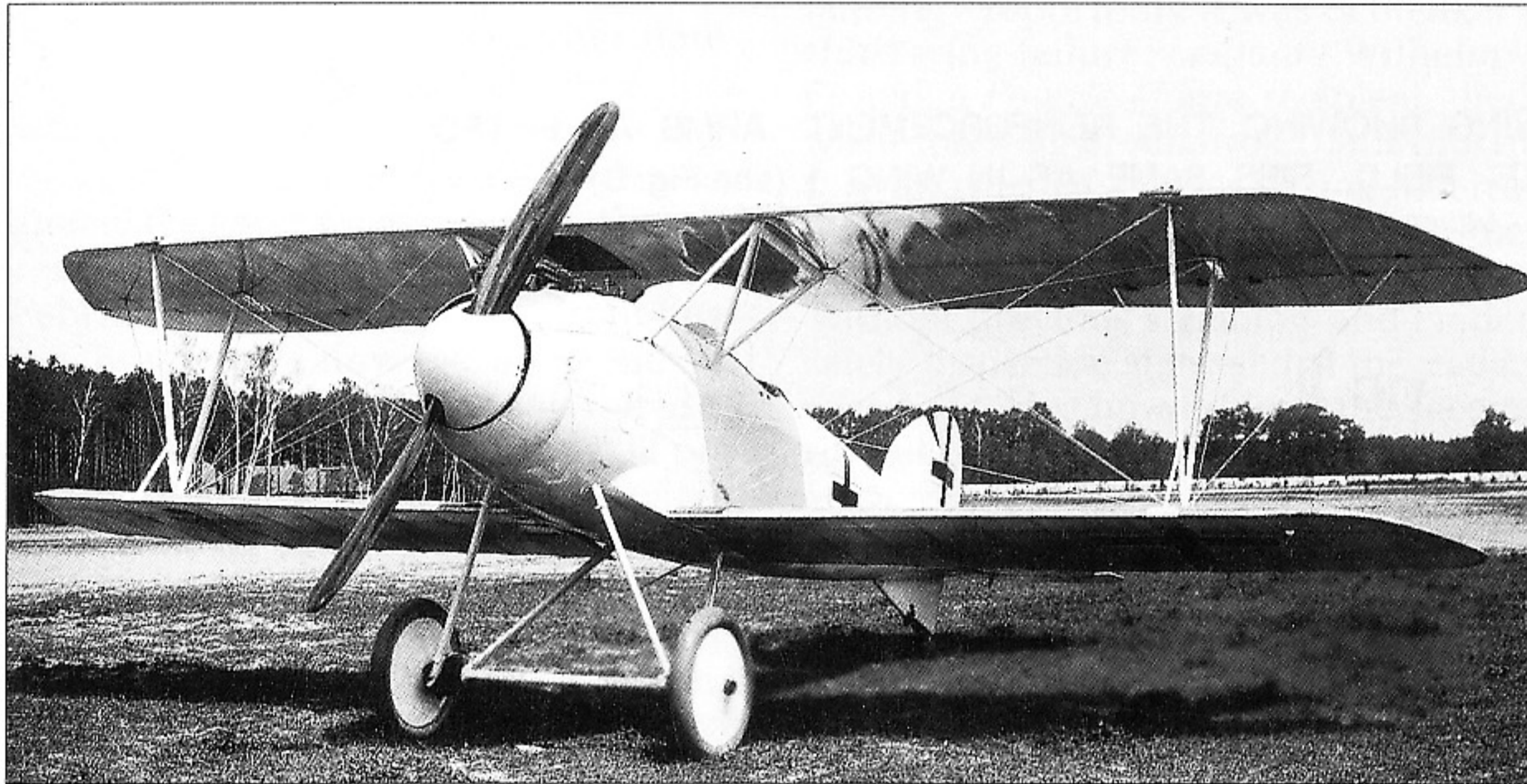
39) *Leutnant* Heinrich Bongartz of *Jasta* 36 with his Albatros D.III 607/17 dubbed 'Laura'.

40). *Oberleutnant* Dittmar of *Flieger Abteilung* 300 'Pascha' was flying the Albatros D.III 636/17 on 8 October 1917 when he was downed by Lieutenants R C Steel and J Lloyd-Williams in a Bristol Fighter (A7194) of No.111 Sqdn. RFC in Palestine. The offset wing radiator has been removed for cleaning or repair.

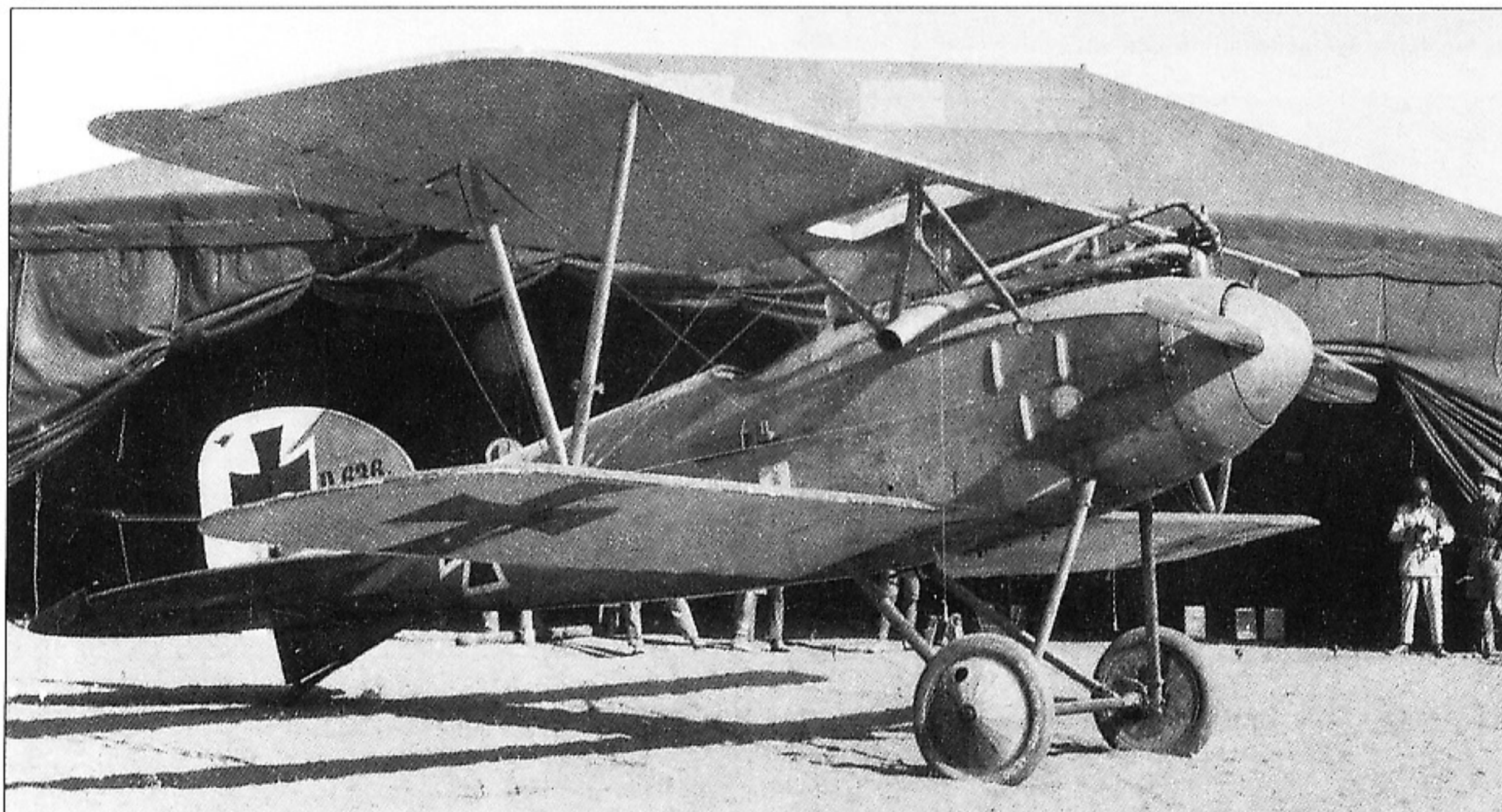




▲ 37 ▼ 38



▲ 39 ▼ 40



the new Albatros D.III fighters; fortunately the aircraft came down safely - a situation that could soon change for the worse.

On what may have been the first such occasion, *Leutnant* Roland Nauck of *Jasta* 6 experienced the fabric of the lower right wing ripping apart while attacking a French Spad on 23 January 1917.¹¹⁾ The fabric 'waved like a flag from the strut' and the lower wing spar then detached. Fired upon and wounded, Nauck with 'great effort and strength' struggled to bring the machine down amongst German trenches where he sat for nine hours before being evacuated. We will meet Nauck again. On 24 January, after downing his 18th victory flying a new Albatros D.III, Manfred von Richthofen wrote that 'as I settled the latter, one of my wings broke at an altitude of 900 feet and it was nothing short of a miracle that I reached the ground without a mishap.'¹²⁾

The sudden spate of wing failures caused *Kogenluft* on 27 January 1917 to ground all Albatros D.III fighters pending resolution of the lower wing problem. Copies of the original *Kogenluft* order are not available, but it is reasonable to assume that the flight restriction applied only to those D.III fighters lacking the reinforced lower wing. It is known that during the time the grounding order was in effect, replacement wings were being shipped to *Jastas* to allow combat operations to continue. For example, on 7 February, one *Jasta* reported that the lower wings on machine D.III 1984/16 had been replaced by stronger ones. At the time, Albatros engineers had already become aware of the wing failure problem and the company was supplying reinforcing braces for aircraft in the field. The two braces, formed of welded sheet metal (1,5 mm thick), provided additional support for the front stringer as shown in wing 5 (see **Fig. A**).

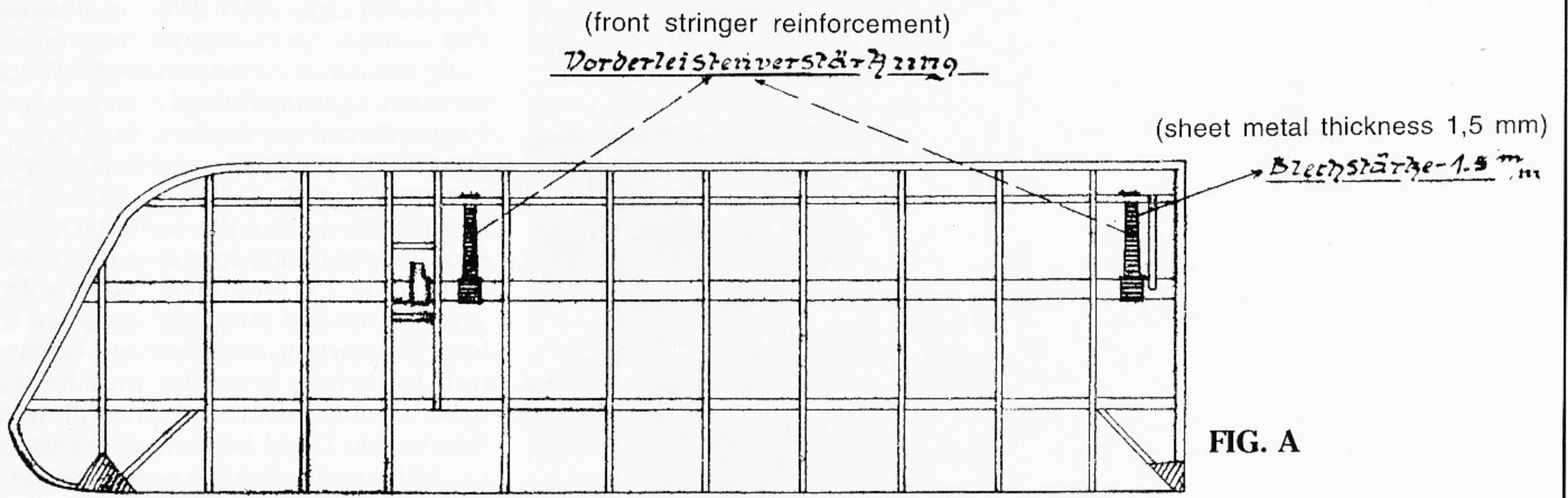
After the grounding order was issued, *Idflieg* engineers investigated the cause of lower wing failure, by performing comparative load tests on five different wings between 29 January and 2 February 1917 (see **Fig. B**).

Wing 1, was an original wing obtained from a frontline aircraft. It failed at 97 percent of the required load when the rib broke at the vee-strut attachment point.

Wing 2, with rib web reinforcement at the spar section, reached a load factor of 111 percent before the box rib at the fuselage end broke. This wing was in production since mid-January 1917.

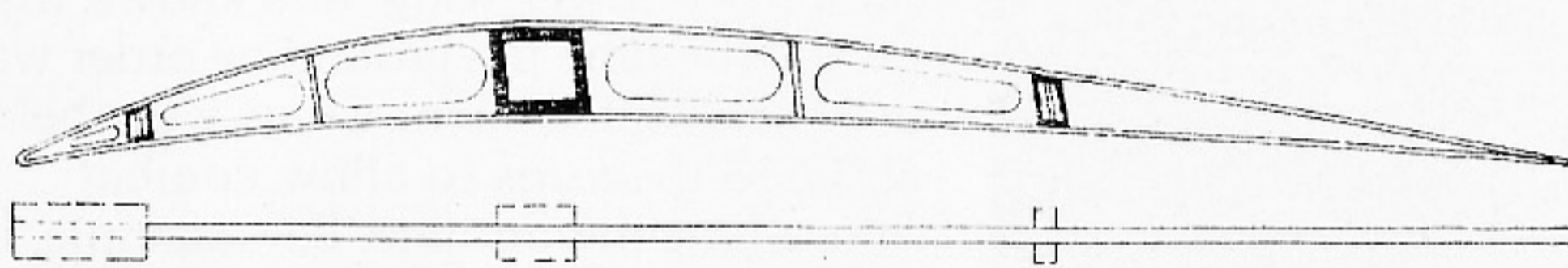
Wing 3, a new wing with increased rib dimensions and a 40 mm rib flange at the spar section, reached a load factor of 102 percent when the rib at the vee-strut attachment point failed. Wing 3 was a design prepared as a result of field reports and was slated for retrofitting to completed wings awaiting installation at the factory.

Wing 4, a new wing with a magnolia rib web and 20 mm rib flanges, reached

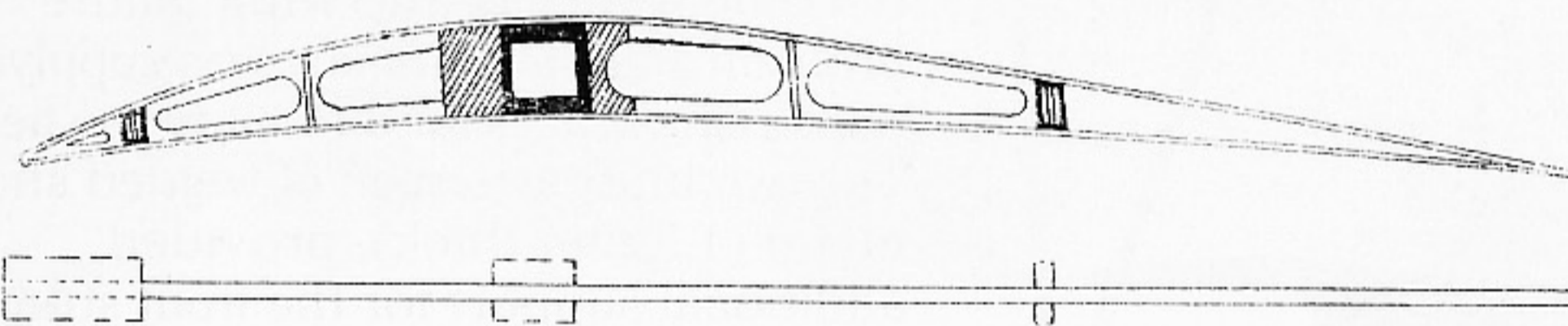
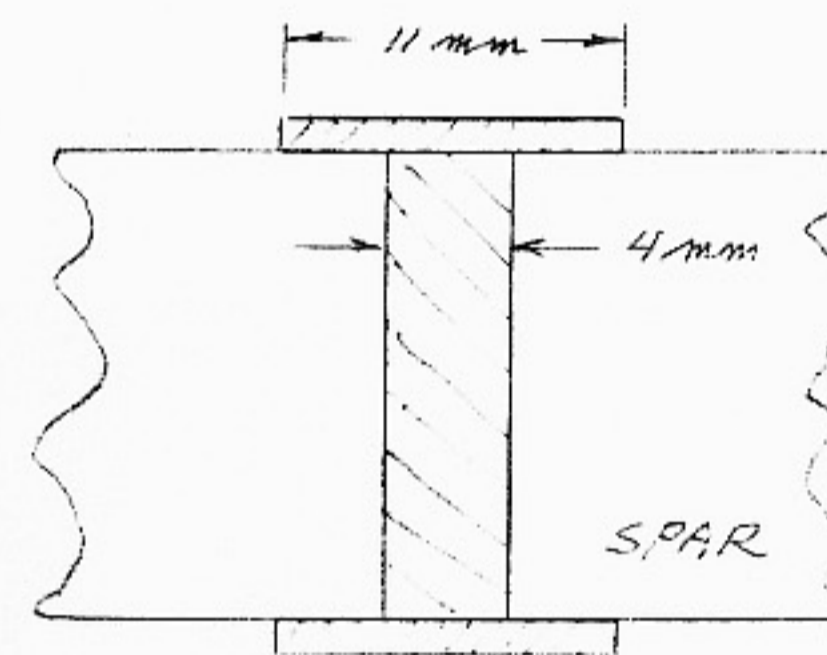


WING 5: ALBATROS D.III WING SHOWING THE REINFORCEMENT ARMS AS FITTED TO AIRCRAFT IN THE FIELD. RIBS SAME AS IN WING 1 (see Fig. B)
(ref. Idflieg Abt.A. Gr.3. B.Nr.1350941)

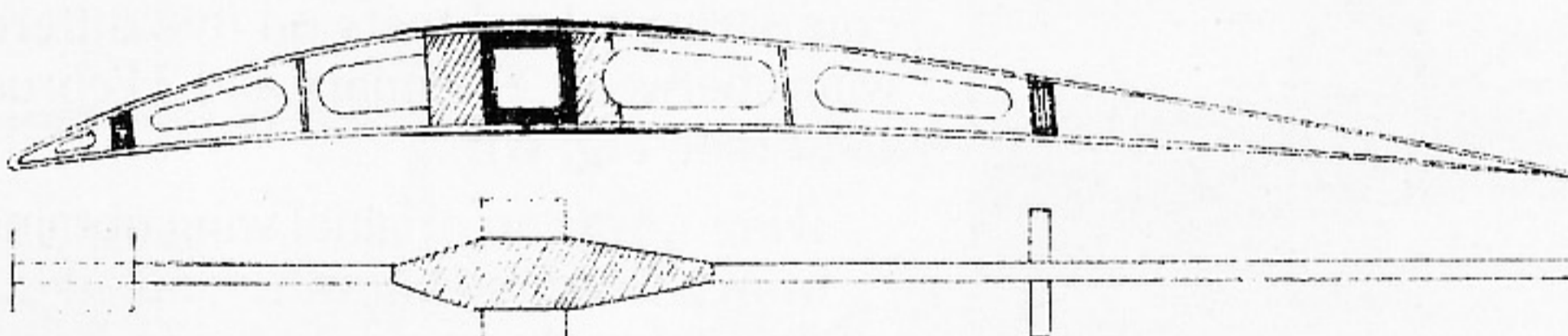
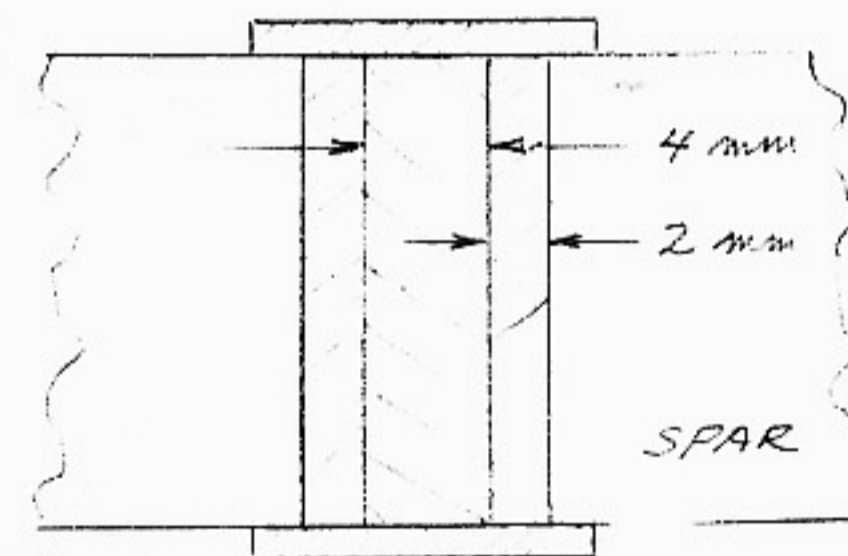
FIG. B



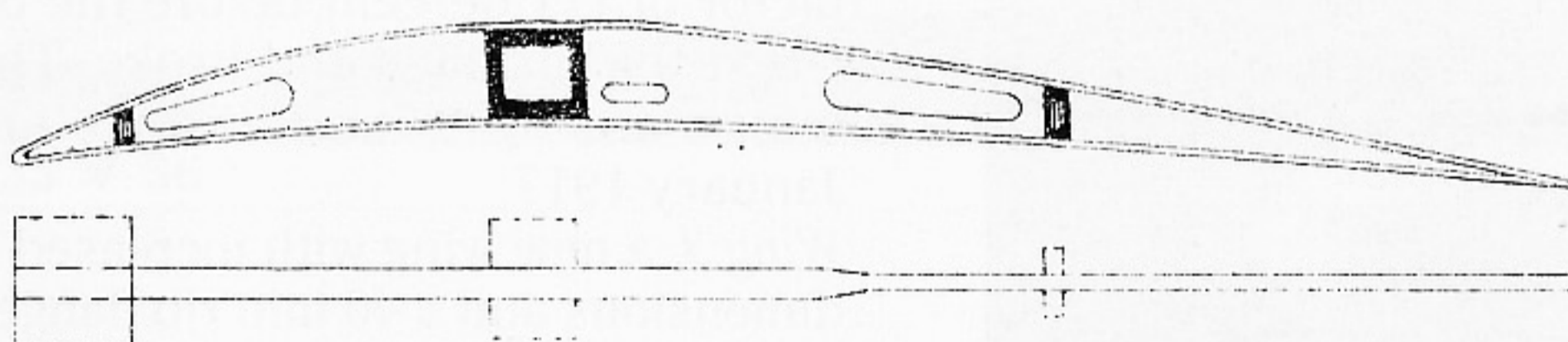
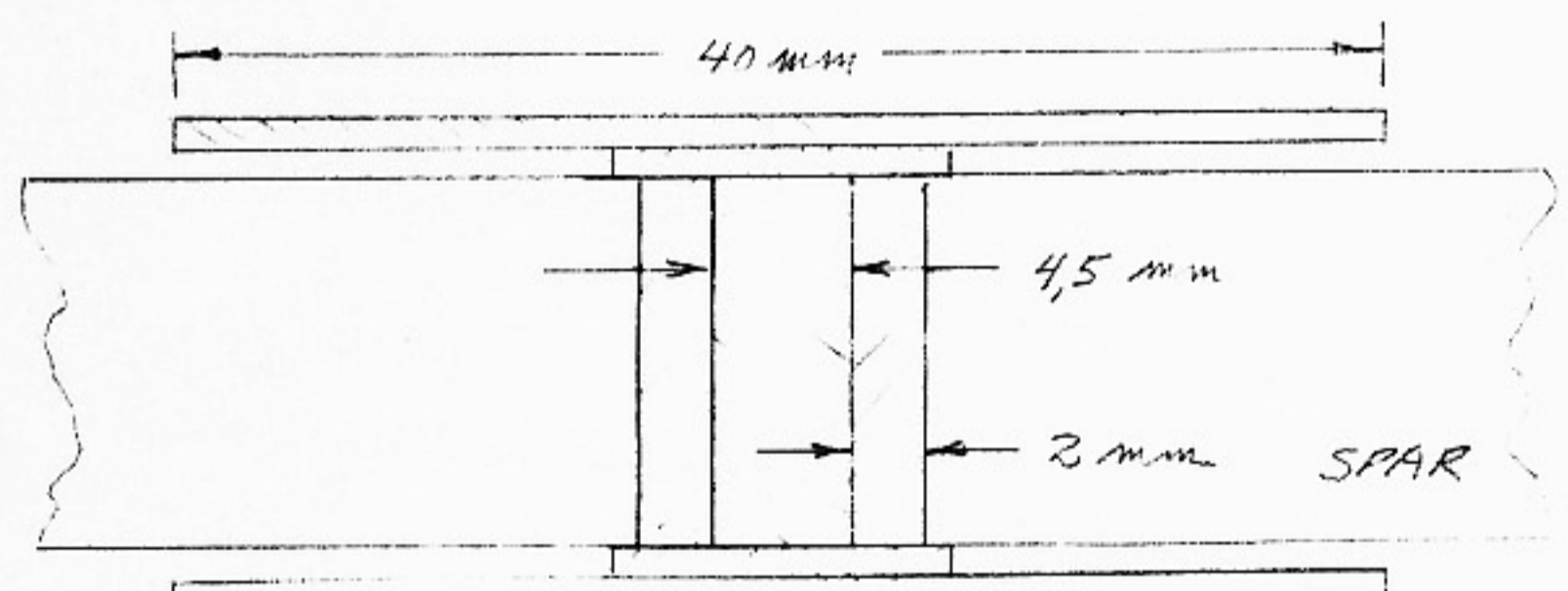
Wing 1 - wing as originally built, taken from an aircraft flown at the Front



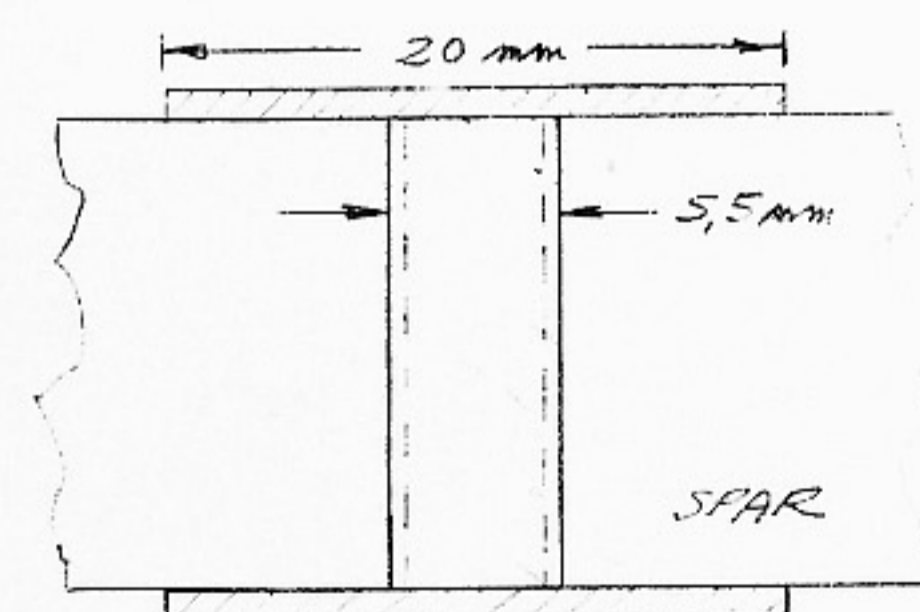
Wing 2 - wing modified by Albatros with wider rib web. In production since mid-January 1917.



Wing 3 - wing reinforced as a result of field reports. Intended for wings that have already been completed. On both sides of the spar, the rib flanges have been made wider.



Wing 4 - reinforced wing intended for new aircraft. The rib webs are reinforced on both sides with magnolia veneer. It is the strongest wing and weighs only 0,8 kg more than the original wing 1.



Note: vertical dimension not to scale

ALBATROS D.III - DRAWINGS OF RIB CONFIGURATIONS TESTED ON 29 JANUARY 1917
(ref. Idflieg Abt.A. Gr.3. B.Nr.1350941)

a load factor of 150 percent before the fuselage box rib failed. Wing 4 was the strongest and intended for all new aircraft. It was only 0,8 kg heavier than the original wing (wing 1).

Wing 5, same as wing 1 but fitted in the field with two front stringer reinforcement arms (see Fig. A)

The test report stated that all four wings had achieved the specified load factor in accordance with the BLV specifications. That is, no obvious cause of failure was found. To make sure nothing had been overlooked, a strengthened wing taken from a front-line aircraft (wing 5) was load tested. It passed the required load factor with ease. So we see that at least five different lower wing structures were either installed or shortly to be on operational machines. At a later date another wing design with three braces was introduced.

Now that the load tests had demonstrated the lower wings' integrity, Kogenluft rescinded the grounding order on 19 February, an indication that front-line machines were now taking to the air with wings reinforced or manufactured to new *Idflieg* standards. Albatros D.III production continued apace with the parent firm receiving two additional production contracts for 50 aircraft each (D.600-649/17 and D.750-799/17) in February and March 1917 before the Johannisthal factory switched over to the new Albatros D.V which was in the process of being flight-tested. To continue the supply to operational units, the Ostdeutsche Albatros Werke (OAW) was phased in at this time to become the primary manufacturer of the Albatros D.III as described below.

The wing failure continues

In the spring of 1917, the brunt of the aerial fighting was performed by the Albatros D.III and D.II fighters, comprising three-quarters of the total German fighter complement on the Western Front, as shown in Table 2. German fighter pilots garnered victories (and decorations) to such an extent that 'Bloody April' has gone down as a nadir in the annals of the Royal Flying Corps. Of the 686 D-types at the Front on 30 April 1917, the frontline inventory was composed as follows:

Table 2 - Frontline inventory on 30 April 1917.

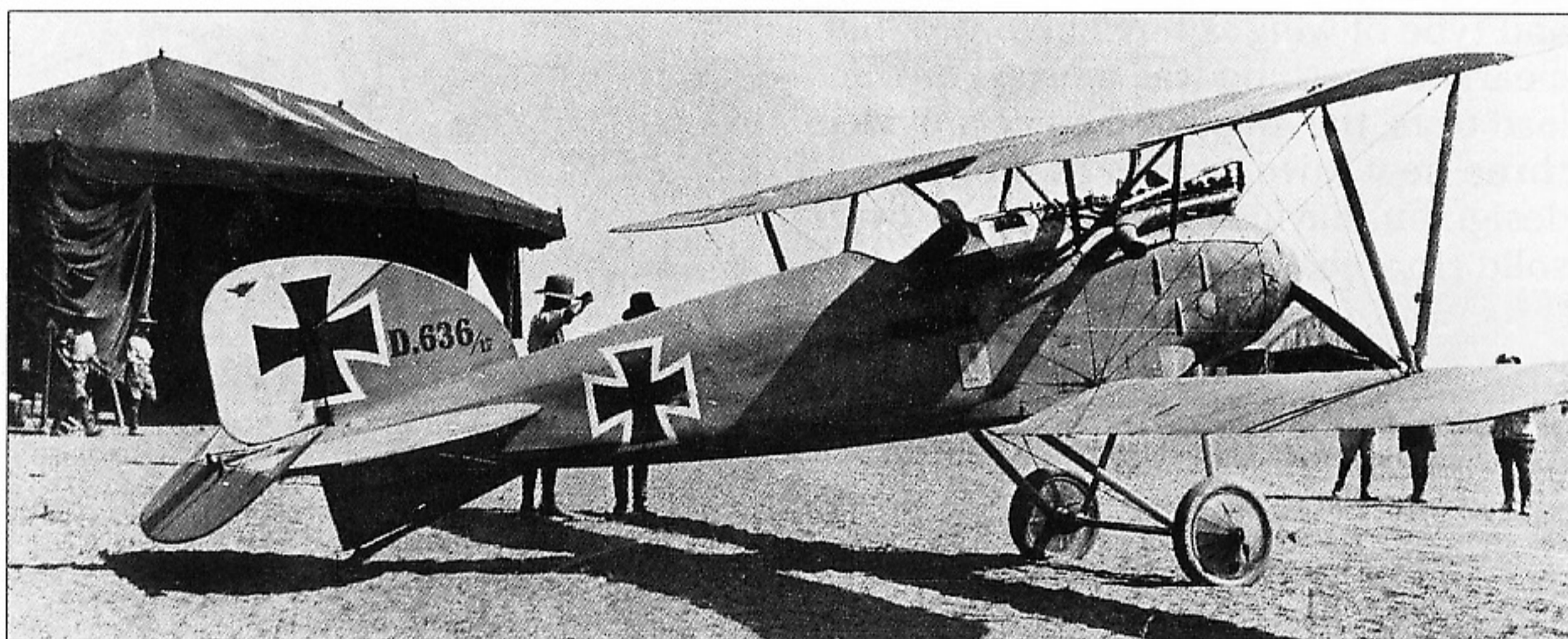
Type	Quantity	%
Albatros D.III	329	48
Albatros D.II	154	24
Roland D.II	97	14
Fokker D.I, D.II, D.V	44	14
Halberstadt D.I, D.II, D.III, D.V	38	
Albatros D.I	20	2
Roland D.I	2	
SSW	2	100
Total	686	

In reading the above chart it should be kept in mind that the Fokker and Halberstadt fighters were essentially second-rate and, if active, relegated to quieter sectors or employed as front-line trainers. The lacklustre Roland D.II fighter, poor on performance, saw little combat activity before it was withdrawn and placed in storage, cannibalised for parts or sent to Bulgaria. The majority of the Albatros D.I fighters were employed as trainers.

But in the blaze of victory there lurked disaster, the extent of which can only be guessed at since most *Jasta* war diaries no longer exist. Four lower wing failures occurred on 8 April 1917 alone: *Leutnant* Schlenker of *Jasta* 3 experienced wing loss at 4000 metres and managed a safe landing - reportedly it was Schlenker's third wing failure. *Leutnant* Wilhelm Frankl, a *Pour le Mérite* recipient, died when the wing of Albatros D.III 2158/16 tore away at 500 metres. Flying Albatros D.III 2223/16, *Feldwebel* Sebastian Festner of *Jasta* 11 lost a wing at 4000 metres 'without previous straining' and landed safely. Inspection showed that the leading edge had folded upward from the second rib out to the vee-strut. All the ribs bet-

ween the main spar and leading edge had failed in precisely the section where the factory had installed metal bracing arms. The wing fabric was torn off by the slipstream.¹³⁾ Significantly, although fitted with two reinforcing arms (wing 5), Festner's machine had nevertheless still experienced failure! The above incidents should have been sufficient for a grounding order, but with the majority of the fighter force composed of Albatros D.III fighters, perhaps such action was inopportune. On 8 April, *Leutnant* Nauck was on the verge of attacking a French observation balloon when he was jumped by a French scout. 'After a few rounds, the Albatros came down out of control in a steep spin, one wing coming off in mid air (...)' The wreckage of Albatros D.III 2234/16 was assigned captured aircraft number G 21¹⁴⁾ Was Nauck's wing loss a result of gunfire damage or internal structural failure?

On 23 and 24 April, a 'much-flown and stressed' frontline Albatros D.III with 50 combat hours recorded but still 'totally airworthy' was static load tested to ascertain what effect continuous field service had on structural integrity. The strength of the wings, tail section and



▲ 41



▲ 42 ▼ 43



41). With radiator replaced, Albatros D.III 636/17 was flight tested by Captain A H Peck, DSO, MC. As in some other D.III fighters the machine guns have a metal cover over the rear section. Photographs show that apparently a downward-firing flare gun was installed above the protective plate on the fuselage. The flares were stored in the rack behind the gun.

42). This unarmed Albatros D.III 639/17 of the second production batch served as a trainer or communication machine.

43). Albatros D.III 751/17 of the third production batch provides a backdrop for *die Kanone*, obviously a *Jasta* pet. The white tail indicates that the machine was attached to *Jasta* Boelcke.

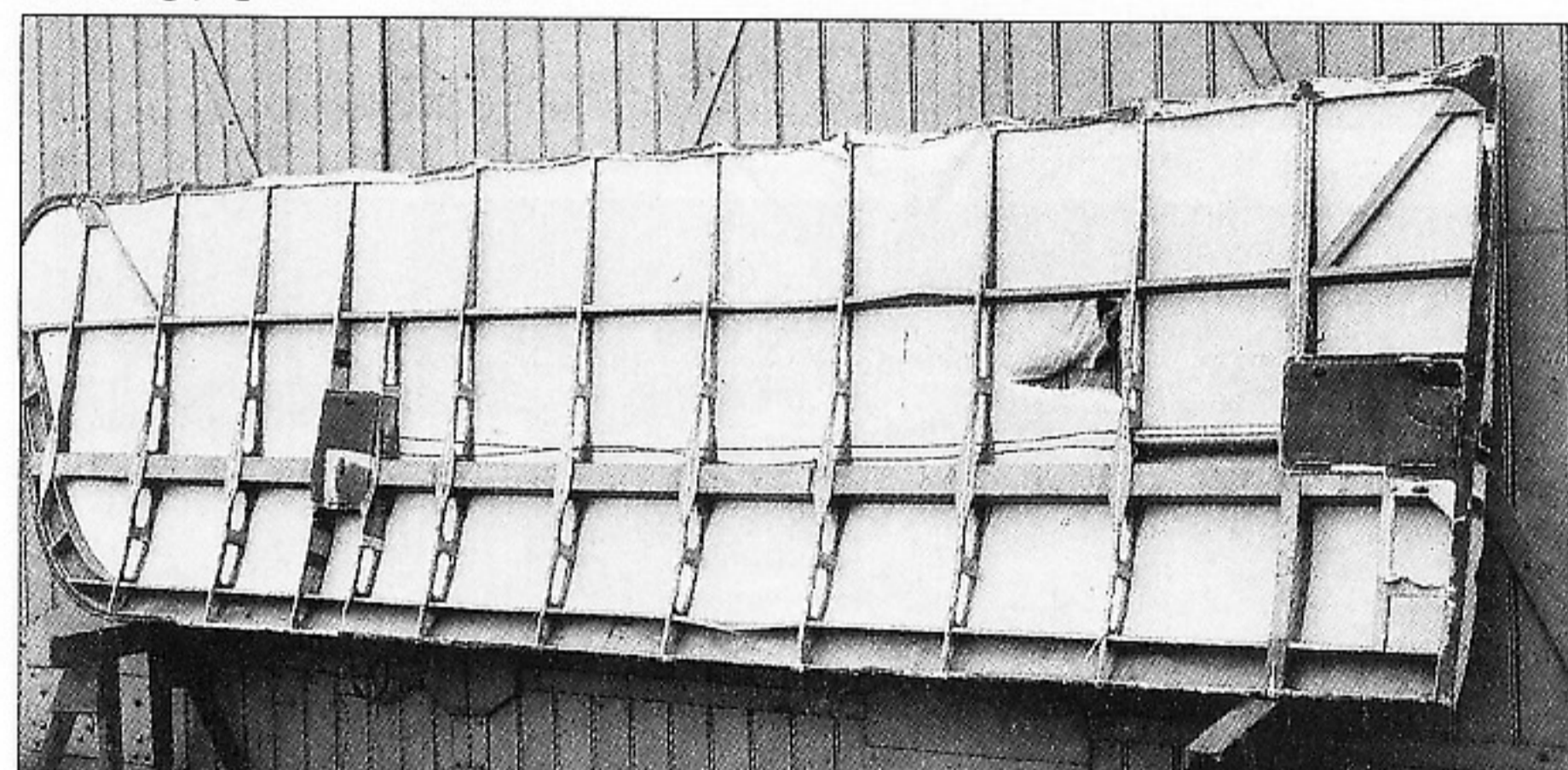
control surfaces was within the specified limits and no significant structural deformation was noticed. Only the flexibility of the rudder control cables was found faulty. The report stated that load tests on other long-duration service aircraft had shown that operational exposure to weather, dampness and handling did not diminish aircraft strength (a statement I find difficult to accept). With no explanation in hand after the tests had concluded, the report stated that 'the possibility certainly cannot be dismissed that in certain aircraft vibration effects may occur which can reduce the aircraft's service life.' A curious bit of doubletalk meaning 'which could cause a crash without warning.' *Idflieg* planned to expose an Albatros D.III airframe to extended vibration (engine vibration) but it is not known if this interesting experiment was conducted.

Two months after the initial tests in late January, *Idflieg* ran a second series of load tests because random wing failures continued to plague the *Fliegertruppe*, ironically at the very time the Albatros D.III fighters were taking a terrible toll of Allied airmen. It is now impossible to ascertain the frequency and type of wing failures involved, but clearly something was amiss. For the load tests, the Albatros factory provided three new lower wings of different design but having in common ribs with solid rib webs. On 26 and 30 April, the three wings and an original wing taken from a frontline machine were load tested to destruction (see Fig. C below). The report pointed out that under 'no circumstance was it possible to fracture

▼ FIG. C

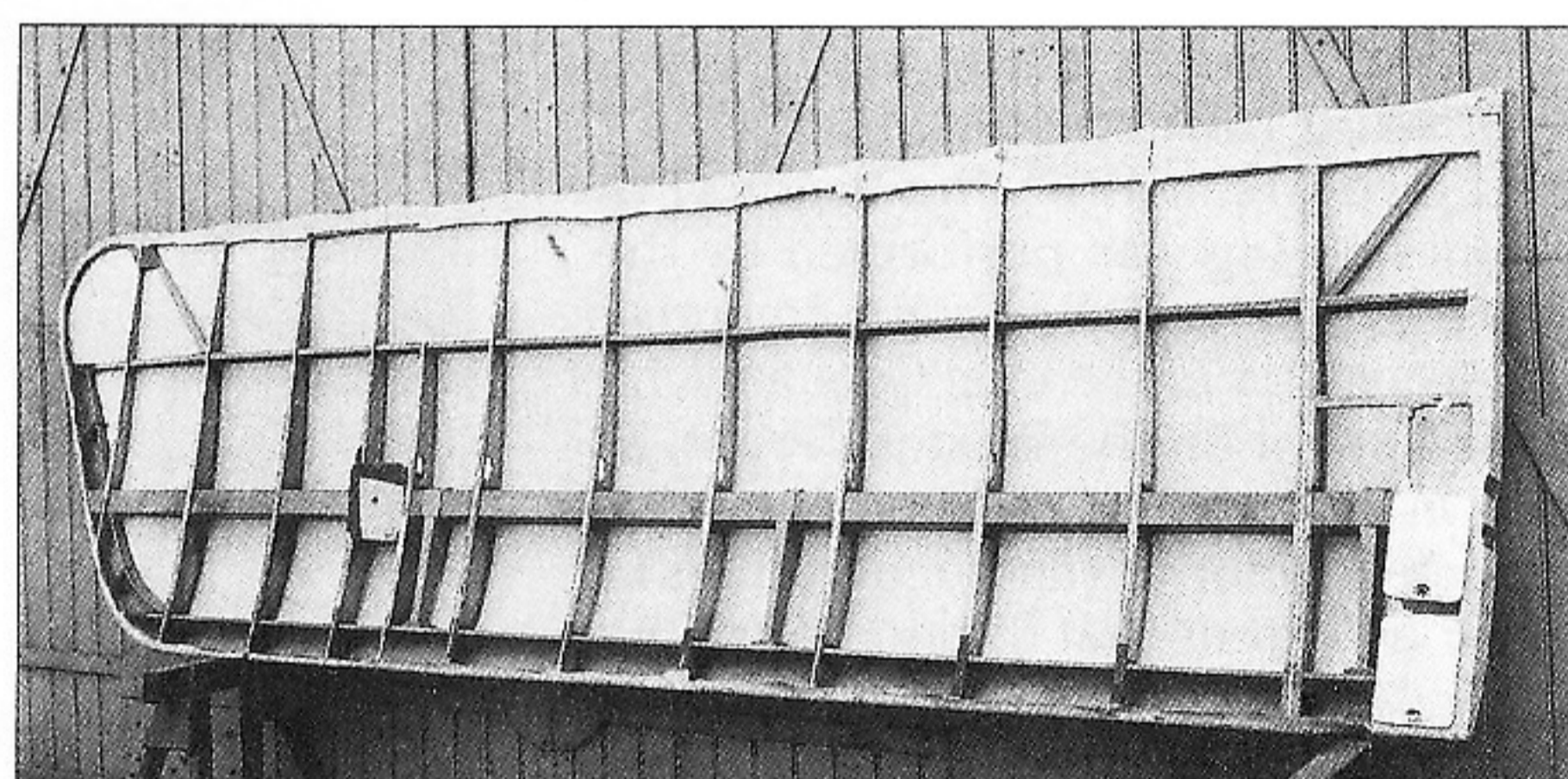
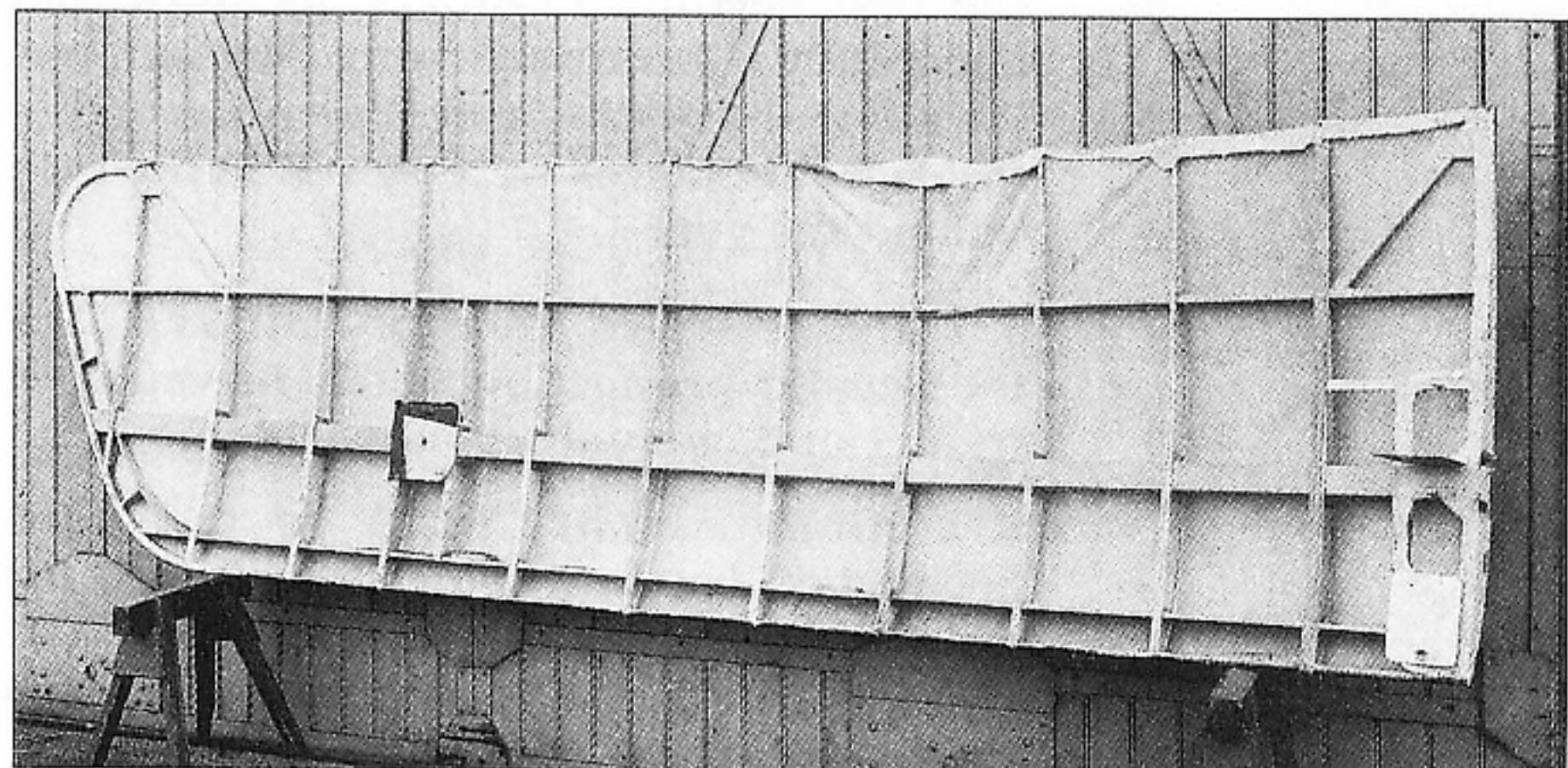


▲ 44 ▼ 45



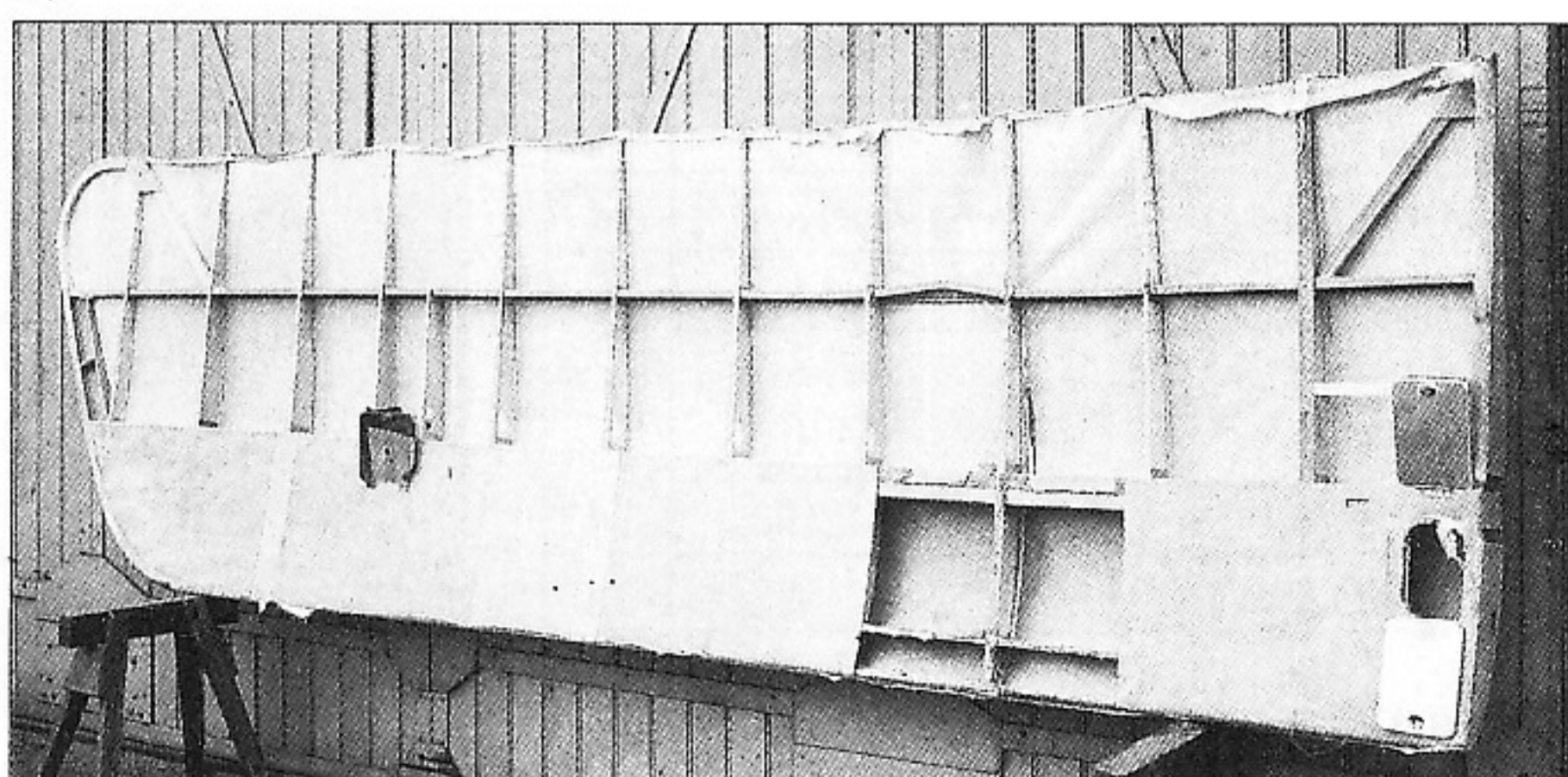
▲ Wing A - an old wing taken from a frontline aircraft. The rib flanges have been widened over the spar. Weight 17,2 kg. Failure of the spar at a load factor of 7,1. (Wing A is identical to wing 3 previously described.)

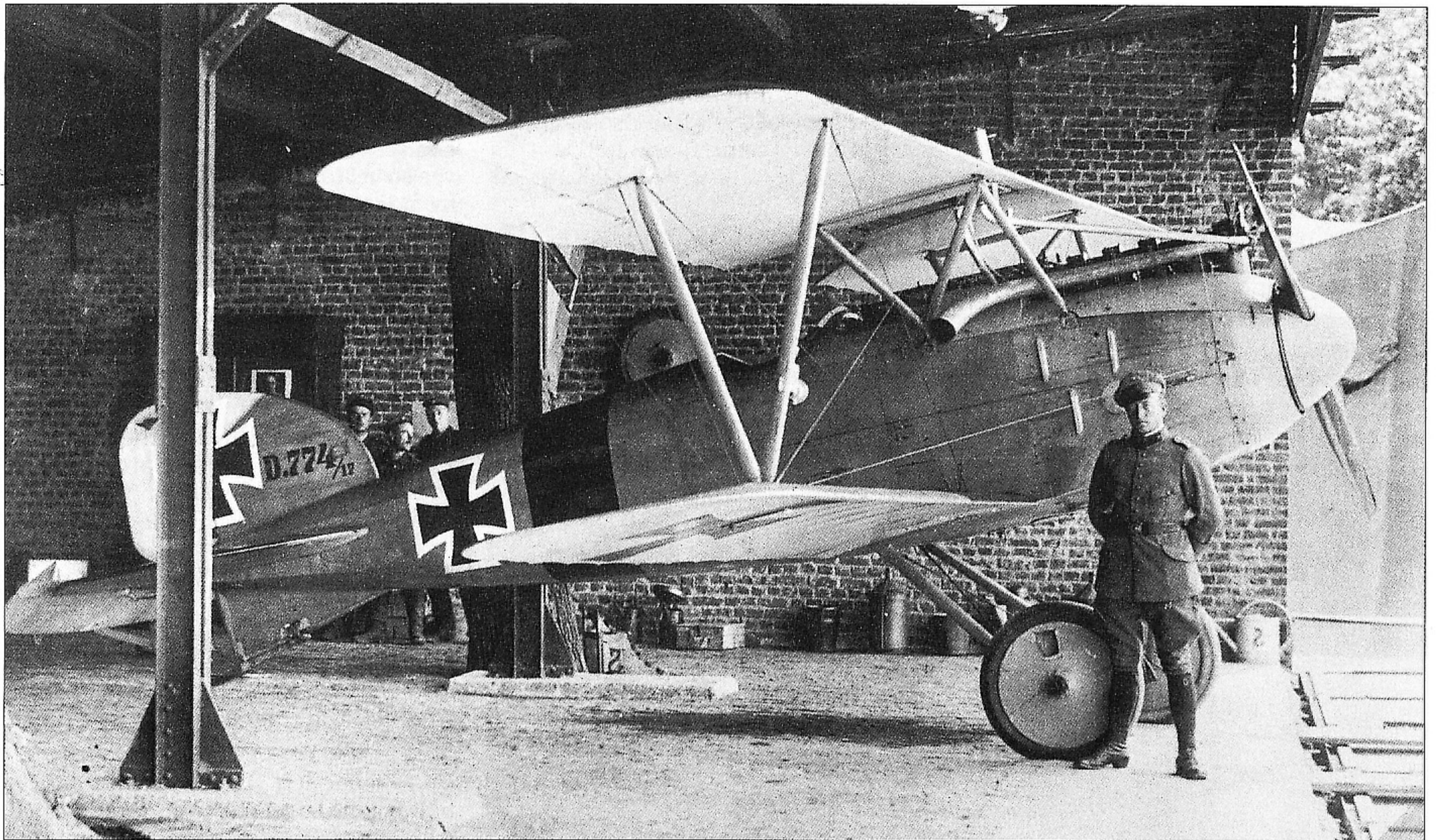
▼ Wing B - a new wing with solid rib webs but without metal braces. Weight 15,1 kg. Failure of the spar at a load factor of 9,0.



▲ Wing C - a new wing with solid rib webs and three metal braces. Weight 17,2 kg. Failure at a load factor of 8,4; fracture of the rear stringer and permanent deformation of the spar; no spar failure.

▼ Wing D - a new wing with solid rib webs but without metal braces. Plywood covering up to the spar. Weight 18,2 kg. Failure of the spar at a load factor of 10,4.





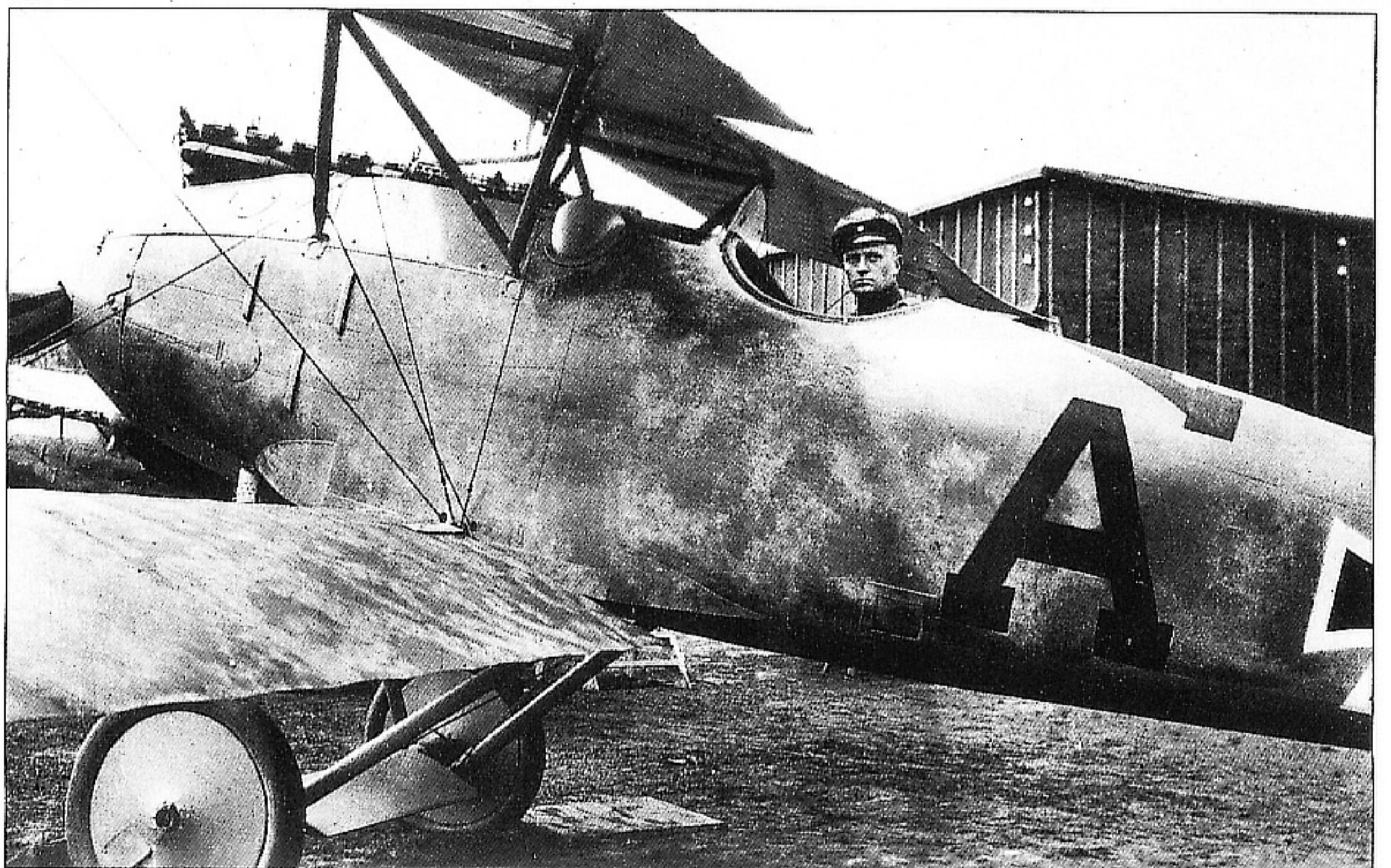
▲ 46

44). A delightful mixed bag of personal insignias are exhibited by the Albatros D.III and D.V fighters of *Jasta* 30. In line are the aircraft of 1. *Oberleutnant* Hans Bethge (?), 2. D.760/17 *Vizefeldwebel* Hans Oberländer (?), 3. D.767/17 *Leutnant* Oskar Seitz, 4 and 5. unknown, 6. *Leutnant* Heinrich Brüggmann (?) or *Unteroffizier* Bruno Beyer (?) 7. *Leutnant* Paul Ergbuth (?), 8. unknown and 9. *Leutnant* Joachim von Bertrab (black fuselage with comet motif).

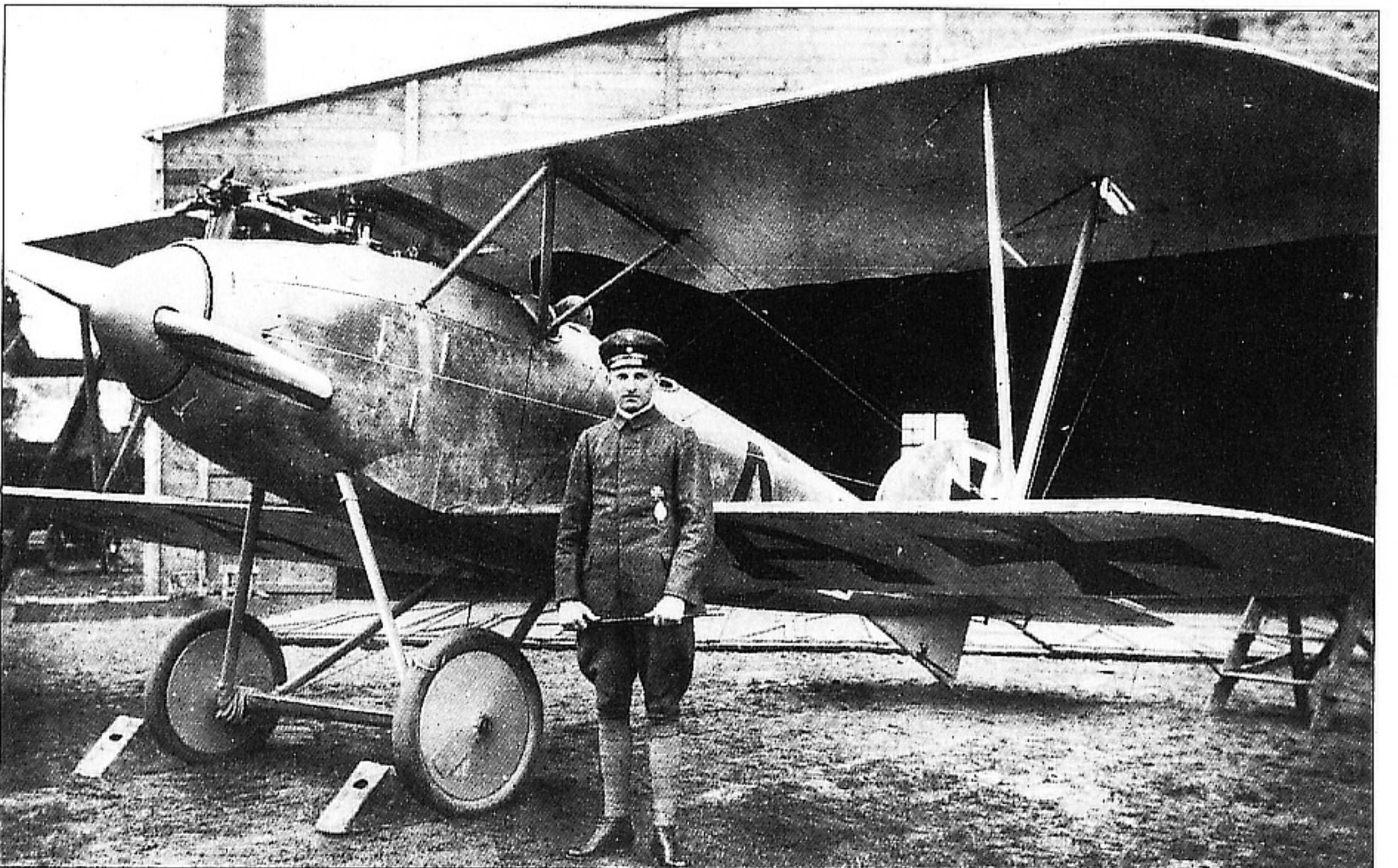
45). Three mechanics busy with the pre-flight check of Albatros D.III 767/17 that was flown by *Leutnant* Oskar Seitz of *Jasta* 30. The tail is covered in the Bavarian blue and white diamond pattern.

46). *Oberleutnant* Otto Hartmann of *Jasta* 28 with Albatros D.III 774/17 in pristine finish surely fresh from the factory. The location was Wasquehal airfield.

47 and 48). *Leutnant* Neisen of *Jasta* 5 at Boistrancourt with an Albatros-built D.III that has been dabbed with rudimentary camouflage colours. The letter 'A' adorns the fuselage and lower wings.



▲ 47 ▼ 48



the ribs.' Not until 'a sausage-shaped bag of sand weighing 10 kg' was dropped on a rib from one metre height did the ribs fail. This 'test' highlights the malignant power of the aerodynamic forces encountered in flight that could cause the lower wing ribs to break and the leading edge to fold back. Adlershof engineers concluded that 'no cause of wing failure could be ascertained' and 'the question regarding under which stress conditions the ribs failed remains unanswered.' It was conjectured that the rib fractures could be blamed on vibration effects or caused by unknown pressure distribution

Photos 47 - 91 - D.IIIs built by Albatros, Johannisthal

over the wing surface. The report suggested that a careful inspection of recently broken wings might provide some clues; hence it was requested that the next failed wing be shipped at once to Adlershof for study - a sure indication that random failures were continuing in the field. Finally, it was recommended that a lower wing be dispatched to the Göttingen aerodynamic laboratory (where a blue ribbon research group

and a wind tunnel were located) for determination of the pressure distribution across the wing surface. Whether this investigation was performed is not known.

The exact cause of the Albatros D.III wing failures will always remain a mystery. Extant field reports hint at possible answers. On 2 April, having inspected a new Albatros D.III 2139/16 prior to assembly and dispatch to *Jasta*

3, the engineer of *Armee Flug Park* 6 reported that three cable turnbuckles and six bolts required to connect the two vee-struts to the lower wing were missing from the shipment. Besides time and effort wasted to correct the shortcomings, a real danger existed that improper bolts and turnbuckles of incorrect size and weaker material would be used when assembling the aircraft. Another intriguing possibility was reported by *Jasta* 24 on 25 April 1917:

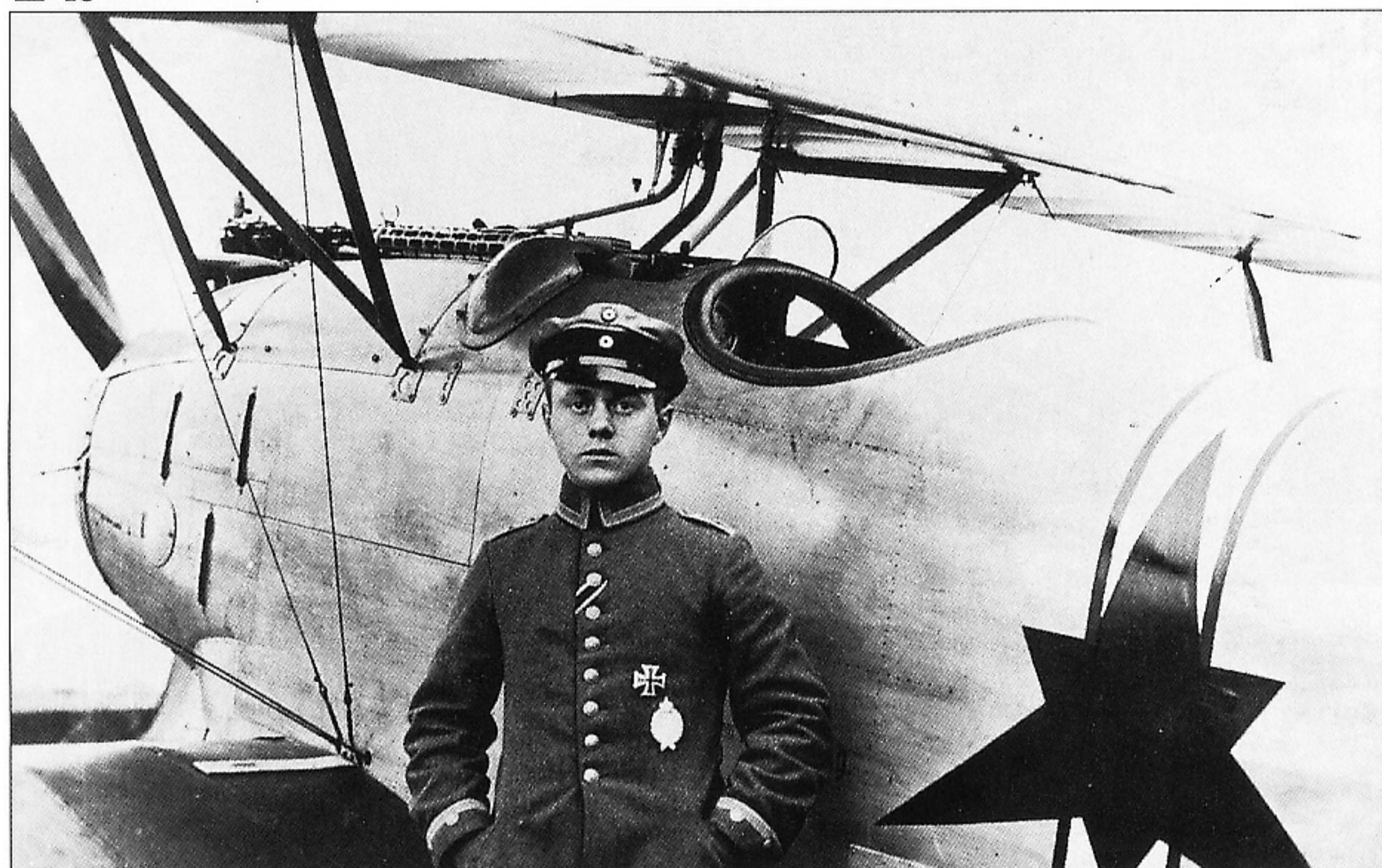
'Due to enlargement of the front and rear bolt holes in the bottom of the vee-struts, the lower wings of many machines have become loose. Several wings could be rotated to such an extent around the wing spar that a leading edge deflection of 2 centimetres was observed. As a stop-gap measure the wing struts were replaced on two aircraft and on the remaining machines an auxiliary bracing strut was installed.'

Upon reflection, it is apparent that the bolt hole enlargement may have resulted from what aerodynamicists now call 'divergence phenomena' - a subtle twisting of the wing in flight; an effect difficult, even today, to analyse under dynamic conditions.

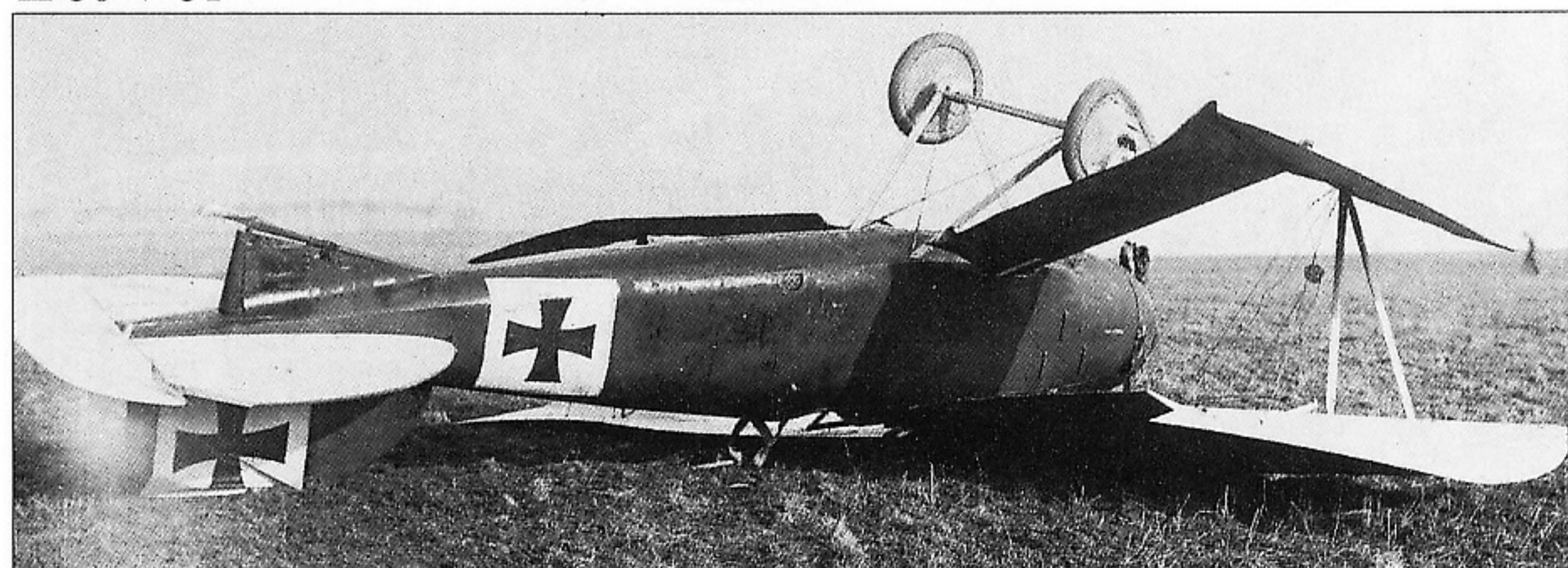
The gravity of the situation was not lost on *Idflieg* personnel. During the spring of 1917, staff officers visited various operational units to dispel fears and drum up support for the Albatros D.III. On 30 April 1917, *Leutnant* Karl Baur of *Jasta* 3 wrote in his diary that *Oberleutnant* Schwarzenberger, the *Idflieg* officer responsible for fighter development, was making the rounds to inform fighter pilots how good the new Albatros D.III fighter was. By then only Baur and *Leutnant* Busse had received the D.III with strengthened wings. This was reassuring, Baur noted in his diary, because 'one does not continually have to fear the break-up of the horizontal planes.' Sadly,



▲ 49



▲ 50 ▼ 51



49). *Leutnant* Kurt Student, who commanded the German paratroops in World War Two, shown here in an Albatros D.III at the time he was attached to *Jasta* 9 on 20 February 1917. As Student wrote, this picture 'appeared in all newspapers in April 1917'. From the central radiator, we see this is an early production machine.

50). A somewhat apprehensive Franz Hilger in front of his Albatros D.III. Identification features are the Albatros *Beule* (bump) over the gun's discharge chute. Hilger served with *Jasta* 27 from 21 April to 2 May 1917 when he was injured in a crash. He later served with several *Kampf Einsitzer Staffeln* (single-seat fighter unit for home defence) where this photograph may have been taken.

51). A somersaulted Albatros D.III at the *Jagdfliegerschule* Valenciennes. It was an early production example (round footstep) and the white cross fields are unusual.

Baur spoke too soon. He lost his life on 19 May when the lower wing of his Albatros D.III 2139/16 tore loose while flying over the *Jasta 3* airfield.

It is apparent that the fighter's structural integrity continued to concern *Idflieg*. In June 1917, Albatros D.III 1987/16, an early production machine with 50 combat hours logged was static-load tested to the original *BLV* specifications without showing any signs of degradation whatsoever. Nevertheless random failures continued. On 4 July 1917, *Leutnant* Walter Kirchbach of *Jasta 35* was killed when Albatros D.III 2085/16 lost a wing.

Available evidence suggests that most of the wing failures were recorded by D.III fighters built in Johannisthal. By the time OAW fighters reached the Front in the summer of 1917, indications are that wing failures had ceased to be a problem. The lower wing structure used by OAW-built D.III fighters is not known, but presumably it was similar to that used on the Albatros D.V.

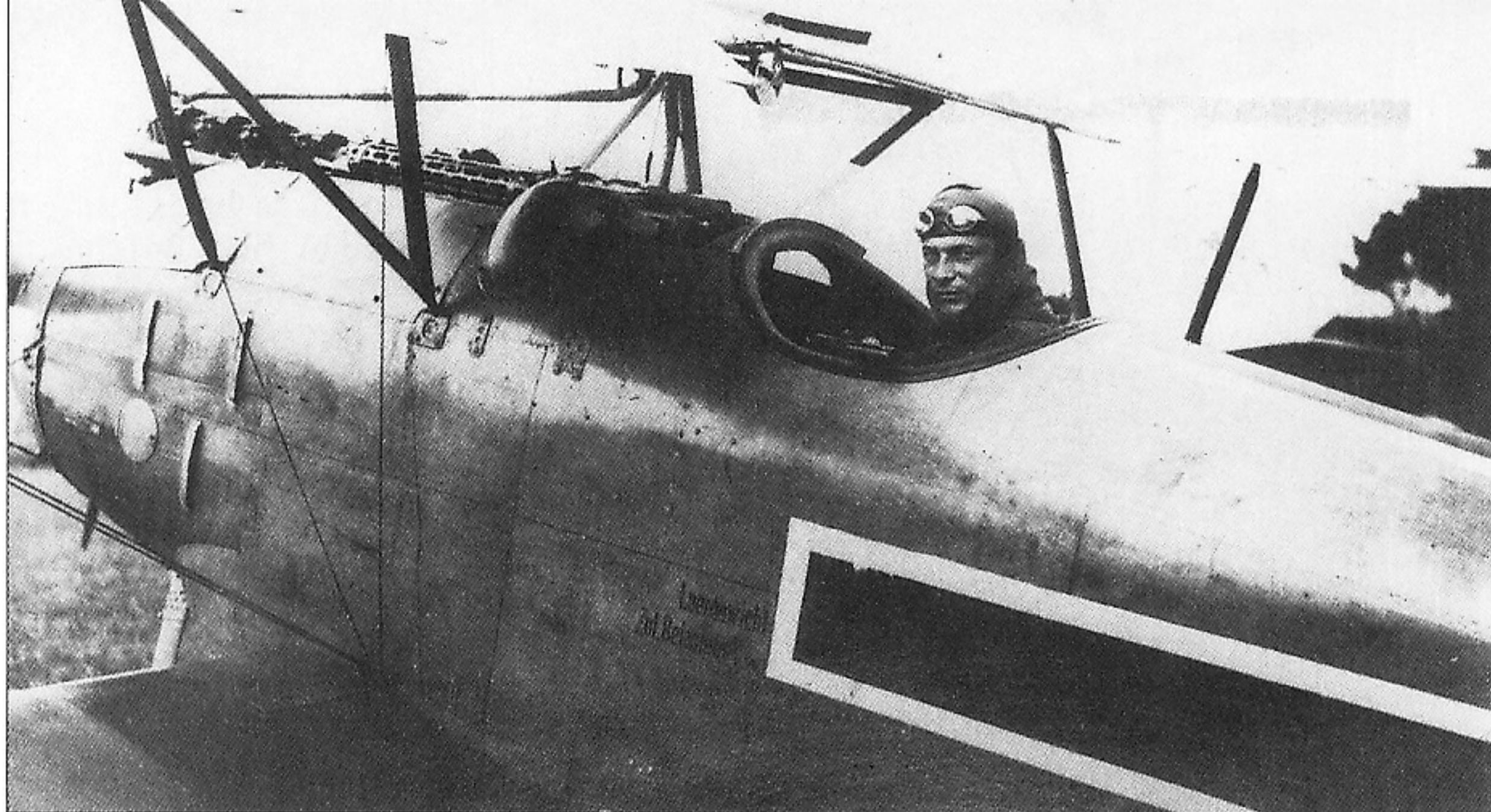
It should be kept in mind that the Albatros D.III(Oef) built under licence in Austria-Hungary did not suffer from lower wing failure. The Oesterreichische Flugzeugfabrik AG (Oeffag) had secured licence rights from Albatros to build the D.III. The Austro-Hungarian *Luftfahrtruppe* ordered 20 D.II and 30 D.III fighters in 4 December 1916. Oeffag engineers, aware of the failure problem, refused to copy the lower wing and designed their own. They made significant improvements; namely, the ribs between the main and auxiliary spar were solid and constructed of heavier plywood. The spar flange thickness was increased from 10 to 20 mm at stress points. Metal reinforcing was added between the main and front stringer (auxiliary spar) and the front stringer was prevented from twisting by a metal fixture at the fuselage juncture. Why was this not done at Albatros-Johannisthal? The Albatros D.III (Oef), powered by increasingly powerful Austro-Daimler engines, was the *Luftfahrtruppe's* most effective fighter.¹⁵⁾

52). An Albatros-built D.III assigned to *Jasta 37* with black and white fuselage markings. The open turtledeck in front of the cockpit is rarely shown in photographs. It is perhaps this opening that the protective plate closed (see *photo No. 22*).

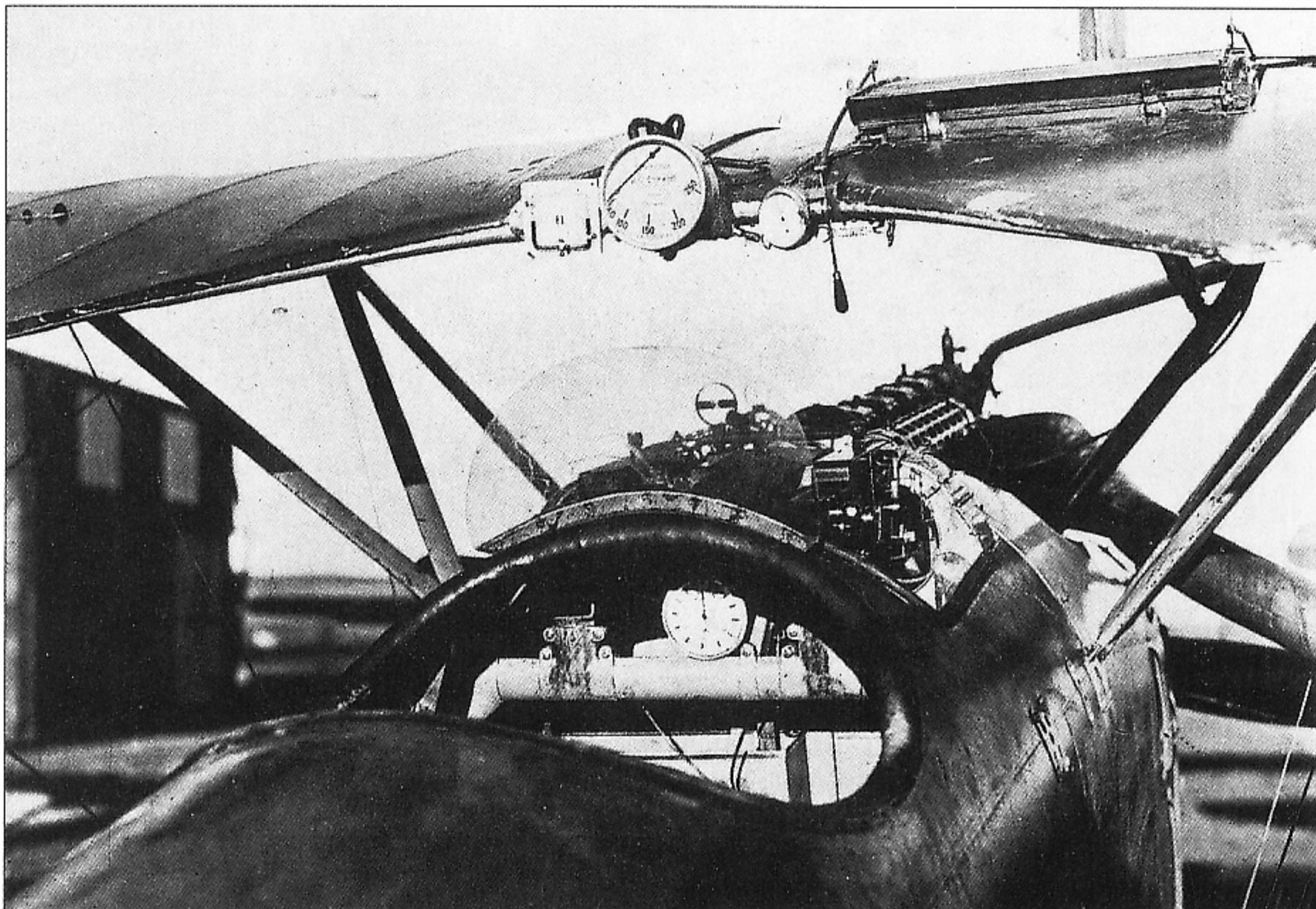
53). A veritable flying laboratory no doubt as a result of the Albatros D.III radiator cooling problems experienced in the summer of 1917. A bank indicator, a airspeed indicator and a timer (?) are mounted on the wing. The radiator is fitted with adjustable cooling louvres. A tachometer sits above the robust metal brace to which the gun butts are bolted.

54). *Oberleutnant* Ernst Wilhelm Turck and ground crew of *Jasta 18* pose with his Albatros D.III circa January 1918.

55). This unarmed Albatros D.III fitted with a pitot tube speed indicator on the upper wing was used for flight trials at Adlershof.



▲ 52 ▼ 53



▲ 54 ▼ 55





▲ 56 ▼ 57



The Albatros D.III (OAW)

In the spring of 1917, Albatros D.III production was transferred to the OAW subsidiary in Schneidemühl to permit Albatros-Johannisthal to concentrate on the Albatros D.V fighter which was cleared for frontline service on 21 April 1917. OAW would build more D.III fighters than the parent factory. On 23 April, OAW received an initial order for 200 D.III(OAW) fighters that would eventually total 838 aircraft.¹⁶⁷ By maintaining output of the combat-proven D.III while the new D.V was introduced, *Idflieg* was taking no chances by placing all its eggs in one basket. In retrospect, a wise

56). Albatros D.III of a *Jagdfliegerschule*. The purpose of the device on the upper wing is not known.

57). Always the entertainer, *Vizefeldwebel* Carl Holler (far left - stage name Niels Sørensen, a singer of folk songs with guitar accompaniment) presents pilots of *Jasta 6* to his audience. For some reason, the water pipe leading to the radiator has a streamlined covering.

58). This early Albatros D.III shows the lower wing braces that were fitted to prevent the wing from twisting. This aircraft was flown by *Offizier-Stellvertreter* Friedrich Altmeier, a 20-victory ace of *Jasta 24*.

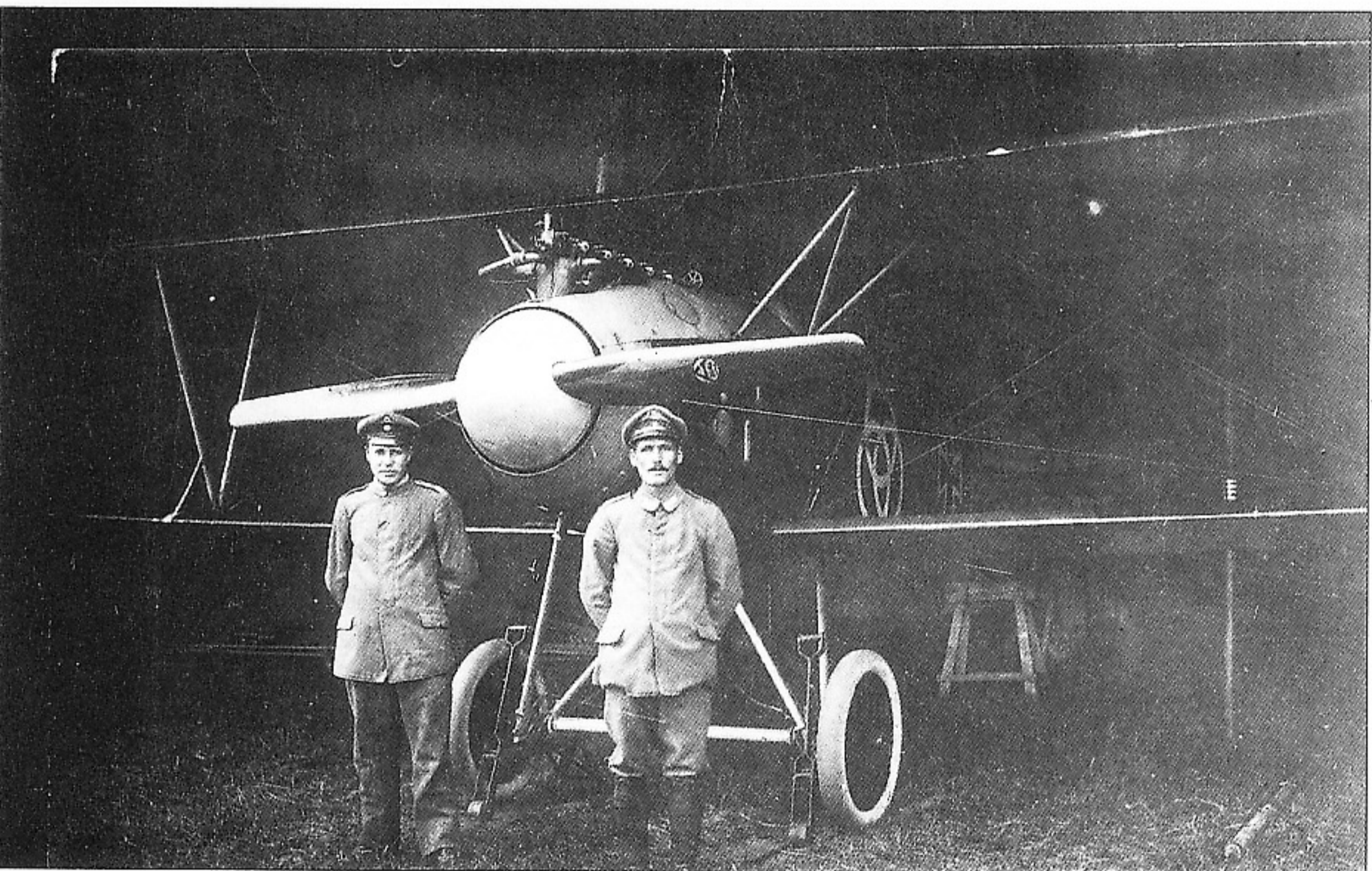
59). *Leutnant* Gerhart Bassenge of *Jasta Boelcke* with his boldly - marked Albatros D.III.

60). *Leutnant* Franz Pernet of *Jasta Boelcke* in his Albatros D.III. The weight table reads: *Leergewicht 675 kg. Zulässige Belastung bei vollem Tank 135 kg.* (weight empty 675 kg. permissible load with full tank 135 kg.)

61). *Leutnant* Hohberg's single-seat reconnaissance flights at *Flieger Abteilung (A)263* stretched over many months. Here is his well-camouflaged Albatros D.III in February 1917 which is finished differently than his D.III illustrated in photo 4.

62). The sailors' uniforms indicate that this camouflaged Albatros D.III was attached to a *Marine Feld Jagdstaffel*. The location is Vlissingen, Flanders in August 1917.

63). *Leutnant* Hohberg's Albatros D.III. Probably the same aircraft as the previous photo, but now exhibiting a generous Prussian observer's badge motif. The lower wings have been fitted with leading edge braces.



▲ 58 ▼ 59

▼ 60



decision since the early production D.V fighters were beset by structural problems and had to be returned to the factory for modification.

In June 1917, the first two OAW-built D.III fighters arrived at Adlershof to undergo the standard *Typenprüfung* (type-test) procedure.¹⁷⁾ Airframe D.1651/17 was static load tested between 8 and 15 June 1917. With regard to the wing, in all three cases (case A, B and D) 'the stipulated load factors were reached without any significant deformation observed'. The tail surfaces and steering controls also proved satisfactory. During the fuselage test, the hindmost fuselage

frame failed at 73 percent of the stipulated load. *Idflieg* ordered the fuselage covering around the rear section to be reinforced.

The inspection report of the flight test aircraft (D.III 1650/17) demonstrates the high degree of technical control exercised by the *Idflieg* engineers in the process of clearing a new aircraft for combat service. Notable is the surprising complexity of a World War One aircraft and the great care taken to place the best possible weapon in the hands of *Fliegertruppe* personnel. Using a check-off sheet as an inspection guide, the shortcomings not in accordance with

the *BLV* regulations were compiled. The OAW engineering staff was experienced and competent as was the resident *Bauaufsicht* (military inspection), making it difficult to justify the extent of the deficiencies listed in the report.¹⁸⁾

Test report - Adlershof, 9 June 1917. Concerning a biplane of the Ostdeutsche Albatros Werke, Schneidemühl. Military Designation: Alb D.III(Albs) Engine: 160-hp Mercedes.

- 1) Documents required by the *BLV* and not received, must be submitted.
- 2) Results of the climb tests have not been received, must be submitted.
- 3) Test of the engine installation: 3 hour flight with temperature measurement: not received, must be submitted.
- 4) Static load tests not yet completed.
- 5) Airframe static load calculations are not required, because licence construction.
- 6) Technical evaluation and test according to *BLV*: see attached.
- 7) Assembly inspection: see attached.
- 8) Evaluation of flight characteristics: report has not been submitted.

Structural deficiencies.

A. Wings:

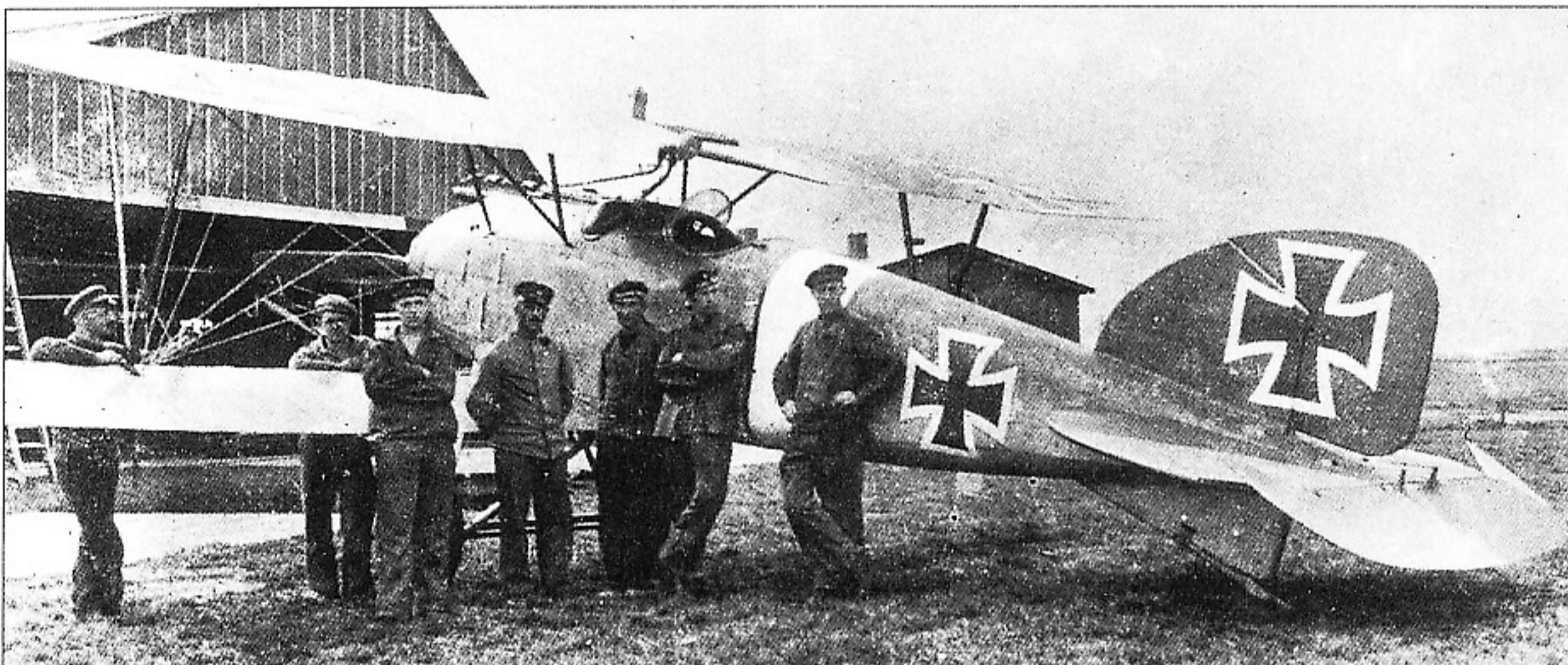
- 1) Some of the turnbuckles were screwed together too tightly.
- 2) The turnbuckle ball joints must remain bare and be well greased. No painting.
- 3) The mounting straps of the drag cables are not aligned with the cable.
- 4) The struts are not marked.
- 5) The wing covering is too slack.

B. Fuselage:

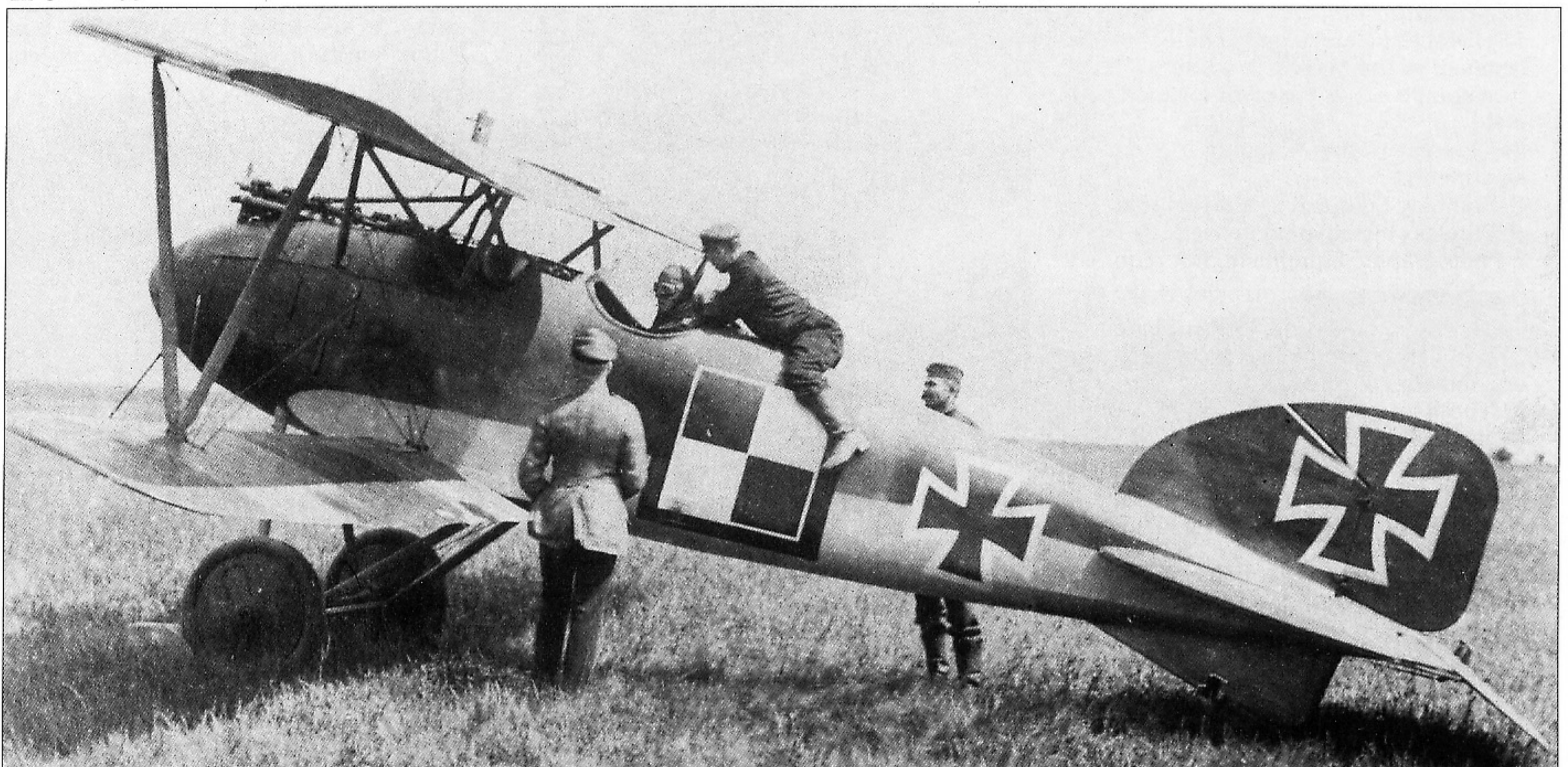
- 1) The longerons at the cockpit must be fabric covered.
- 2) Missing are: company markings on the individual parts, rigging diagram, instructions for lifting the fuselage, altimeter, speed indicator.
- 3) Holes for water drainage must be placed in the tailskid keel.
- 4) A downward closing fabric cover must be installed on the fuselage frame behind the pilot's seat.
- 5) The middle frame in the cockpit must be better protected against damage when



▲ 61



▲ 62 ▼ 63



entering the aircraft.

6) There is space in front of the right hand ammunition box for oxygen breathing apparatus. An installation drawing will be sent to the company.

C. Undercarriage: (no entry)

D. Steering Controls:

1) The attachment of the aileron cables must be asymmetric. The use of dissimilar turnbuckles is recommended.

E. Powerplant:

1) The cooling water ducts are incorrectly positioned.

2) In contrast to the original aircraft, the auxiliary throttle has been manufactured in an expedient manner.

3) The throttle cables must be relocated to prevent them from being stepped on.

4) One thermometer is sufficient for the cooling water.

5) The bends in the radiator pressure tubing are too sharp.

6) The temperature measurements have not been received by *Idflieg Flz.B.3*, must be submitted.

7) The water pump grease cups are totally inaccessible.

8) The oil separator in the air pressure duct is missing.

9) *Idflieg Flz.B.3* has not received the wiring layout, must be submitted.

10) The hand air pump could be more conveniently placed.

11) The starboard distributor plate is difficult to access.

12) The oil drainage outlet has not been led overboard.

13) It would be better to have the oil filler spout on the outside.

14) A glass oil gauge is missing.

15) The oil petcock is not readily accessible.

16) The engine compartment ventilation is insufficient.

17) The exhaust header must not be painted in order to easily spot possible faults. The header is ruptured at the first arm. Contrary to regulations, a second exhaust header did not accompany the aircraft. It must be submitted.

18) Petcock markings are missing.

19) The fuselage should receive more openings to improve engine accessibility (for example oil control petcock).

F. M.G. installation:

1) The M.G. belt discharge chute must be fastened to the M.G. with a bolt which in turn should act as the pivot for the cover plate.

2) The rear of the mounting frame must be stiffened.

G. Bombing Equipment: not required

H. Wireless Installation: not required

J. Photographic Equipment: not required

Assembly inspection:

1) The elevator is difficult to actuate.

2) The attachment of fuselage access covers must be improved.

3) The filler spout to the fuel tank must be made more accessible.

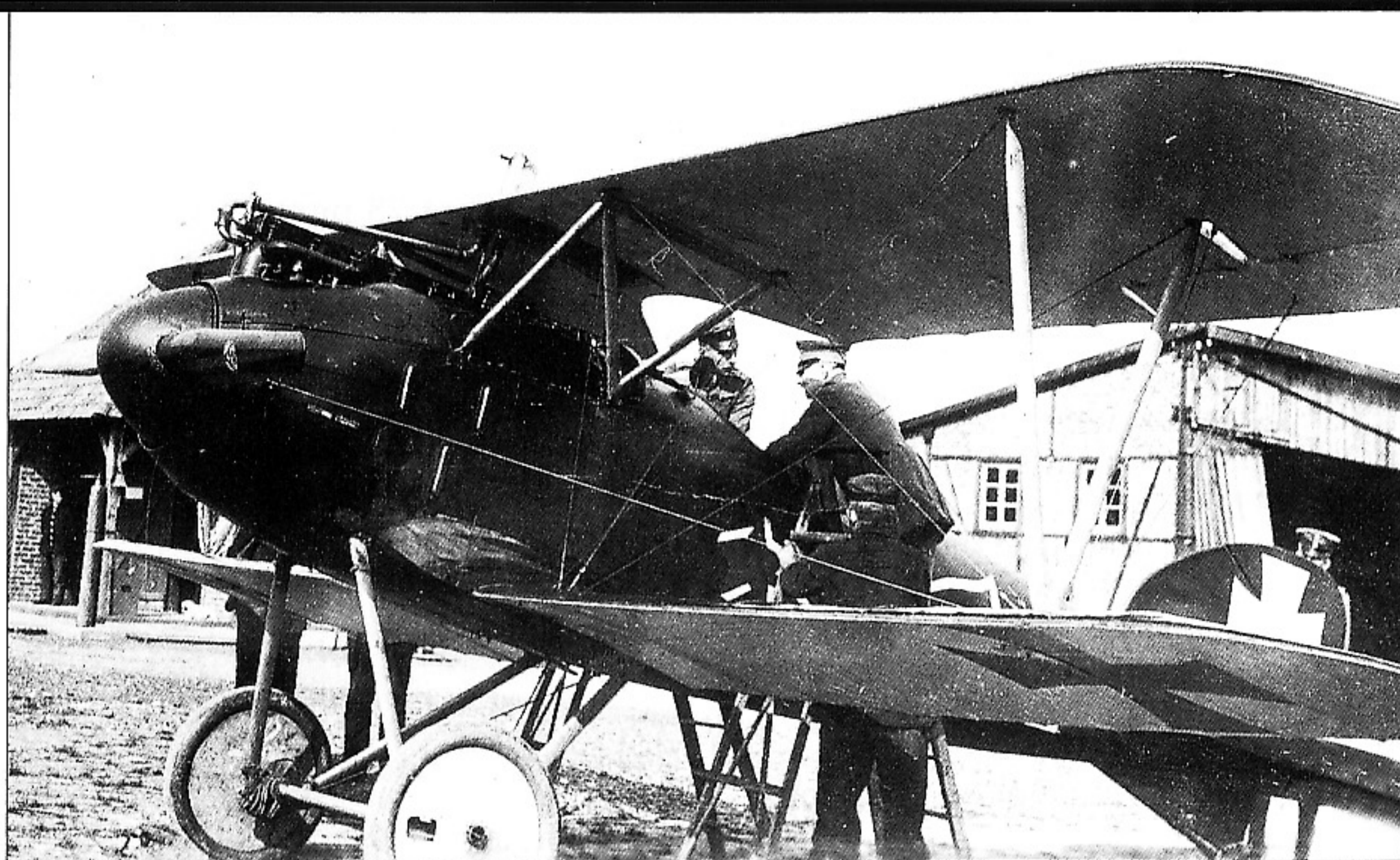
4) Accessibility to the starboard magneto is obstructed by the exhaust header.

5) The water pump grease cup is difficult to manipulate

6) The elevator cables chafe in several places.

Summary:

The aircraft conforms to the original. After correction of the above listed deficiencies and passing the load test, the aircraft is (judged) fit for front use, provided it exhibits



▲ 64

the performance of the original aircraft. In addition a radiator of appropriate size must be unconditionally demonstrated.

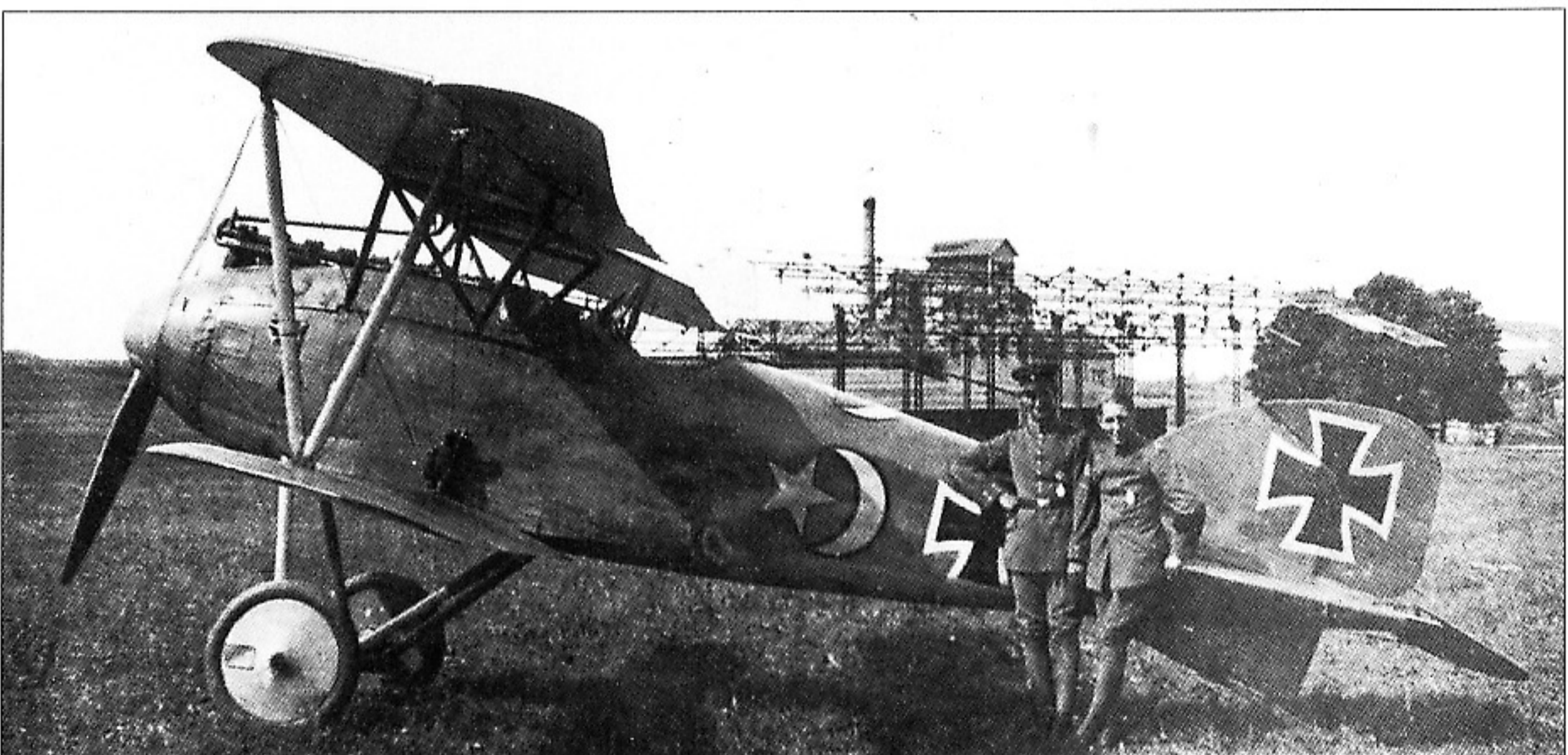
The report, distributed in 22 copies, was signed by 11 members of the *Idflieg* inspection team, by two OAW representatives and one representative from the Daimler engine company.

The production of the Albatros D.V (Johannisthal) and the D.III(OAW) ran in parallel into late 1917.¹⁹⁾ Having the opportunity to fly both aircraft, many pilots, among them von Richthofen, preferred the D.III over the D.V. This is supported by an *Idflieg* report of 24 July 1917 which states that:

'The Albatros D.III is more robustly constructed than the D.V. The D.V is merely regarded as a lightened D.III. The performance of both is equal. The D.V will not be manufactured further, only the D.III'.

To some extent the statement was correct. Owing to structural failure, early examples of the D.V fighter were grounded and airframes returned to the factory for reinforcement, while work

▼ 65



▲ 66 ▼ 67



was underway on the development of the strengthened Albatros D.Va. By being properly cautious, *Idflieg* had fortuitously maintained a high level of D.III output thus insuring the supply of fighters while the D.V problems were being resolved.

Manfred von Richthofen discussed the role of fighter performance and manoeuvrability with specific reference to the Albatros D.III in a report prepared in the summer of 1917. He wrote that the primary requirement of a fighter is not to lose altitude at full throttle when performing tight turns at higher altitudes. 'This is not the case with the Albatros D.III, its chief drawback'. Regarding sensitivity of controls, von Richthofen wrote 'the ailerons of the Albatros D.III are not entirely effective. Aileron control is the main requirement in a fighter'. According to von Richthofen the rudder control was good; and the elevator 'very pleasant'. As to visibility, it must not be 'encumbered above, below and to the side'. Richthofen reported the D.III visibility as 'good'. An aircraft in a vertical dive of over 1000 metres, ending in an elevator pull-out, must be absolutely safe. With the Albatros D.III this is not always the case, according to the *Rittmeister*.

Albatros D.III and D.III(OAW) identification features.

The primary distinguishing feature between the two aircraft was that the

64). Mechanics of *Jasta 30* prepare *Leutnant Joachim von Bertrab's* Albatros D.III for flight. The centrally-mounted radiator indicates that it is an early production machine. The iron crosses on tail and fuselage were over-painted in white.

65). *Offizier-Stellvertreter Anton Dierle* of *Jasta 24* with his Albatros D.III. The radiator expansion dome can be seen over the top wing.

66). *Offizier-Stellvertreter Schluckebier* and *Vizefeldwebel Jacobsen* of *Jasta 31* and an Albatros D.III at Mars sur Boucy.

67). Albatros D.III of an unidentified unit.

68). *Leutnant Hermann Frommherz* of *Jasta Boelcke* in front of his Albatros D.III in Pronville. The round step identifies this as an early production machine. The aircraft was painted light blue overall except for the black and white sash. Frommherz called it his *blaue Maus*.

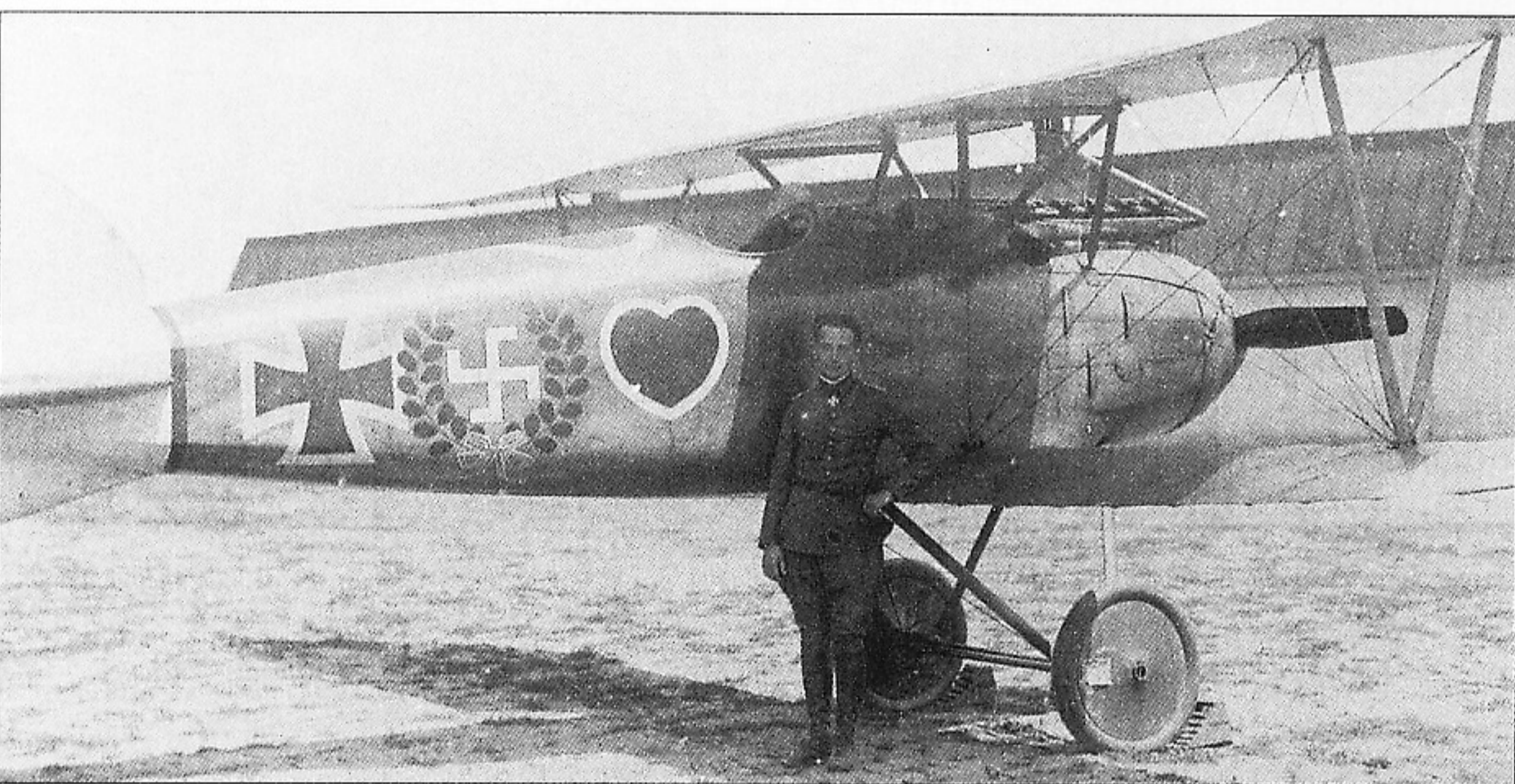
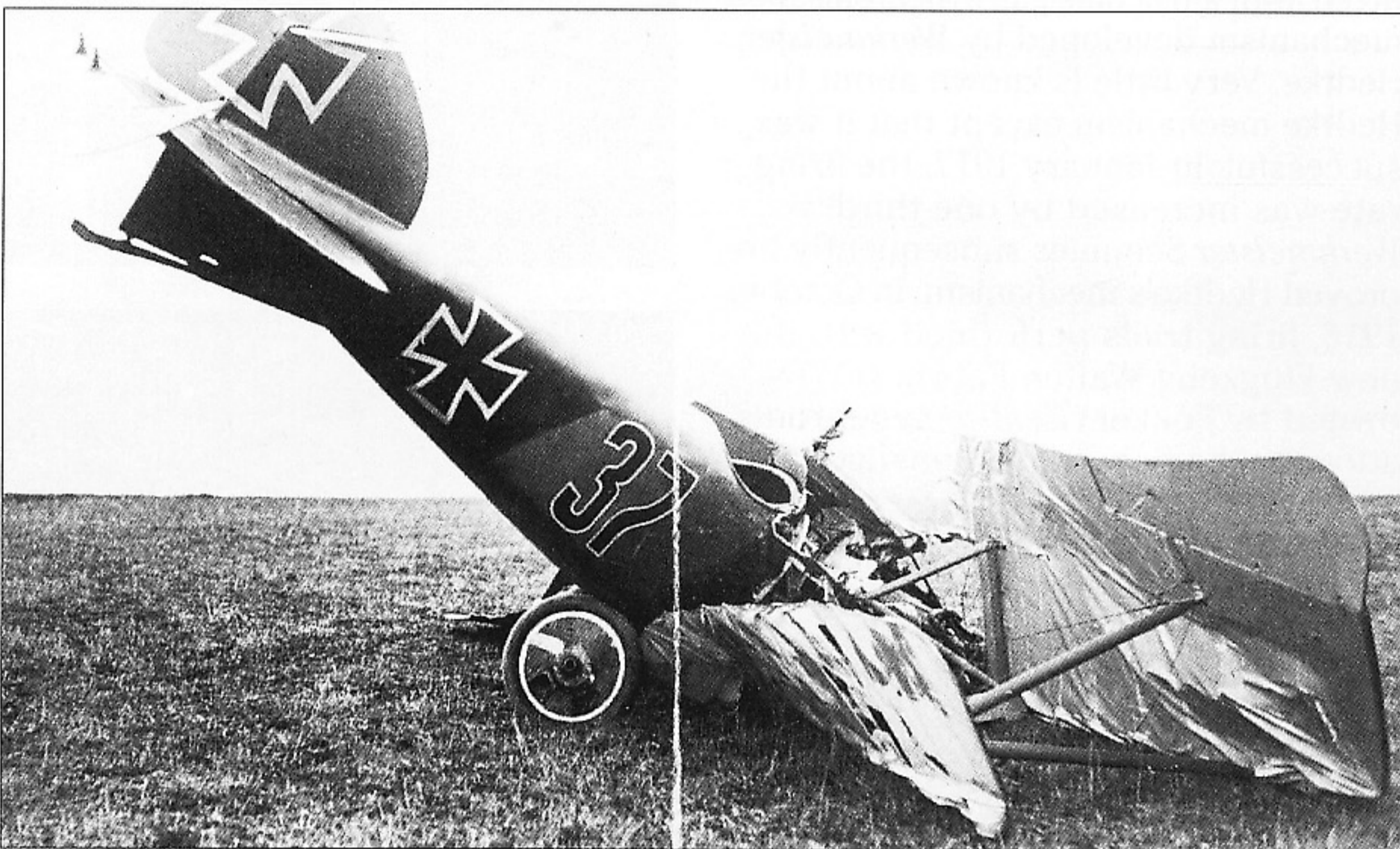
69). The large numbers on the fuselage generally point to a *Jagdfliegerschule* machine. This Albatros-built D.III was severely damaged but one hopes the pilot survived.

70). *Leutnant Werner Voss* and his gaily decorated Albatros-built D.III. The swastika was an ancient good luck symbol unfortunately adopted by the Nazis where it has come to mean just the opposite.

71). An original photograph of *Voss' Albatros D.III* was taken at the *Flieger Beobachter Schule Cöln* and flown by *Leutnant Leusch*. Was it just visiting?



▲ 68 ▼ 69



▲ 70 ▼ 71



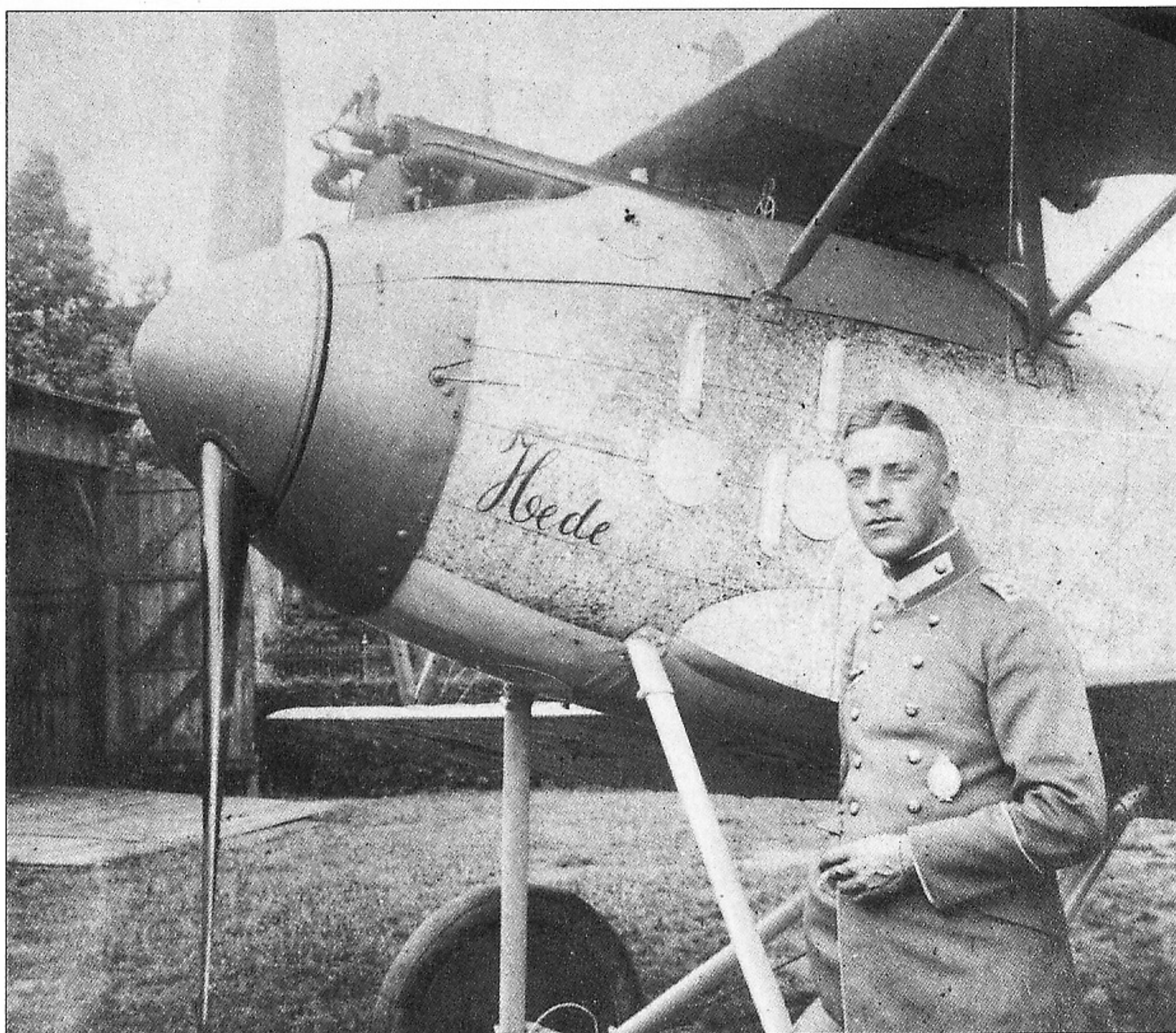
rudder trailing edge of all Albatros-built machines was straight, whereas all OAW machines left the factory with a fully-rounded rudder. Although the rounded OAW rudder was interchangeable with Albatros-built aircraft, no photographic evidence has been found to show this occurred. Albatros-built fighters had a bowl-shaped metal cover over the machine-gun discharge chute (on the port side) unlike the OAW machines that had a curved, rectangular chute. All D.III fighters fitted with a central radiator were built by Albatros-Johannisthal. The switch to offset radiators occurred between airframes D.2215/16 and D.2252/16.

Initially, the Albatros fighters were fitted with a machine-gun synchronisation mechanism developed by *Werkmeister* Hedtke. Very little is known about the Hedtke mechanism except that it was successful. In January 1917, the firing rate was increased by one-third. *Werkmeister* Semmler subsequently improved Hedtke's mechanism. In October 1916, firing trials performed with the new Flugzeug Waffen Fabrik (FWF - owned by Fokker) *Zentral* synchronisation mechanism proved unsuccessful in a twin-gun Albatros fighter.²⁰⁾ As a result the Hedtke-Semmler synchronisation continued in use on all Albatros aircraft until August 1917 when Albatros switched to the FWF system.²¹⁾

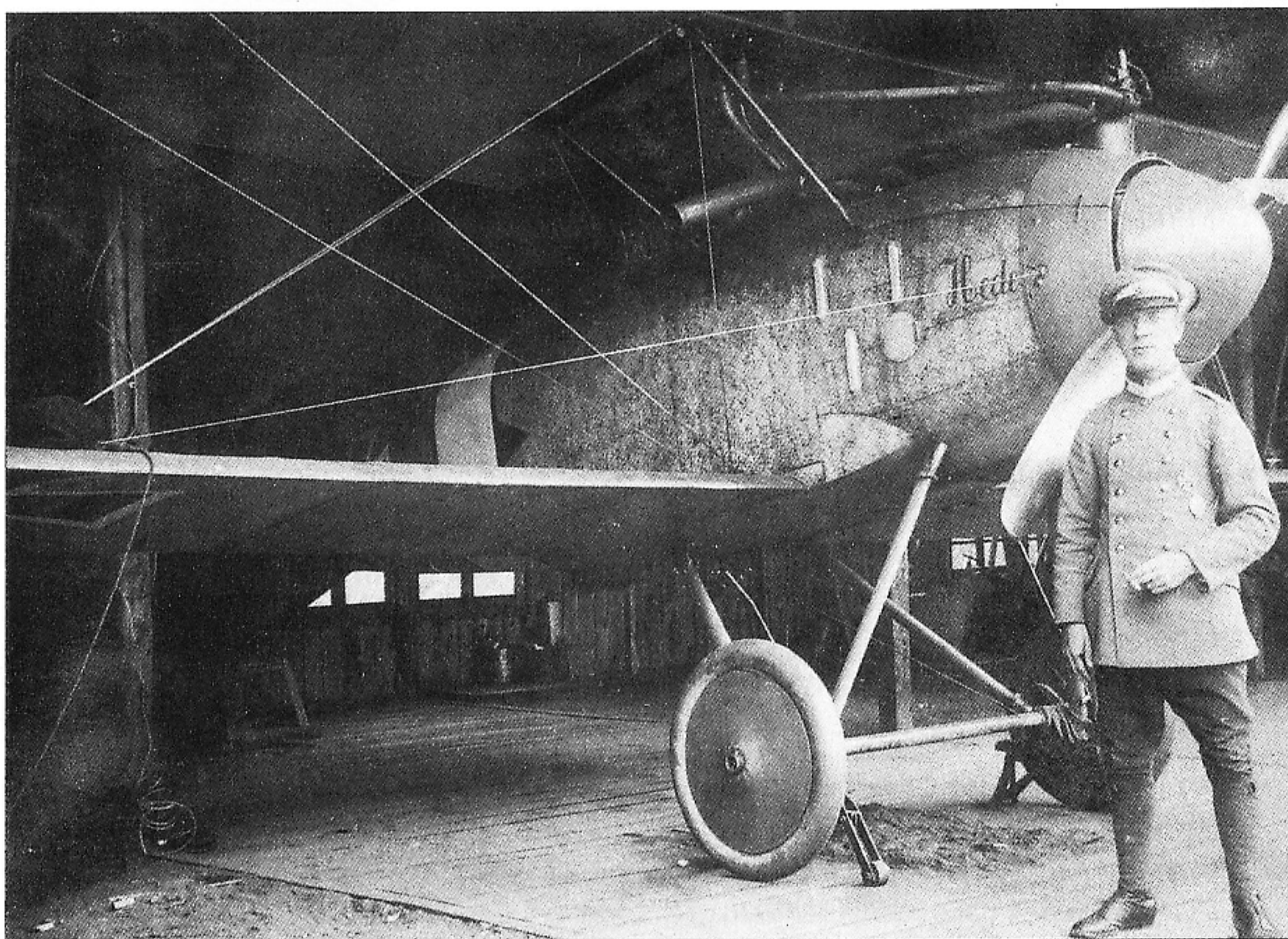
All Albatros D.III fighters left the factory with a single drag cable running from the nose to the base of the vee-strut. In the field, a small number of Albatros D.III machines were fitted with a second drag cable installed in two variations: a) attached from the nose cable attachment point, or b) attached to the nose below the nose cable attachment point. Both supplementary drag cables ran to the upper, rear vee-strut attachment point. Obviously the additional drag bracing served to 'stiffen' the wing cellule although documents defining the reason for the additional bracing have not been found. As already mentioned, in the field some D.III fighters were fitted with a small bracing arm running from the vee-strut to the lower wing leading edge. A rarely-seen modification was the bracing cable running from the lower vee-strut attachment point to the upper, rear wing spar near the wing tip.

The different aircraft weights stencilled on the fuselage are shown by the following:

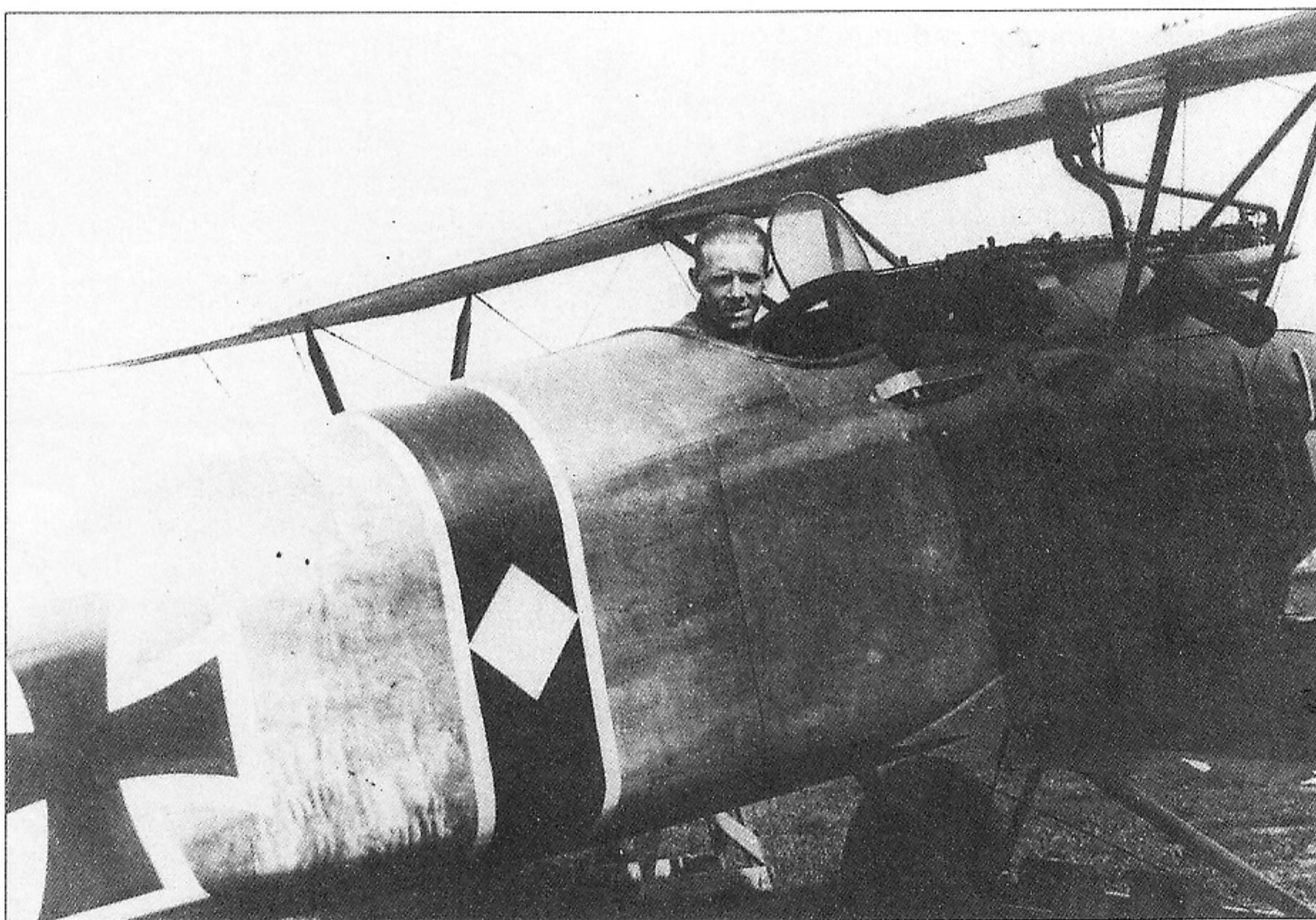
All Albatros D.III fighters built in Johannisthal were delivered with a placard empty weight of 675 kg and an allowable load of 135 kg with a full fuel tank. The OAW-built machines had an empty weight of 660 kg, a saving of 15 kg, no doubt made possible by various structural refinements. Some Albatros D.III(OAW) showed an empty weight of 735 kg and an allowable load of 235 kg. The weight difference can be explained by the fact that these machines were



▲ 72



▲ 73 ▼ 74



stressed to carry twin radiators and the commensurate weight of cooling water, and probably includes fuel as well. It was not unusual for *Idflieg* to order small production batches of aircraft for service with Turkish and German units stationed in Mesopotamia and Palestine.²²⁾ In the hot climate encountered, larger or twin radiators were mandatory. Some of the D.III(OAW) designed for the tropics remained in Germany and as a consequence were simply fitted with a single offset radiator although the placard weight remained at 735 kg.

Albatros D.III as an experimental machine.

Wrapped and basket-weave fuselages

In November 1916, *Idflieg* ordered five D.III fighters fitted with 'wrapped' fuselages without giving details. However this neatly coincides with a patent issued to Albatros (Patent 326,719) on 22 December 1916 that describes a 'basket-weave' fuselage formed of broad, interwoven wooden strips which could be strengthened by being sewn together and sewn to the fuselage frame. Two fuselages based on the patent were manufactured by the A Geipel company and submitted for testing in mid-1917. After standing exposed to the weather for three weeks, load tests were performed at Adlershof on 4-5 July 1917. The unusual basket-weave fuselages, one bare and the other fabric-covered, failed the load requirements by a substantial margin. A final attempt to rescue the project by fitting interior longerons and frames to strengthen the structure, proved upon analysis to have the same weight as the standard fuselage and therefore of no benefit.

72 and 73). *Leutnant* Josef Rohe, attached to the I. *Marine Feld Jasta*, flew Albatros D.III named after his lady friend 'Hede' (short for Hedwig). A square metal trough to protect the engine from firing debris was mounted above the intake manifold of the Mercedes engine.

74). *Leutnant* Krämer of *Jasta* 37 and his Albatros D.III. A flare cartridge rack is mounted aside the cockpit. For warm weather flights, the radiator has been fitted with an air deflector.

75). The central radiator identifies this Albatros D.III as an early production machine. In the cockpit is *Leutnant* Alfred Lenz of *Jasta* 14 in May 1917.

76). The large air deflector under the radiator is evidence that this Albatros D.III of *Jasta* 37 was experiencing cooling problems. The black/white marking completely encircles the fuselage.

77). Close-up of an Albatros-built D.III showing the discharge chute cover and a rather proud windscreen. It was flown by *Hauptmann* Hans von Hühnerbein of *Jasta* 5.

78). It took only three persons to roll an Albatros D.III onto the *Jasta* 14 airfield. To save effort, the support trestle has been placed on the undercarriage. The cockpit is fitted with a flare gun holder.



▲ 75 ▼ 76



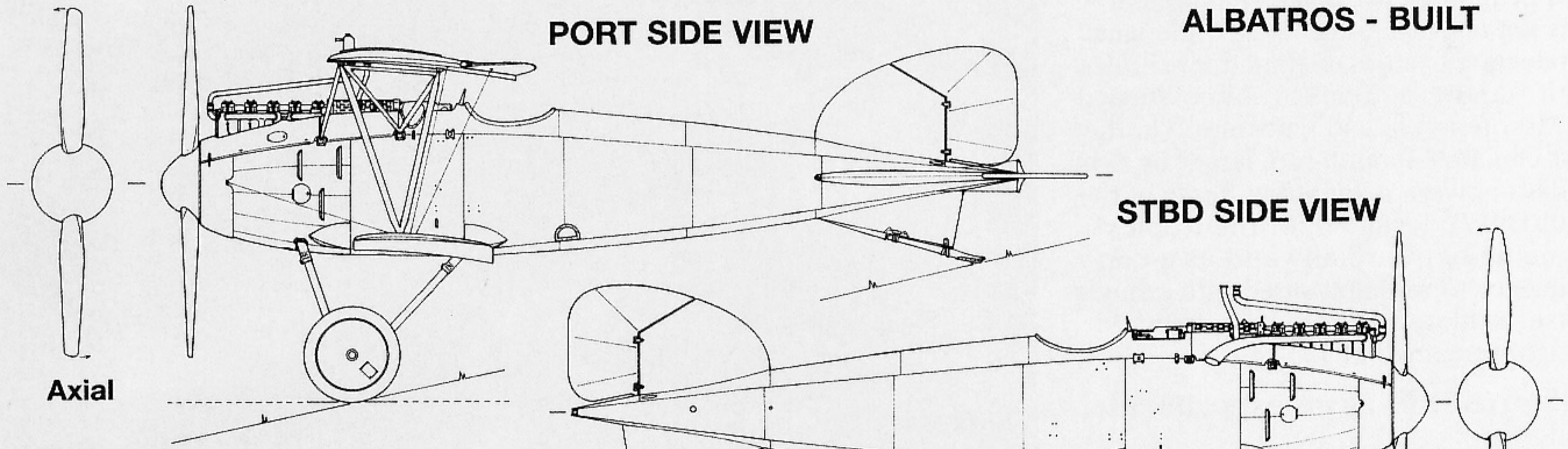
▲ 77 ▼ 78



Drawn and traced by Martin Digmayer © 2003 Albatros Productions, Ltd.

PORT SIDE VIEW

ALBATROS - BUILT

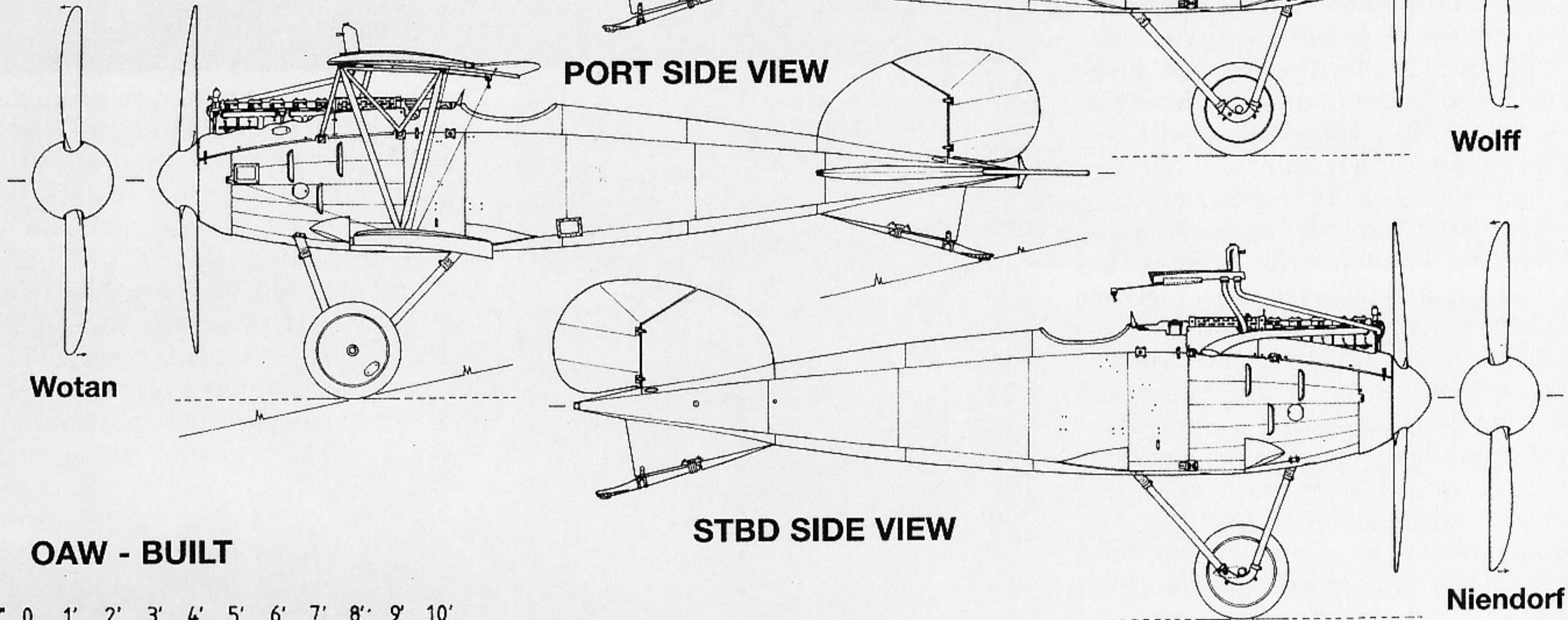


Axial

STBD SIDE VIEW

Wolff

PORT SIDE VIEW

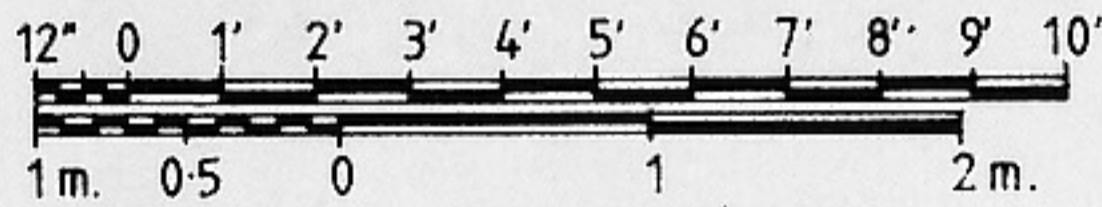


Wotan

STBD SIDE VIEW

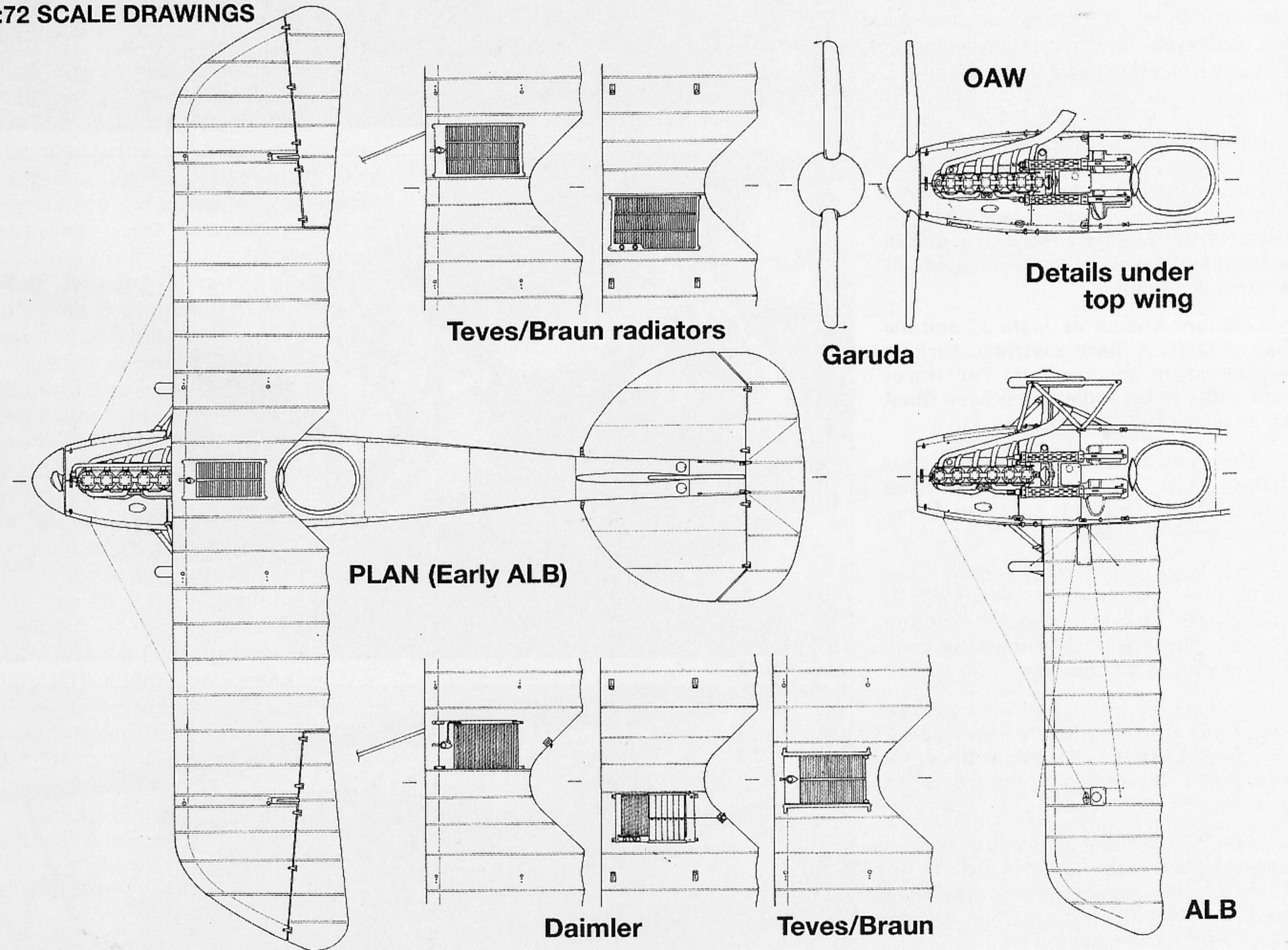
Niendorf

OAW - BUILT



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1:72 SCALE DRAWINGS



PLAN (Early ALB)

Teves/Braun radiators

OAW

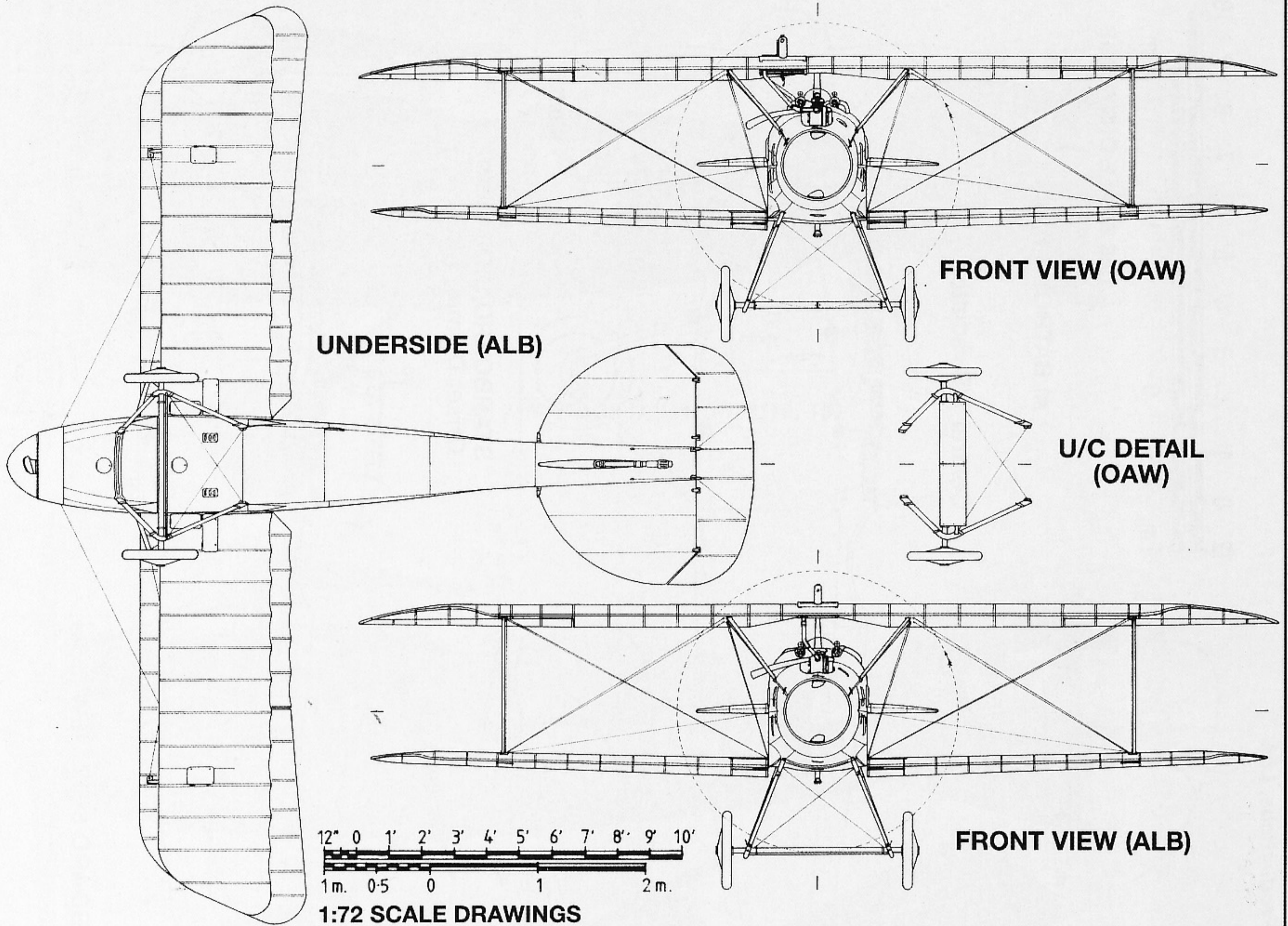
Details under top wing

Garuda

Daimler

Teves/Braun

ALB

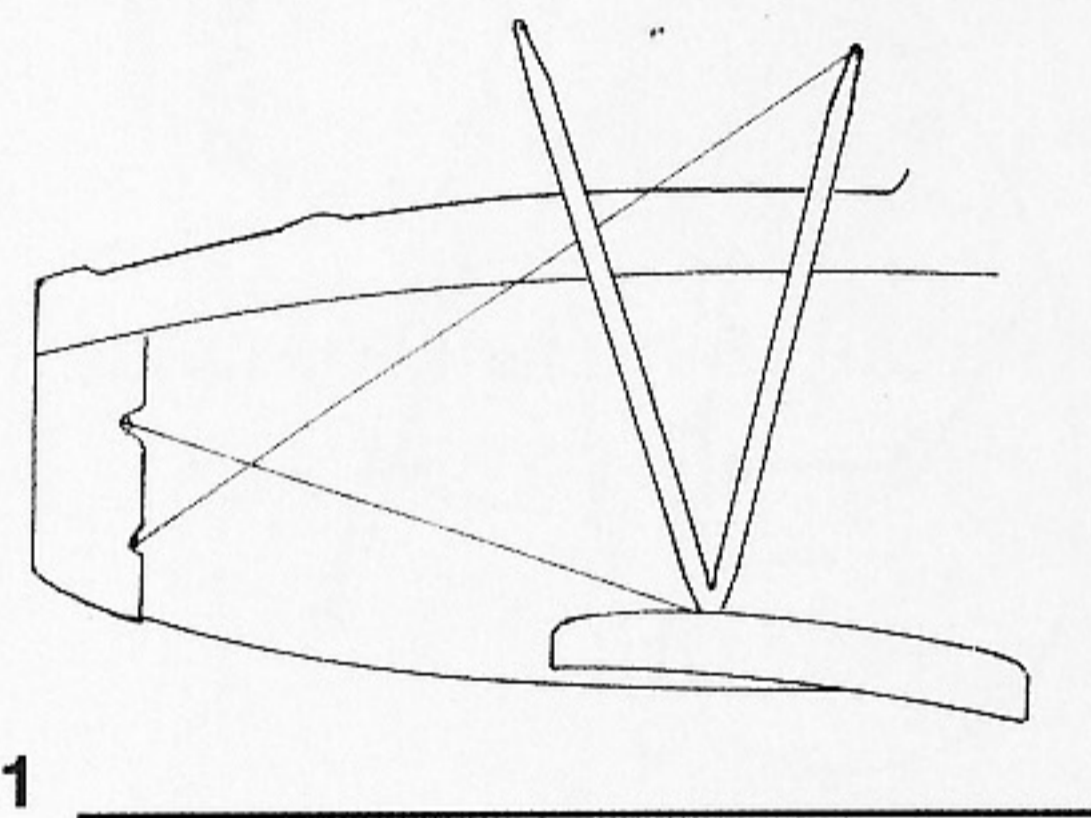


ALBATROS D.III (OAW/Albatros-built)

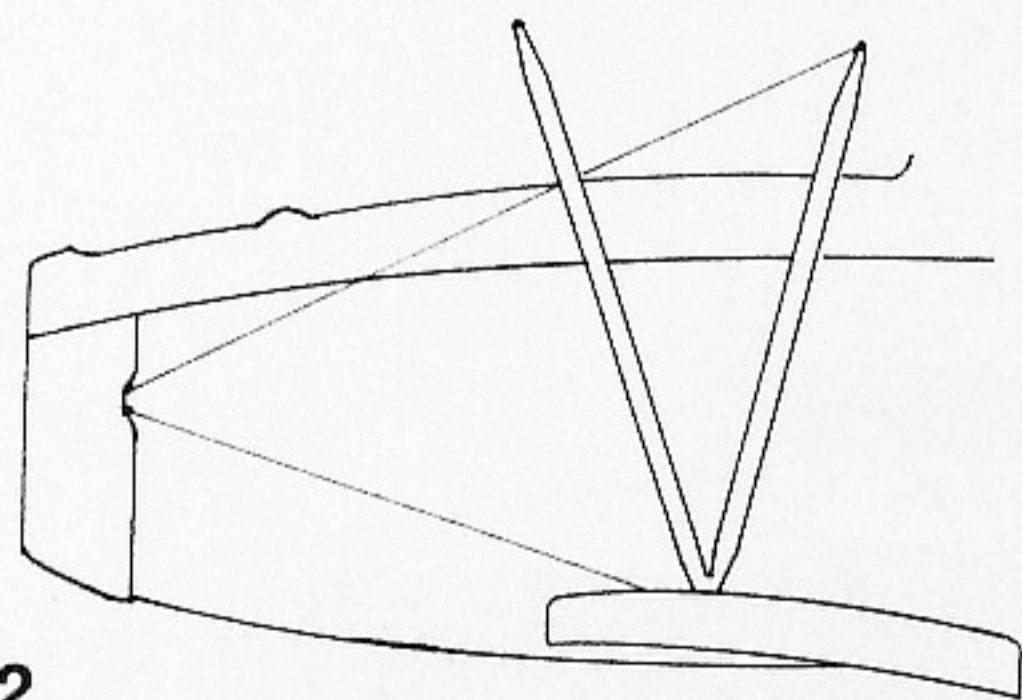
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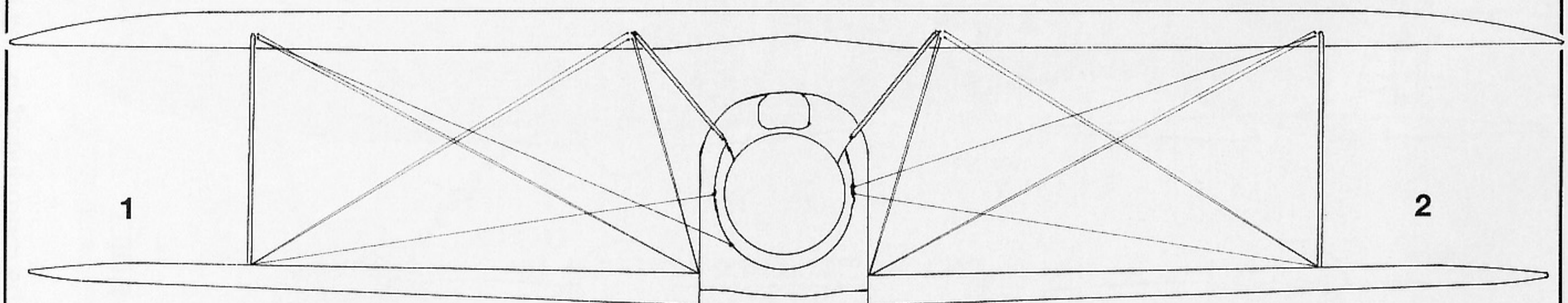


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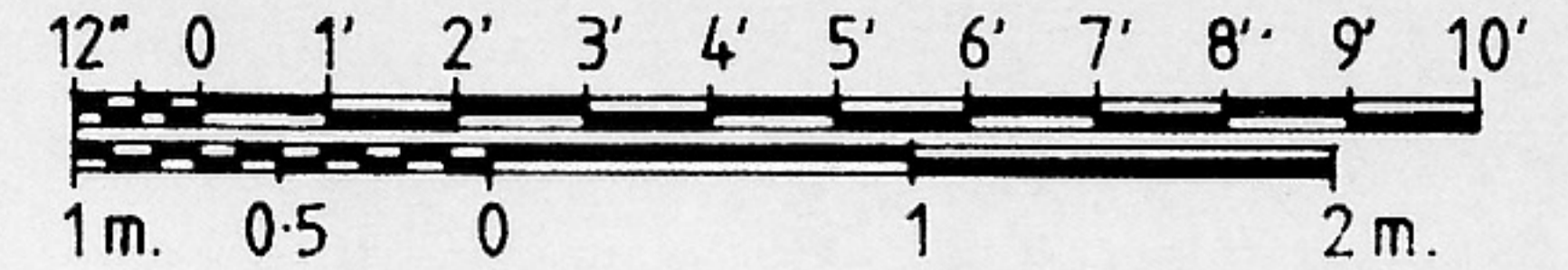


2

ALTERNATIVE WIRES 1:48 SCALE



Drawn and traced by Martin Digmayer © 2003 Albatros Productions, Ltd.



1:48 SCALE DRAWINGS

ALBATROS - BUILT

Central T/B radiator

Wolff

STARBOARD SIDE VIEW
Offset Daimler radiator

Niendorf

PORT SIDE VIEW

PORT SIDE VIEW

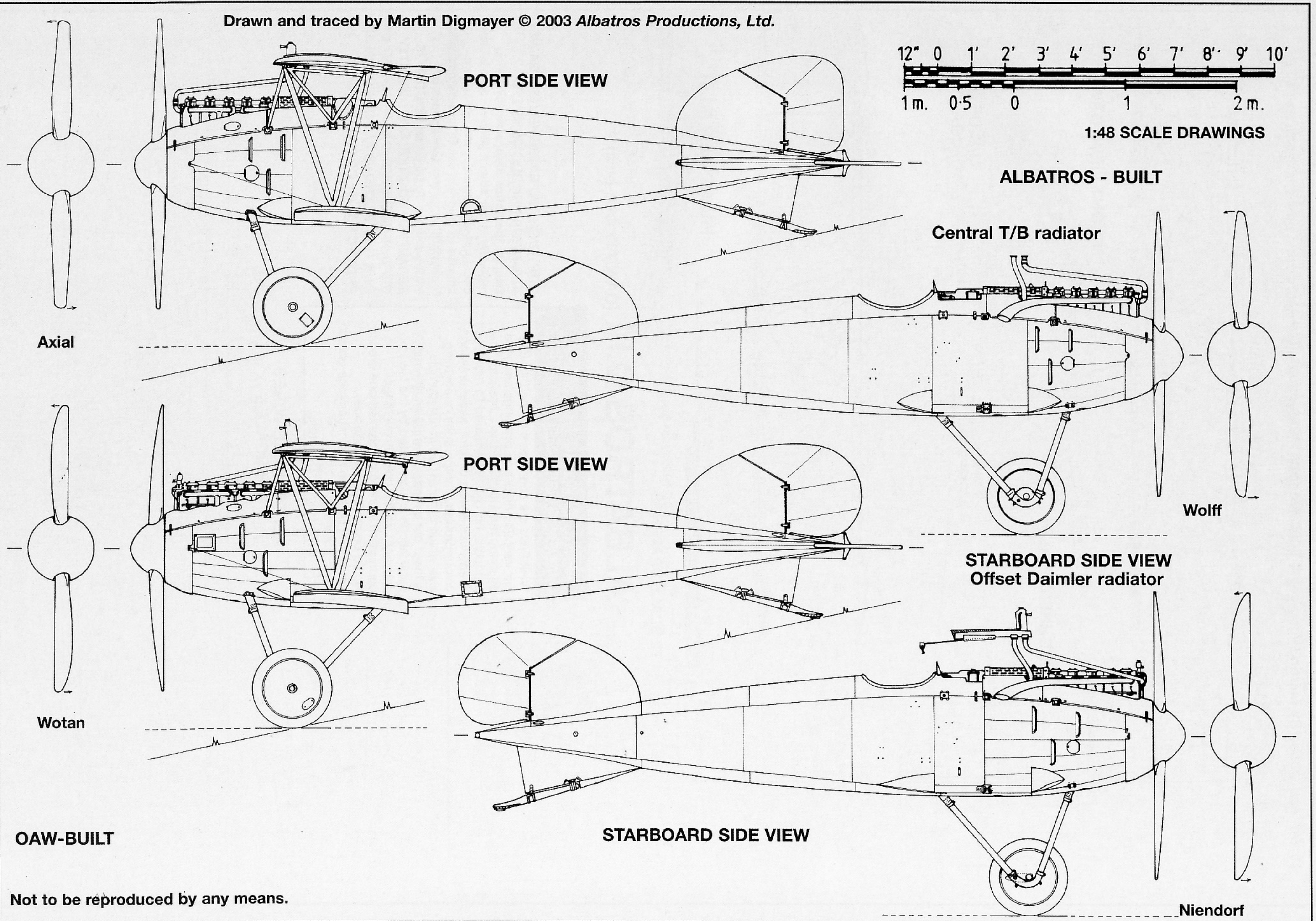
STARBOARD SIDE VIEW

Axial

Wotan

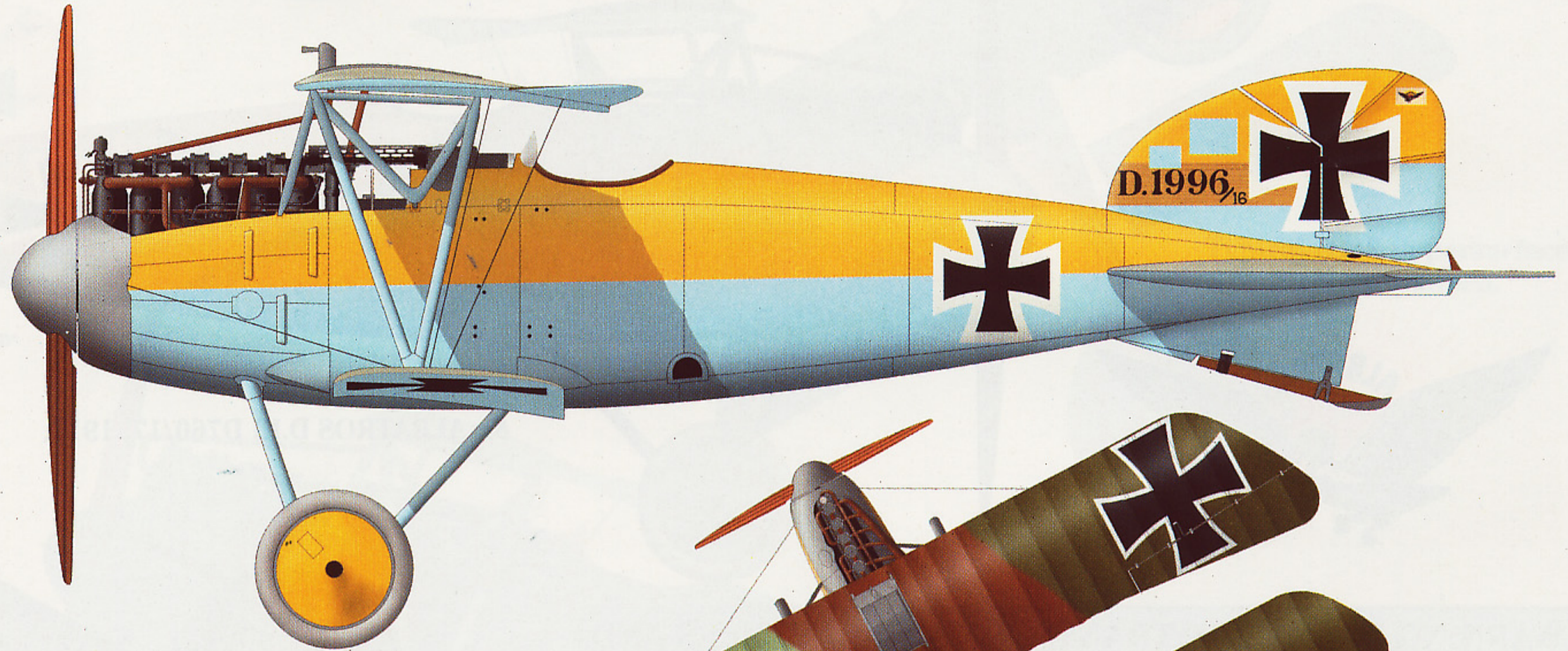
OAW-BUILT

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4). ALBATROS D.III D.1922/16, 1917.



5). ALBATROS D.III D.1996/16, 1917.



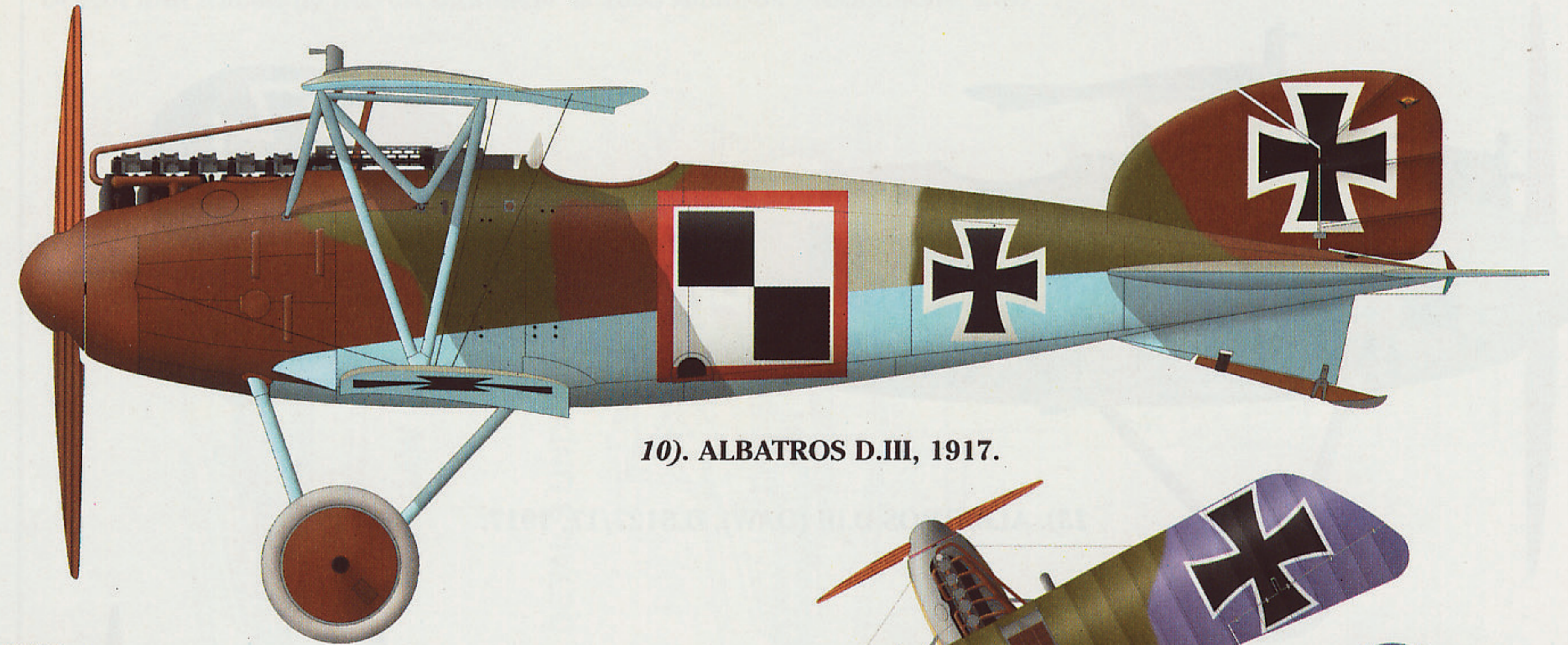
Typical upper surface
3-colour pattern.



6). ALBATROS D.III D.23??/16, 1917.



7). ALBATROS D.III, 1917.



10). ALBATROS D.III, 1917.



8). ALBATROS D.III D760/17, 1917.



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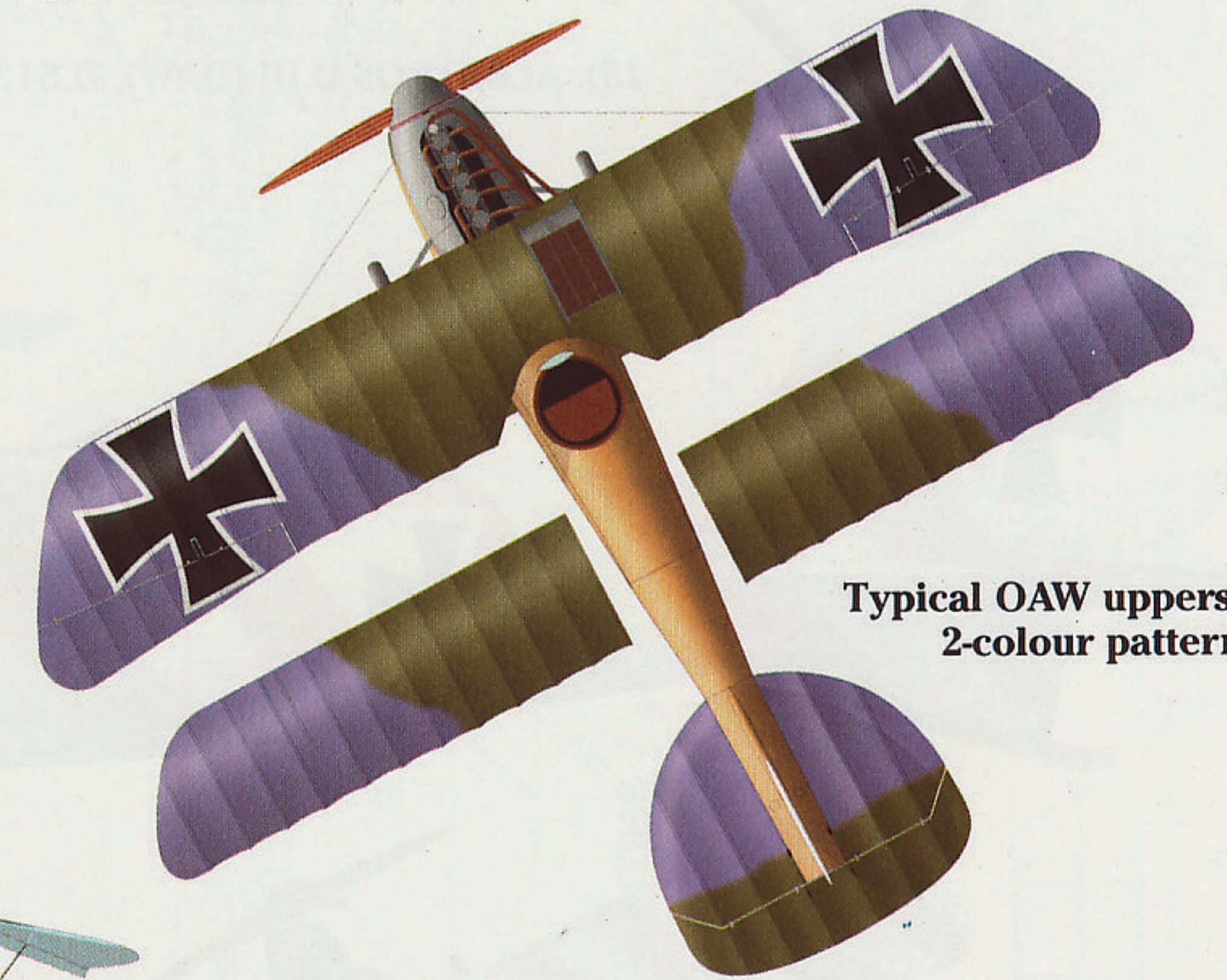
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R Rimell/A Hogan, Directors.



Uppersurface 3-colour pattern (typical)
 Lower wing pattern not known.



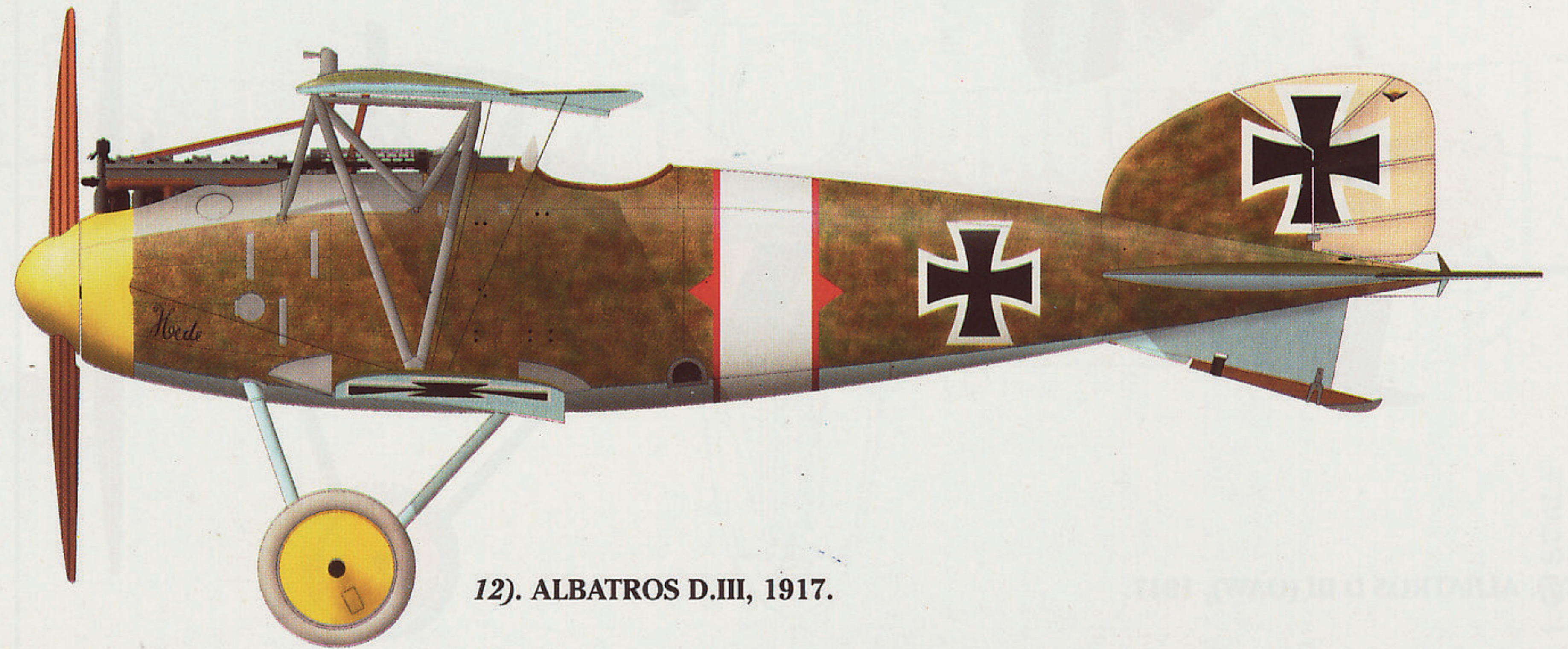
9). ALBATROS D.III D.767/17, 1917.



Typical OAW uppersurface
 2-colour pattern.



11). ALBATROS D.III, 1917.



12). ALBATROS D.III, 1917.



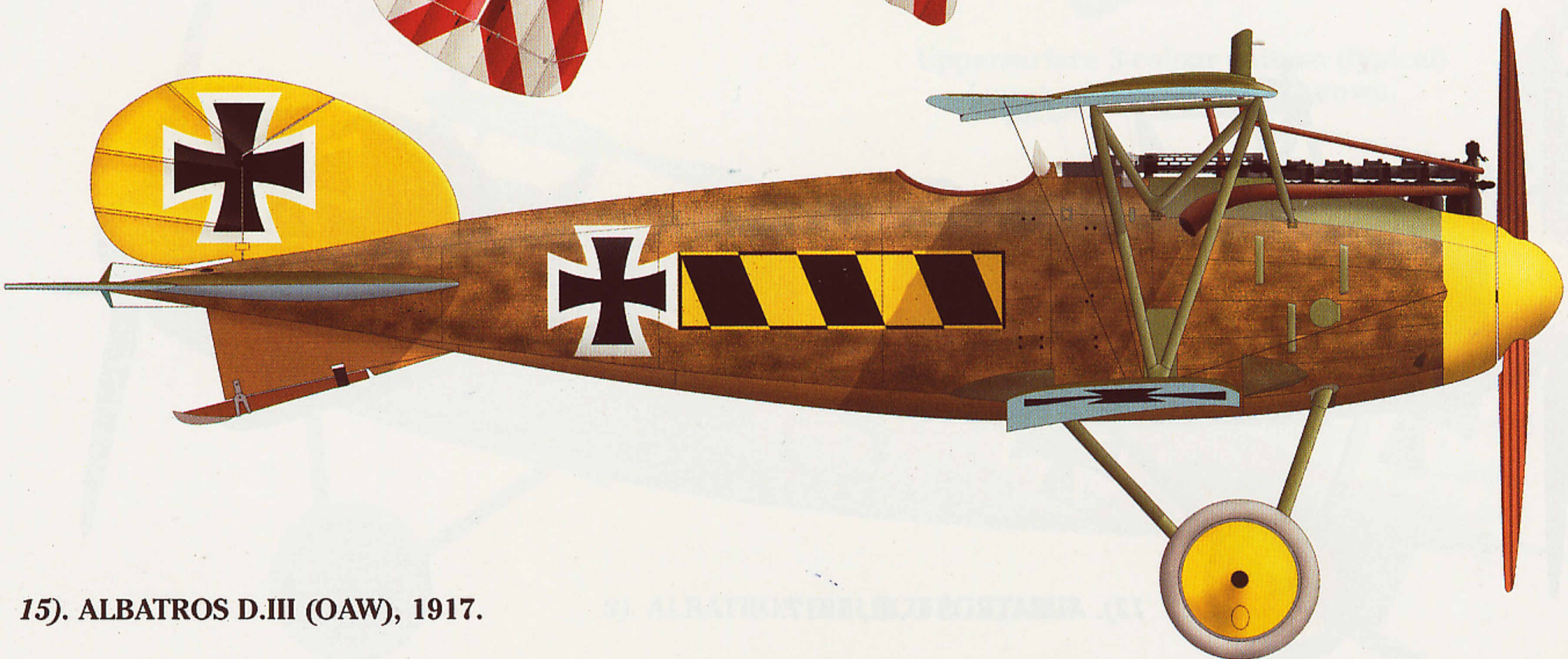
13). ALBATROS D.III (OAW), D.5127/17, 1917.



14). ALBATROS D.III (OAW), 1917.

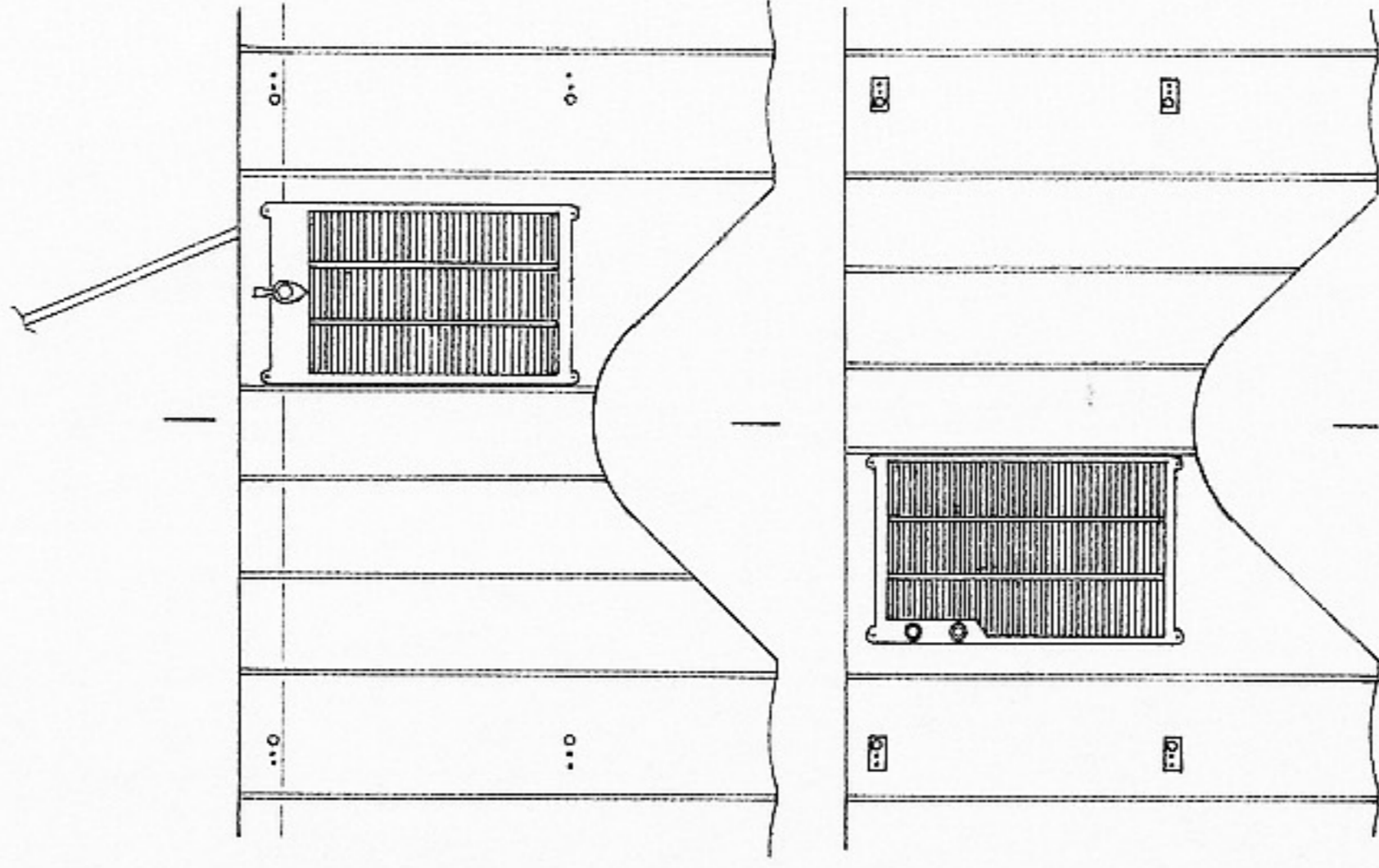


Uppersurface detail, *plate 14.*

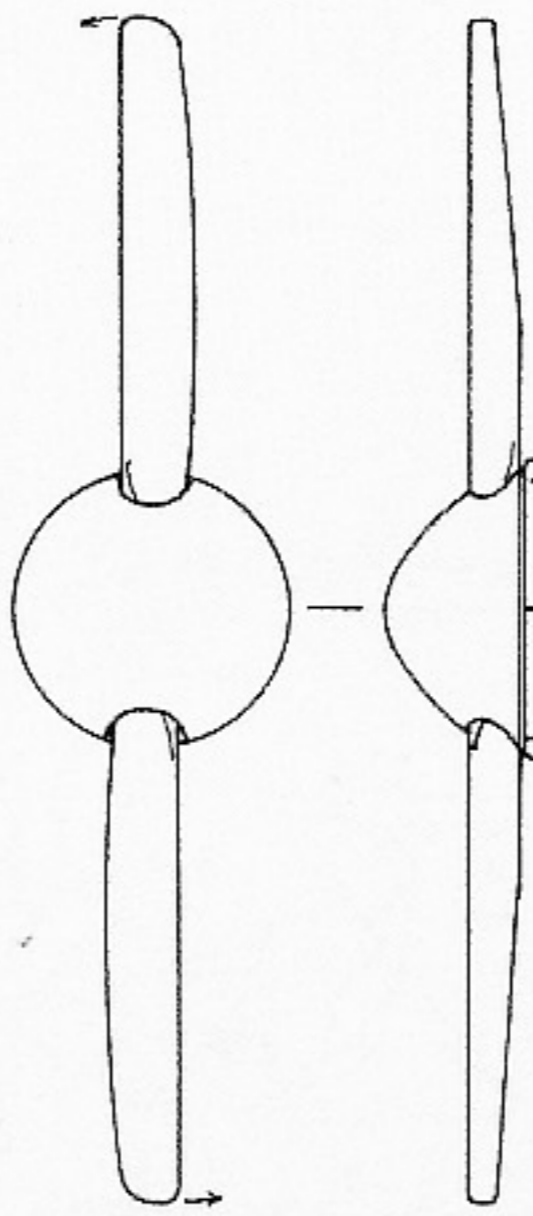


15). ALBATROS D.III (OAW), 1917.

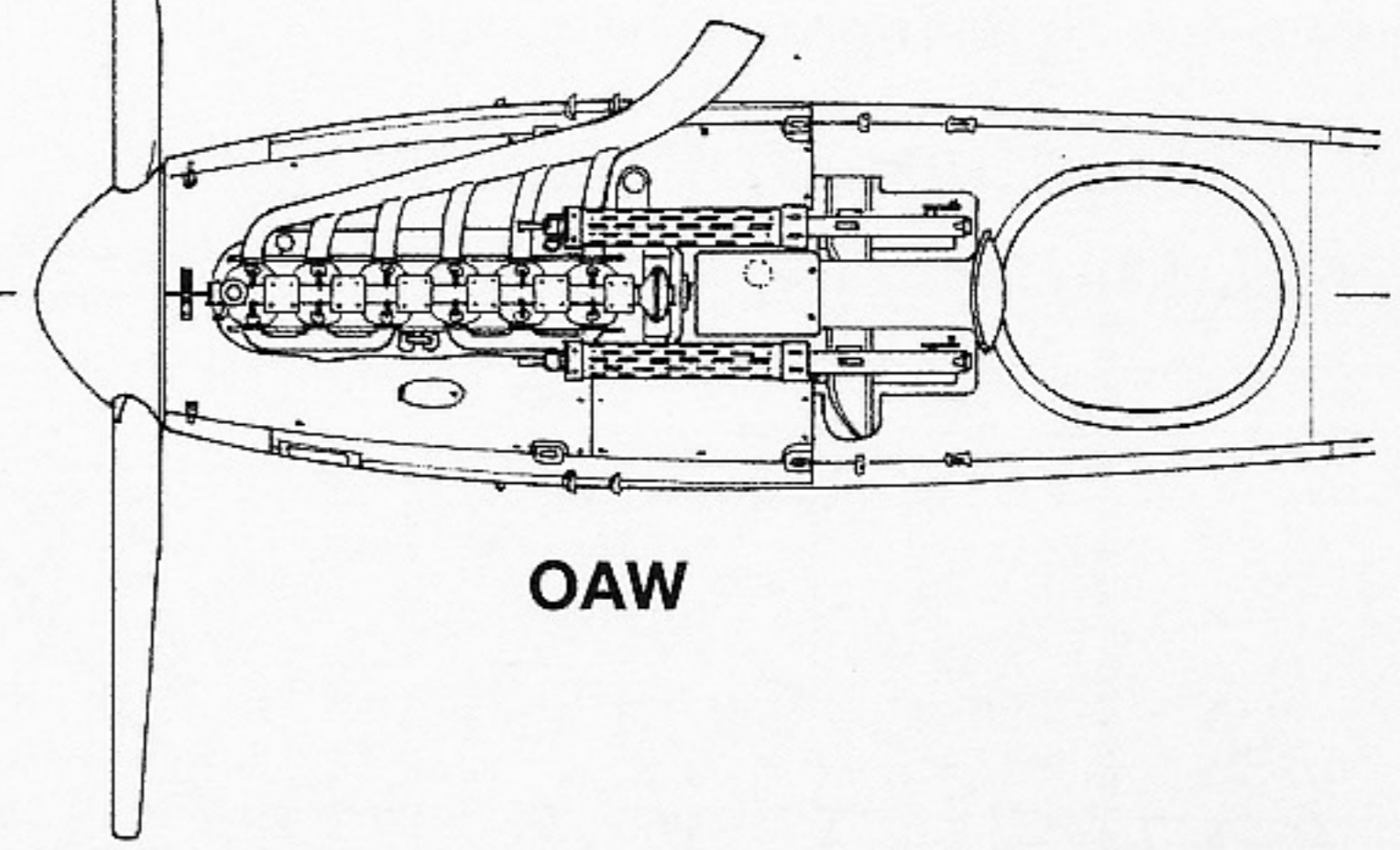
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Teves/Braun radiator

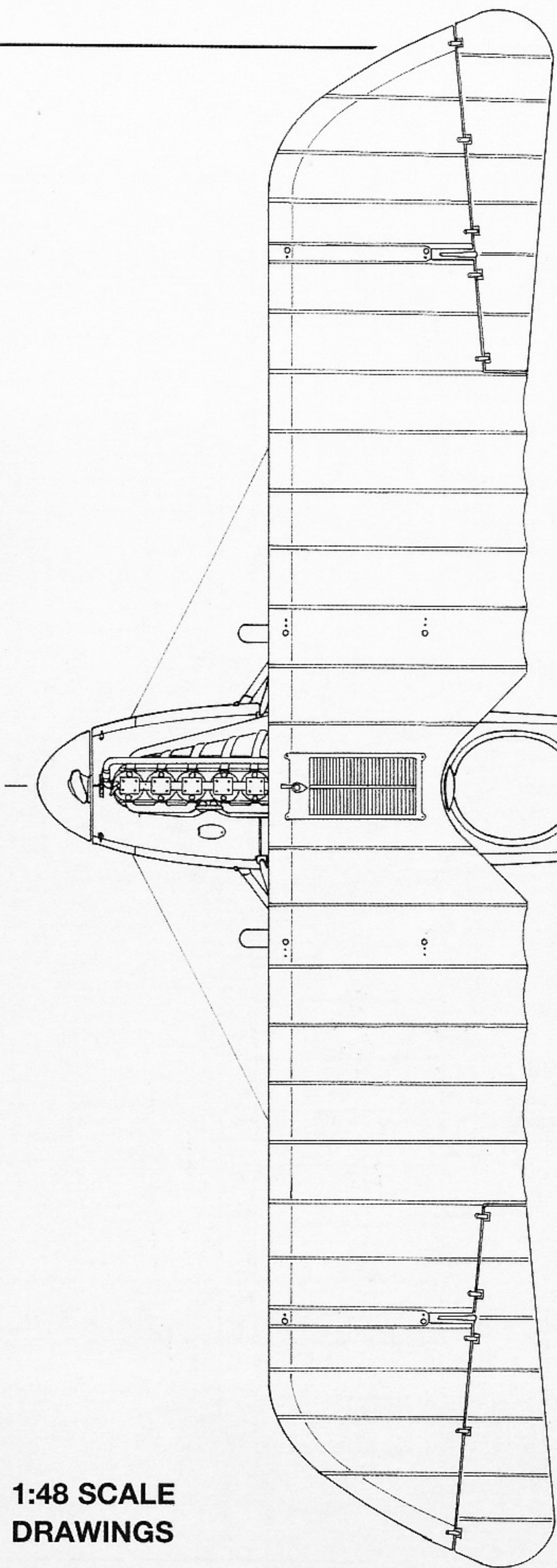
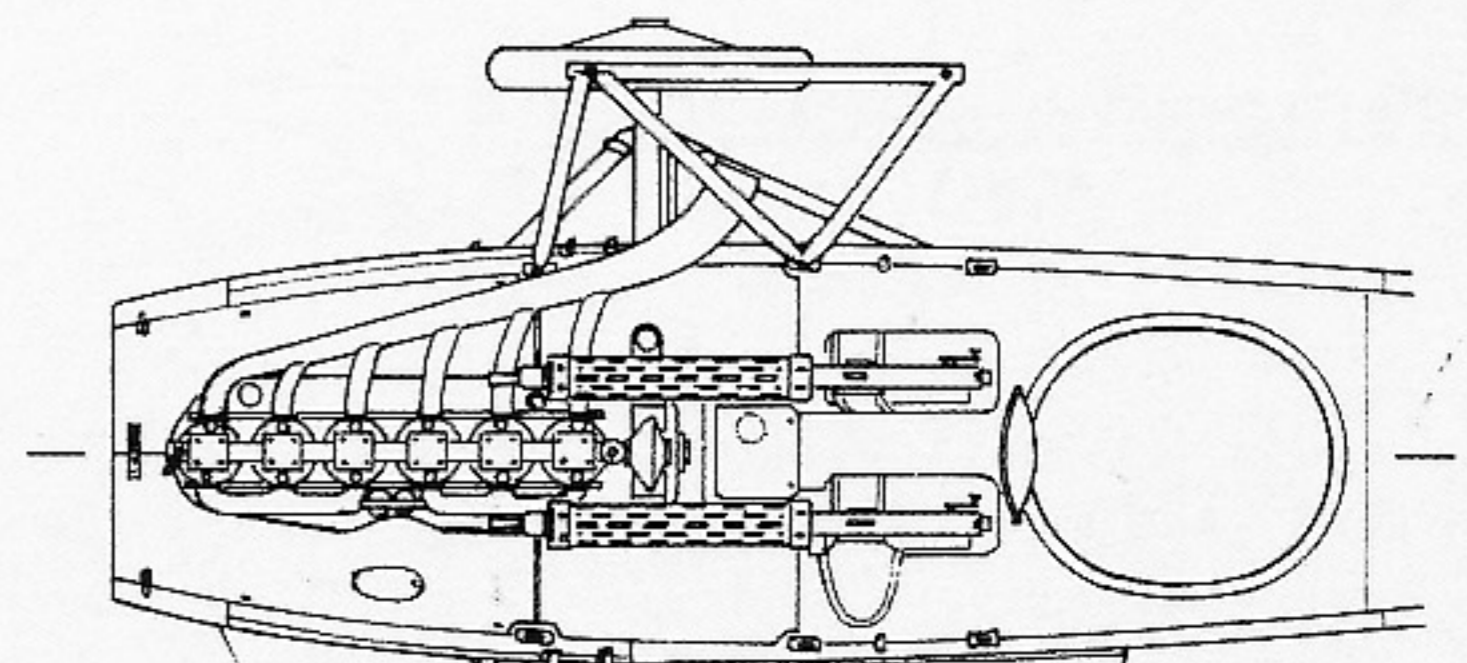


Garuda

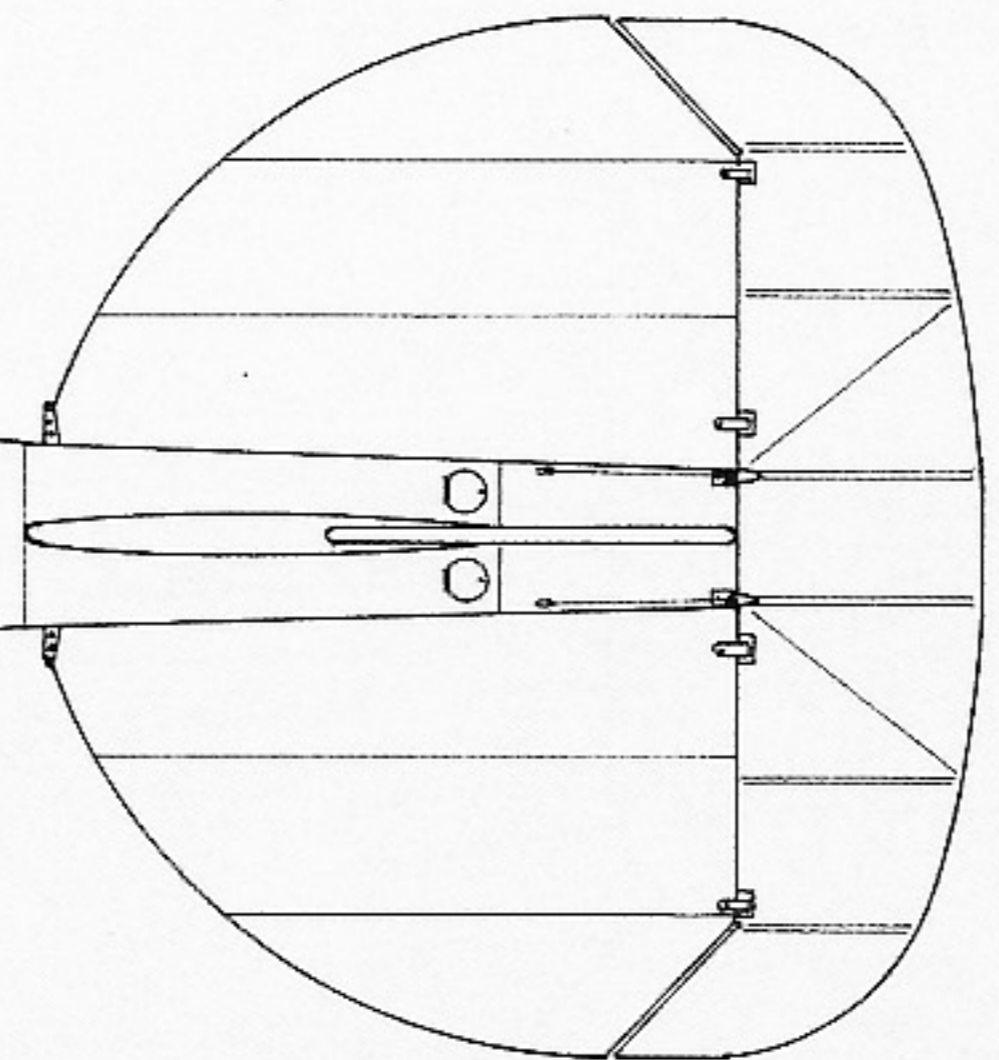


OAW

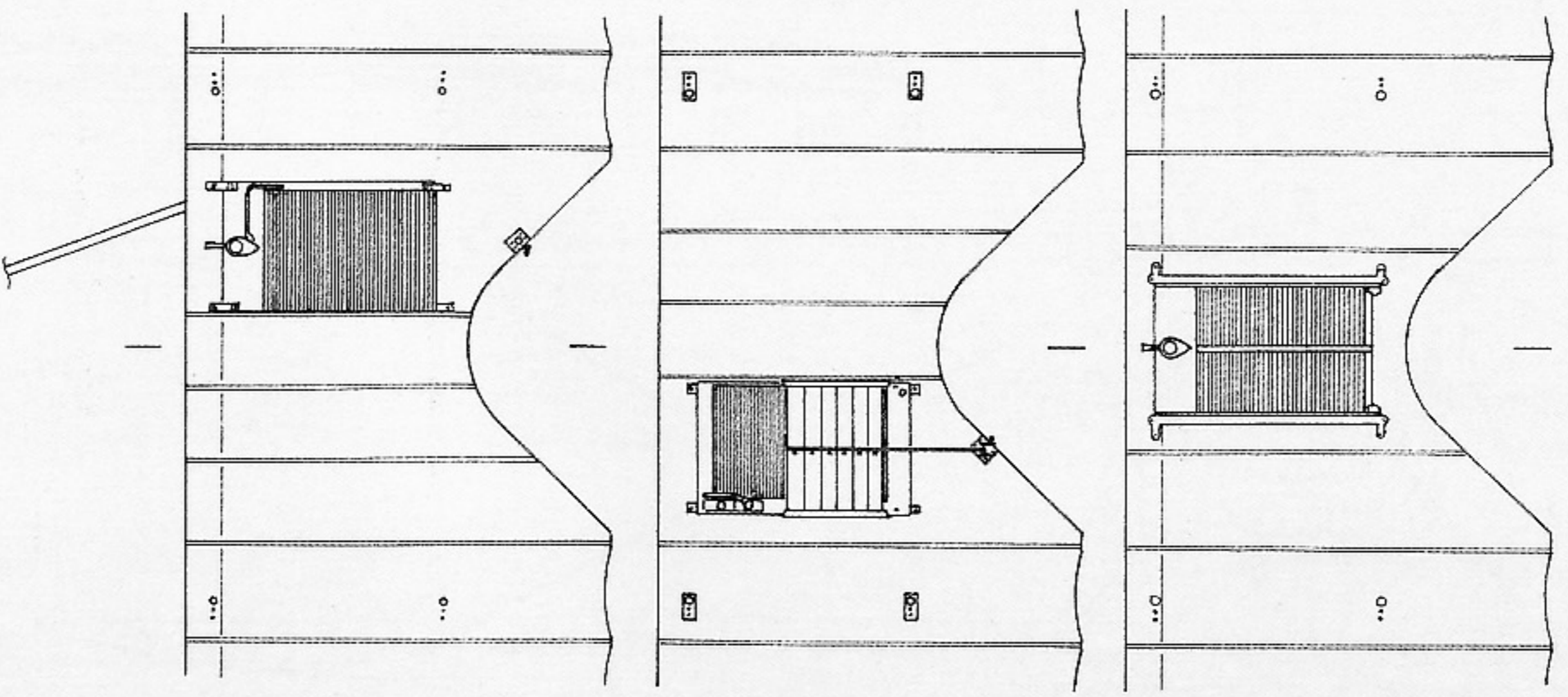
DETAILS UNDER TOP WING



PLAN (Early ALB)



RADIATORS

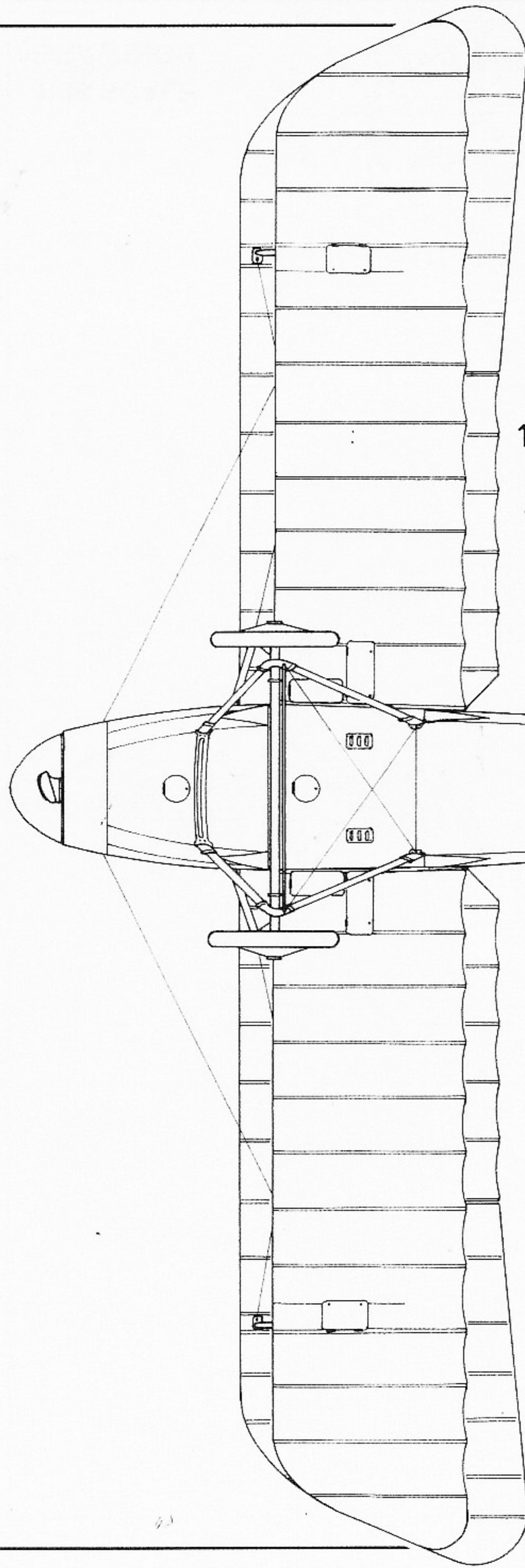


Daimler

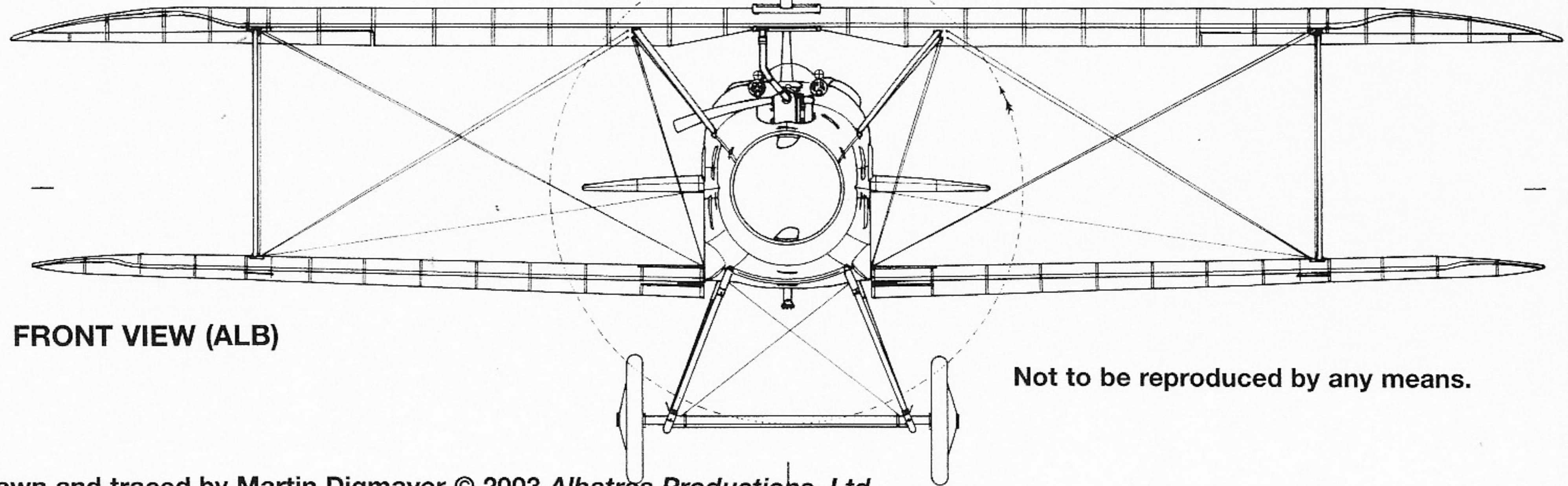
Alternative Teves/Braun

ALBATROS

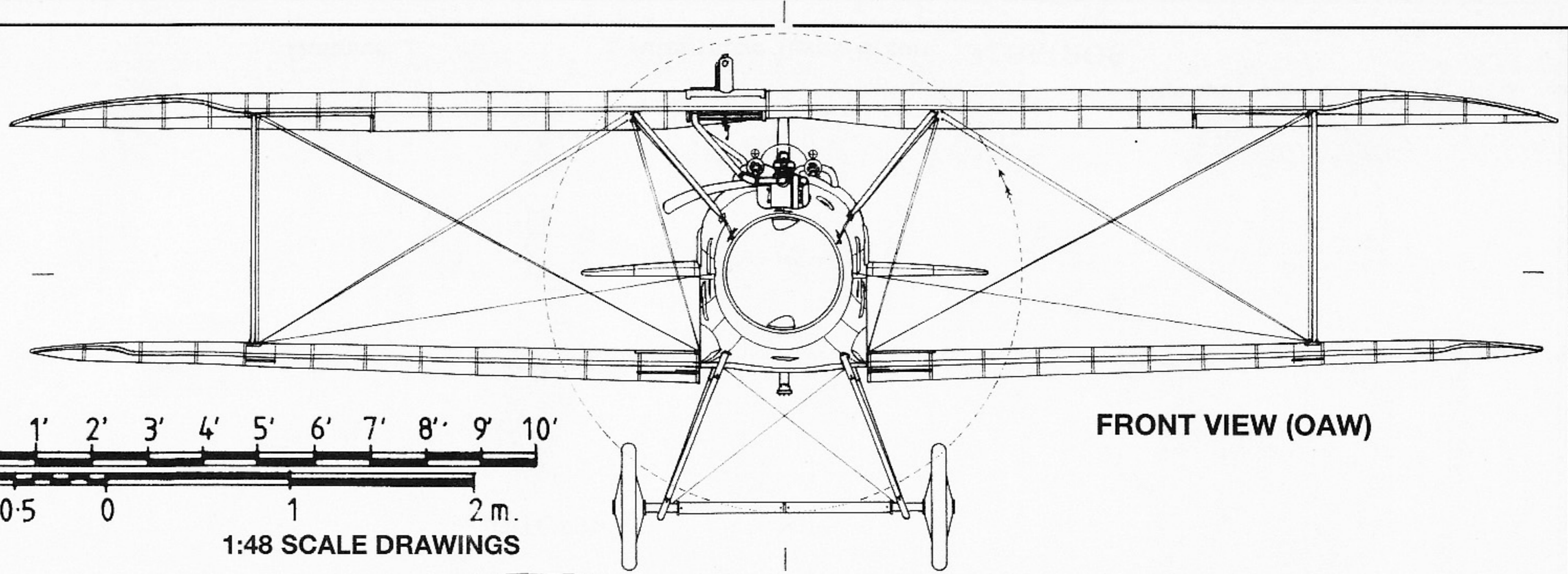
1:48 SCALE DRAWINGS



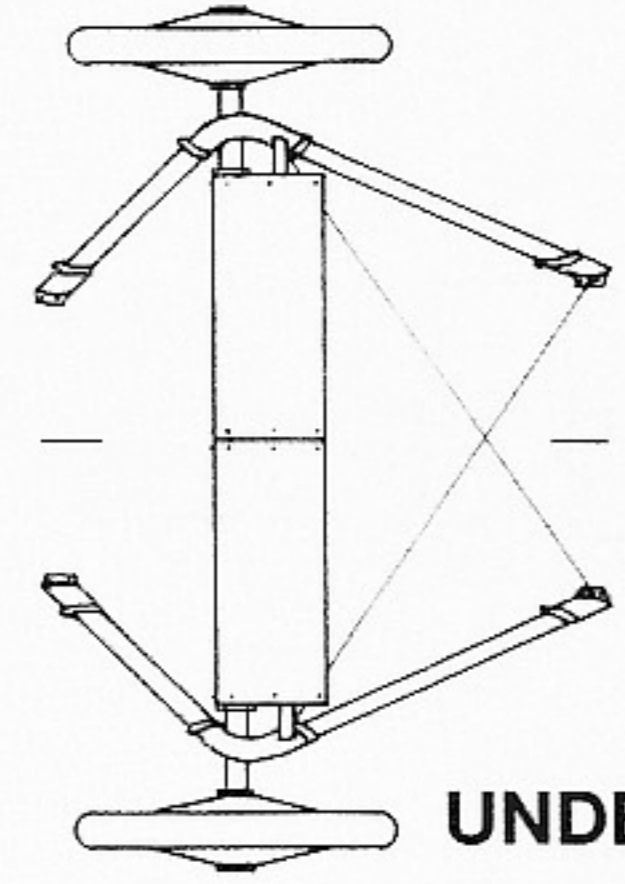
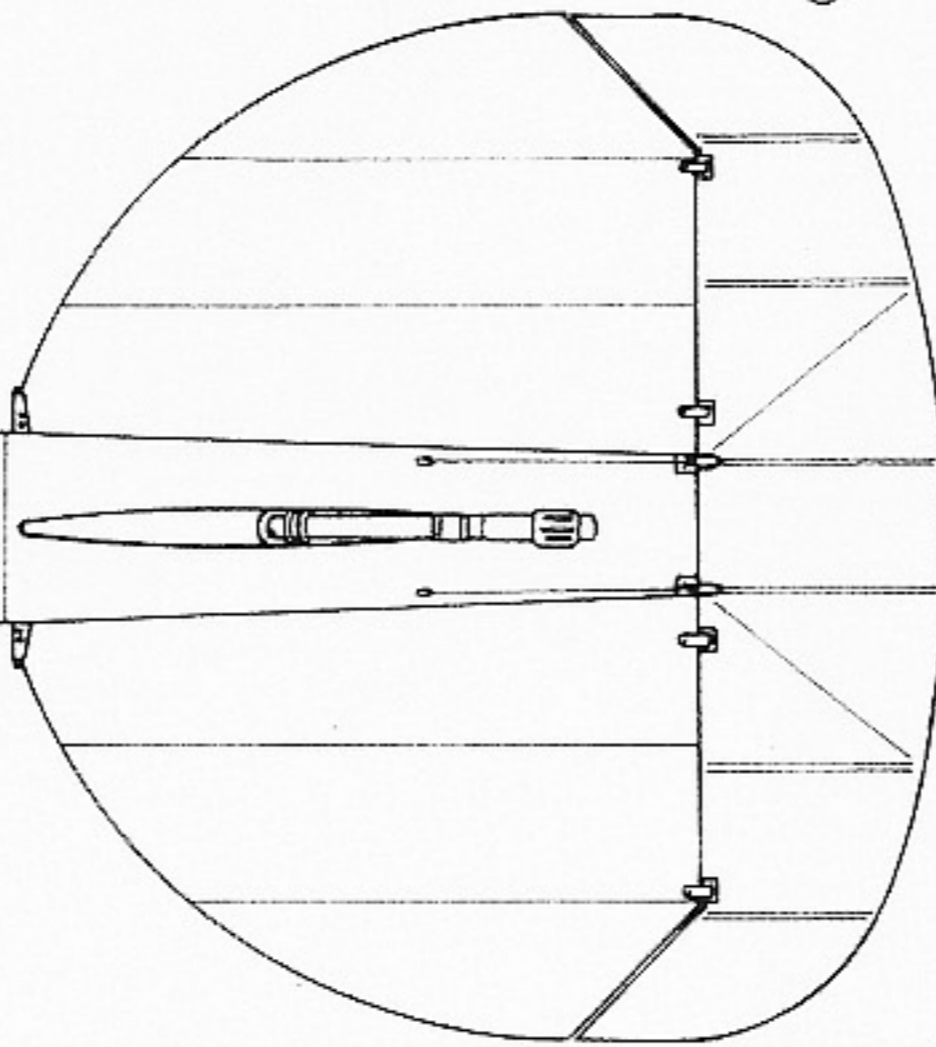
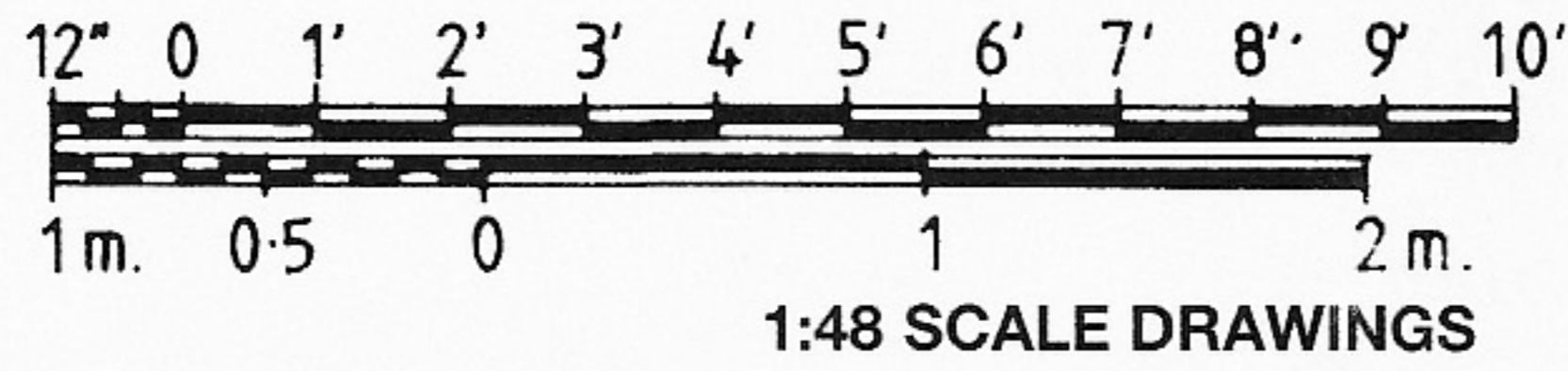
UNDERSIDE VIEW (ALB)



FRONT VIEW (ALB)

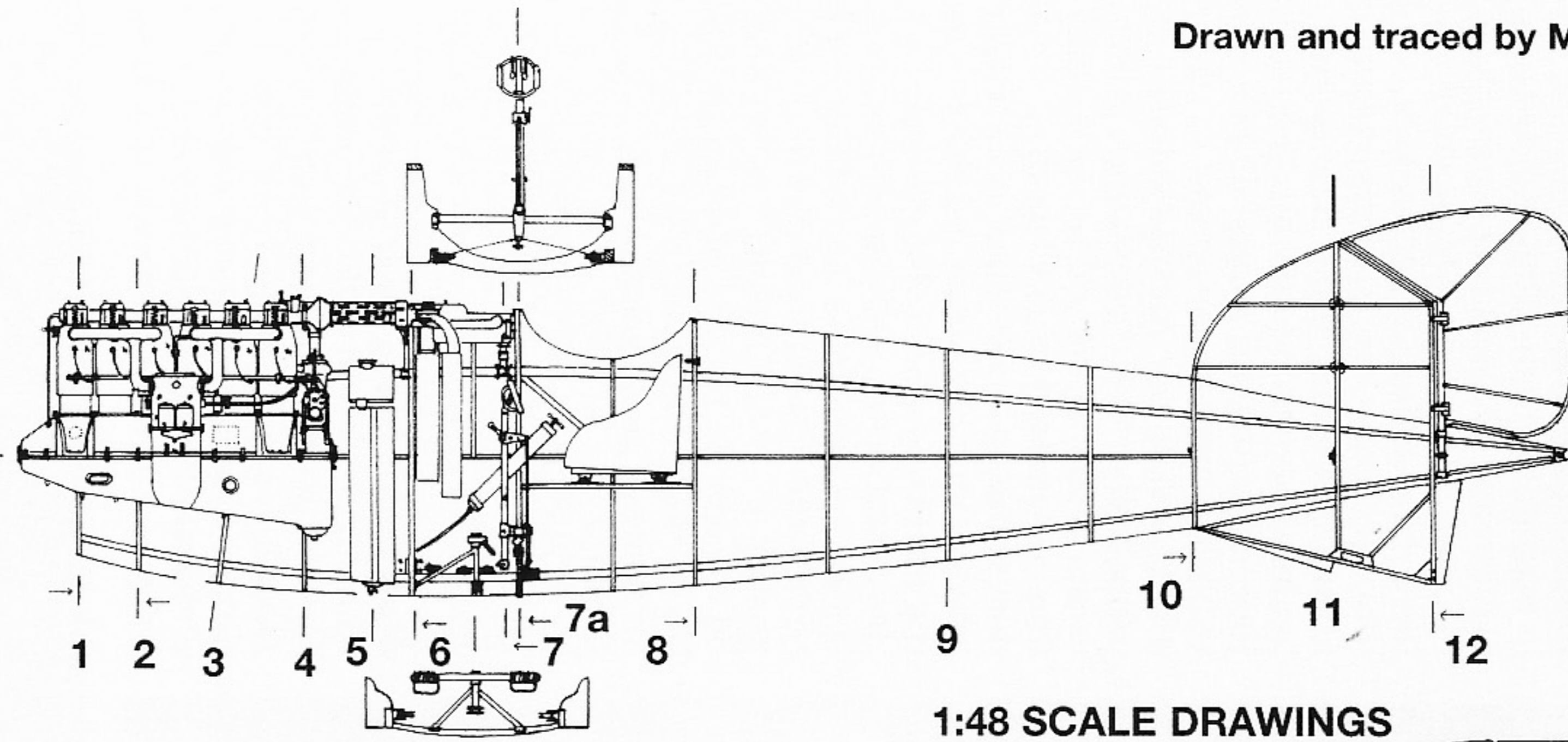
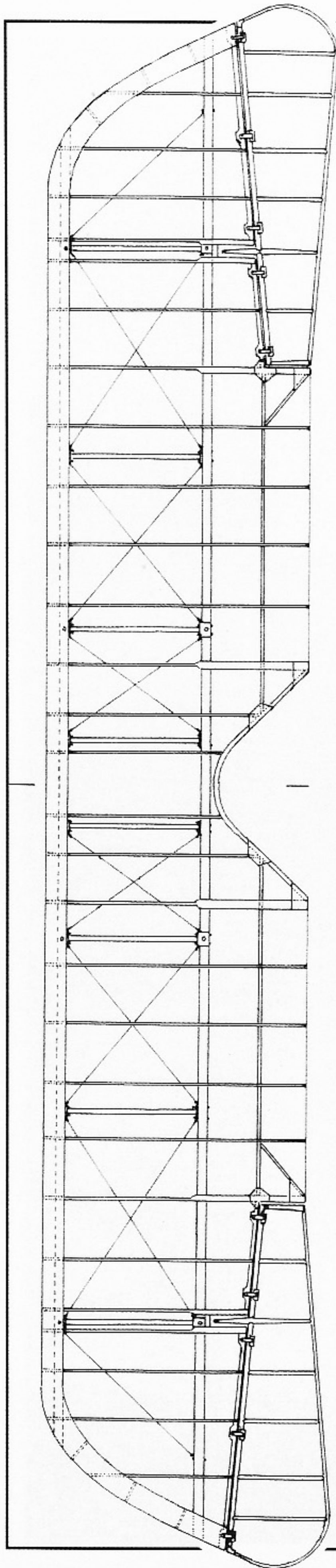


FRONT VIEW (OAW)

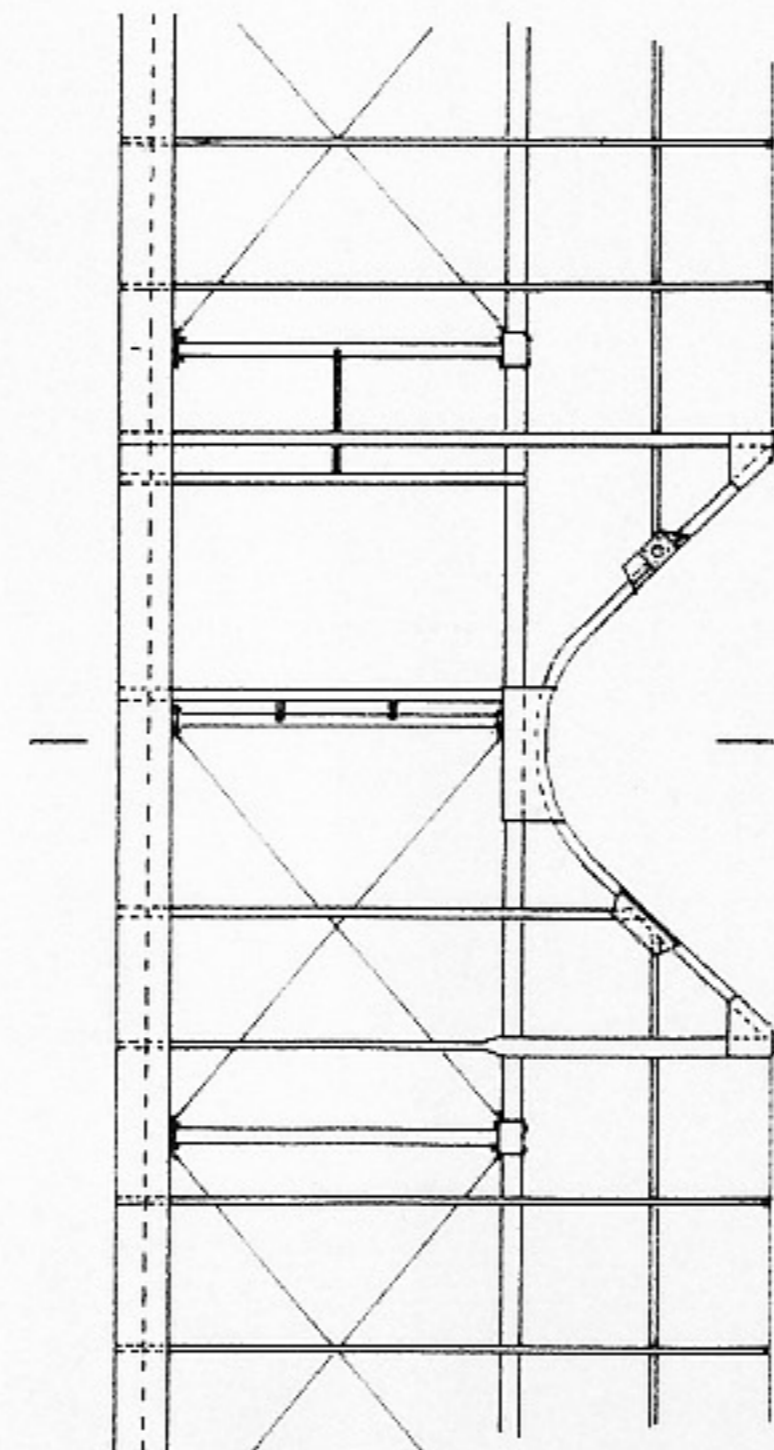
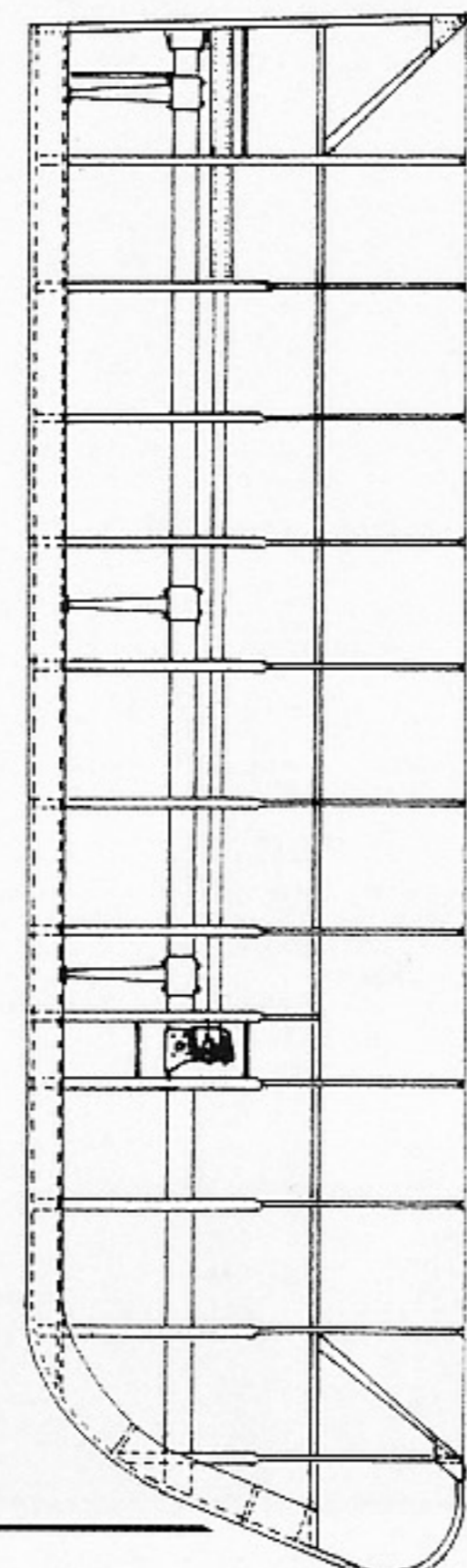
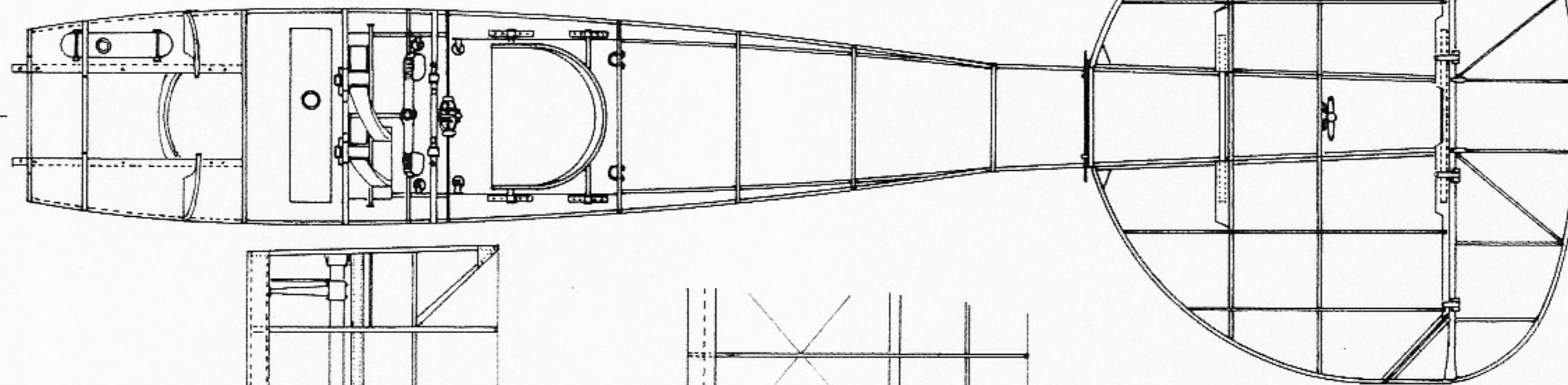


OAW UNDERCARRIAGE DETAIL

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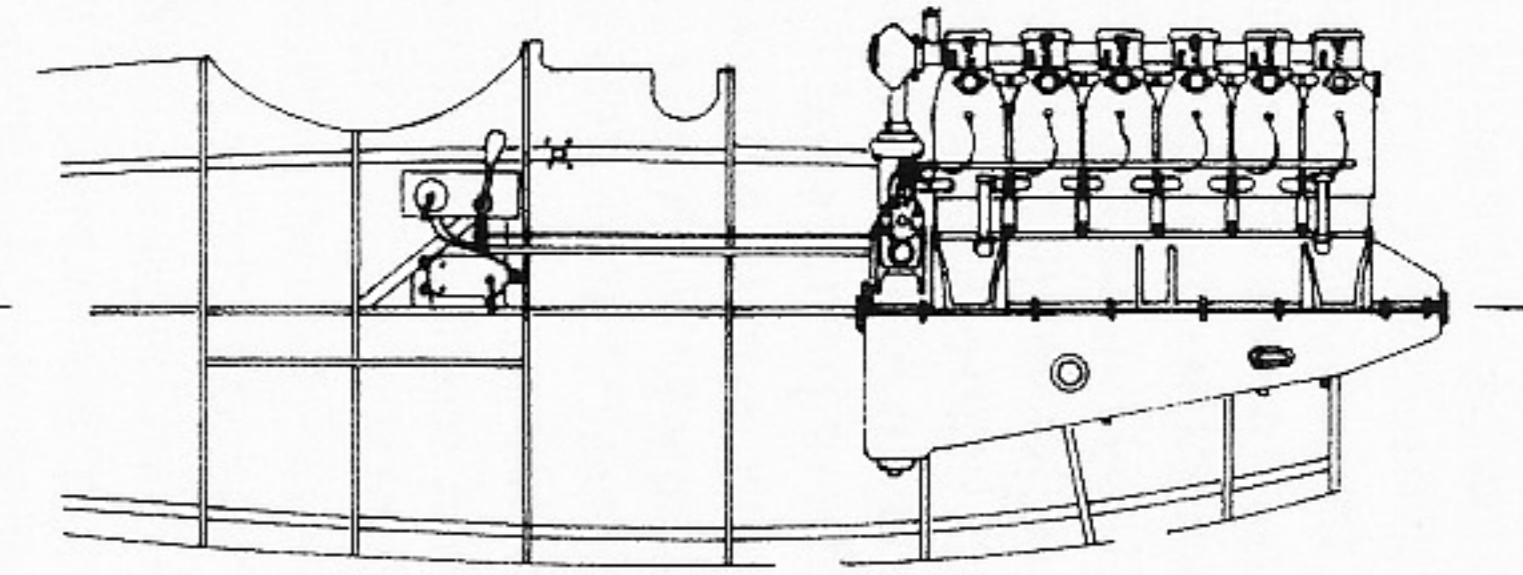
STRUCTURAL DETAILS



OFFSET RADIATOR CUT-OUT

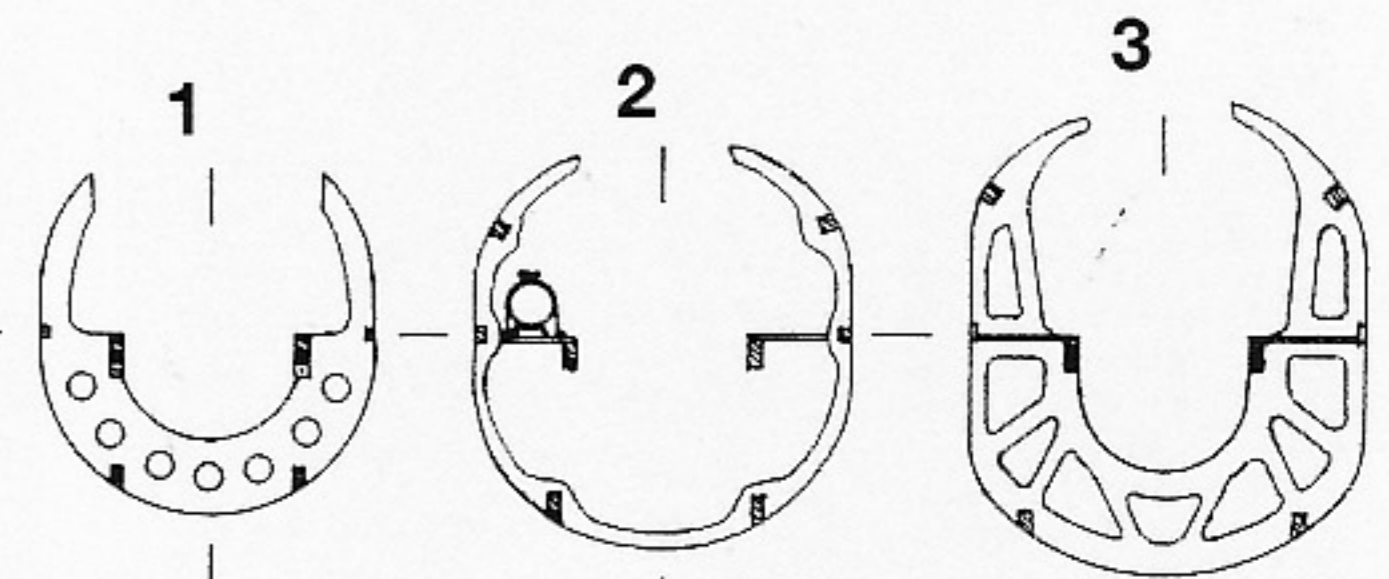
1:48 SCALE DRAWINGS

PORT SIDE INTERNAL DETAILS

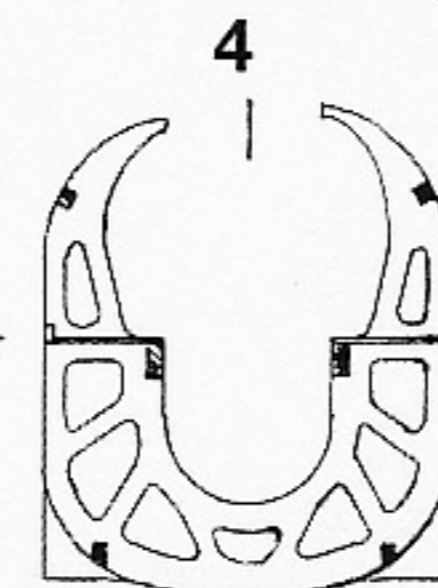
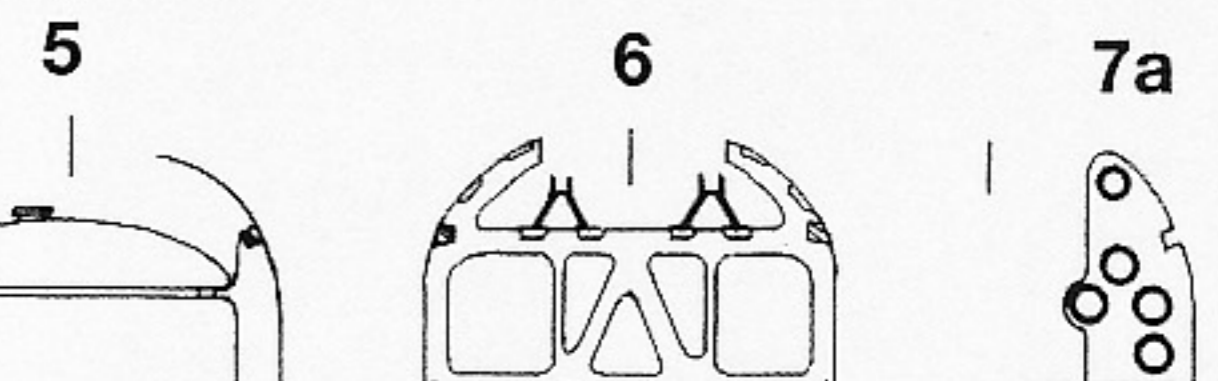


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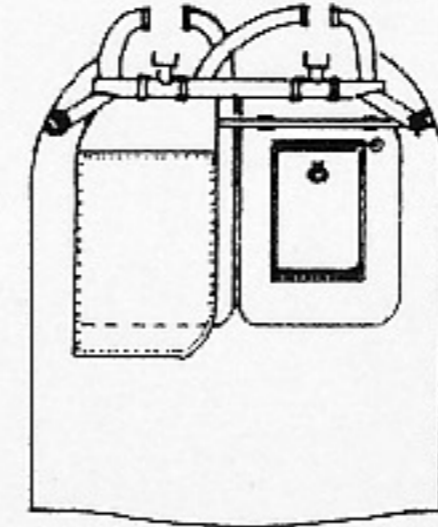
FUSELAGE SECTIONS



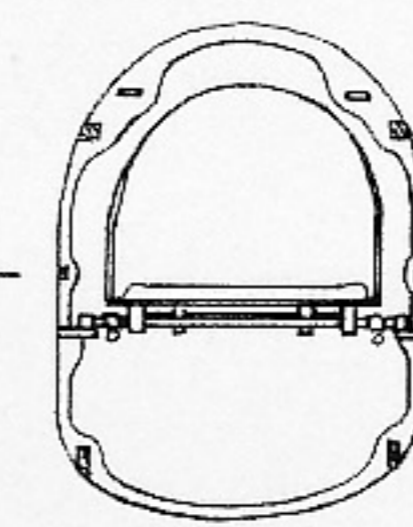
Fuel tanks



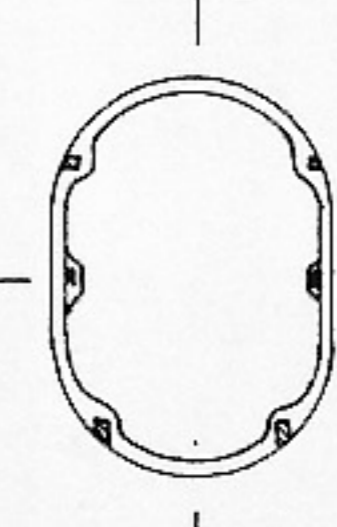
7 | Ammo boxes



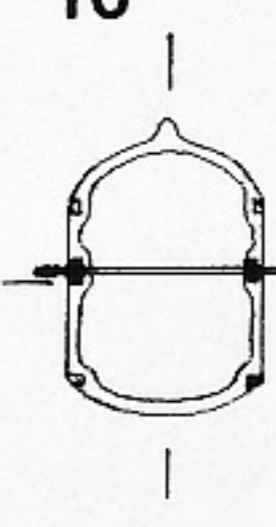
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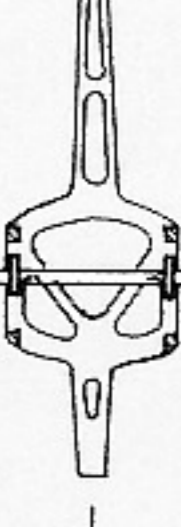
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10



11

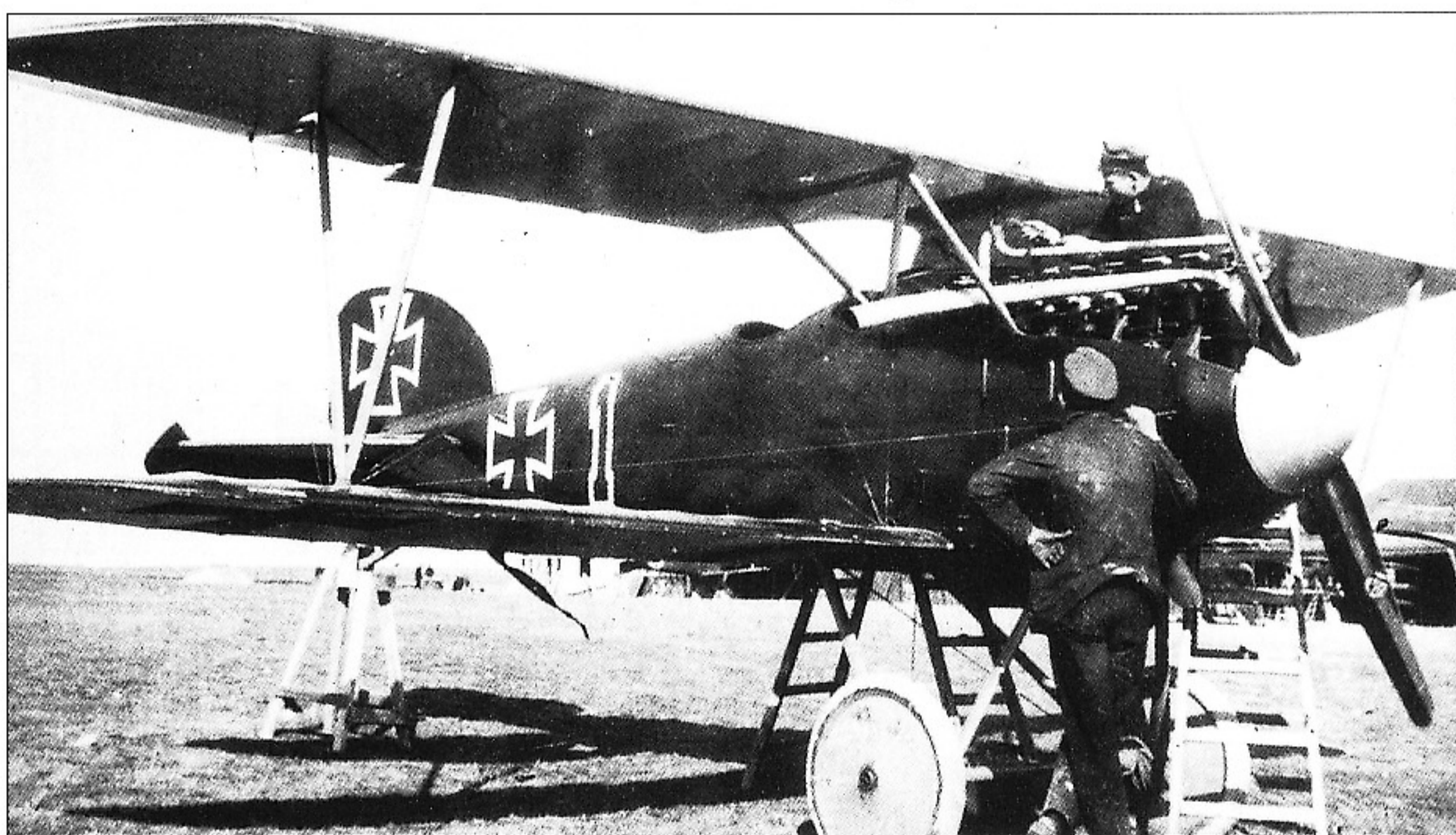
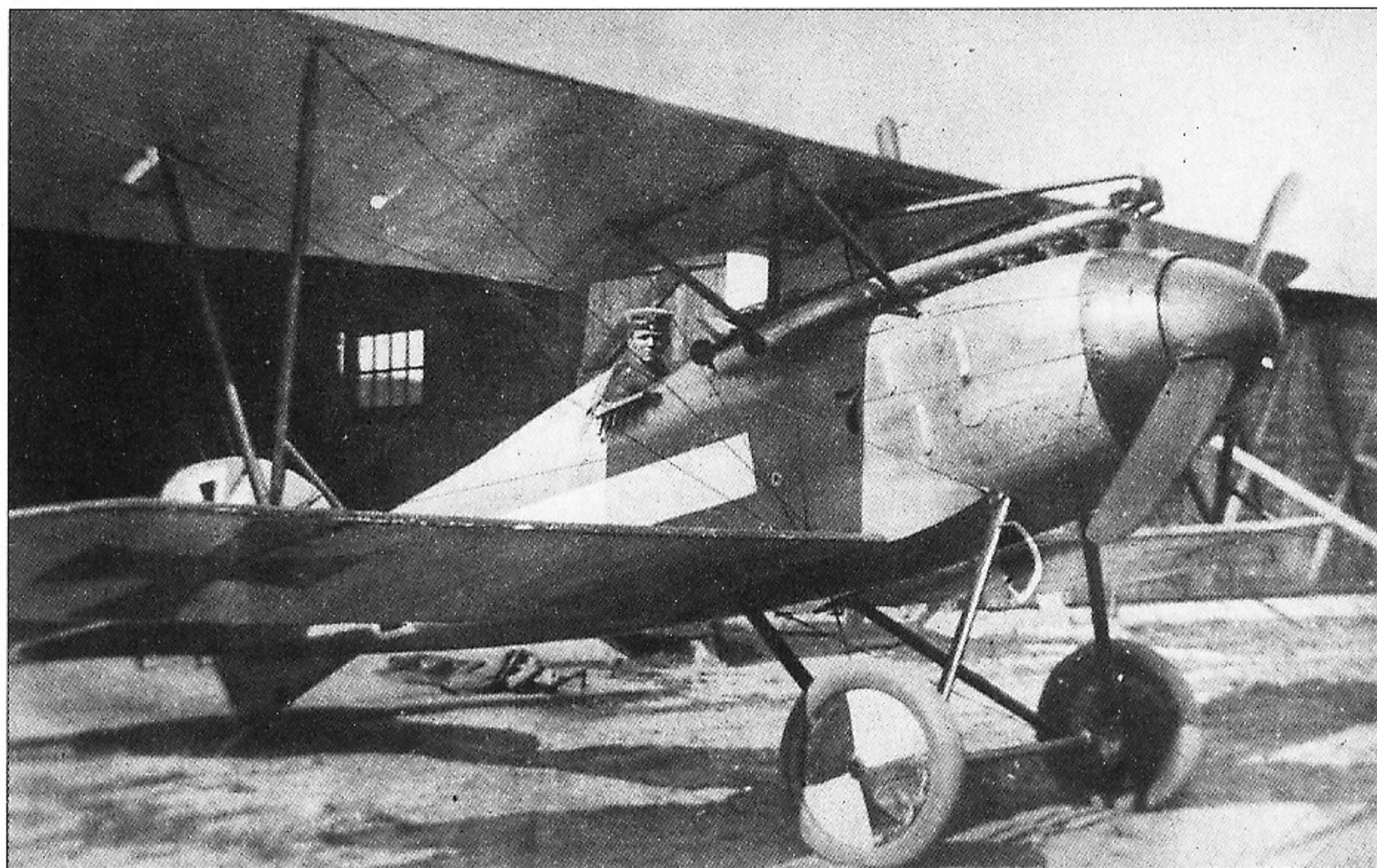


12





▲ 79 ▼ 80



▲ 81 ▼ 82

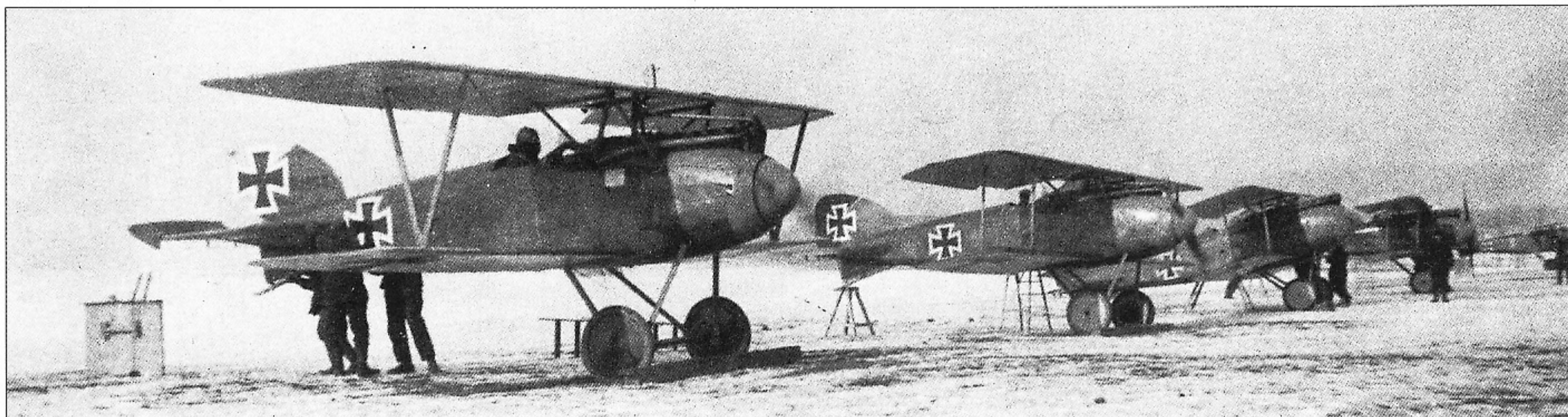


Photo-reconnaissance single-seater

In December 1916, the enterprising *Leutnant* Hohberg of *Flieger Abteilung* (A)263 received support from *Kogenluft* for his proposal to install an automatic strip camera in a single-seat fighter. It is possible the idea came from the Austro-Hungarian *Luftfahrtruppe* that began investigating terrain photography using high-speed single-seaters in 1916. Flying an Albatros D.II and later a D.III, Hohberg performed his first photographic sortie with full success on 10 February 1917. During one reconnaissance flight on 25 May 1917 Hohberg returned with 300 strip photographs of the Arras sector. His last recorded photo sortie took place on 21 August. For unknown reasons the German *Fliegertruppe* eschewed Hohberg's pioneering work and continued to operate two-seater reconnaissance patrols on the Western Front for the duration of the war.

Rocket launcher

In his autobiography Rudolf Nebel tells of mounting double 'stove-pipes' under the wings of his fighter from which to fire a salvo of four signal rockets (obtained from German pioneer troops) at enemy aircraft. Nebel claimed that his initial experiments whilst flying a Halberstadt fighter gained him two victories, but when mounted on an Albatros D.III, one rocket exploded prematurely. Nebel, badly burned, barely escaped with his life and was prohibited from performing further trials. Reportedly during the award celebration when *Oberleutnant* Berr presented Nebel with the iron cross and a victory cup, Hermann Göring, who had witnessed Nebel's rocket attacks, coined the word *Nebelwerfer* (literally fog thrower) in honour of Nebel's exploits.²³⁹ Nebel went on to command *Kampfeinsatzstaffel* 1a (*Kest* - single-seat fighter flight employed for home-defence against Allied bombing attacks). The *Nebelwerfer* resurfaced in World War II as an effective *Wehrmacht* rocket barrage weapon.

Motor-machine-gun test bed

The engine-driven *Motor-Machinen-Gewehr*, designed by Siemens-Schuckert *Ober-Ingenieur* Harald Wolff, was demonstrated at Siemensstadt on 10 October 1917. The SSW motor-gun weighed 4.5 kg as compared to the 11 kg

of a Spandau LMG 08/15. The SSW motor-gun fired at 800 rounds per minute when mounted in an Albatros D.III and at 1350 rounds in an Albatros D.V. Further ground and air demonstrations with the D.III and D.V, witnessed by Manfred von Richthofen, occurred in Döberitz on 15 October. Eventually, several Albatros D.V fighters armed with the SSW motor-gun would reach combat trials with some success reported.²⁰

Zeppelin fighter

In the winter of 1917, the German Navy Airship Command began to investigate the possibility of carrying a 'parasite' fighter for defensive purposes. In November engineers installed three tackles with quick-release hooks under the belly of airship *L 35* (ex-Army *LZ 88*) to support the Albatros D.III 3066/16. Virtually no aircraft modification was necessary with exception of redirecting the engine exhaust downward away from the inflammable hydrogen gasbags. After suitable ground tests to verify the equipment, the D.III fighter was taken aloft on 25 January 1918 to ascertain the behaviour while suspended under the airship. One half hour prior to landing, the pilot climbed into the cockpit and when the airship reached the ground, the release mechanism was found to work perfectly. The next day, 26 January, with a pilot aboard and the engine running, the *L 35* lifted off and climbed to 1400 metres whence, upon a pre-arranged signal, the pilot pulled the release lever and the fighter dove for about 50 metres, levelled out and headed home. In a conference held on 23 February, the various problems

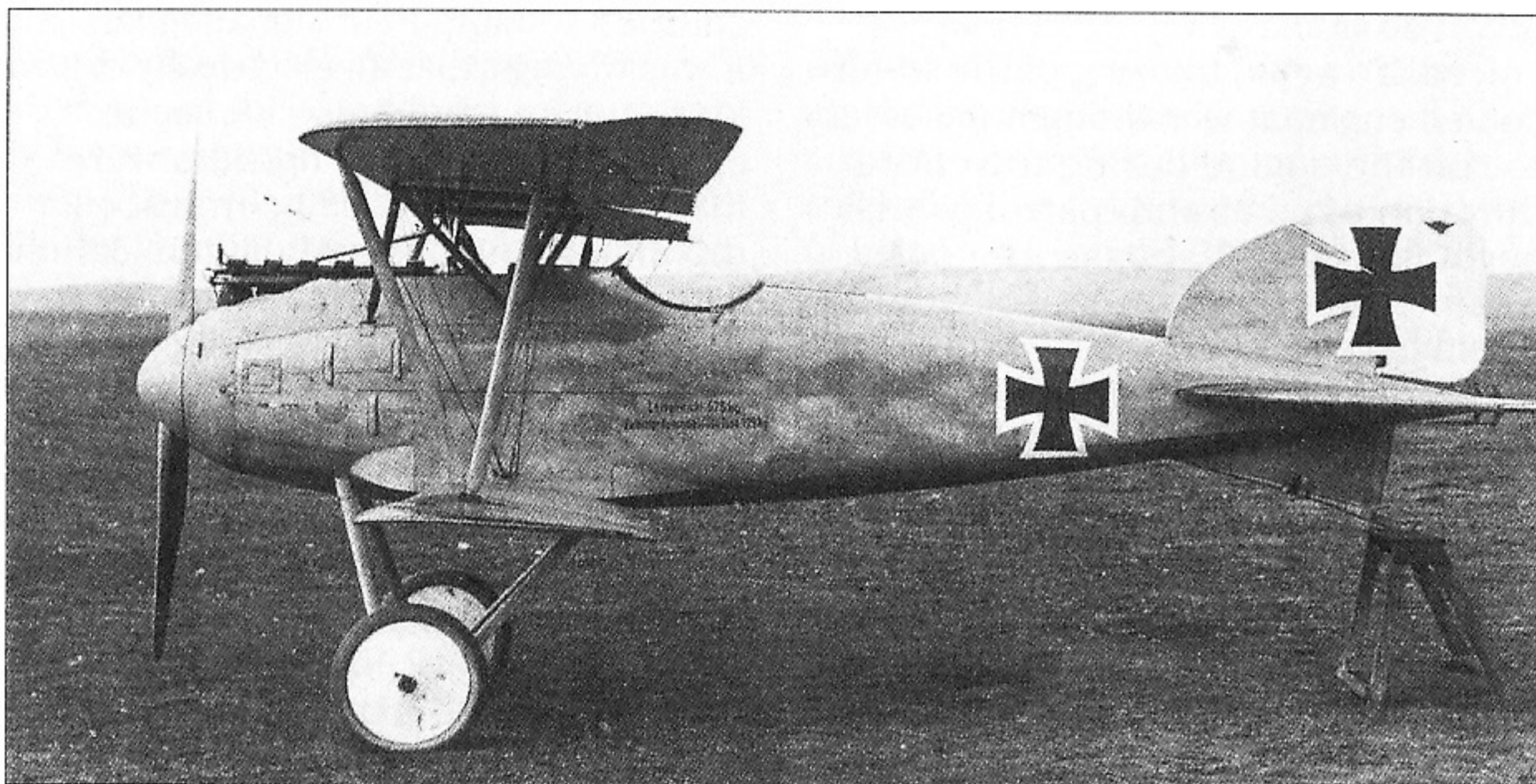
79). When things were slow it was time for make and mend. Mechanics of *Jasta 27* preening an Albatros D.III on a perfect day in a truly bucolic setting. The engines and propeller are covered to ward off the ravages of dampness and climate.

80). *Vizefeldwebel* Burggaller of *Jasta 10* flew this Albatros D.III which had a raised turtledeck behind the pilot, a frontline modification. It is fitted with lower wing braces. In the cockpit is *Gefreiter* Leinmüller, the mechanic who serviced Burggaller's machine.

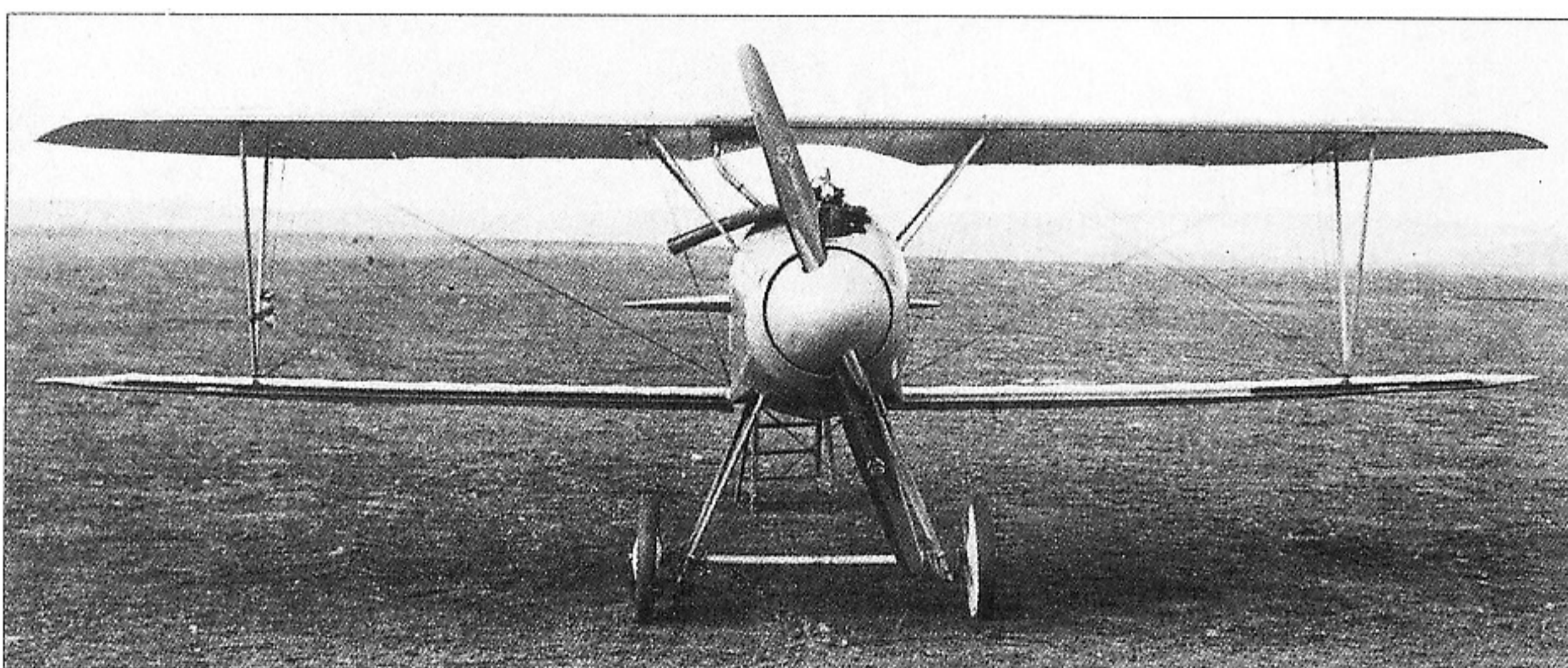
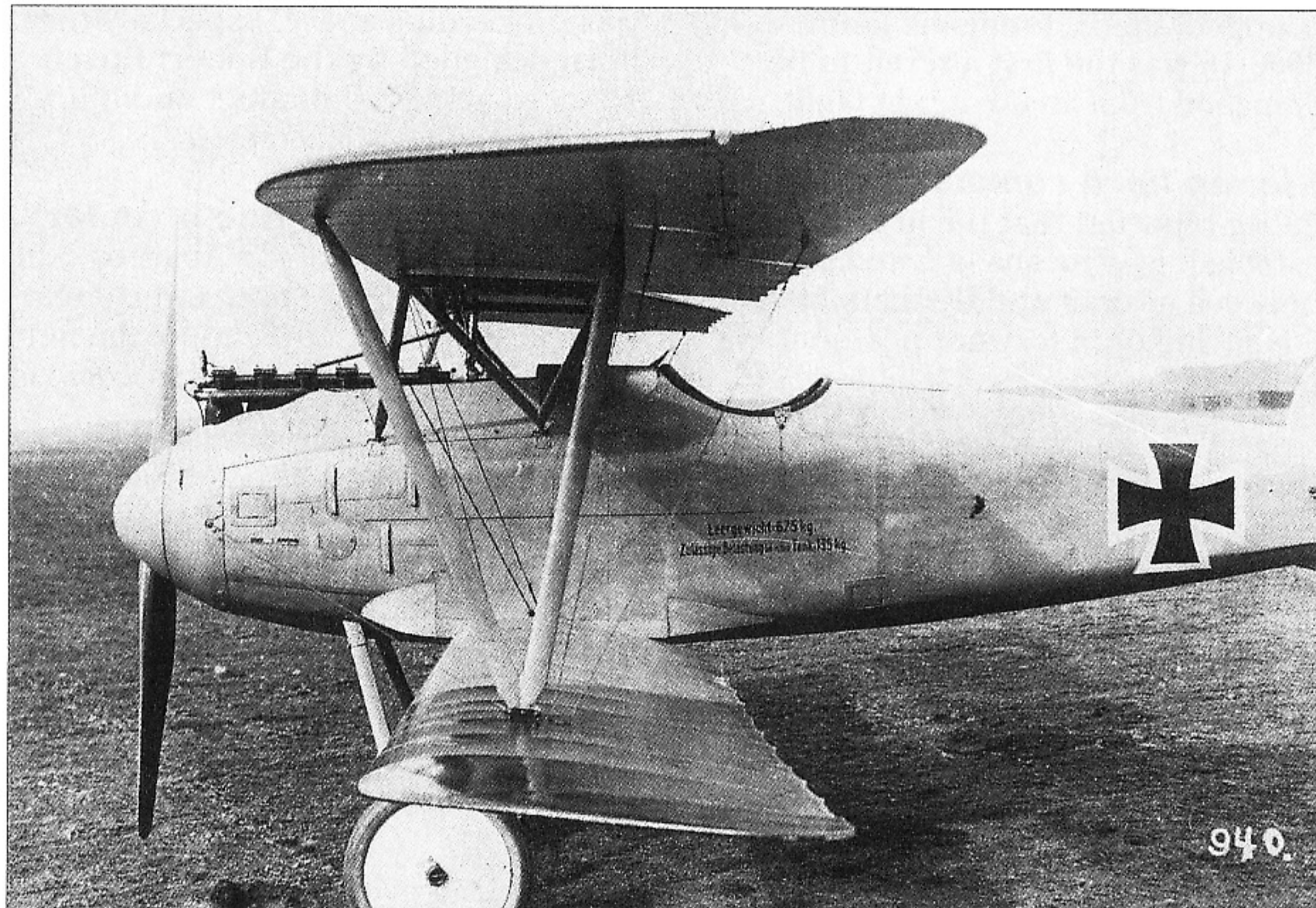
81). Aptly assigned the number 1, this Albatros D.III was flown by *Leutnant* Dornheim at the time commander of *Jasta 29*. The central radiator shows that this is an early production machine.

82). This photograph from *Hauptmann* Godwin Brumowski's photo album was taken just as the new Albatros D.III fighters were being introduced at *Jasta 24* in the winter of 1916-1917. In comparison the Albatros D.III does not impart the compact solidity of the Albatros D.II next in line.

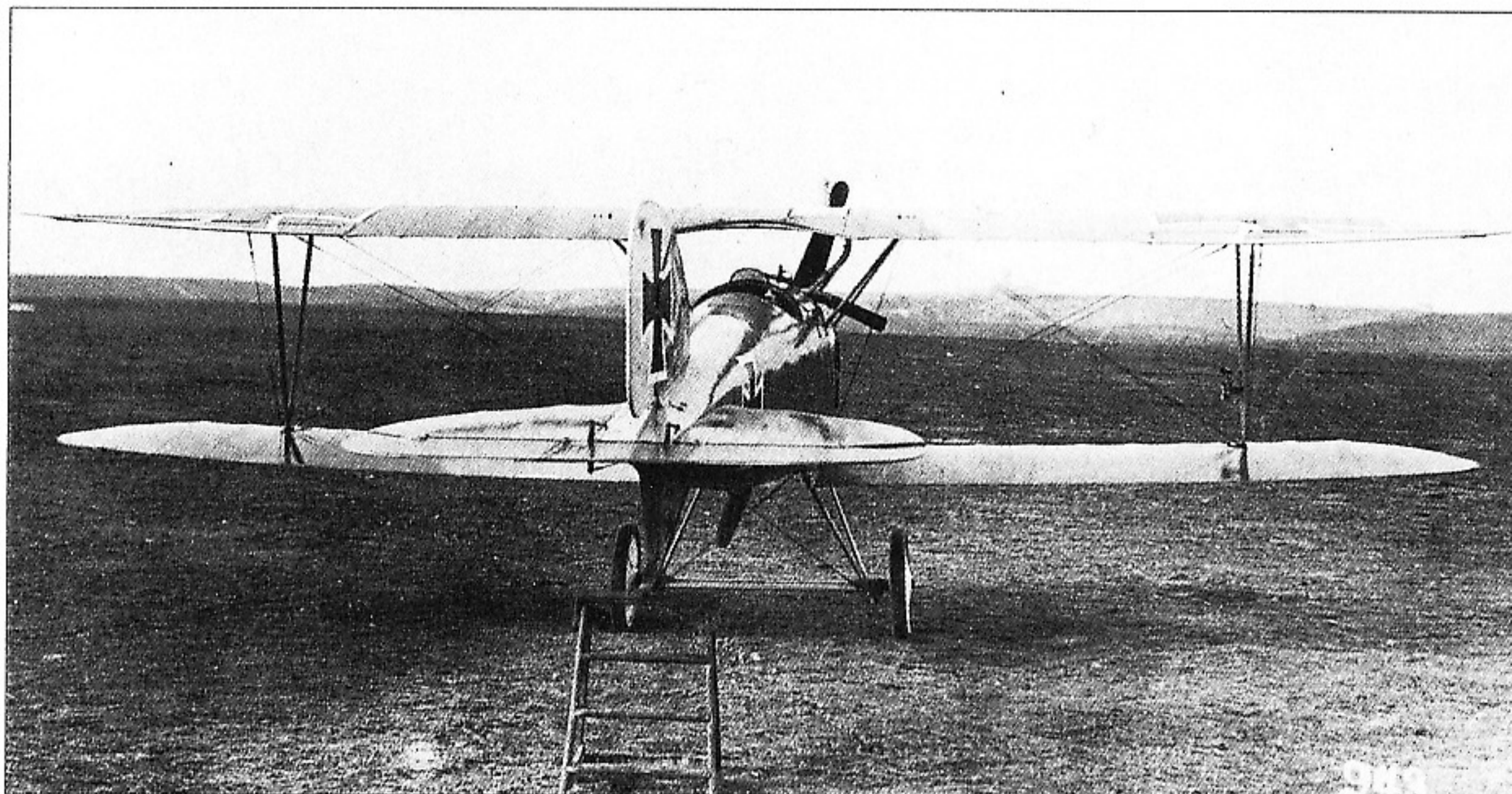
83, 84, 85 and 86). One might ask what an unarmed, unnumbered Albatros D.III was doing on the Fokker airfield in Görries-Schwerin? The Fokker photographer fortunately captured what appears to be a brand-new machine; thus we can appreciate the fine lines and structural details. The different colours of the wing camouflage are barely discernible.



▲ 83 ▼ 84



▲ 85 ▼ 86



involved in carrying an aircraft were voiced. To avoid freezing of the water-cooled engine it was thought necessary to run the engine during the entire duration of an airship patrol, which might last up to 20 hours. Air-cooled rotary engines were proposed but they would have had to be kept warm as well. One officer warned of the wreath of exhaust flame surrounding a running rotary engine with possible disastrous consequences should hydrogen gas be present. Another officer proposed a seaplane because after launching over the North Sea the pilot would have to land safely. Curiously, no thought was given to having the fighter return to the airship. Although the project was dropped, the fact remains that the D.III 3066/16 was the first aircraft to be launched from an airship in flight.

Klaxon horn communication

Idflieg reported that the necessity of establishing a means of communication between aircraft and German infantry advancing or in forward positions was becoming more pressing in late 1916. In

addition to hand-held signaling lamps it was thought that an electrically-driven klaxon horn would also be useful.²⁵⁾ Several Albatros D.III fighters were fitted with an electrically or propeller-driven klaxon horn for communication with troops on the ground. Tests had demonstrated that the signal could be heard from 1400 metres altitude, although Morse code signals began to blur at 700 metres. In early October, ten klaxon horns were sent to the 1st Army for evaluation but we learn that 'the less-powerful horns were regarded unsuitable for combat units and were to be placed at the disposal of observer schools'. The design of more-powerful klaxon horns of about one horsepower was proceeding apace. Especially the horn designed by the Robert Bosch concern achieved distinct audibility from a height of 1500 metres.

Albatros D.III frontline inventory.

The first examples of the Albatros D.III reached *Armee Flug Parks* and combat units in December 1916, approximately three months from the *Typenprüfung* in

late September 1916. The frontline inventory grew steadily through October 1917, at which time the combat chores were shared among the Albatros D.V and the Pfalz D.III. As of mid-December 1917, a total of 362 Albatros-built and 684 OAW-built D.III fighters were on hand. Of these, 423 were listed in the frontline inventory on 31 December 1917. The remainder were either in repair, in storage or in transit. The Albatros D.III remained active into 1918. A number of machines that remained were flown as advanced trainers in fighter schools, others soldiered on in Palestine and Turkey. At least 32 Albatros D.III(OAW) fighters equipped with twin radiators were delivered to the Turkish air service under the designation AKD 1 to 32.

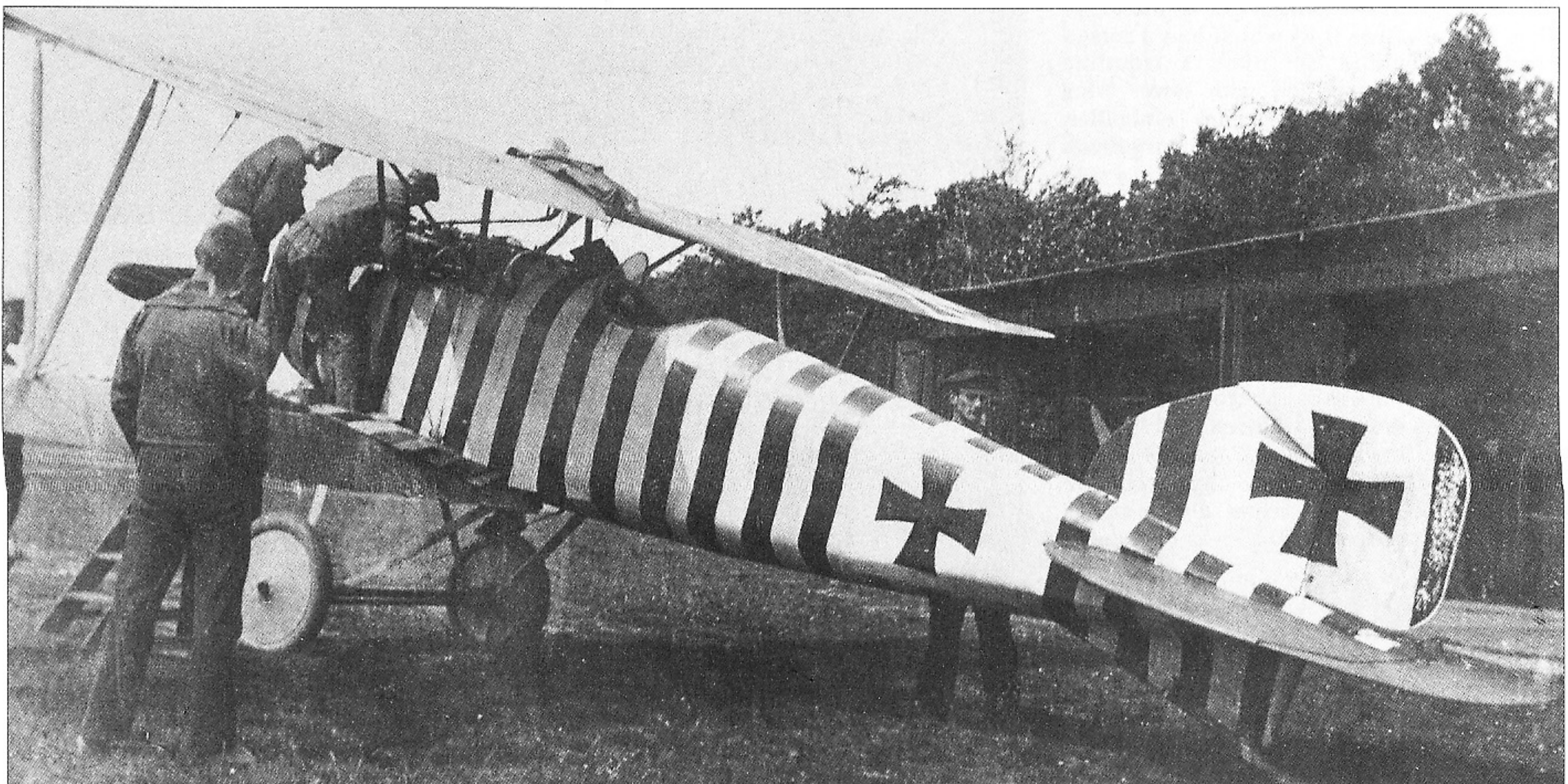
In a count made for the Inter-Allied Aeronautical Control Commission, there were 96 Albatros D.III fighters in various states of repair, with or without engine, remaining in German hands as of January 1920.

Conclusion

We know now with the advantage of



▲ 87 ▼ 88



hindsight that the *Fliegertruppe* would have been better served had the Albatros design staff concentrated on developing the twin-strut, single-bay fighter concept. They had made a good start with the rugged Albatros D.II - a fighter esteemed by German pilots as they mastered the art of air combat and tolled the first victories. Instead, the successful D.II layout was abandoned midstream in favour of a radically-new wing design featuring a sesquiplane layout with a single-spar lower wing - a concept that had been more or less 'dictated' by the enemy. One cannot blame the Germans for wanting to emulate the Nieuport, but in the case of the Albatros D.III the 'structural dynamics' were wrong. The graceful Nieuport 11 comprised a very light but strong airframe, cleverly designed for maximum weight reduction to attain high performance from a relatively low-power rotary engine. The low power and weight consideration restricted the armament to a single machine gun. Given a light aircraft such as the Nieuport 11, the stresses encountered in combat manoeuvres were acceptable. Airframe failure, even of the single-spar lower wing, was not a problem. On the other hand, a much heavier aircraft, such as the Albatros D.III, fitted with a powerful in-line engine naturally subjected the airframe to higher aerodynamic stress. It often took the single-spar wing beyond calculated design limits in a failure mode that was never fully understood, even after extensive testing and analysis.

Significantly, as the war progressed both Nieuport and Albatros engineers abandoned the vee-strut configuration in favour of a conventional twin-strut, single-bay wing cellule that was equal to any combat demands placed upon it. But Albatros engineers had to learn the lesson the hard way.

The *Jagdstaffel* exploits of the D.III and its luminary aces have been amply recorded throughout aviation literature and do not require repeating here. Suffice it to say that despite its problems, the Albatros D.III performed its wartime role with distinction - from the northern shores of the Baltic to the desert skies over Palestine - from the time of its introduction in December 1916 through the war's finale.

One final note. After the war in 1919, Albatros, like all German aircraft manufacturers, was eager to sell its aircraft wherever an export market existed. To provide a coherent system of identification not linked to the military, Albatros assigned new company numbers to the aircraft produced during the war. In this system Albatros B.I became Albatros L 1, Albatros C.III became L 10 and so forth all the way up to Albatros F.I which became L 54. In the Albatros sales brochure the Albatros D.III was known as the L 20, strictly a post-war attribution and never used during the war, as has so often been claimed in contemporary aviation literature.

NB: ALL photo captions by P M Grosz.

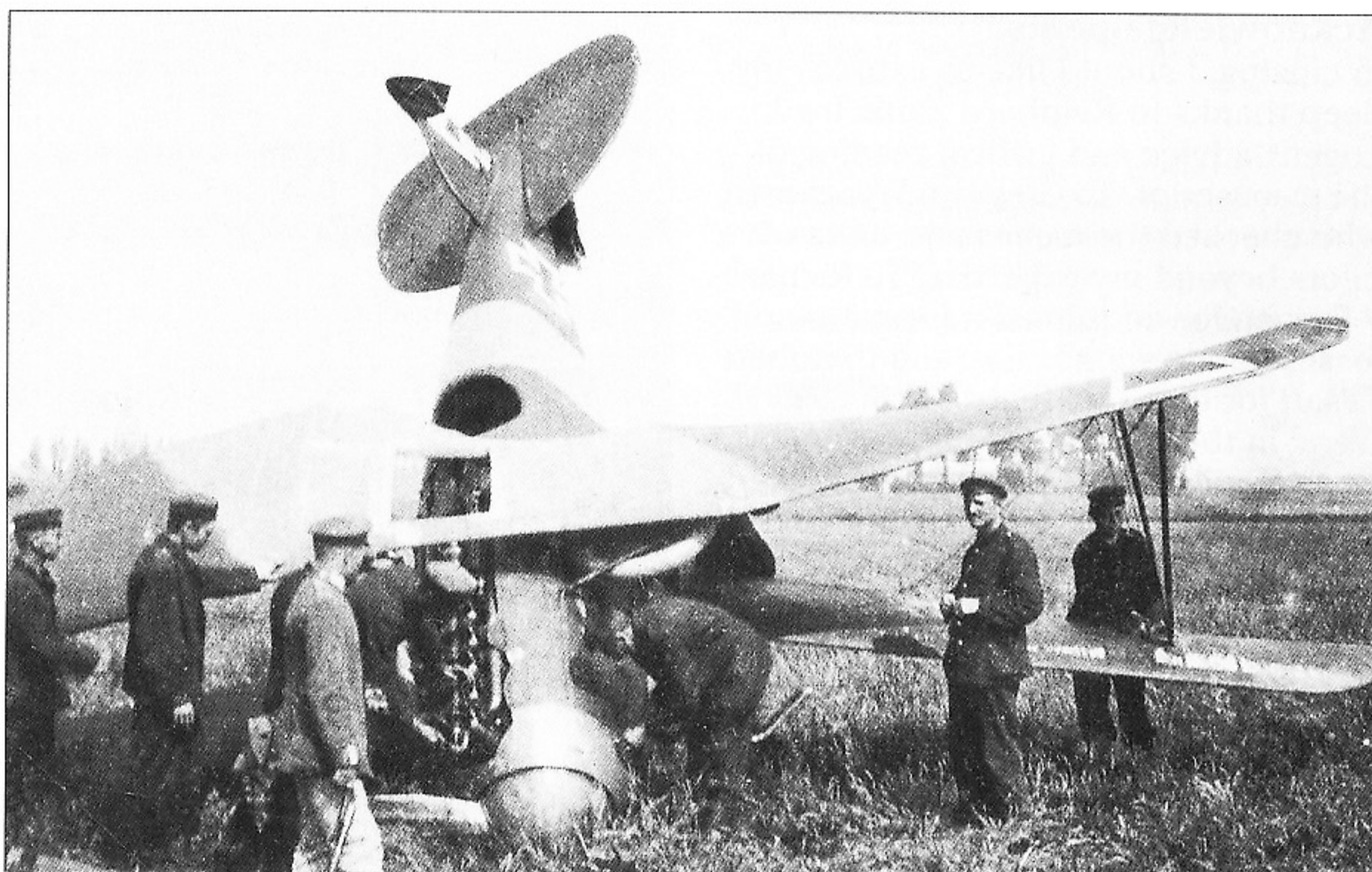
87). Albatros factory photograph of an early production D.III. It appears the wheel covering was left in natural linen finish. The fuselage was delivered in clear varnish finish which owing to the physics of reflectivity appears much darker than it actually was.

88). A *Marine Feld Jasta* Albatros D.III being prepared for flight. The radiator has been covered to keep the engine water warm. A fighter was not allowed to take-off until the engine water temperature had reached a safe level which sometimes led to a delay of many minutes, especially frustrating when enemy aircraft were reported. In critical times, it was customary to fill the radiator and engine with heated water to reduce run-up time.

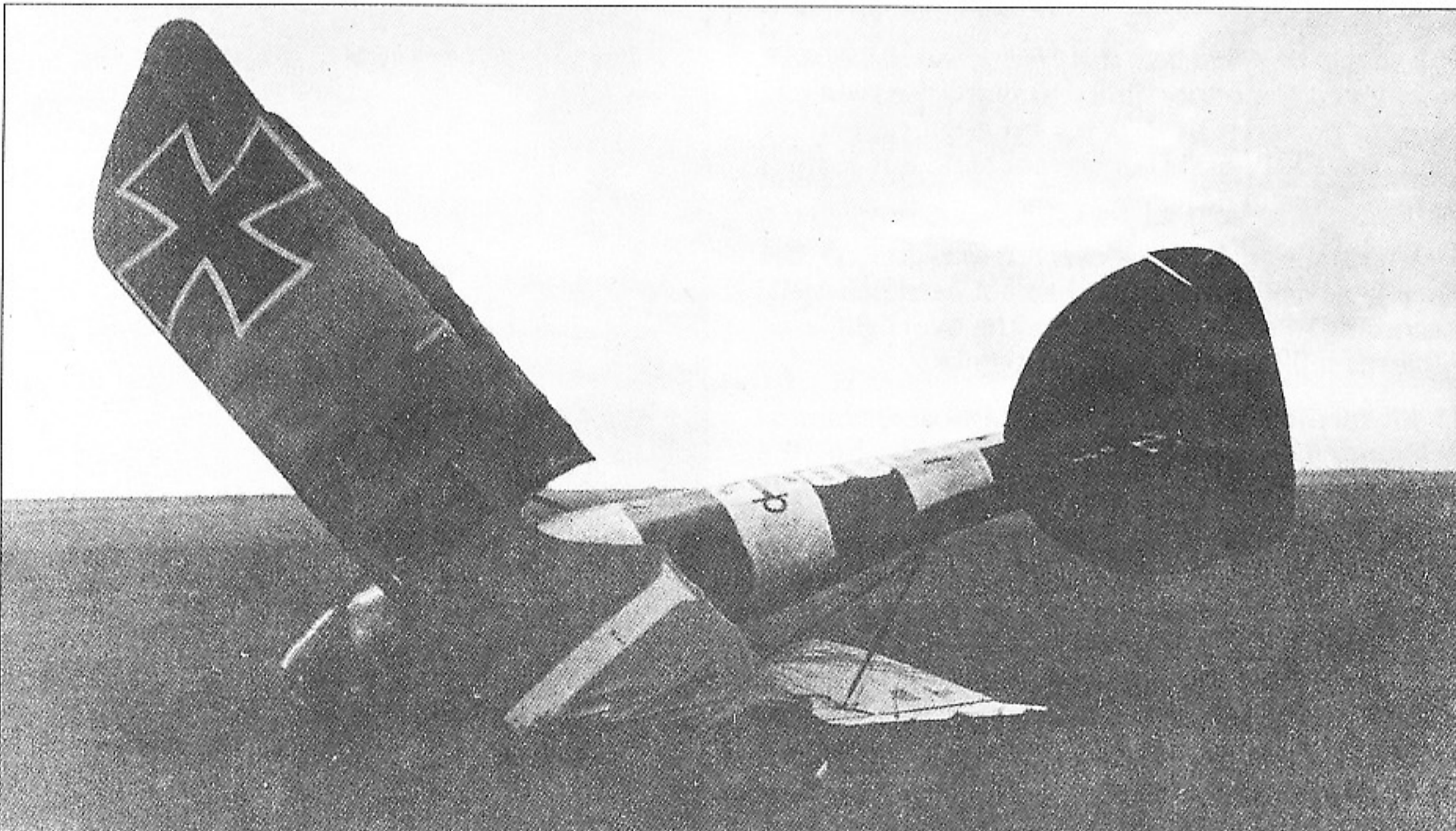
89). Albatros D.III of *Jasta 27*. The force of the crash has torn the radiator from its mountings. Not often visible is the camouflage treatment of the upper wing.

90). Marked with a number '1' on the wing, and an anchor and number '88' on the fuselage, this Albatros D.III was attached to a *Jagdfliegerschule 1* at Valenciennes. According to the photo caption it was crashed by Otto Wieprich, later of *Jasta 57*.

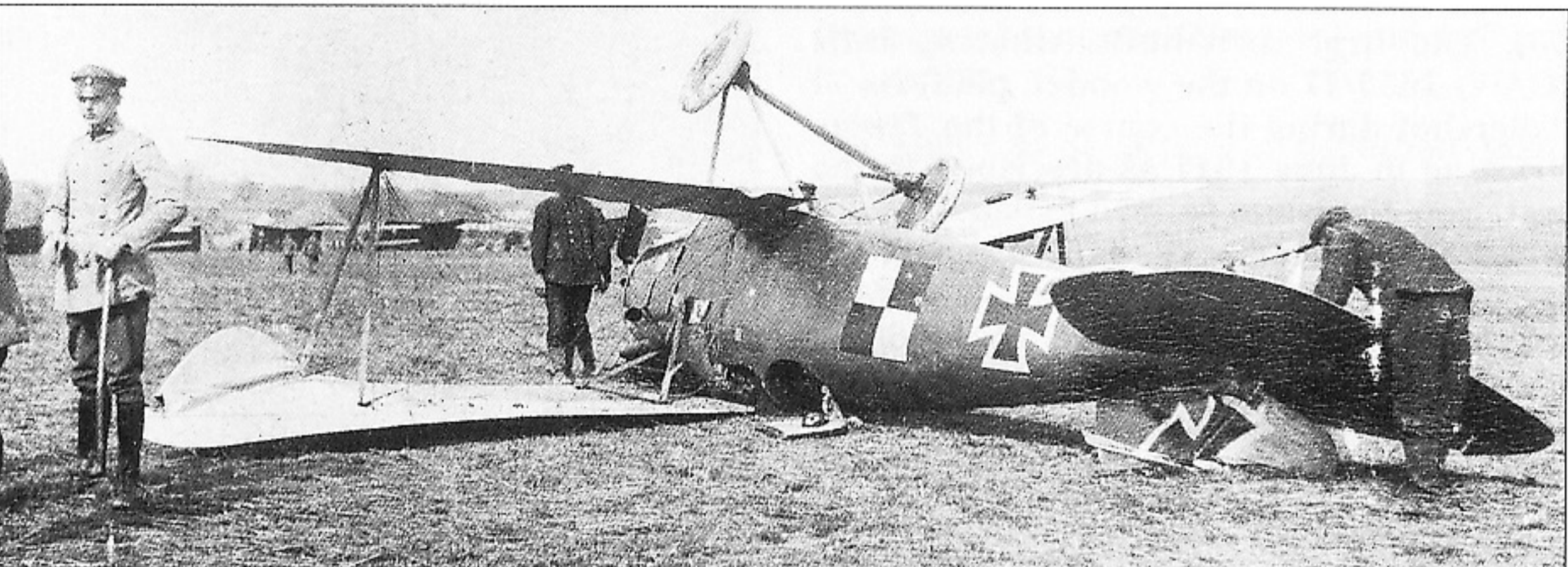
91). This Albatros D.III was flown by *Leutnant Rudolph Hepp* of *Jasta 24* when he crashed on 17 April 1917. The crash was not recorded in the *Jasta 24* war diary.



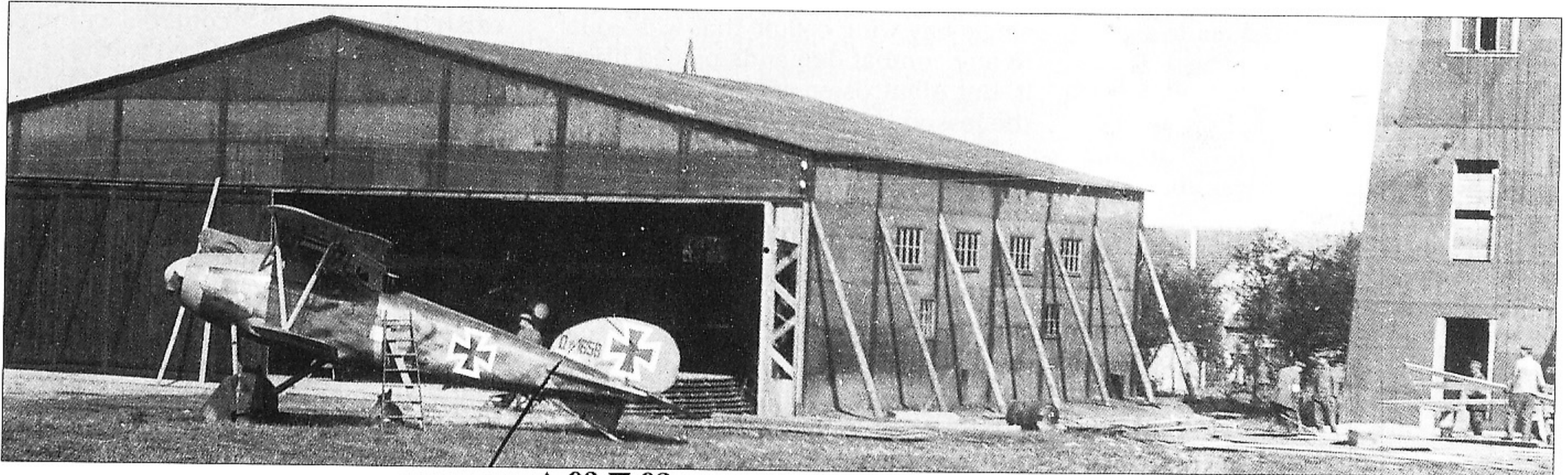
▲ 89



▲ 90 ▼ 91



Photos 92 - 135 - D.IIIs built by OAW, Schneidemühl.



▲ 92 ▼ 93

Acknowledgements

In closing, I should like to express my deep thanks to Reinhard Zankl for his cogent advice and critical reading of the manuscript. To Greg Van Wyngarden who checked the names and units of pilots beyond my expertise. To Richard P Duiven for additional information on losses due to wing failure and to Robert Casari for data on Albatros D.III 2096/16 'Vera' in the USA. A deep bow to Alex Imrie for the use of some photos, likewise to Dr. Volker Koos for his contribution. The views expressed and any errors are mine alone. All photographs are from my collection. I wish to refrain from any opinion regarding aircraft colours or camouflage since this is the responsibility of general editor Ray Rimell, Greg VanWyngarden and others.

Footnotes

1). It should be noted here that Fokker and Halberstadt were given the opportunity to build the twin-gun fighters powered by 150/160-hp engines, namely the Fokker D.IV and Halberstadt D.IV. But neither were successful designs.

2). After the war, Albatros executives regretted that the ply-panelling techniques had not been patented. According to an *Idflieg* engineer, the oversight 'cost Albatros millions in royalty payments'.

3). for further details see Peter M Grosz, *Albatros D.I and D.II, WINDSOCK DATAFILE* No.100, Berkhamsted, 2003.

4). The report suggested that the Nieuport 12 be fitted with a machine gun and flown as a single-seat fighter.



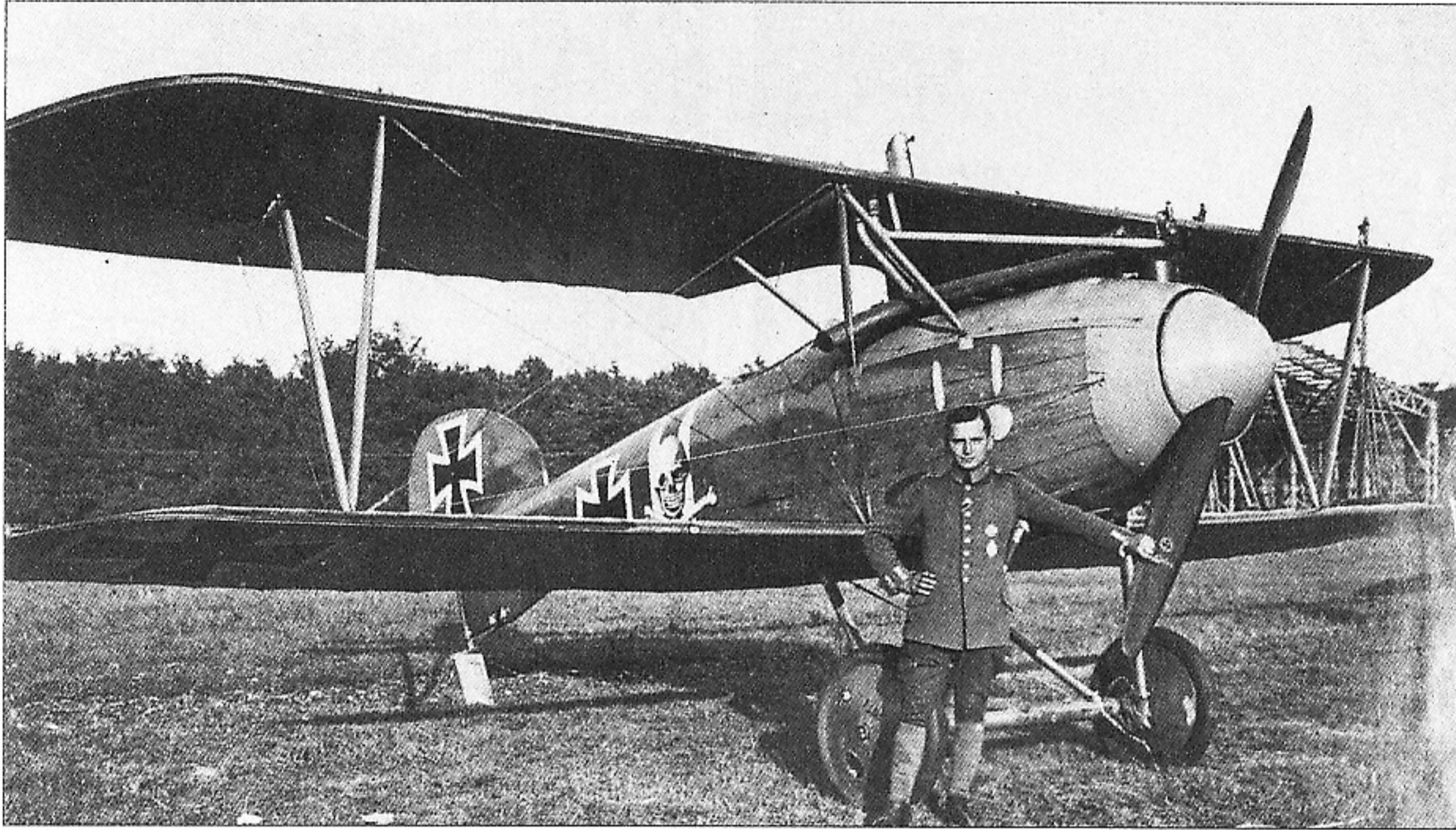
▲ 94 ▼ 95

92). An atmospheric photograph of Albatros D.III(OAW) 1658/17 (immediately identified as OAW-built by the rounded rudder) on the airfield of a Bavarian unit.

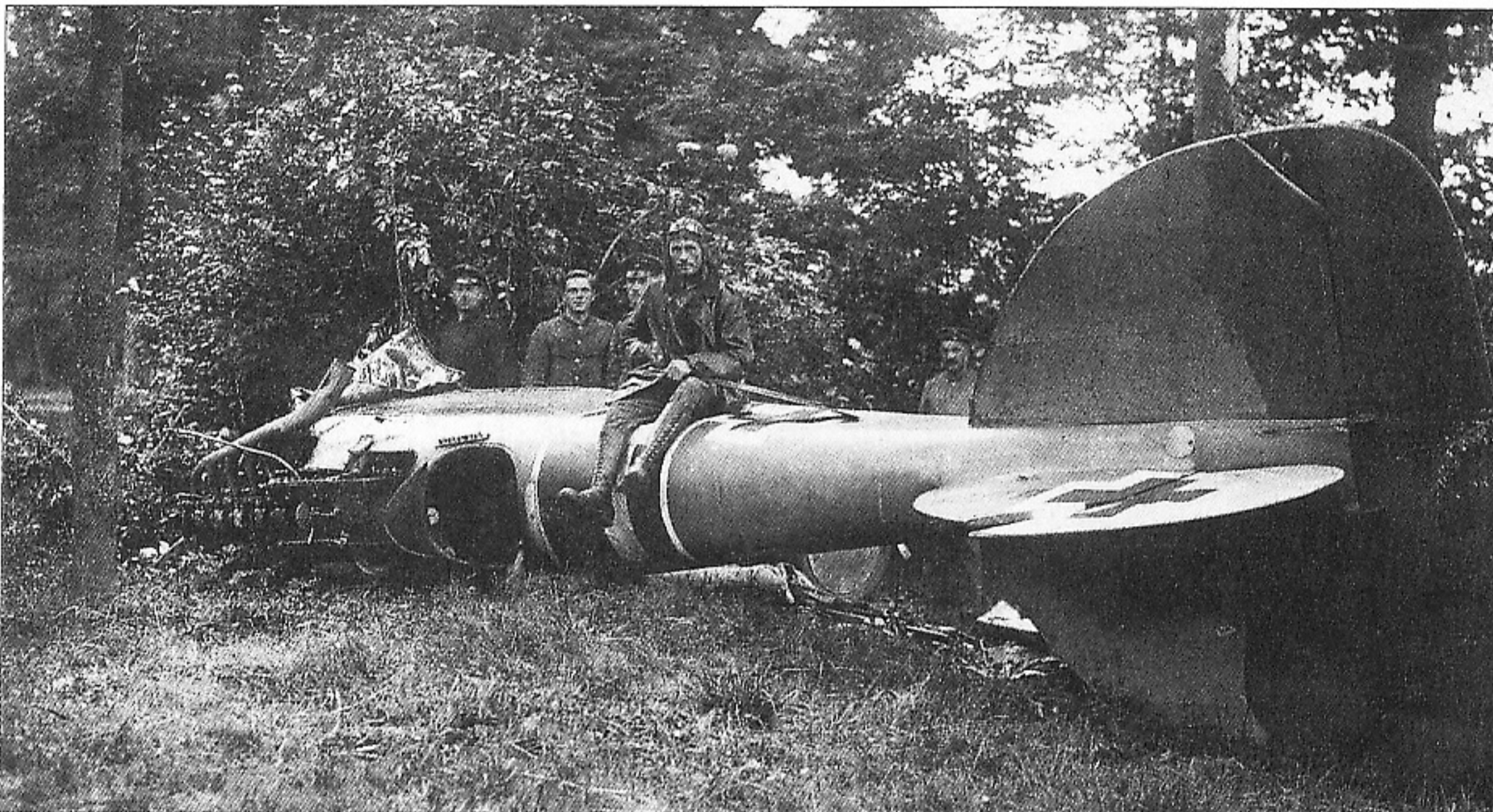
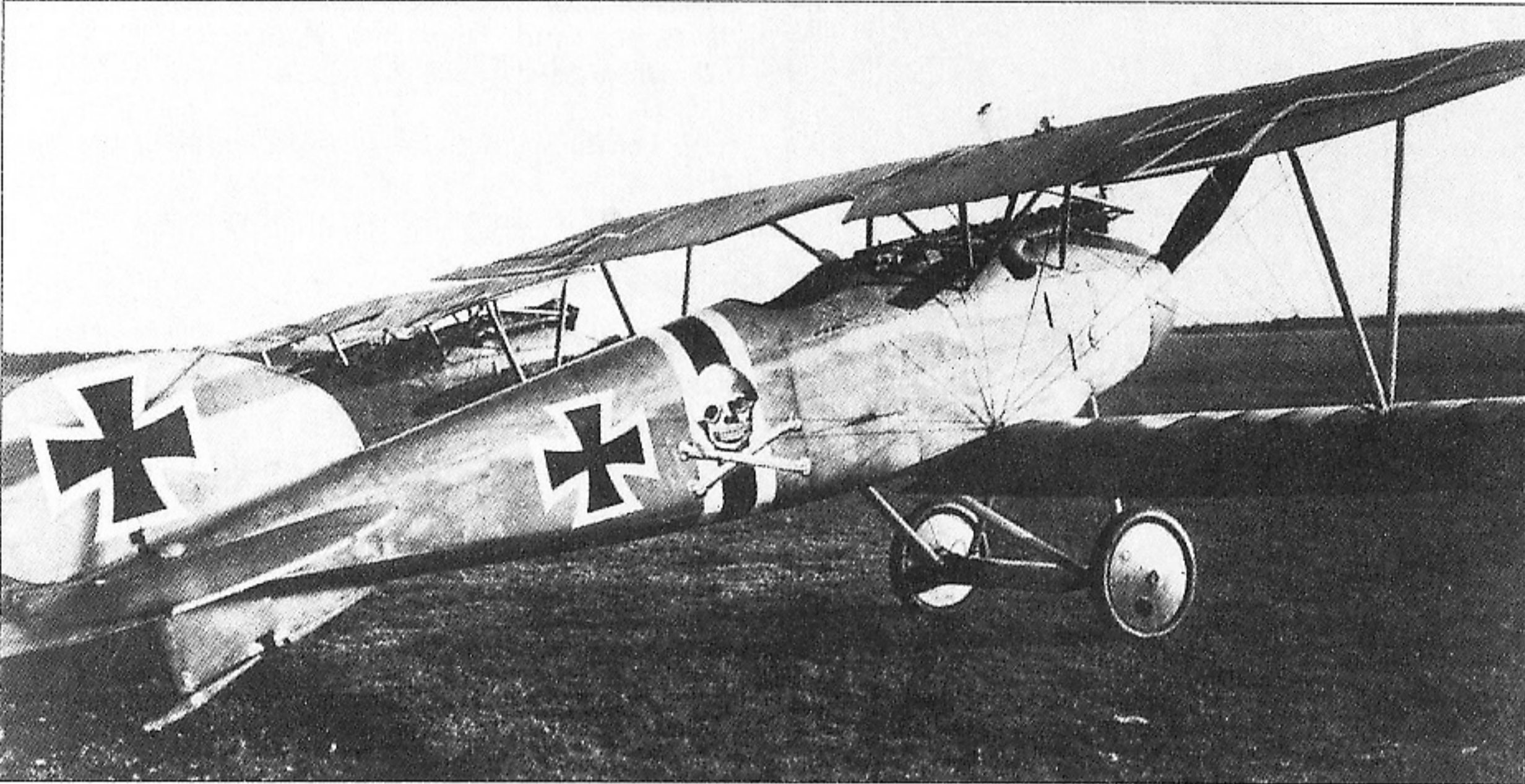
93). The first OAW-built Albatros D.III (OAW) 1650/17 on the wooden platform at Adlershof during the course of the *Typenprüfung* in June 1917 as described in the text. Note the white painted exhaust header which was faulted in the *Idflieg* report.

94 and 95). Albatros D.III(OAW) 1669/17 photographed on 2 January 1918. *Feldwebel* Wimmer of a Bavarian flying school came down so hard that the wings collapsed around him, but the integrity of the fuselage saved his life.





▲ 96 ▼ 97



▲ 98 ▼ 99



5). *Kommando des Luftfahrwesens des Marinekorps*, Brügge, A 33631.

6). Wilhelm Hoff, *Die Entwicklung deutscher Heeresflugzeuge in Krieg*, Verlag Verein deutscher Ingenieure, Berlin, 1920, p.5.

7). To cover the other end of the spectrum, *Idflieg* ordered Nieuport copies to be manufactured by Euler and Siemens-Schuckert, duplicated virtually line for line to such a degree that it requires a trained eye to spot the difference.

8). Structural load testing of German aircraft became mandatory after the wings of a Rumpler *Taube* collapsed during manoeuvres in September 1913. For a full description of the complex stress analysis and test procedures performed at Adlershof test centre between 1914 and 1918 see Wilhelm Hoff, *Analysis of Stresses in German Airplanes*, NACA Report No.143, Washington DC, 1922.

9). The *Bau und Liefervorschriften* were promulgated by *Idflieg* to assure that all aircraft were built and delivered to established standards. In addition to static load test requirements, the *BLV* provided material, installation and acceptance standards, application of markings and the like. The *BLV* was periodically revised to incorporate the latest technology.

10). It should be noted that the oft-repeated canard about pilots complaining about the danger of being scalded by hot radiator water was *not* a factor in shifting the radiator location.

11). It has been suspected that *Leutnants* Hans Imelmann and Paul Ostrop of *Jasta 2* were killed on 23 January 1917 as a result of Albatros D.II wing failures but confirmation is missing.

12). Floyd Gibbons, *The Red Knight of Germany*, Garden City, New York, 1927, p.118.

13). Floyd Gibbons, *The Red Knight of Germany*, Garden City, New York, 1927, p.206.

14). G21. *Notes on German aeroplane brought down by unknown machine on 8th April 1917 at Villeveque* (unsigned RFC report).

15). Peter M Grosz, George Haddow, Peter Schiemer, *Austro-Hungarian Army Aircraft of World War One*, 2nd edition, Flying Machines Press, Boulder, 2002, p.248.

16). Through 1917, aircraft manufactured by Ostdeutsche Albatros Werke GmbH were assigned the abbreviation 'Albs'. For example, the Albs C.I and Albs C.II were different from the Alb C.I and Alb C.II. Later the distinction for aircraft built in both factories was dropped. However when the first OAW-built D.III arrived for the type-test, it was designated Albs D.III or Albatros D.III(Albs). By late 1917, OAW-built aircraft were given the standard designation Alb D.III(OAW), Alb C.III (OAW) and Alb D.Va(OAW).

17). *Typenprüfung* - type-test, an exhaustive series of static load tests and flight evaluations that every German aircraft had to undergo in order to receive approval for service use.

18). The *Bauaufsicht* - (*lit.* construction overseer) was a resident military inspection unit assigned to every German aircraft company. The *Bauaufsicht* was generally composed of an engineering officer and additional inspection personnel to assure compliance to *BLV* regulations, monitor quality and facilitate production.

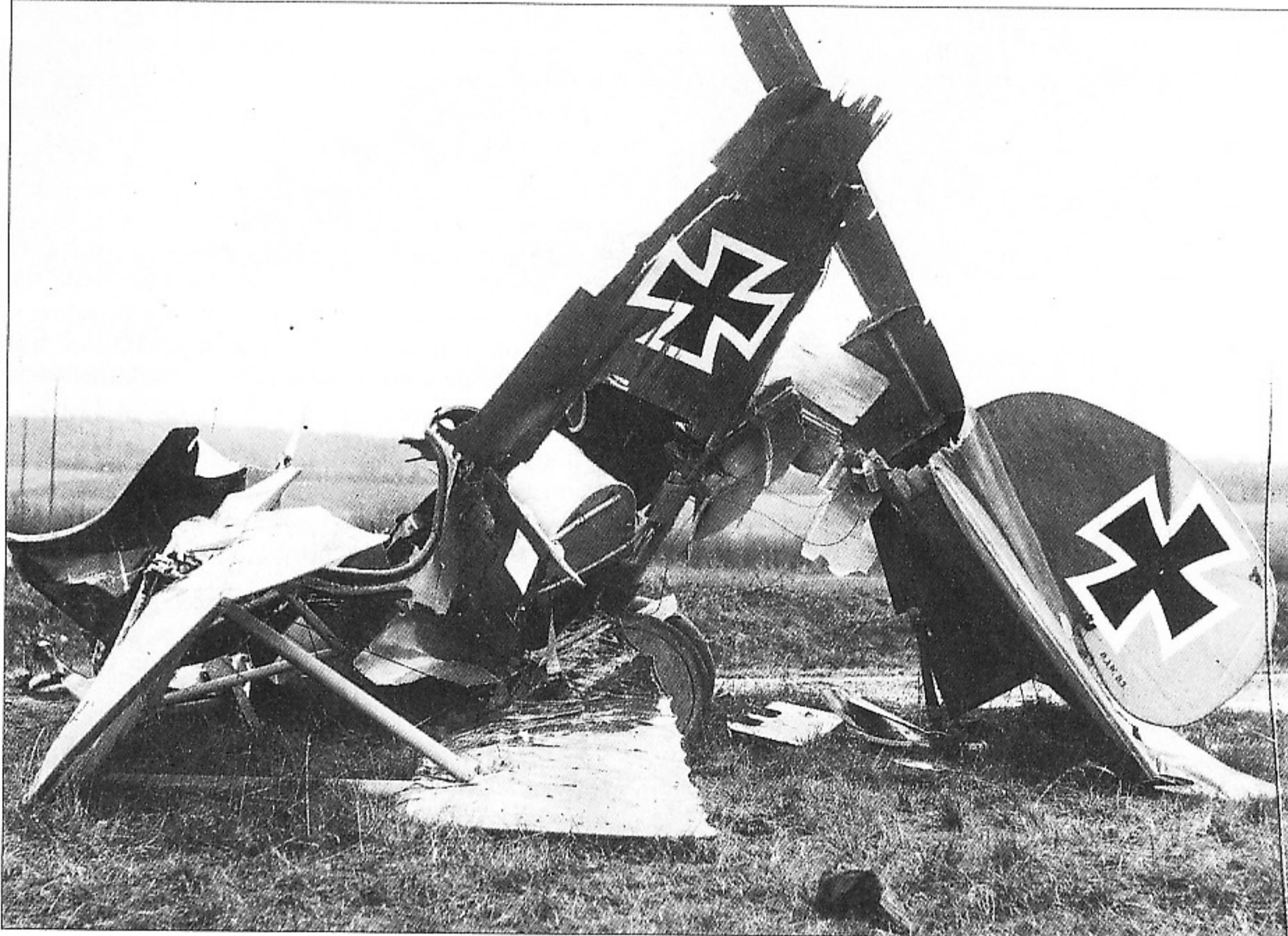
96 and 97). Albatros D.III(OAW) 1671/17 stunningly marked with a skull and crossbones insignia. The pilot and unit are unknown.

98). Lucky to be alive, a disgruntled *Jasta 84* pilot sits on his demolished Albatros D.III(OAW) 1729/17.

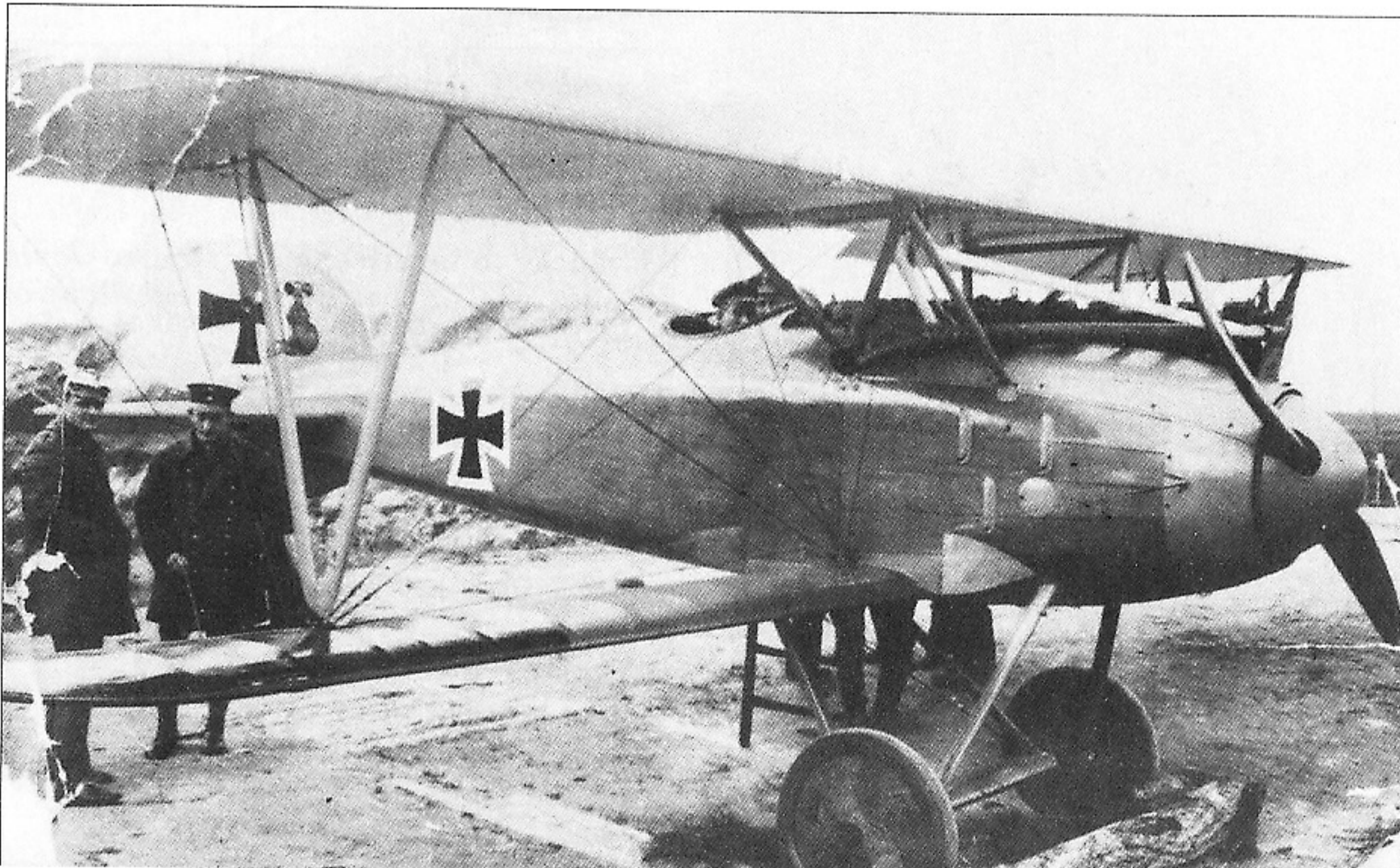
99). Albatros D.III(OAW) 1732/17. Surrounded by a crowd of Austro-Hungarian *Luftfahrtruppe* personnel, the pilot flashes a broad grin while the engine idles in preparation for take-off. The lack of armament and oversized serial number point to training use or a post-war photograph.



▲ 100 ▼ 101



▲ 102 ▼ 103



19). As of 21 December 1917, OAW still had 61 D.III fighters to deliver.

20). The Flugzeug Waffen Fabrik *Zentral* mechanism, driven directly from the engine via a Bowden cable, was just coming into use. It supplanted the FWF *Strangensteuerung* (push-rod control) which was less reliable and heavier.

21). D H König, *Maschinengewehr und Geschütz im Flugzeug*, *Marine-Luftflotten-Rundschau*, Feb/Mar 1927, p.51.

22). Among others, AEG, Rumpler and Halberstadt delivered aircraft specially equipped for tropical service.

23). Rudolf Nebel, *Die Narren von Tegel*, Droste, Düsseldorf, 1972, S.38.

24). The SSW-MMG was also called the Kändler machine gun in honour of SSW *Ingenieur* Kändler who was the responsible project engineer. Using the SSW-MMG *Oberleutnant* Gandert of *Jasta* 51 recorded one victory on 17 March 1918. *Fedwebel* Rumey of *Jasta* 5 and *Leutnant* Thuy of *Jasta* 28 one victory each on 18 March and Thuy one victory on 21 March. (*Telegram SSW Archiv 4/Lf 583*)

25). Trials with a hand-held signalling lamp (*Donatsche Lampe*) proved so successful that 1000 were ordered in October 1916.

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100). Here, *Leutnant* Heinrich Arntzen, commander of *Jasta* 50 and his minions pose in front of Albatros D.III(OAW) 2380/17. Arntzen flew this machine in combat although when this photograph was made, the armament had been removed.

101 and 102). This totally wrecked Albatros D.III(OAW) 2479/17 was photographed by *Flieger Abteilung* 46 to provide a crash record. The serial number is on the wheel cover. The rudder carries the Albatros company logo and the designation O.A.W. D.3. Lower wing crosses are white - outlined; an OAW trait.

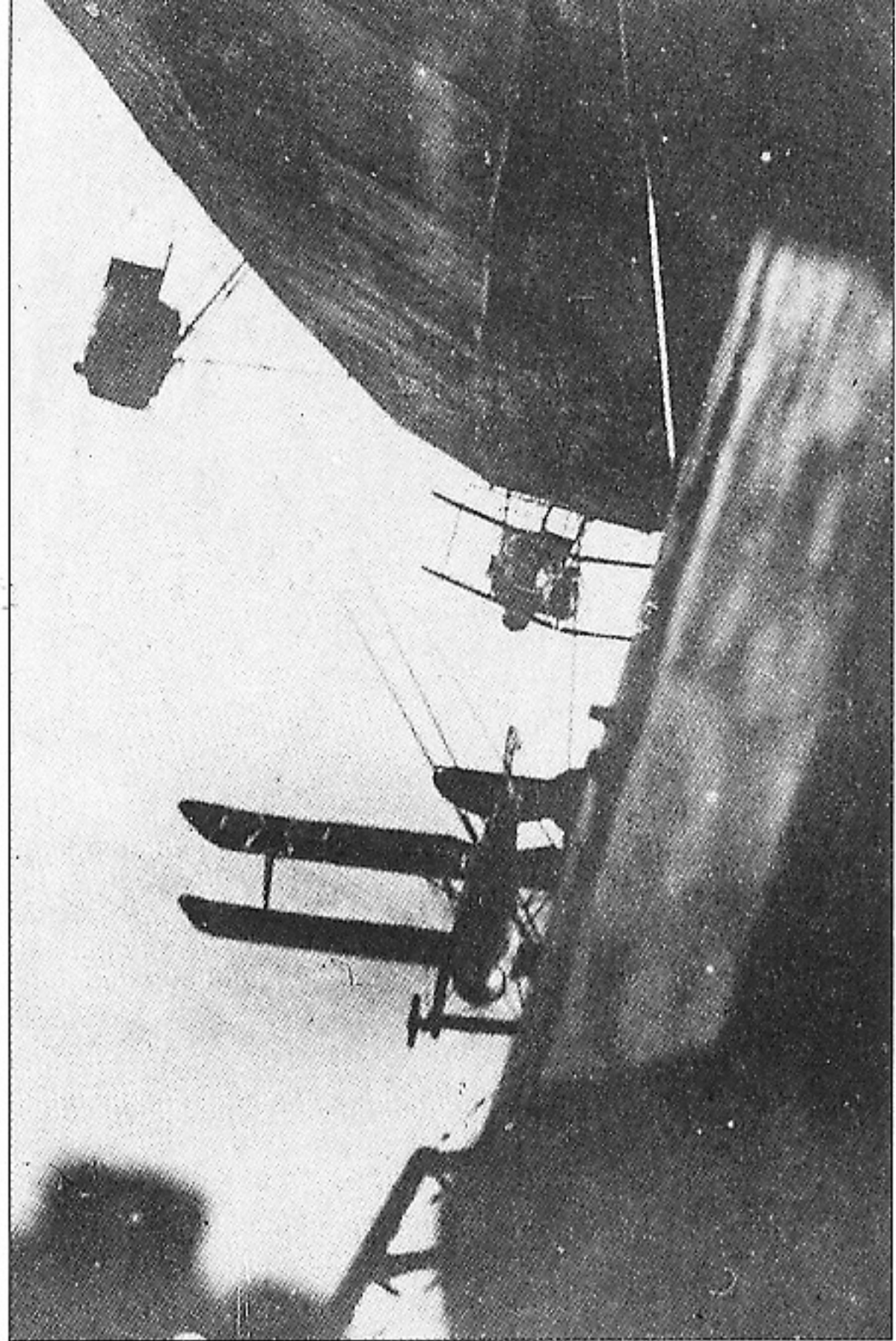
103). Albatros D.III(OAW) 2561/17 on the firing range for machine gun orientation and adjustment. The water pipes have been wrapped with asbestos.

104). Albatros D.III(OAW) 3066/17 caught at the moment of release from airship *L 35* (ex-Army *LZ 88*) on 26 January 1917 at an altitude of 1400 metres. The event marked the first time an aircraft was launched from an airship in flight. Behind the D.III hangs a Siemens-Schuckert wire-guided glide bomb.

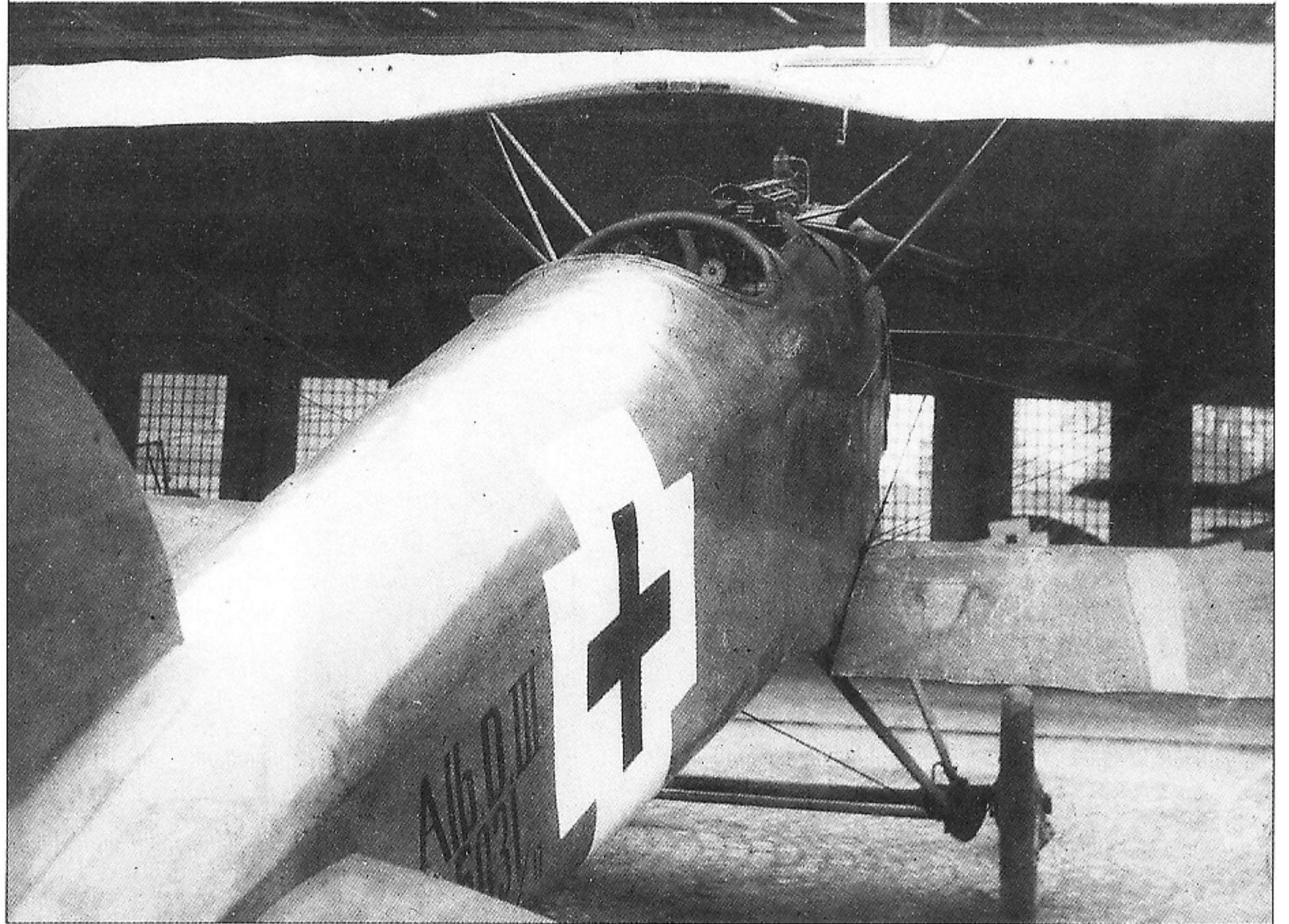
105). Albatros D.III(OAW) 5031/17 showing a variation of the broad *Balkenkreuz* introduced in April 1918.

106). Albatros D.III(OAW) 51- /17 of *Jasta* 49 with the pilot in full combat array and ready to go. The flare pistol was used to signal other squadron pilots when attacking the enemy. The Ogee sight is interesting in that it has a supplementary aiming bar mounted on it.

107). Damned if they were going to turn over their aircraft to the Allies at the war's end, a few enterprising German airmen defected to Switzerland. On 13 November 1918 eight aircraft landed, on 14 November four and one on 2 December. Among them was Albatros D.III(OAW) 5214/17 (?) photographed on landing. It appears the machine guns have been removed and (is it possible?) the pilot's ditty bag was stuffed into the centre-section space.



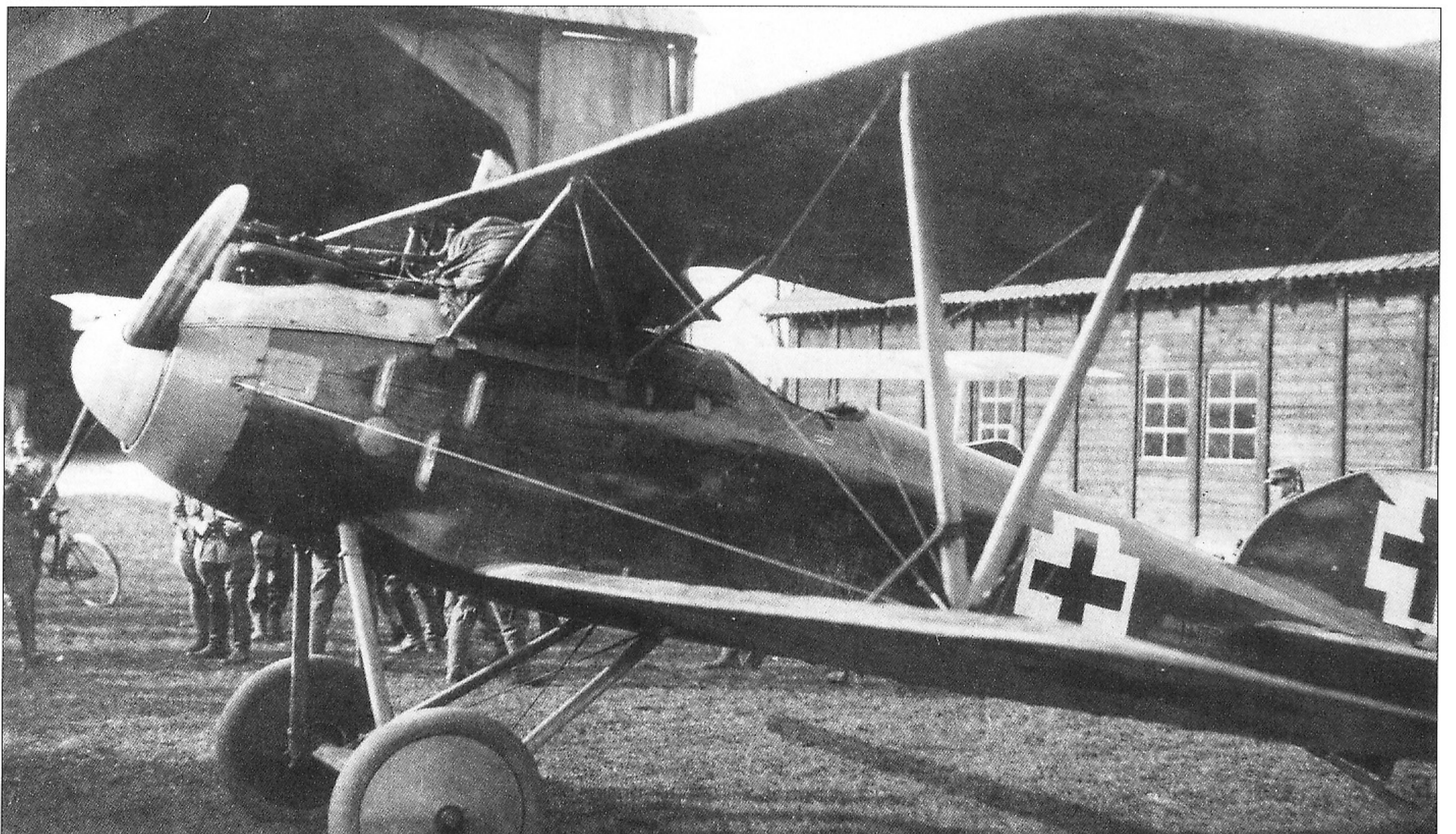
▲ 104



▲ 105

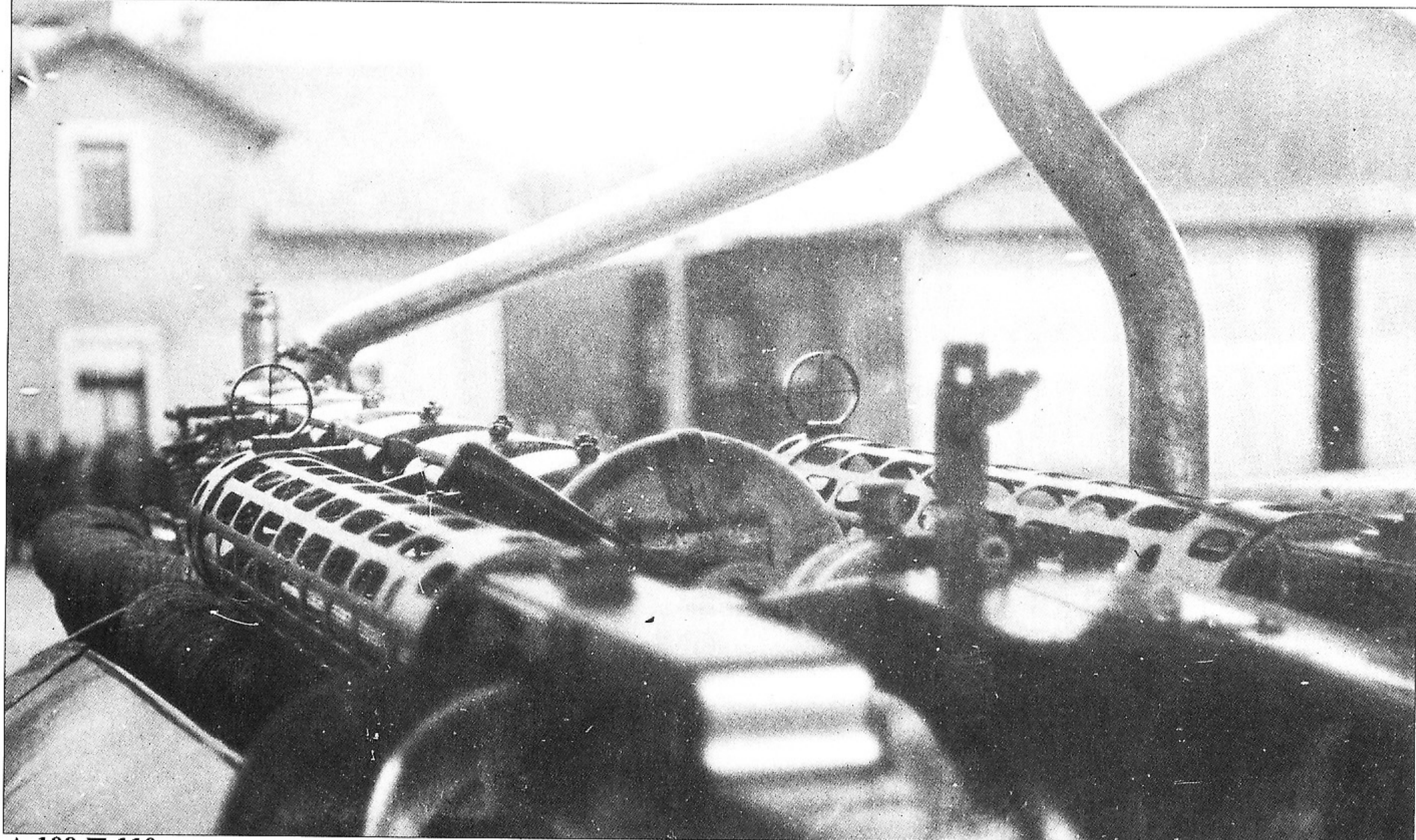


▲ 106 ▼ 107

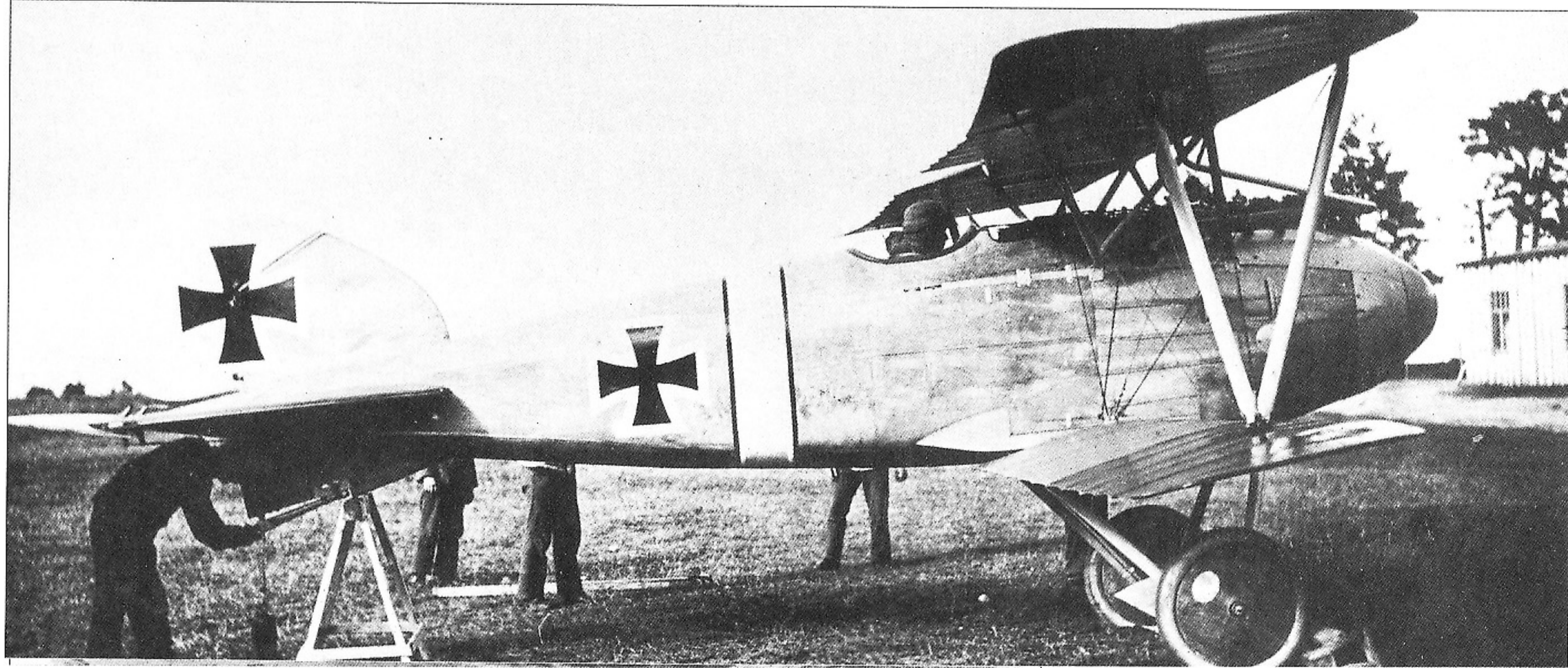


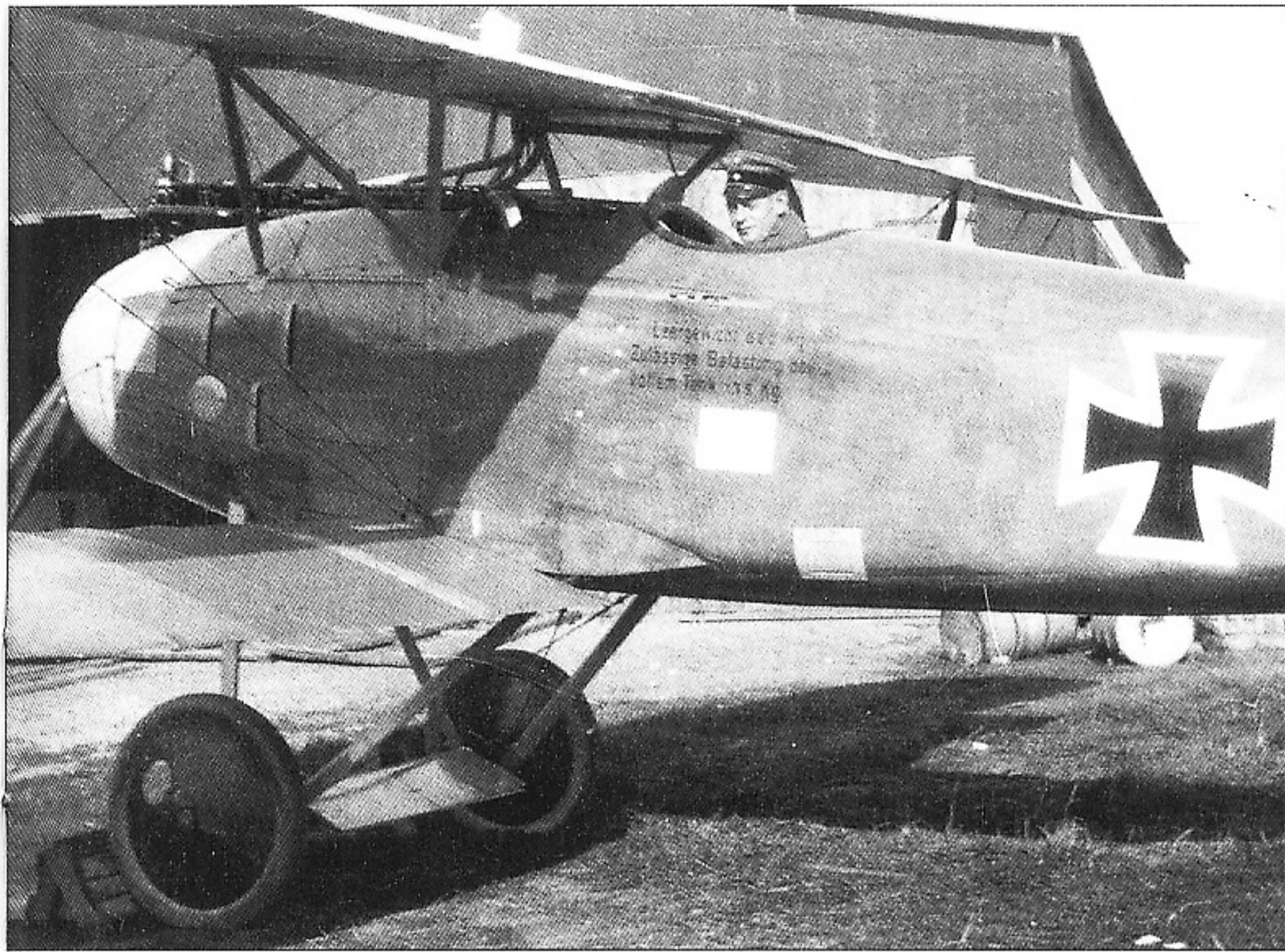


▲ 108



▲ 109 ▼ 110





▲ 111
108). Albatros D.III(OAW) of *Jasta 49* fitted with an Oigee sight and flare gun.

109). The business end of Albatros D.III(OAW) showing the aiming reticules, the Mercedes engine decompression lever and the exposed, rectangular discharge chute common to all OAW-built D.III fighters.

110). A classic pose. With engine running this Albatros D.III(OAW) is raised for firing trials.

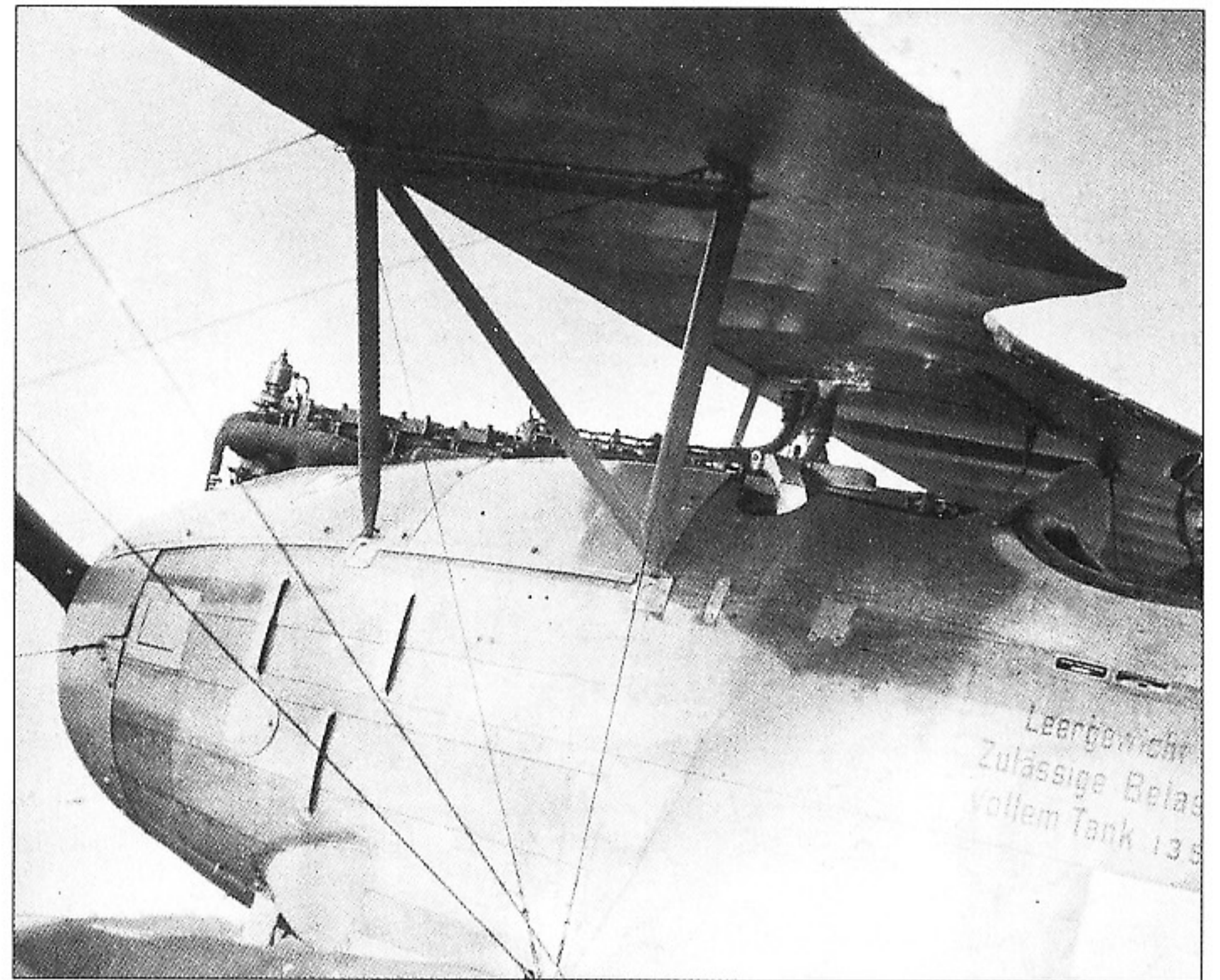
111). The white placard below the weight table was a cellophane-covered sheet with the rigging instructions for the Albatros D.III(OAW).

112). Albatros D.III(OAW) fitted with an Oigee telescopic gun sight.

113). A fine view of an Albatros D.III(OAW) provides plenty of detail for modellers. Noteworthy items are the rectangular discharge chute and the manufacturer's serial number and work number plates below the cockpit. The square engine access panel in the nose was an OAW feature.

114). Albatros D.III(OAW) with more than meets the eye. *Leutnant Franz Ray* of *Jasta 28* with Fido (a 30-victory ace if you count rats). Notice the altimeter on the centre-section, the radiator louvre adjusting handle on the right, the water pipe support brace and the flare cartridge rack. The

▼ 112



▲ 113



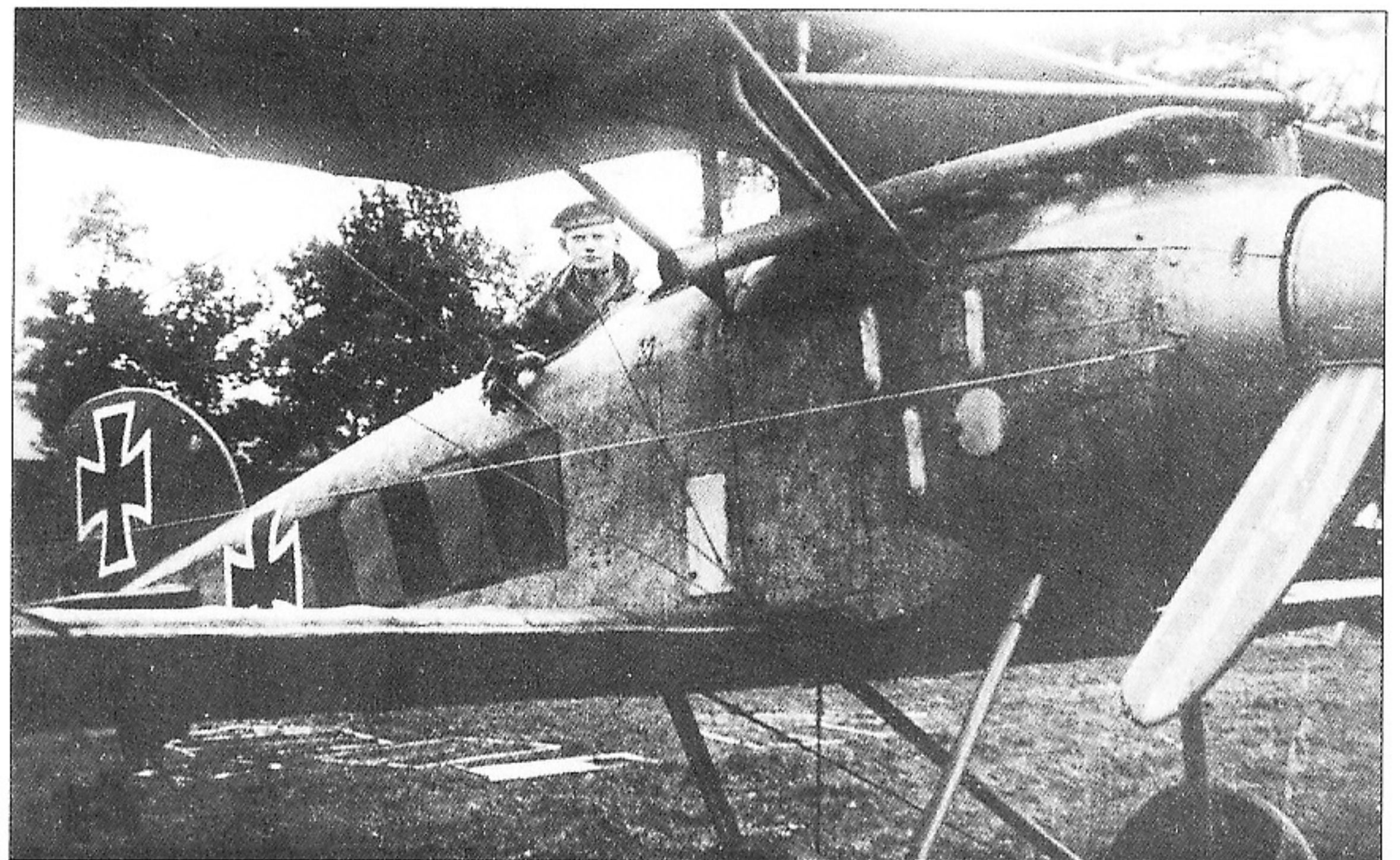
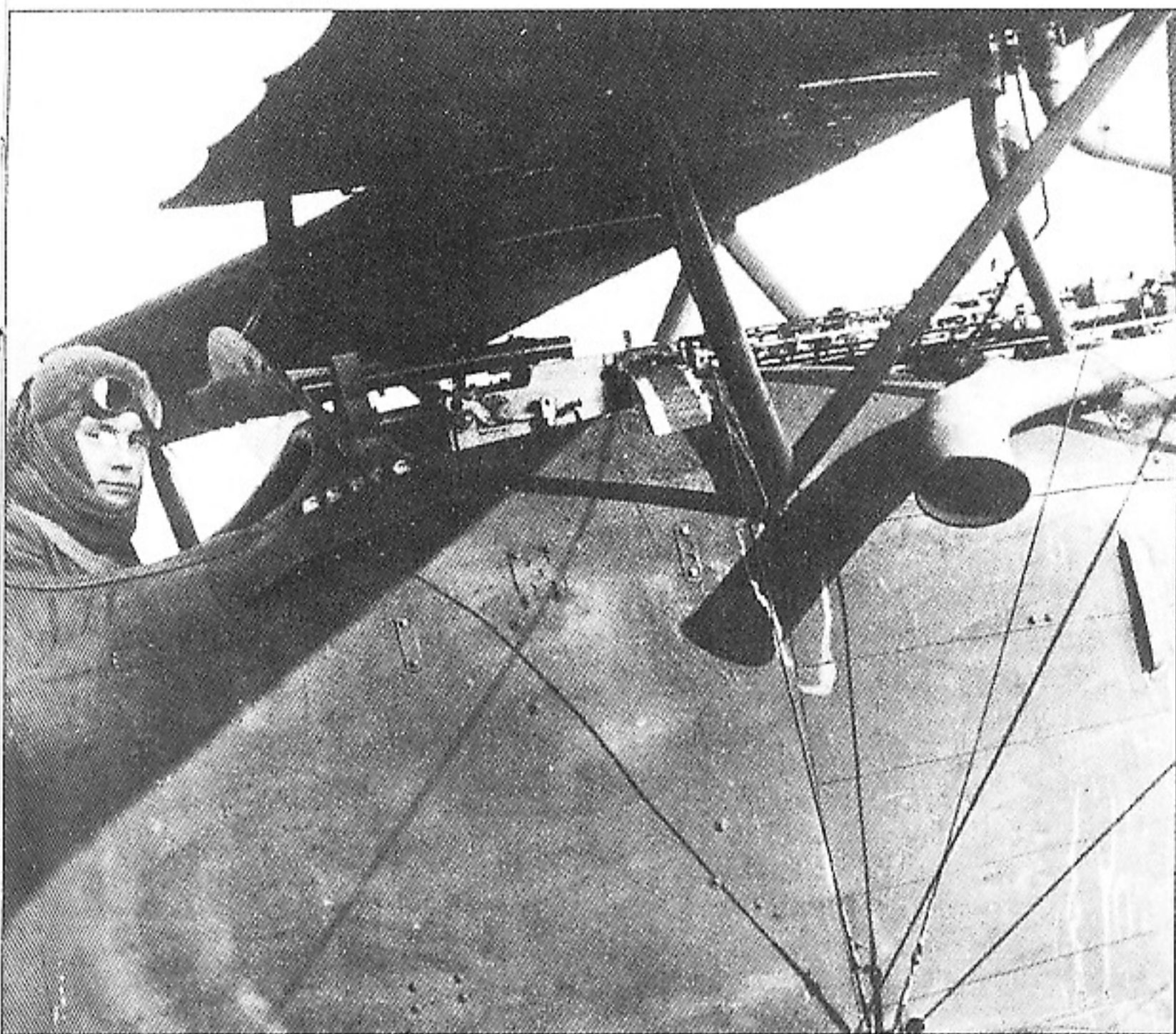
▲ 114
flare-gun muzzle sticks out below the cockpit.

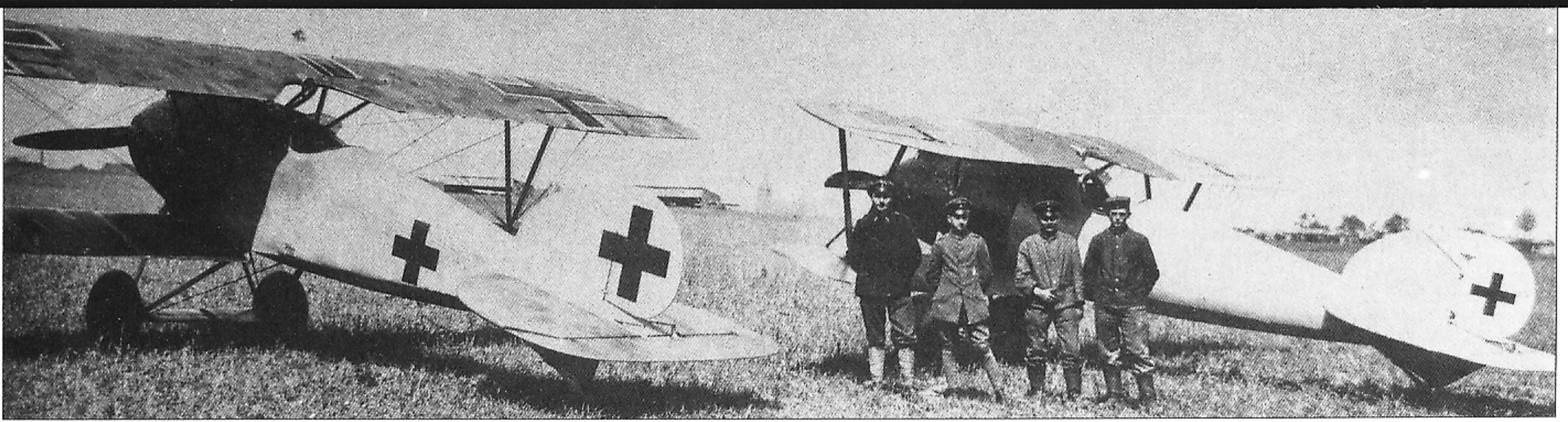
yellow as these two colours are usually associated with marine units.

115). Secure in the knowledge that his teddy bear talisman will lead him safely through the trials of war, a *Marine Feld Jasta* pilot poses with his Albatros D.III(OAW). The purpose of the upright, rectangular panel or door above the lower wing is not known. Fuselage markings were possibly black and

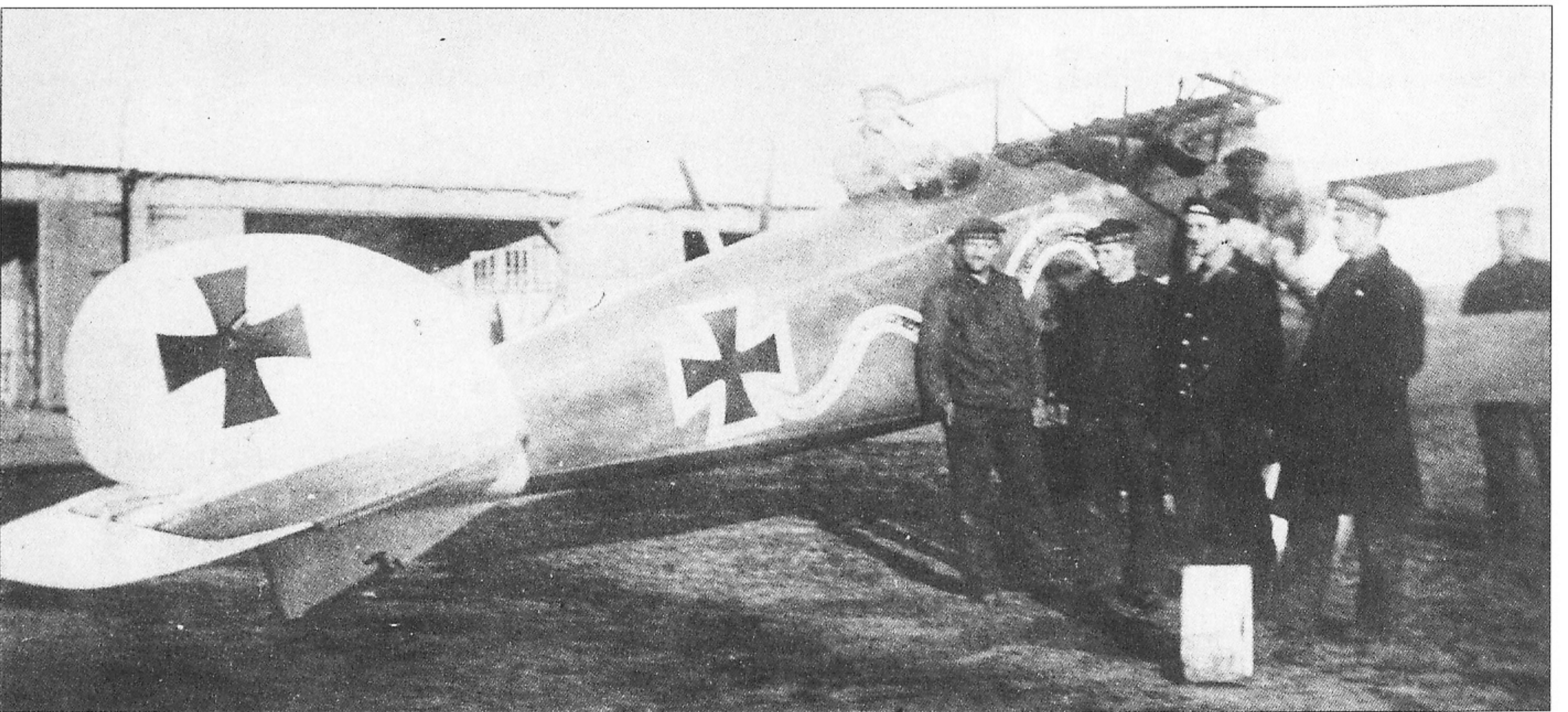
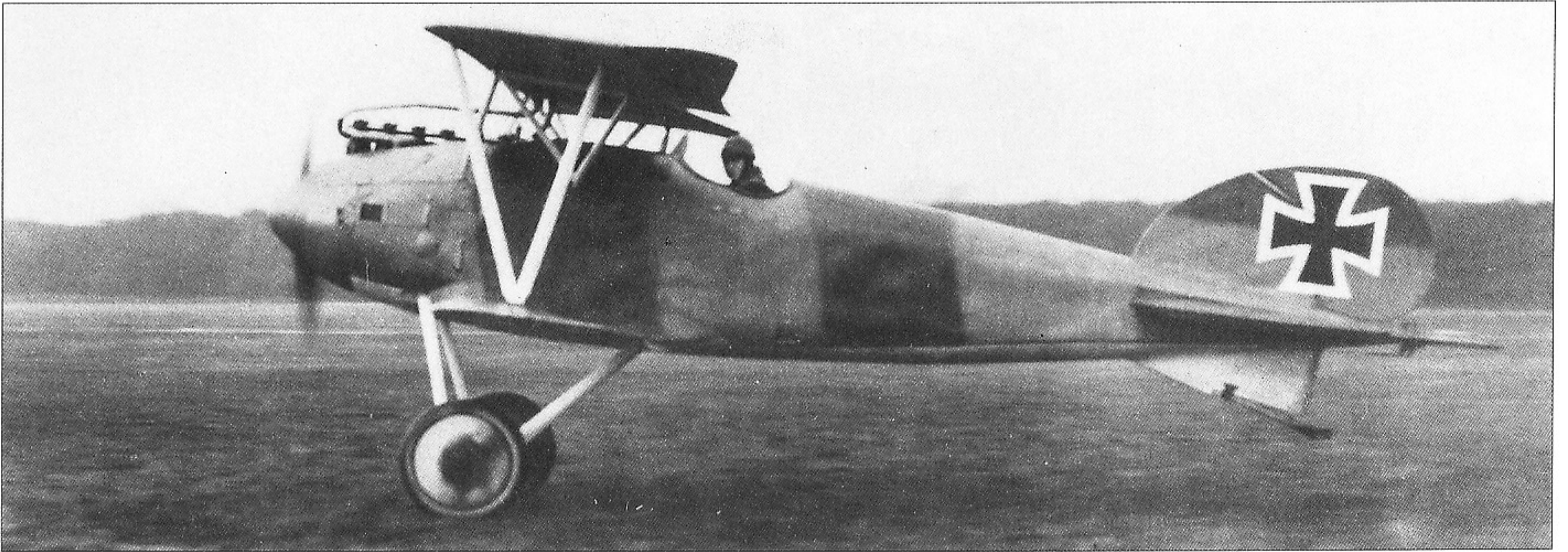
▼ 115

116). - overleaf: An Albatros D.III (OAW) sharing the field with an Albatros D.Va (right) provides a contrast between the two types. The D.Va has been fitted with lower wing braces indicating it too suffered from similar structural problems. The pilot in the tunic is *Gefreiter Hitschler* of *Jasta 57* in May 1918.

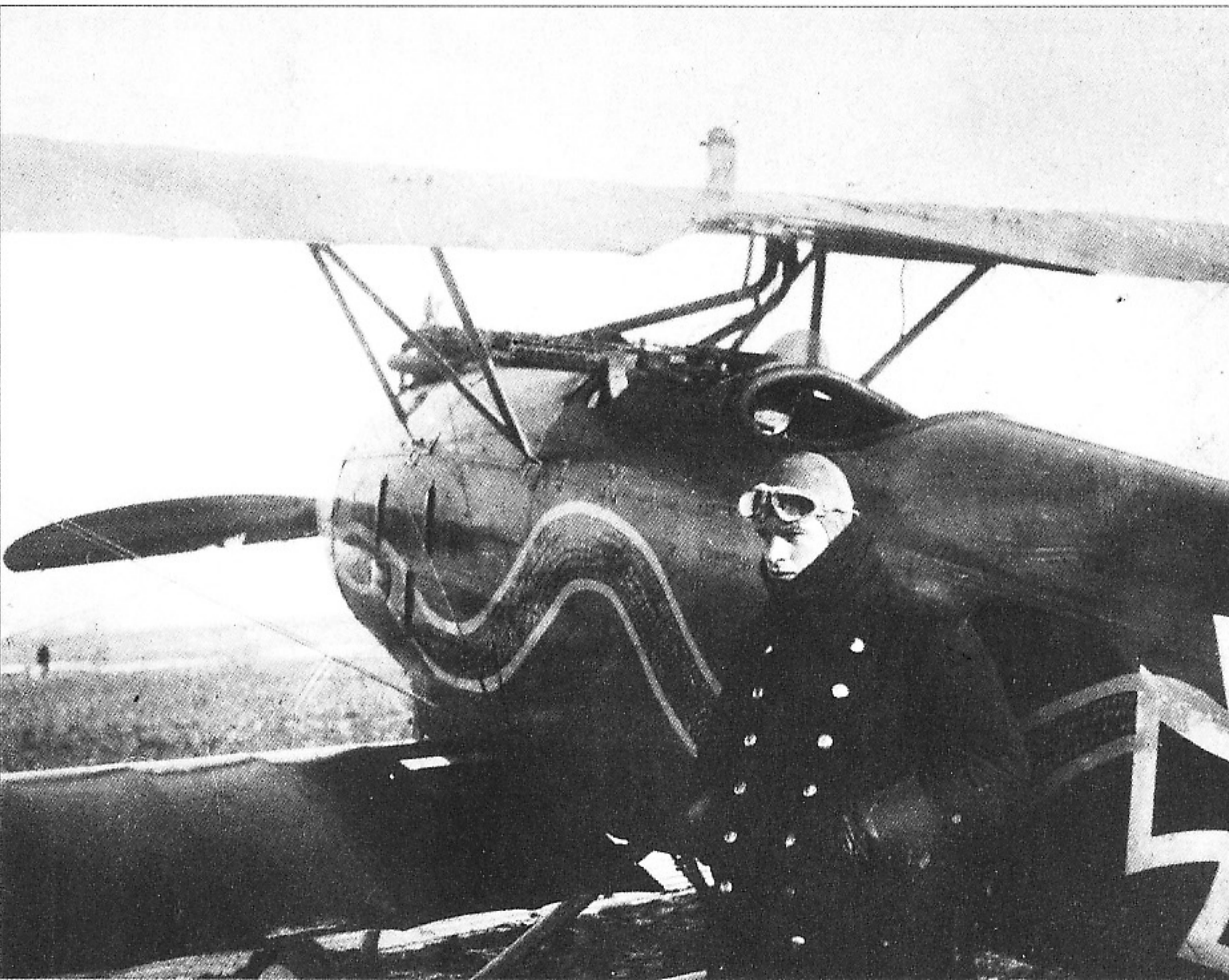




▲ 116 ▼ 117



▲ 118 ▼ 119



117). Compared to the other contemporary fighters, this Albatros D.III(OAW) carries a rather subdued camouflage pattern. The nose engine access cover appears to be open, owing to hot weather?

118 and 119). Flown by *Flugmaat* Arnim Undiener of the II. *Marine Feld Jasta*, this Albatros D.III(OAW) sports distinctive tail markings and a writhing snake for personal effect.

120). *Leutnant* Wilhelm Papenmeyer of *Jasta Boelcke* in the winter of 1917 with his beautifully decorated Albatros D.III (OAW) fighter. The manner in which the slipstream has abraded the paint on the wing trailing edge is interesting.

121). Another view of Papenmeyer's crowned eagle insignia with an unidentified person.

122). *Leutnant* Franz Hilger with his meat-ball decorated Albatros D.III(OAW). The white placard below the weight table details the rigging instructions.

123). This Albatros D.III(OAW) was captured on film by the squadron photographer of *Flieger Abteilung 44*, presumably when the unit shared an airfield with a *Jasta*.

Page 46:

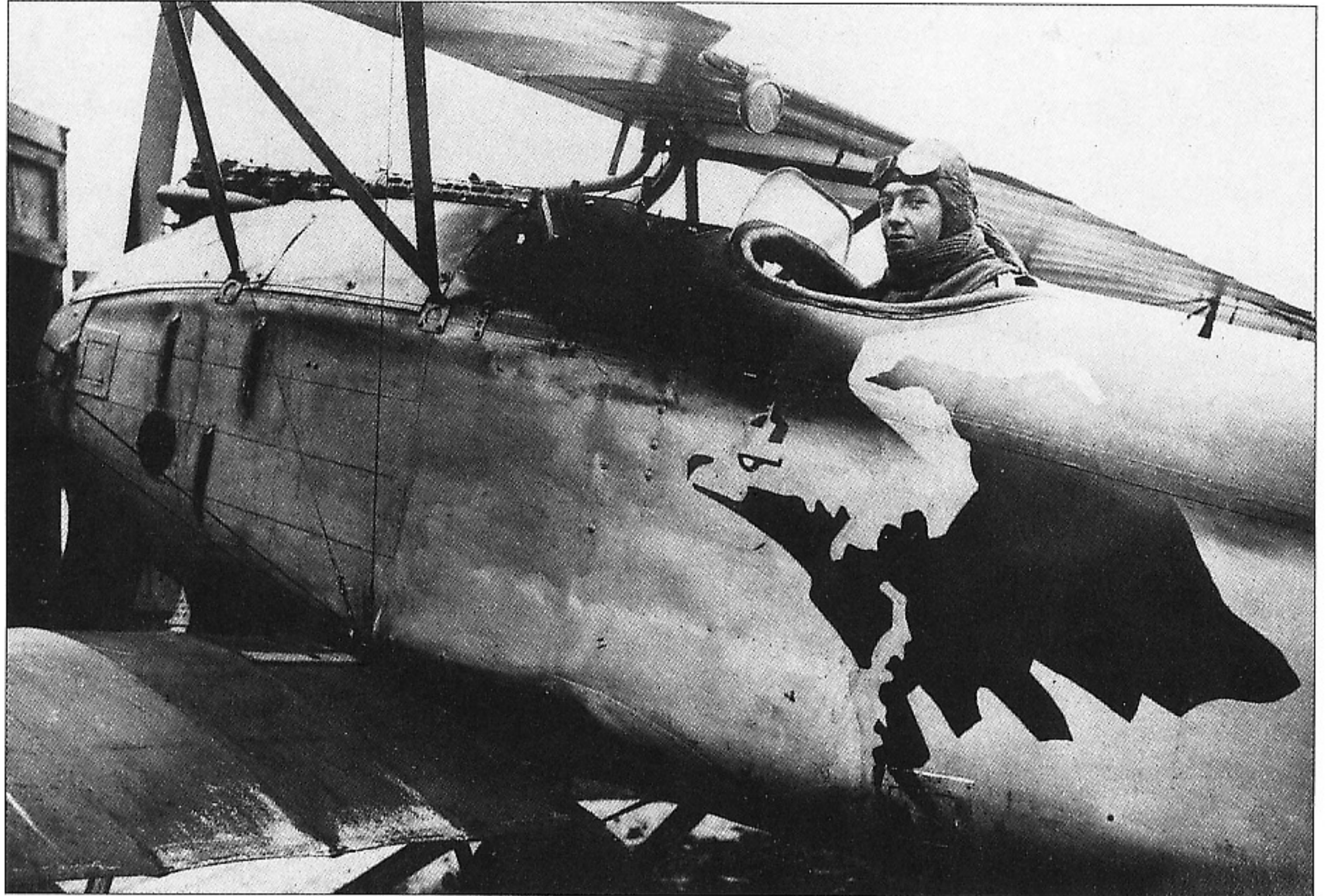
124). A dapper *Vizefeldwebel* Pinkert of *Jasta 25* with his D.III(OAW) on the Macedonian Front.

125). *Leutnant* Karl-August von Schoenebeck of *Jasta 11*, later CO of *Jasta 33* in his Albatros D.III fitted with an Ogee telescopic sight. (This may be an OAW-built machine.)

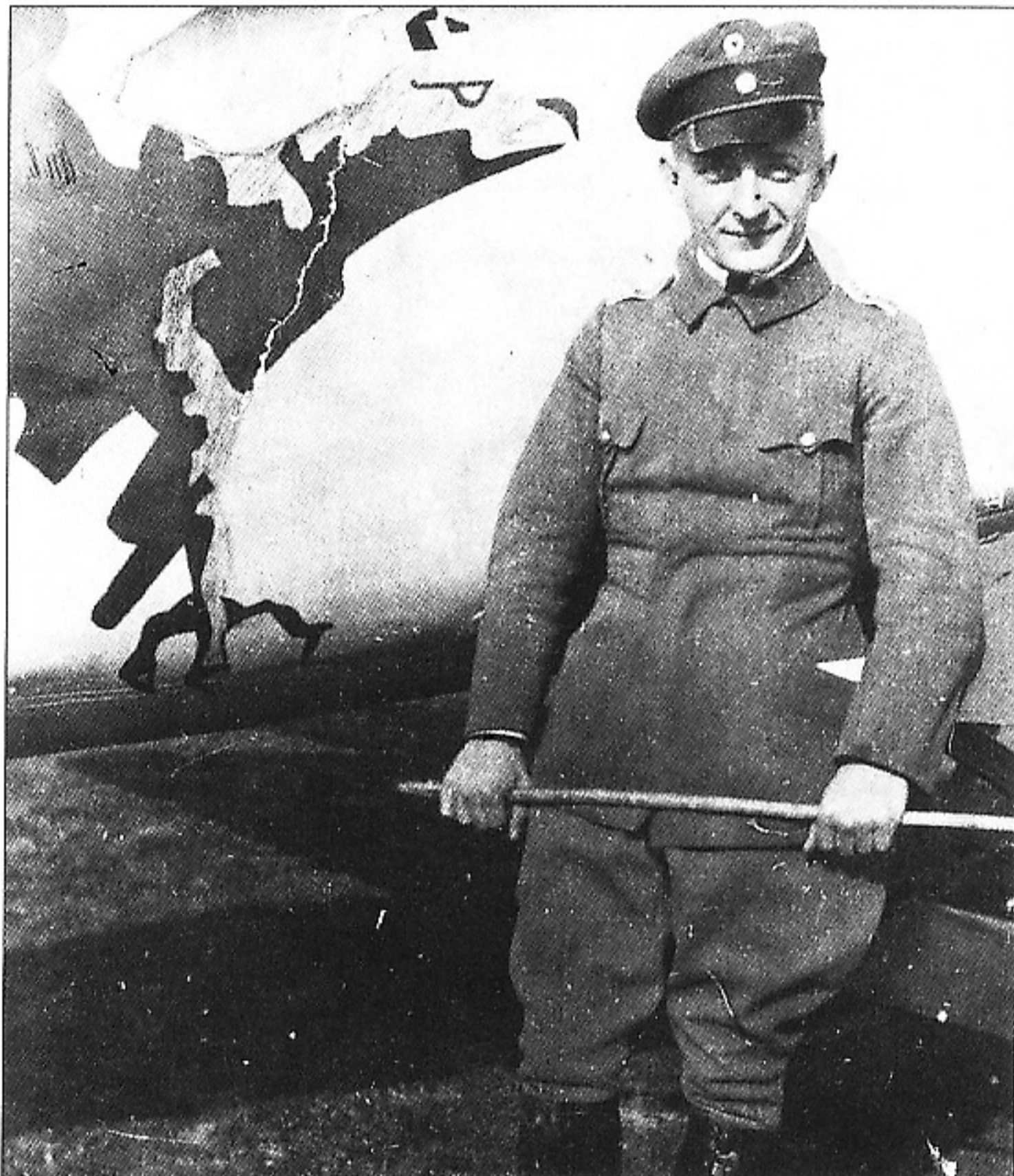
126). Photographs of Albatros D.III(OAW) equipped for hot weather operations are rare indeed. Here is D.III(OAW) 5065/17 (*w/n* 1773) fitted with twin radiators to provide adequate cooling in the desert heat.

Page 47:

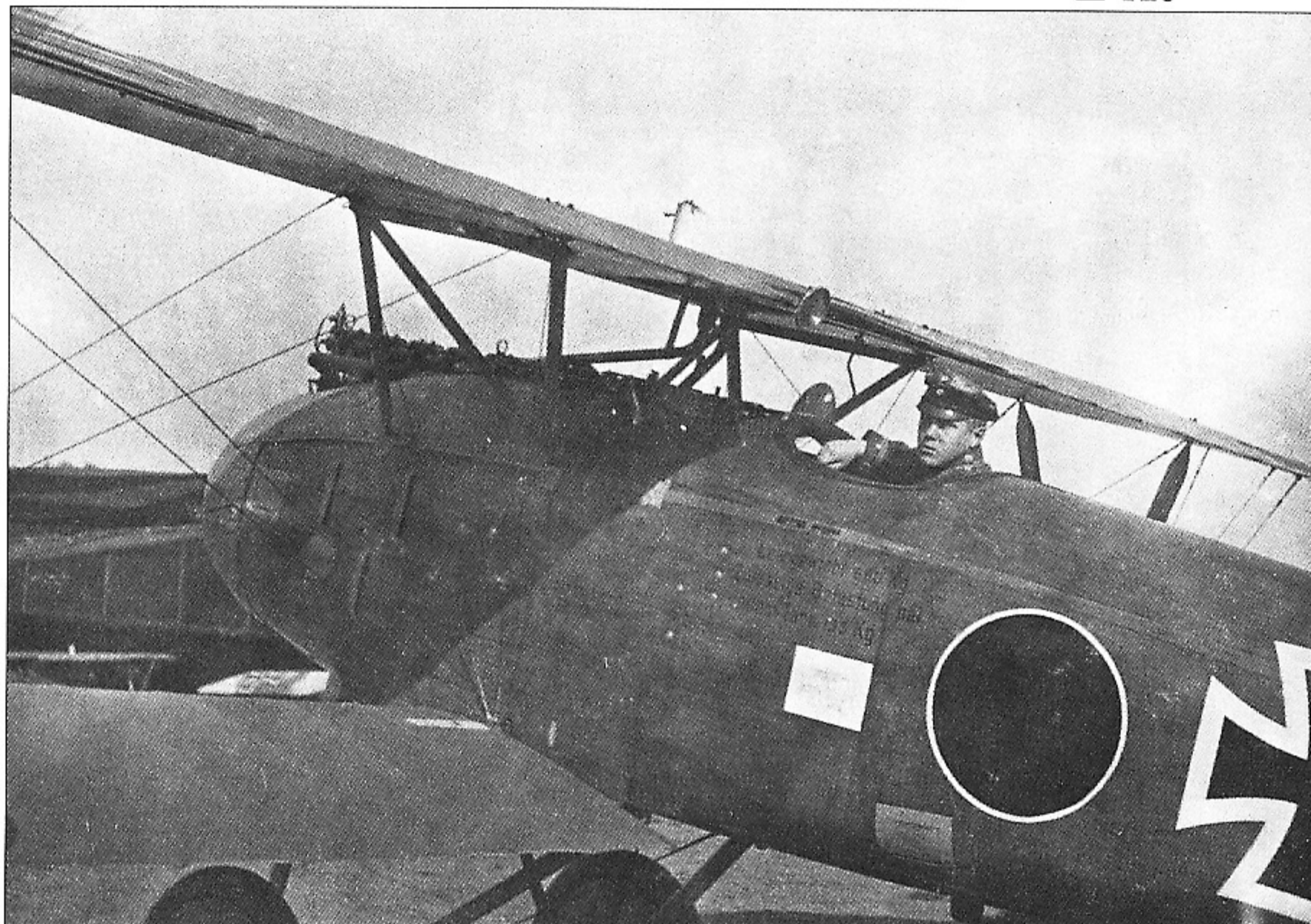
127). August Quoos, a German pilot serving in the Turkish *6nci Bölük* in northern Iraq standing in front of an Albatros D.III (OAW) with Turkish insignia on tail and wings. The piping leading to the twin radiators was



▲ 120



▲ 121

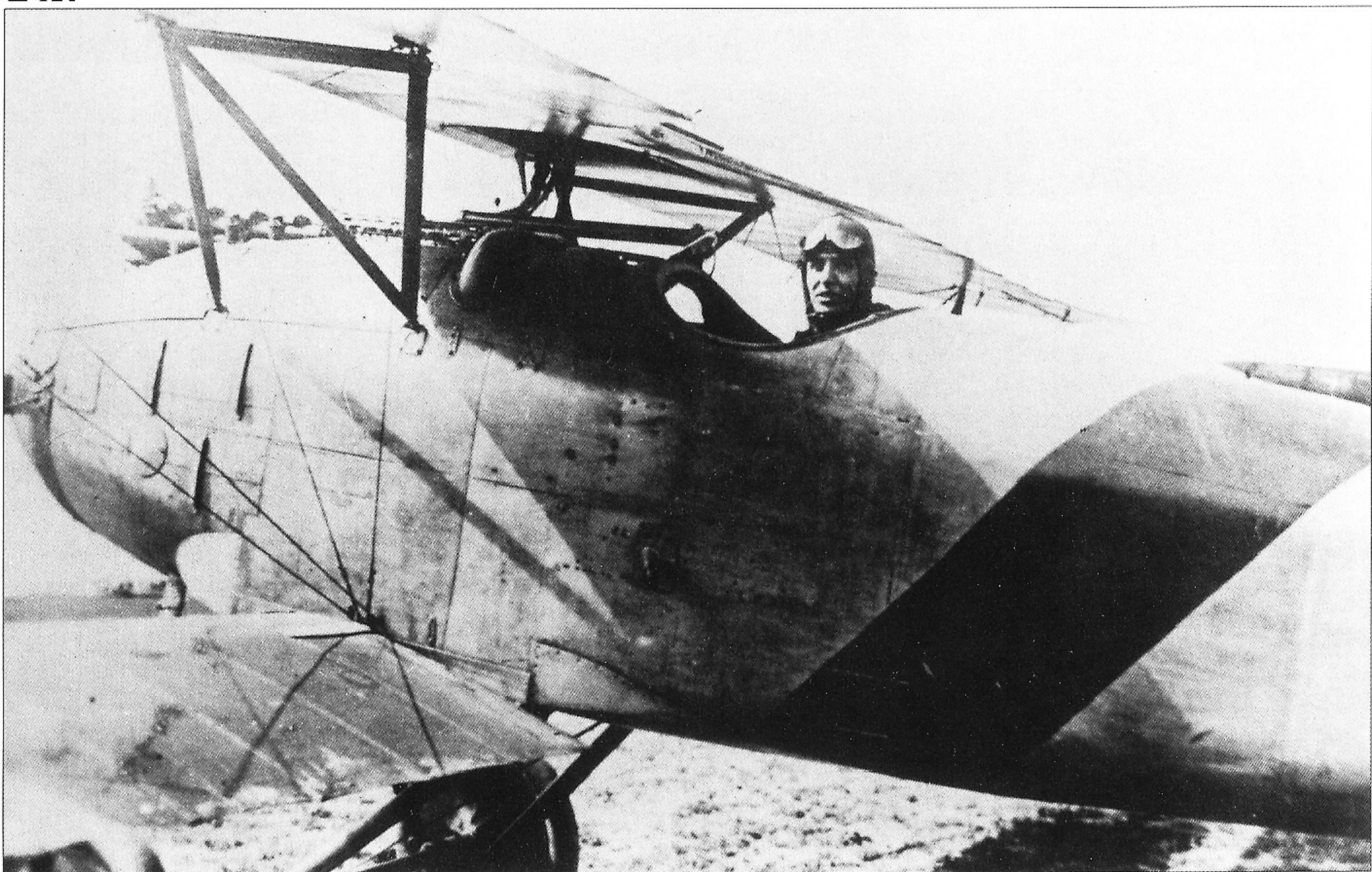


▲ 122 ▼ 123

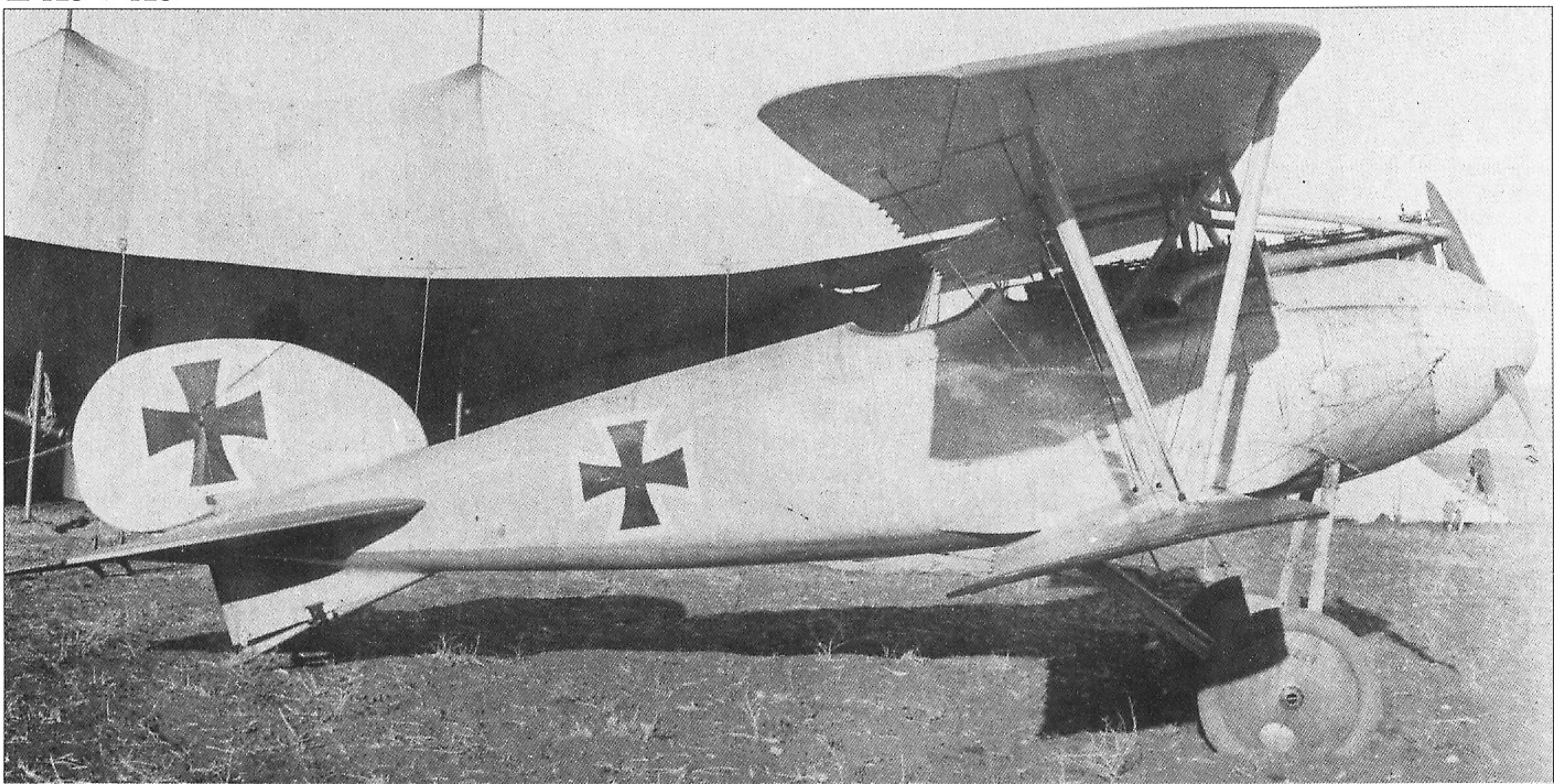




▲ 124



▲ 125 ▼ 126





▲ 127

neatly spread to provide the best possible field of view.

128). A Turkish air service *Bascavus* (sergeant) pilot with his Albatros D.III (OAW) fitted with twin radiators. The desperate state of affairs is reflected in the tyres made of thickly-wrapped fabric. The weight table below the cockpit reads: *Leergewicht 735kg Zulässige Belastung bei vollem Tank 235kg*. The Turkish air service received at least 32 D.III(OAW) fighters which were assigned the Turkish designations AKD 1 to AKD 2.

129). One for the modellers. This Albatros D.III(OAW) of one of the German *Jastas* that fought on the Italian Front has seen better days. It was photographed on the Veldes airfield in October 1917. The position of the cross identifies this as an OAW-built machine.

Page 48:

130). An unidentified pilot with his Albatros D.III(OAW) embellished with a fire-spewing dragon while a good luck monkey talisman enjoys the ride from the wing's leading edge.



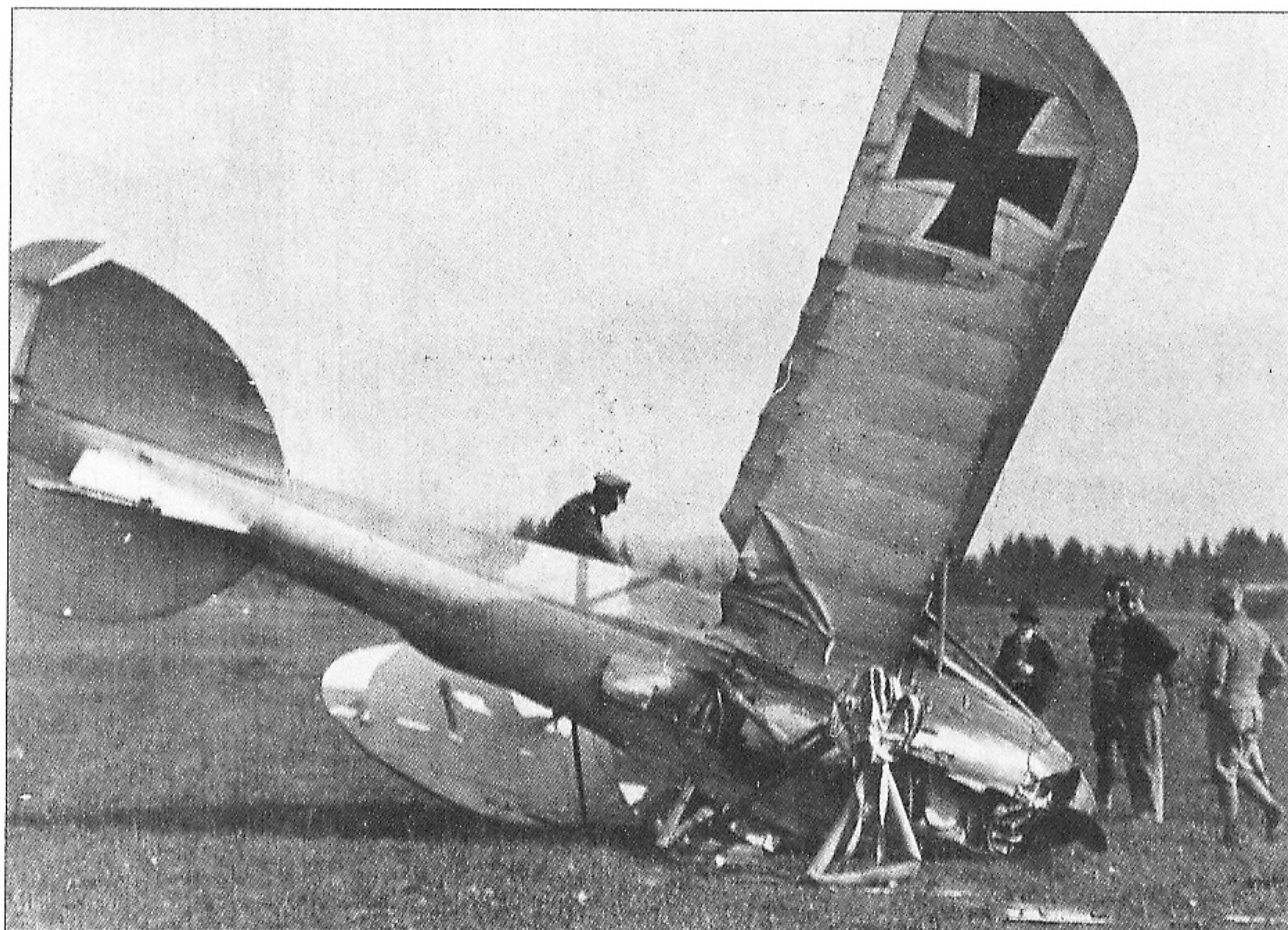
▲ 128 ▼ 129

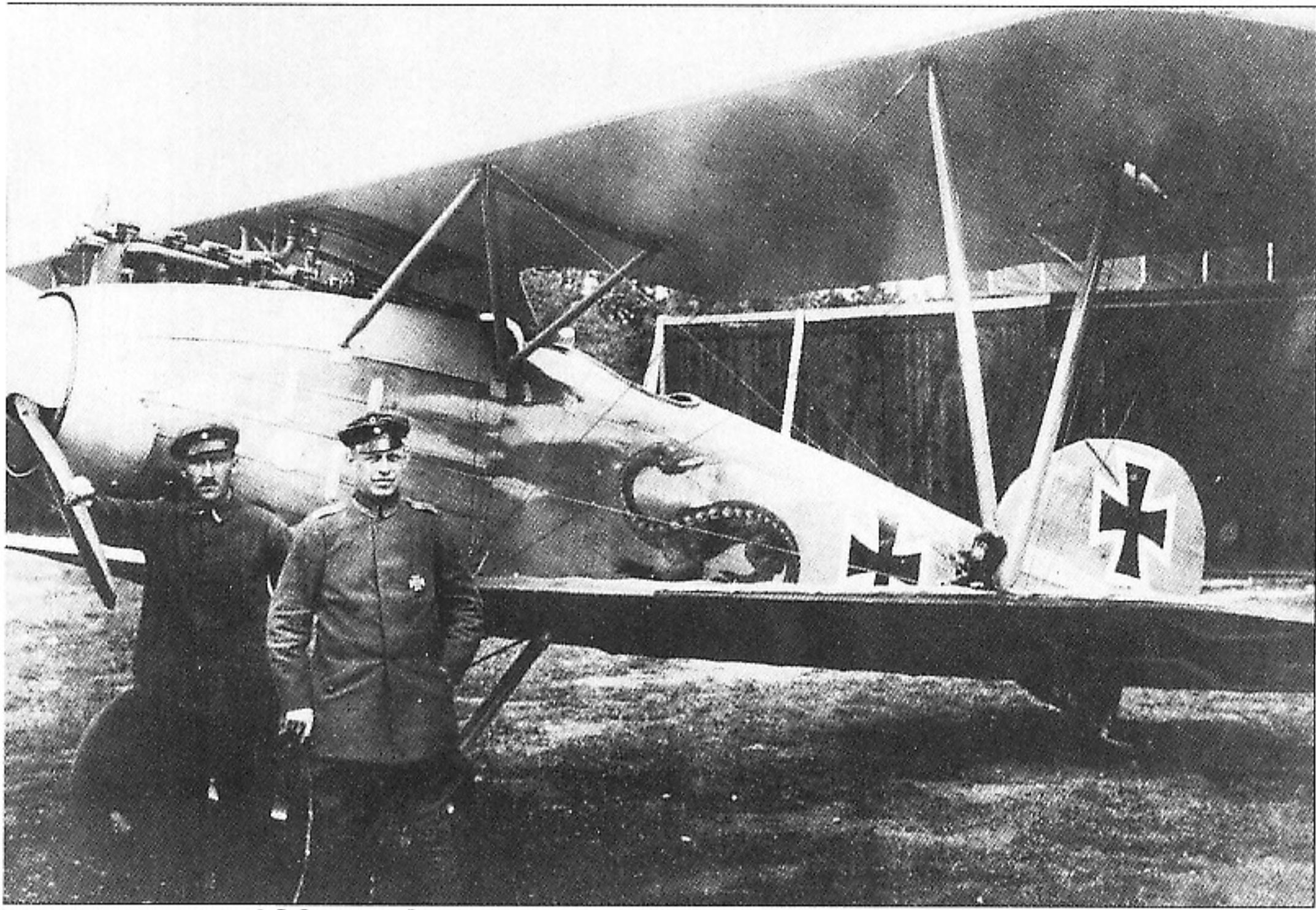
131). Photographs of Albatros D.III fighters in 1918 markings are extremely rare.

132). *Leutnant* Rudolf Hess (Hitler's errant deputy) sits in the cockpit of an unarmed Albatros D.III while Eduard Max Hofweber (left) converses with an officer. This was probably taken at a *Jastaschule* since *Jasta* 35 was flying Fokker D.VII and Pfalz D.XII fighters when Hess arrived in October 1918.

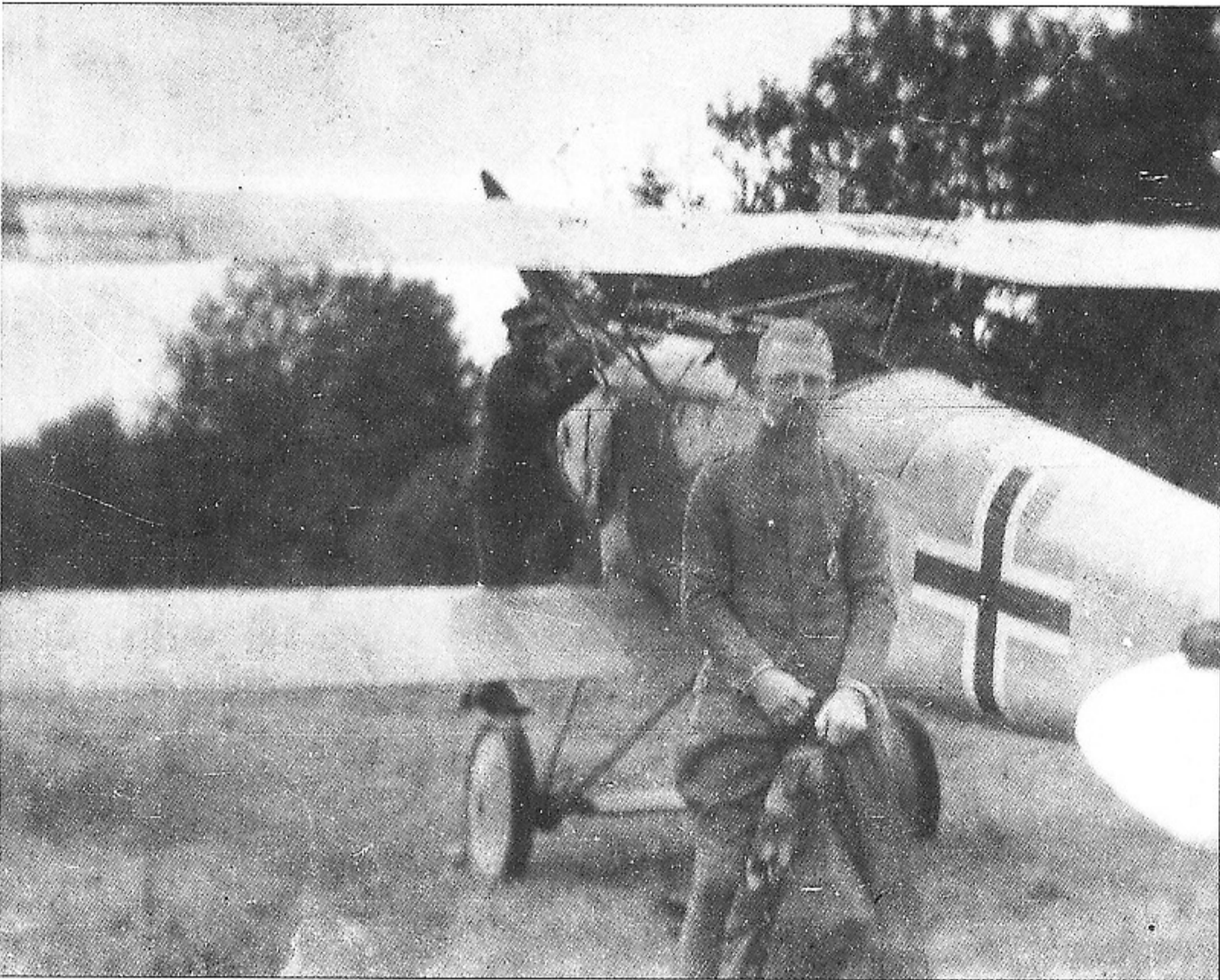
133). A sequence from a series of propaganda photographs taken after parachutes were issued in January 1918 shows a *Jasta* 8 pilot being fitted for the parachute harness. The parachute, seen on the rear turtledeck of an Albatros D.III, served as a seat cushion.

134). A propeller-driven Klaxon horn mounted on the undercarriage strut of an Albatros D.III for practical trials in communicating with ground troops at the Front as described in the text. This photograph was published in 1918 over the caption 'D.III with horn for night-landing purposes'. If true, there was no explanation how this was done.





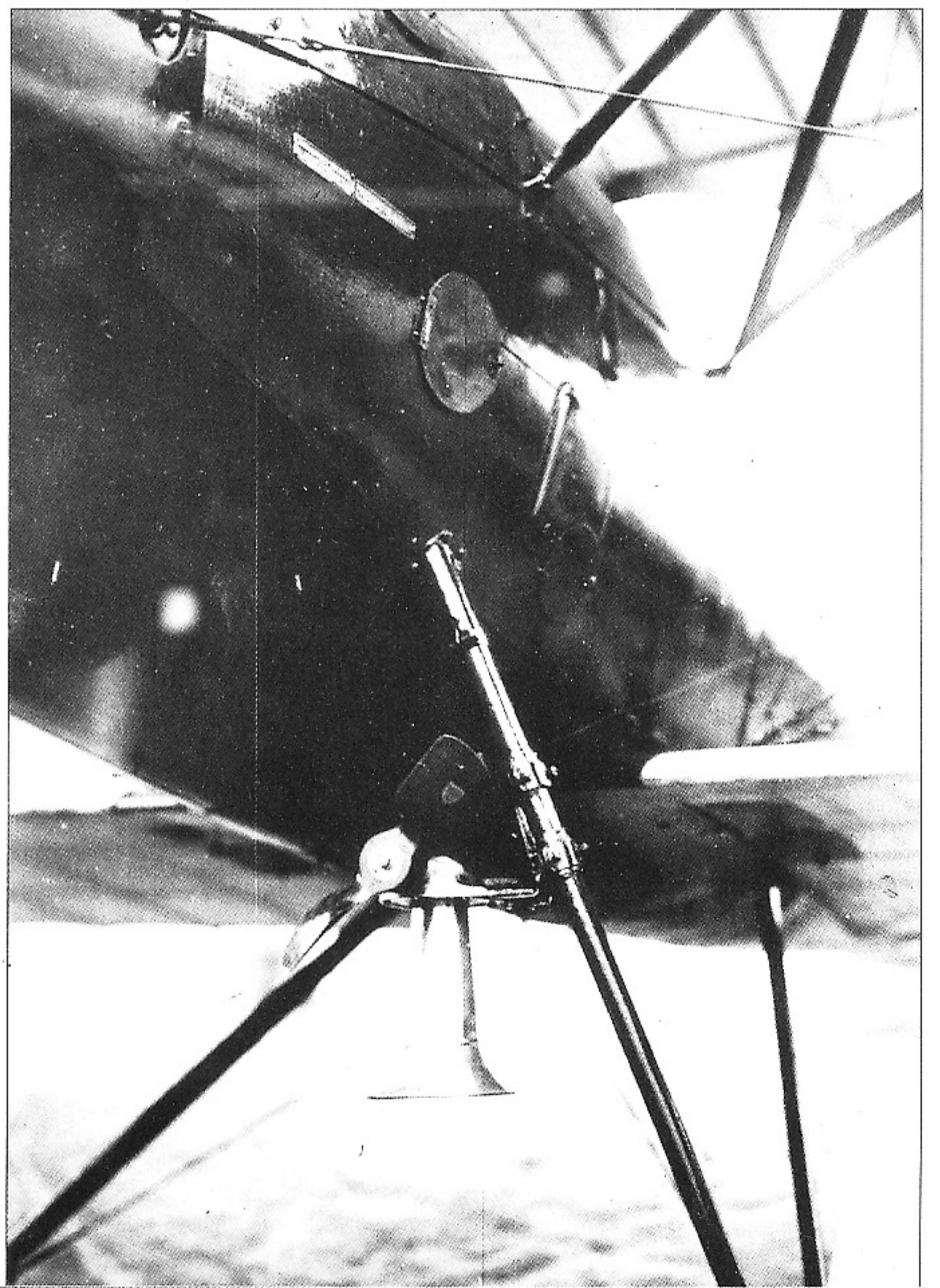
▲ 130 ▼ 131



▼ 132



▲ 133 ▼ 134



D.III COLOUR NOTES By Greg VanWyngarden



By the time the first production order for the Albatros D.III was placed with the firm at Johannisthal in October 1916, most German aircraft manufacturers had abandoned the clear-doped or off-white finish which characterised an earlier generation of aircraft. Many German aeroplanes were now being given a 'terrain' camouflage of at least two or more colours applied to the upper surfaces. The astute and insightful French aviation writer Jean Lagorgette described the trend in this way (after inspecting numerous captured aircraft): '...white or unbleached fabrics have been replaced on nearly all German aeroplanes by a camouflage perfectly resembling certain Nieuport aeroplanes; very light blue or pale yellow under the wings; variegated green and brown, or ruddy brown, rather dark shades above the wings and on all the surfaces of the tail and on the fuselage.'

Each manufacturer differed in the pattern of application, and even in the precise colours used. For the predecessors of the Albatros D.III, there are several pieces of primary data that fortunately survive and which help to shed light on the camouflage used on the D.III. Lagorgette wrote an in-depth article in *L'Aerophile* describing the Albatros D.I, based on the captured

D.391/16 and also D.497/16. He wrote: 'The wing fabric, like the fuselage plywood, is painted green and brown-red (marron) on the upper side and pale blue on the lower side, like the Fokker and Roland are.' Furthermore, there are two small fabric pieces from a captured Albatros D.I, 'G.17', in the Imperial War Museum. (NB: Most sources hold that G17 was the well-known skull-decorated D.I of Prince Friedrich Karl of *Fl. Abt. (A) 258*, who frequently flew with *Jasta 2*; however, the frequently cited serial number of 410/16 is certainly in error). In his ground-breaking article 'WWI German Aircraft Finishes' in *AeroModeller* November 1957, Peter L Gray described these fabric samples as 'sage green and burnt sienna'. Paul S Leaman has also studied these same samples, and he graciously supplied his own determination of the matching hues in the *Methuen Handbook of Colour*. Paul cites the green piece as '3E6, Olive' and the brown as near '6E8, Rust'. Thus we have a fairly definite choices for two camouflage colours as applied to the upper surfaces of the Albatros D.I and probably the D.II as well. However, there is certainly some photographic and documentary evidence that a third colour (probably a light green) was applied as well on some D.I and D.II

machines. As the *L'Aerophile* report and some photos indicate, these colours were sometimes applied to the plywood-covered fuselage as well as to the wings and tail surfaces (perhaps a factory hall-mark of one batch of D.IIs produced by the OAW firm, as Dan-San Abbott has stated) but it would seem from photos that most D.IIs had their fuselages left natural or possibly stained reddish-brown and given several coats of varnish.

Albatros-built D.IIIs

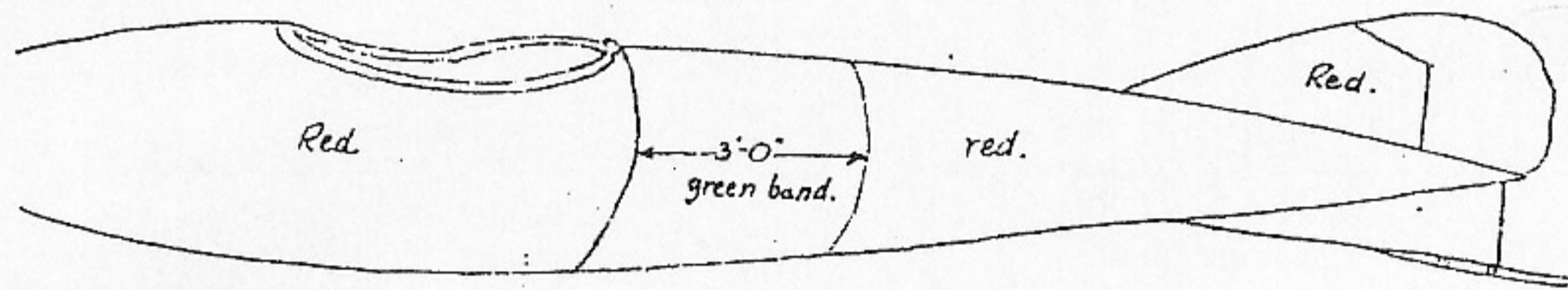
As far as the D.IIIs from the parent firm at Johannisthal are concerned, we are very fortunate to have a detailed RFC report on the captured Albatros D.III 2015/16 (from the first production batch) of *Ltn. Georg Simon of Jasta 11*; this machine was captured on 4 June 1917 and was given the captured aircraft number *G42*. The report from the office of Brig. General R Brooke-Popham was provided to this author through the *All captions: P M Grosz.*

135). As the war progressed, *Idflieg* required all parts of an aircraft to carry identification markings which OAW has done in an exemplary manner. The struts and wheels carry the information 'OAW D 3 5127'. The pilot of this Albatros D.III (OAW) 5127/17 is *Offizierstellvertreter Hermann Habich of Jasta 49.*

▲ 135

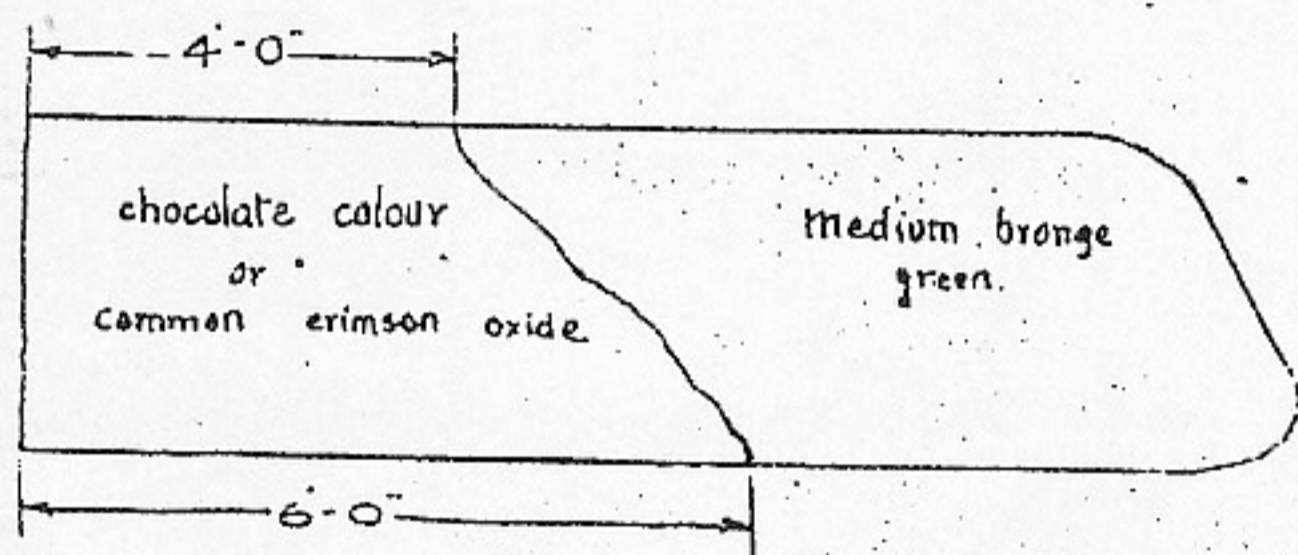
FUSELAGE CENTRE SECTION STRUTS, UNDERCARRIAGE, WHEELS, TAIL PLANE, ELEVATORS AND RUDDER are painted in bright red, which is either vermilion with crimson lake or geranium lake only.

A broad band of green is painted around the fuselage, immediately below the cockpit; Green composed of common brunswick green & white.

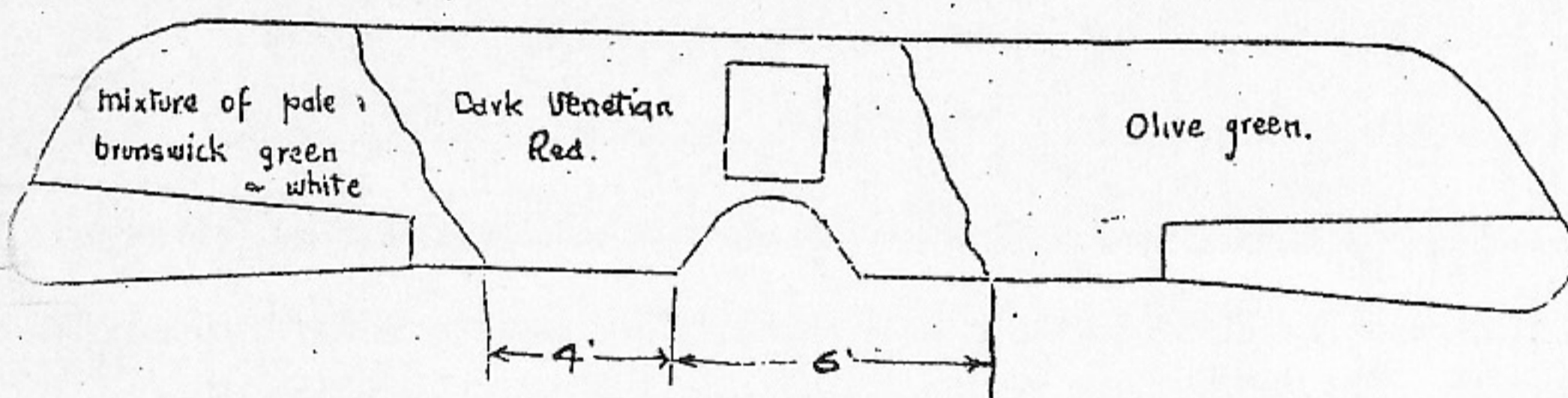


ENEMY MACHINE: G. 4-2. ALBATROS SCOUT.

Fig. D



Colours blended at junctions.



Under sides of all planes painted pale sky blue.

courtesy of Dan-San Abbott. It is quite detailed and, most surprisingly, contains sketches that provide some information which partially contradicts the textual description - see Fig. D; it is obvious the sketches were done by an artist with more of an eye for subtleties of colour than the author of the text. The fuselage and tail were overpainted in *Jasta 11* red, with Simon's personal green fuselage band, but the wings retained their factory finish. The first page of the text states:

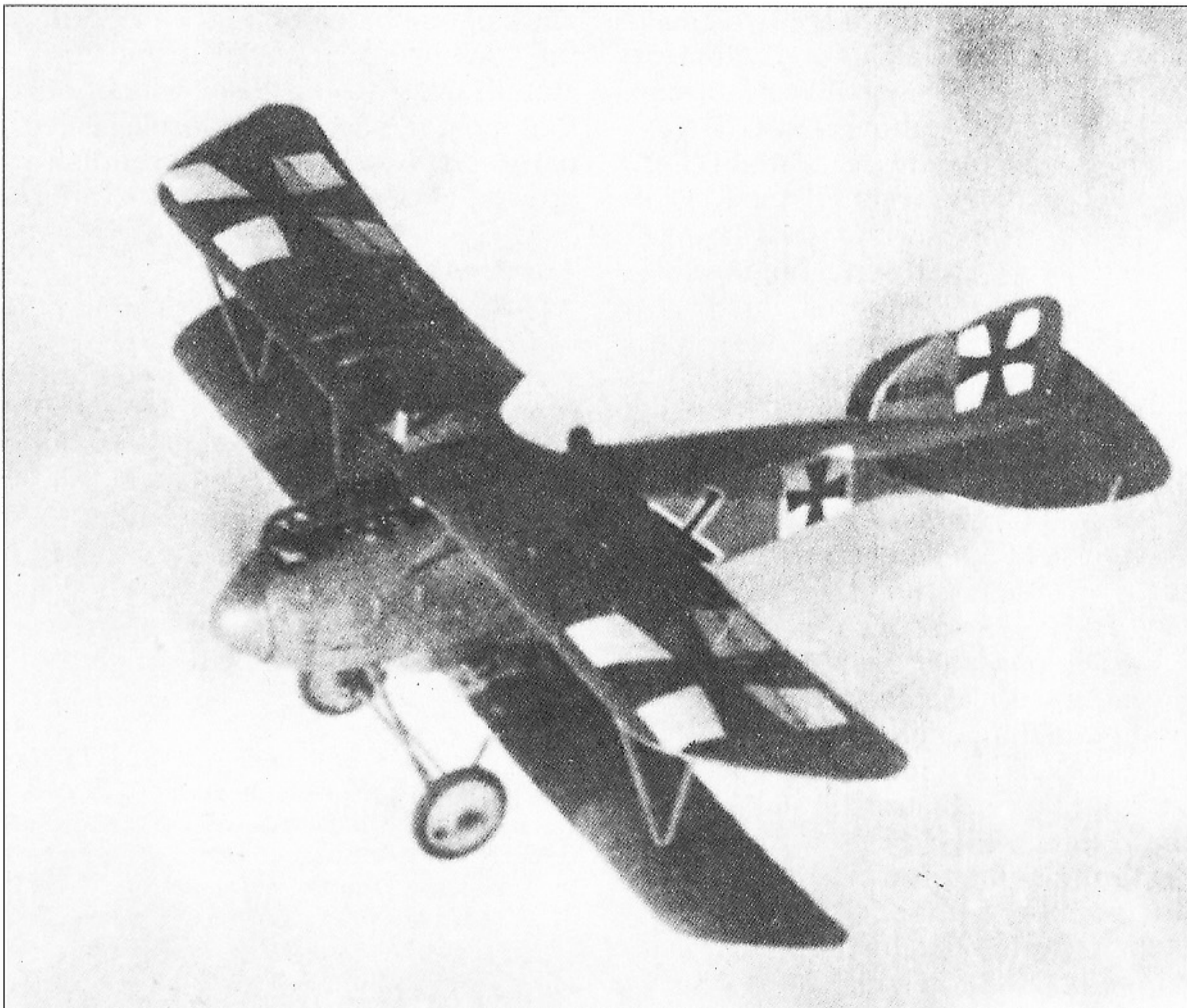
The planes are painted as follows:-
 Top plane: Upper surface - Red in the centre, Dark Green on the outside portions.
 Lower surface - Light Blue.
 Bottom planes: Upper surface - Inside portions next to the fuselage, Red. Outside portions, Dark Green.
 Lower surface - Light Blue.

If that was the only information contained in the report, then present-day colour researchers would logically assume that the wings were painted in 'red' (a reddish-brown) and 'Dark Green' only. However, colours are often in the eye of the beholder, and one person's casual description may well leave out important distinctions. The sketch on the second page of the report contains a more detailed and informative colour analysis. The top wing is drawn with these colours, left to right: 'mixture of pale Brunswick green & white, Dark Venetian Red, Olive Green.' This makes it clear that there were in fact three different colours employed on the upper surfaces, which is borne out by some photos of this and other D.III aircraft. The sketch also notes that, 'Undersides of all planes painted sky blue.'

What is perplexing, however, is that the accompanying sketch of the lower starboard wing top surface has two colour sections labelled (right to left) 'chocolate colour or common crimson oxide, and medium bronze green.' Clearly the artist went to some pains to attempt to describe the colours accurately, though sadly there is no sketch of the port lower wing. Does this mean that there were five different colours used in Albatros camouflage? Though not impossible, it seems unlikely. The difference between 'Dark Venetian Red' cited on the top wing (perhaps *Methuen 8D-E8*) and 'chocolate (*Methuen 6F4*) or crimson oxide (*Methuen 8E8*)' for the lower wing, are almost negligible. The same might be said for the 'Olive Green' (*Methuen 2F6*) on the top wing and 'medium bronze green' (*Methuen 30F3*) on the lower. Furthermore, a report on an OAW-built Albatros C.III captured in Bulgaria (see below) also mentions three distinct colours: a light and dark green and burnt

136). A few photographs exist showing the Albatros D.III with the old fashioned iron cross insignia for it was superseded by the time the deliveries of the fighter were underway. This may be one of the earliest Albatros D.III's built, if not the prototype.

▼ 136

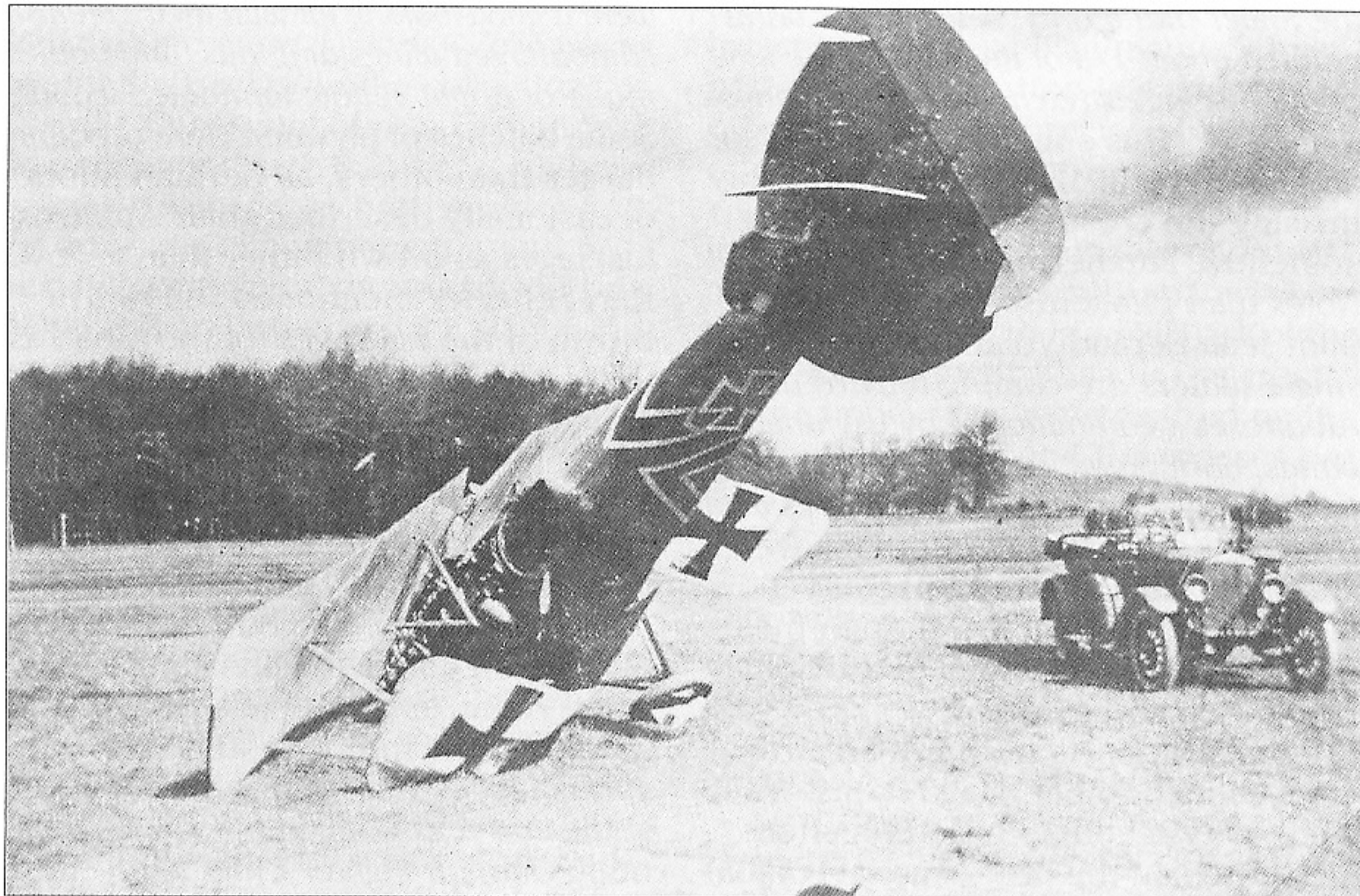


sienna. Perhaps we might speculate that the differences in the descriptions of the upper and lower wing colours were due to the upper wing camouflage being a bit more faded than that on the lower wing? It should be noted that all *Methuen* colour designations quoted here are approximations at best. Even more approximate is an estimate of the light green shade used ('mixture of pale Brunswick green & white'), but it was possibly in the area of *Methuen 26 C6*, or perhaps even lighter. Photos show that these colours were applied in large asymmetric sloping 'bands', they were sprayed on but had fairly 'hard' edges.

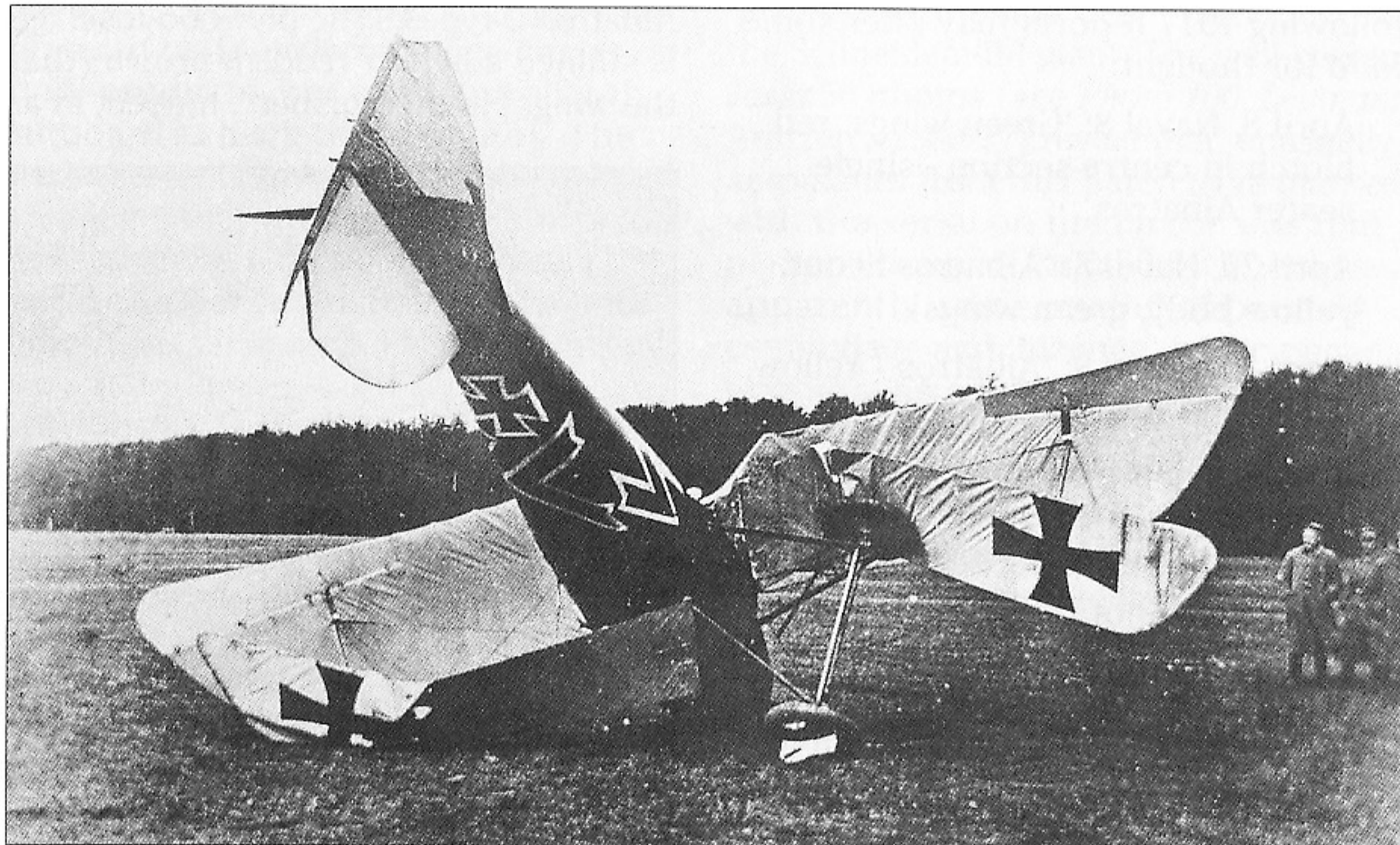
While the report on *G42* is by far the most detailed and conclusive available for a Johannisthal-built D.III, the few others available should not be ignored. In *l'Aerophile* 1-15 June 1917, Lagorgette described the D.III, referencing the following captured aircraft: '1982, 1990, 2107, and 2111/16, ...most taken toward the end of February 1917'. Lagorgette stated, 'The ply veneer of the fuselage is varnished or painted [ripoliné] a light yellow, while the wings and tailplanes [gouvernes] remain green and deep chestnut (Marron foncés)'. Although Lagorgette mentions only two colours in the uppersurface camouflage, this writer believes this to be an understandable simplification on his part, and the most common camouflage scheme on Johannisthal-built D.III machines consisted of a dark reddish-brown, and a dark and a light green.

However, there are a few bits of primary data which imply that other colours might have been used as well. The most frequently cited is a detailed description of the well-known D.III 2096/16 of *Jasta 24* (named 'Vera' on the fuselage) provided by Brigadier General William Mitchell in his book *Memoirs of World War I*, originally serialized in *Liberty* magazine in 1926. Mitchell had a first-hand look at 'Vera' which had been flown by *Ltn. Wichard*, and was downed on April 21 1917. Mitchell cited both the serial number 2096/16 and works number 1440 from the metal data plates on the fuselage, and gave an in-depth description of the aircraft's motor, armament, cockpit and control mechanisms. He wrote, 'The wings were blotched green and yellow, to render it inconspicuous, and on the side in large letters was painted the word Vera.'

The writer believes this green and yellow description should not simply be dismissed as an erroneous transcription, or a one-off in-the-field modified paint job. The PRO file AIR 1/2343 contains this translated description from a French report on an enemy aircraft encountered on 'the Monastir Front' in the Balkans, February 7 1918: 'The machine possessed 2 'V' struts as in the Nieuport, and a very slender fuselage of a light yellow colour... The underneath of the wings were coloured light blue, the top camouflaged in green and yellow and a black cross underneath



▲ 137 ▼ 138



137 and 138). For the insignia collectors. The chevron display is exposed by the crashed Albatros D.III of *Jasta 37*.

139). This aircraft is identified as OAW-built Albatros D.III by virtue of the weight table which reads: *Leergewicht 660 kg.*

Zulässige Belastung bei vollem Tank 135 kg. (weight empty 660 kg, permissible load with full tank 135 kg.) The bowl covering the discharge chute was not OAW issue. The fighter was flown by *Leutnant Alfred Träger* of *Jasta 17*. Markings are black and white.

▼ 139



the lower plane only. A large red band painted about 1/3 of the way up the side of the fuselage stretched from the wings to the tail.' This sounds very much like an Albatros D.III, the observer probably missing the crosses on the top wing somehow. Furthermore, in his book *Notes d'un pilote disparu*, the French pilot Jean Beraud Villars wrote: '...four single-seaters are coming toward us - Albatroses...camouflaged by asymmetric bands, dark green, yellow and brown, they have the appearance of vultures with irregular spotted wings.' Perhaps we should not discount the use of yellow in Albatros camouflage, though these might be interpretations of the light Brunswick green colour.

Combat reports from British airmen often contain colour descriptions. While such brief accounts based on short encounters in the heat of aerial combat are less than perfectly reliable, the following 1917 reports may offer some food for thought:

April 8, Naval 8: 'Green wings, red blotch in centre-section - single seater Albatros'.

April 29, Naval 8: 'Albatros Scout, yellow body, green wings'.

April 30, Naval 8: 'Albatros - Yellow, Green and Brown Wings'.

May 5, 56 Sqn: 'Albatros Scouts - Red fuselages with red and green top planes and blue undersides.'

It perhaps cannot be overstated that such combat reports are hardly conclusive, but it is evident that reddish-brown and green shades predominated in Albatros factory camouflage.

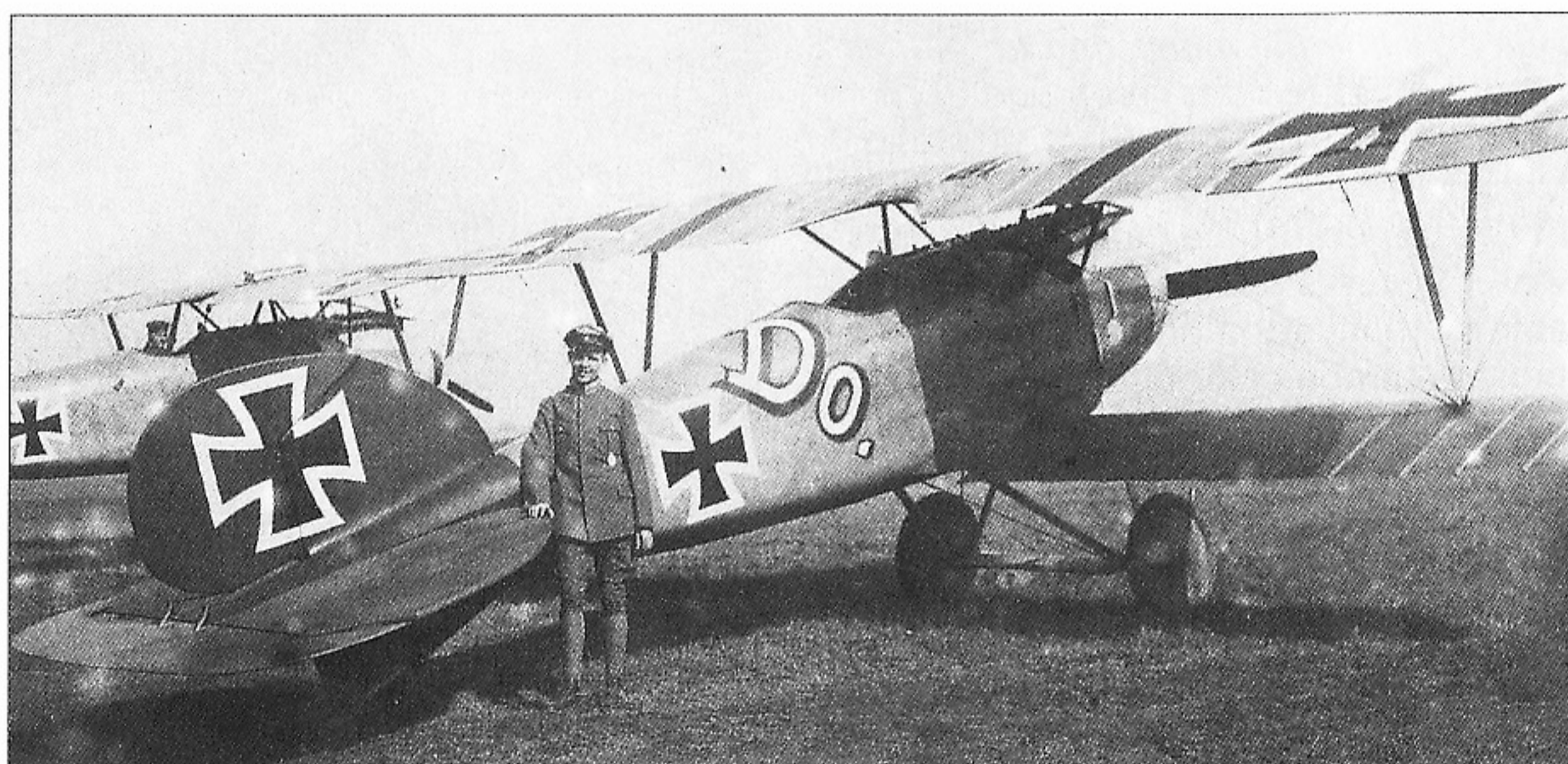
As noted in the *l'Aerophile* article on the D.III cited above, the birch plywood covering of the D.III fuselage was generally given a clear varnish which resulted in a warm yellow or yellow-brown appearance. Again, numerous Allied combat report descriptions would seem to confirm this; Rhys Davids of No.56 Squadron, writing of a combat of May 29 1917, even stated: 'I was pursuing that wretched little 'banana man' (as we call them, because of the yellow body and green wings, which look something like an unripe banana with the peel rolled back and stretched out)...' Though no doubt describing D.Va types, Charles Biddle of the 13th Aero Squadron wrote on August 6 1918: 'These...were Albatross single seater chasse planes and certainly

were a good-looking lot with their greenish camouflaged wings and tails, and bodies made of bright yellow laminated wood'. Some batches of plywood were probably darker than others, as German pilots occasionally described their Albatros fuselages as brown rather than yellow. Karl Schaefer mentioned the 'warm brown of the fuselages' of the Albatros two-seaters of KG 2. Lt. Boehme described his D.V of October 1917 as having a 'natural brown fuselage' (*naturbraunen Rumpf*), while other *Jasta* Boelcke pilots mention simply either 'dark' or 'yellow' fuselages.

There has been a good deal of discussion about the possibility that some Albatros D.III fuselages were stained reddish-brown and then varnished, as was reportedly done with some D.Is and D.IIs. In his marvellous book *German Fighter Units 1914 - May 1917*, Alex Imrie states that on early Albatros D-types: 'The plywood fuselage is stained a lighter reddish-brown [than the wings] and varnished'. Indeed, in an

Idflieg document issued on 20 September 1918 as part of a discussion of painting the plywood fuselages of aircraft (to match the printed fabric then in use) it was suggested that the ply fuselage be darkened by mixing the lacquer with *lasur*: 'Experiments by the Albatros firm have proved that colouring the fuselage (plywood parts) is possible without an appreciable increase in the A. U. weight (50 grams)... Struts and undercarriage should also be painted in an appropriate camouflage colour'. However, the dates of this experiment in staining the fuselage are not given. It is my opinion that very few, if any, D.III fuselages were stained reddish-brown.

In any case, experience showed that reddish-brown camouflage actually made the aircraft *more* visible at a distance, and was thus discontinued. On April 12 1917, *Idflieg* issued this order: 'Red, or Red/Brown paint on the top surfaces of wings has led to misunderstandings, being taken for enemy colours, and led to fights between our own aircraft. Therefore Dark



▲ 140



▲ 141 ▼ 142



Green and Lilac should be used only. Since the final batch of Johannisthal-built D.IIIs (750-799/17) was ordered in March 1917, it is difficult to say if any D.IIIs from the parent firm left the factory in dark green and lilac (mauve) camouflage. It is possible some front line units attempted to meet the *Idflieg* requirement on their existing aircraft by overpainting the reddish-brown areas. Perhaps this explains the perplexing report on the captured D.796/17 of Georg Noth of *Jasta Boelcke* (G.39, captured on May 19 1917), which states that the wings were painted green and *light blue* on upper surfaces, and light blue on under-surfaces!

It is frequently stated that the metal cowling panels, louvres, and struts were painted a light grey. This is certainly plausible, even likely, but this writer has never seen any mention of these components in primary sources. The Canberra Albatros D.Va is said to originally had its cowling panels, undercarriage and struts in 'Khaki brown', save for the outer vee struts in light grey, with grey wheel covers. A staff member at the NASM told the author that the few surviving metal components of the 'Stropp' D.Va were also a brownish shade prior to restoration (ironically, both these

extant D.Va machines were 'restored' with dark green metal panels). Relic pieces of an Albatros D.V in the collections of Charles Gosse and Marco Fernandez-Sommerau indicate that a greyish beige primer was used on both interior and exterior metal components, and a surviving cabane strut remains in this beige colour. Undercarriage struts and some interior metal pieces were then apparently painted a brownish, muddy green (or grey-green). Thus there are several neutral colour possibilities for metal components.

The rudders were often covered in clear-doped fabric or occasionally painted in one of the uppersurface camouflage shades; most rudders bore the familiar Albatros transfer in the outer 'corner'. Iron cross insignia on all uppersurfaces were given the regulation 50cm white border, though at least one early D.III had the old square cross fields in place. The crosses on the upper wing were not centered on the aileron hinge line as on OAW products, but were just slightly outboard - check those photos! The crosses on the underside of the bottom wing generally were painted directly on the light blue with no white outline. Serial numbers were painted on both sides of the fin in ornate black characters.

OAW-built D.IIIs

Much of the detail finish of the D.III (OAW) was very similar to that of Johannisthal machines. A British report on an OAW-built Albatros C.III C.2363/17 found in Bulgaria at the war's end reveals its colours: *'...large patches of burnt sienna and light and dark green blending into one another. Undersurfaces very pale blue...'* Though this machine was produced well before the first OAW D.III order (1650-1849/17, ordered April 1917), it is presumed the camouflage on D.IIIs from the first batch was similar. Photos of the initial OAW-D.IIIs show at least two painted camouflage colours, probably

dark green and burnt sienna (reddish-brown) or perhaps lilac/mauve. The pattern of application is easier to discover than the precise shades, and reference to the photographs in this volume will reveal the 'wavy' demarcation lines of the colours, roughly chordwise on the wings and usually spanwise on the tailplanes, which is a hallmark of the first OAW production batch. The crosses on the upper wing were centred on the aileron hinge line, and the crosses on the fuselage were further forward than those on Johannisthal products. The crosses on the lower wing underside generally did have a white outline (another OAW trait) and were situated as far outboard as possible. Serial numbers were noticeably absent from outer wheel covers and struts.

By the time of the production of the second D.III(OAW) batch (D.2362-2561/17, ordered May 1917) five-colour printed 'lozenge' fabric had been introduced at the Schneidemühl plant. The well-known *Jasta 50* photos (see *Photo 100*, *Leutnant Arntzen's 2380/17*) reveal that, unusually, aeroplanes from this batch *were* marked with the serial on the fin (or was that perhaps done at *Jasta 50*?). There was apparently some mixing of painted camouflage and 'lozenge' fabric components, as existing stock of painted wings were used up. However, most OAW-built D.IIIs from the middle of this second batch on, display five-colour fabric on wings, tailplane and rudder.

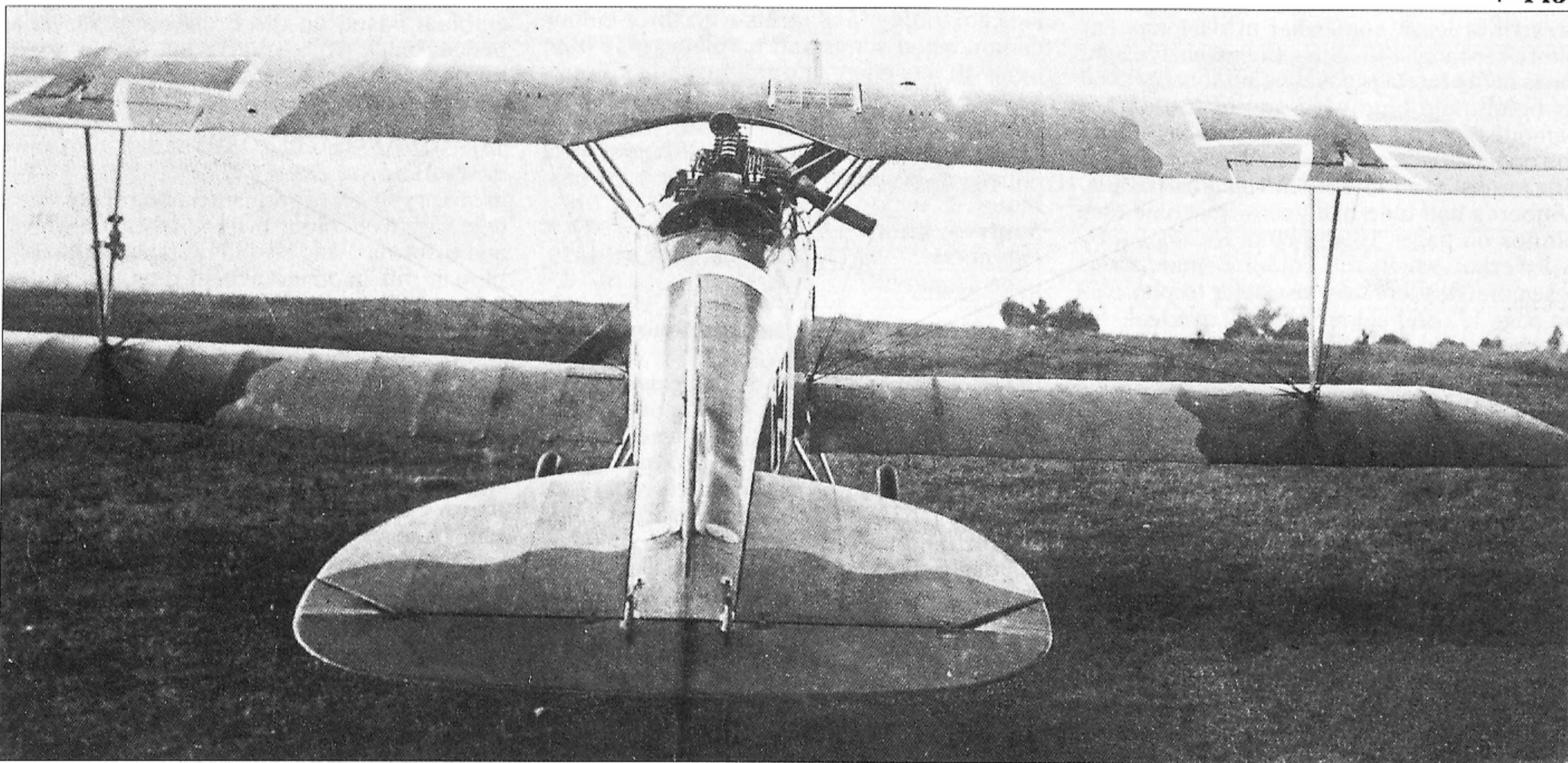
This author would like to thank Dan-San Abbott, Dave Roberts, Stefen Karver, P S Leaman, and above all Alex Imrie for the information they have provided in the literature over the years. I also have little doubt that none of them will agree entirely with the tentative conclusions presented here, and I take full responsibility for the opinions presented. Informed comment and criticism is (as always) welcome. (GVW)

140). Not to be outdone by anyone, *Leutnant Günther Dobberke* of *Jasta 45* has decorated his Albatros D.III(OAW) in splendid fashion.

141). In spite of being crudely applied, this garish scheme applied on this Albatros D.III (OAW) makes its mark.

142). A well-publicised photograph and rightfully so! This gaggle of OAW-built Albatros D.III fighters was based on the Italian Front probably with *Jasta 39* in the summer of 1917.

143). Most photographs fail to catch the nuance of camouflage application. Here Albatros D.III(OAW) demonstrates one scheme applied by OAW.



▼ 143

KEY TO COLOUR PLATES:

Inside front cover:

1). ALBATROS D.III, serial and pilot unknown, *Jasta 6*, 1917.

Fuselage, fin and rudder overpainted in slate blue-grey which is a *provisional* colour although there are extant combat reports which suggest grey *Albatrosse* in *Jasta 6*. White rear fuselage and three lateral stripes as shown; wing upper surfaces probably camouflaged in factory-applied three-colour pattern with pale blue beneath. Both surfaces of tailplane and lower wing undersurfaces striped in the unit's black and white markings.

Source: photo 57 on page 18/*Von Richthofen's Flying Circus* by G VanWyngarden, pages 16 and 25 (for lower wing *Jasta 6* markings).

2). ALBATROS D.III, serial and pilot unknown, *Jasta 37*, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage and three-colour camouflaged wings with pale blue beneath. Metal panels, wheel covers and struts shown as pale grey/beige, although other shades are possible. Black and white markings encircle the fuselage behind the cockpit. The application of *Jasta 37's* black and white tailplane markings are shown although it is not known for certain when, or if, this aircraft wore them.

Source: photo 76 on page 23.

3). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) serial, pilot and unit unknown, 1917.

This well-known D.III was photographed in factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage and camouflaged wings and tailplane - colours could be either green/brown or green/lilac. At least we can be reasonably certain these undersurfaces were pale blue! Wheel covers appear to be darker than the paler-looking metal panels and have been shown as dark green. The starboard wheel cover also bears a 'roundel' bullet hole patch and a partial number 4?671...

Sources: photos 96 and 97 on page 39.

Page 27:

4). ALBATROS D.III 1922/16, pilot unknown, *Jasta 24*, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage and three-colour camouflaged wings with pale blue beneath. Fuselage motif was probably black and white as shown here.

Source: photo 1 on page 1.

5). ALBATROS D.III 1996/16, *Ltn. Rudolf Hohberg, Fl.Abt.(A)263*, 1917.

The colours of 1996/16 must remain, for the present at least, somewhat provisional. For photo-reconnaissance use the extensive light areas of the fuselage could be reasonably cited as being pale blue with one of the darker camouflage colours, green or red/brown, as the upper surface colour/s. GVW also proposes this former *Jasta 11* aircraft could be *Ltn. Edy Lübbert's* half blue/half yellow machine (see photos on pages 16 and 20 of *Richthofen* by A E Ferko) which the colour demarcations resemble. Readers may also refer to photo 63 on page 19 - and colour plate 10 overleaf - for another of *Ltn. Hohberg's* D.III's before making any conclusions. Wing and tail upper surfaces of 1996/16 were most likely in three-colour camouflage, pale blue beneath.

Source: photo 4 on page 2.

6). ALBATROS D.III, 23??/16, pilot and unit unknown, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage and three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane; pale blue beneath (?) The fuselage and fin have had their reflective surfaces subdued by overpainting in a dark mottle finish - possibly a shade of green, or green and brown intermixed. It may be worth noting that mottling on later naval *Albatrosse* was green

and mauve/purple. Fuselage marking is a black Mercedes star over a white disc.

Source: photo 35 on page 10.

Page 28:

7). ALBATROS D.III, serial and pilot unknown, *Jasta 36*, 1917.

An example of a chequerboard-marked D.III, the colours of which were likely to have been black and yellow but this is not known for certain. These striking markings eventually extended beyond the fuselage to cover the three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane. The rudder was left in its original clear-doped fabric, the distinctive Albatros logo remaining intact.

Source: photo 36 on page 10.

8). ALBATROS D.III, 760/17, *Vzfw. Hans Oberländer, Jasta 30*, 1917.

In factory finish of three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane; pale blue beneath with the usual pale colour on spinner, cowling and struts. The varnished natural ply fuselage pale flanks are marked with a black chevron and the pilot's initial - also black (presumably).

Source: photo 44 on page 14.

9). ALBATROS D.III, 767/17, *Ltn. Oskar Sietz, Jasta 30*, 1917.

Another *Jasta 30* D.III, 767/17 was finished in the same manner as 760/17 (above), aside from the pilot's black (?) fuselage initial and both fin and rudder decked out in traditional Bavarian fashion.

Source: photo 45 on page 14.

Page 29:

10). ALBATROS D.III, serial unknown, *Ltn. Rudolf Hohberg, Fl.Abt.(A)263*, 1917.

Here's yet another of *Ltn. Hohberg's* observation aircraft or possibly an overpainted one (see photos 4 and 62 on pages 2 and 19 respectively...) Uppersurfaces, wings and tailplane were probably camouflaged in a three-colour pattern with the pale blue beneath wings and tail extended to the fuselage as shown. Prussian observer's badge on fuselage flanks - a logical choice of decor for an observation machine...

Source: photo 63 on page 19.

11). ALBATROS D.III, serial unknown, *Ltn. Joachim von Bertrab, Jasta 30*, 1917.

This black-painted D.III of von Bertrab still engenders heated debate amongst enthusiasts but Bob's profile shows the most likely version of its controversial colours. Black fuselage, fin, rudder and struts with three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane; pale blue beneath. Fuselage and tail insignia colours have been reversed and the comet motif either red or orange (a *Jasta 30* colour) with white or very light yellow highlights. Wheel covers appear to be a pale beige/grey or very pale blue.

Sources: photo 64 on page 20/*WINDSOCK International* Vol.15, No.2, March/April 1999, page 32 and IBC.

12). ALBATROS D.III, serial unknown, *Ltn. Josef Rohe, MJF.I*, 1917.

In factory finish of three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane; pale blue beneath. The original varnished natural ply fuselage has been subdued with a green and brown mottling, while its undersurfaces have received a coat of pale blue paint. The typical marine unit's yellow colour is applied to nose cowlings, spinner and wheel covers; the fuselage band in white with red (or black) border and engraving. 'Hede' is rendered in black.

Sources: photos 72 and 73 on page 22.

Page 30:

13). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) 5127/17,

Offstv. Hermann Habich, Jasta 49, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage with five-colour printed fabric on wings, rudder and tailplane. Wing edging and rib tapes most likely were blue. Black chequerboard pattern applied to forward fuselage as shown.

Source: photo 135 on page 49.

14). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) serial unknown, *Obltn. Josef Loeser (?) Jasta 39*, 1917.

This spectacular D.III has had its entire upper surfaces repainted in either black and white (or red and white) candy striping. Possibly the wing and tail surfaces retained their original underside finish of pale blue or five-colour printed fabric - we cannot be certain.

Source: photo 142 on page 52.

15). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) serial and pilot unknown, *MFJ III*, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage with three-colour camouflaged wings with pale blue beneath, the fuselage markings are likely to have been black and yellow; wheel covers also in yellow. To reduce the brightness of the varnished wood areas a green and brown mottle has been applied as shown.

Source: photo 115 on page 43.

Inside back cover:

16). ALBATROS D.III, serial unknown, *Vzfw. Burggaller, Jasta 10*, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage with three-colour camouflaged wings and tailplane; pale blue beneath. The aircraft bears typical *Jasta 10* decor of chrome yellow nose cowls and spinner together with a black individual number - 7 in this instance. A personal marking in the form of a white bar has been applied to the fuselage, and wheel covers appear to be segmented in white and yellow - the latter colour also seems to extend to wing struts and undercarriage legs. The headrest (a field modification) was rarely seen on examples of the Albatros D.III.

Sources: photo 80 on page 34/*Von Richthofen's Flying Circus* by G VanWyngarden, page 29.

17). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) 2380/17, *Ltn. Heinrich Arntzen, Jasta 50*, 1917.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage with five-colour printed fabric on wings, rudder and tailplane - latter overpainted in the black/white chevron markings of *Jasta 50*. Arntzen was a former observer and as such he usually marked his fighter aircraft using an emblem based on the Prussian observer's badge; black white quartering within a red border.

Source: photo 100 on page 40.

18). ALBATROS D.III, (OAW) serial, pilot and unit unknown, *circa 1917*.

In factory finish of varnished natural ply fuselage with five-colour printed fabric on wings and tailplane. Wing LE and rib taping probably blue in this instance. Wheel rims are tightly bound with fabric strips.

Source: photo 128 on page 47.

Outside back cover:

ALBATROS D.III, serial and pilot unknown, *MFJ?*, 1917.

This unidentified *Marine Feld Jasta* Albatros has its wing and tailplane upper surfaces in factory three-colour camouflage with pale blue beneath. The ply fuselage has been overpainted in black and white stripes to provide a spectacular colour scheme.

(Painting by Robert Karr)

(Colour notes by Ray Rimell based on research by Greg VanWyngarden, Bob Pearson and RLR. All artwork © copyright 2003, Albatros Productions, Ltd.) □

APPENDICES



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Table 3 - Albatros D.III weight allowances

Type	weight empty	allowable load with full fuel tank
Albatros D.III	675 kg	135 kg
Albatros D.III(OAW)	660 kg	135 kg
Albatros D.III(OAW)	735 kg	235 kg

144). Another one for the modellers. *Flieger Abteilung 298b* photographed the demise of Albatros D.III(OAW) with '8' on the fuselage on the Les Baraques airfield.

Outside back cover:

Prepared to go aloft, this splendid Albatros D.III(OAW) awaits the signal.

Table 4 - Frontline inventory of Albatros fighters

	1916			1917						1918			
	31 Aug	31 Oct	31 Dec	28 Feb	30 Apr	30 Jun	31 Aug	31 Oct	31 Dec	28 Feb	30 Apr	30 Jun	31 Aug
Type													
Albatros D.I	1	50	39	28	20	17	12	9	8	5	6	1	3
Albatros D.II	1	28	214	212	154	90	44	11	6	2	2	2	2
Albatros D.III			13	137	327	303	385	446	423	357	17	82	52
Albatros D.V					216	424	526	513		250	131	91	20
Albatros D.Va							53	186		475	928	604	307
Totals	2	78	266	377	501	626	865	1045	1136	1089	1241	780	384

SPECIFICATIONS

<i>Engine:</i>	160-hp Mercedes D.III
<i>Wing:</i>	Span Upper 9,00 m
	Span Lower 8,81 m
	Chord Upper 1,50 m
	Chord Lower 1,10 m
	Dihedral Upper none
	Sweepback none
	Gap 1,47 m
	Area 20,54 sqm
	<i>General:</i>
	Empty Weight 673 kg
	Loaded Weight 908 kg
<i>Maximum Speed:</i>	kmh
<i>Climb:</i>	1000m 2,5 min
	2000m 6,0 min
	3000m 11,0 min
	4000m 17,0 min
	5000m 24,5 min

Table 5 - Albatros D.III production orders

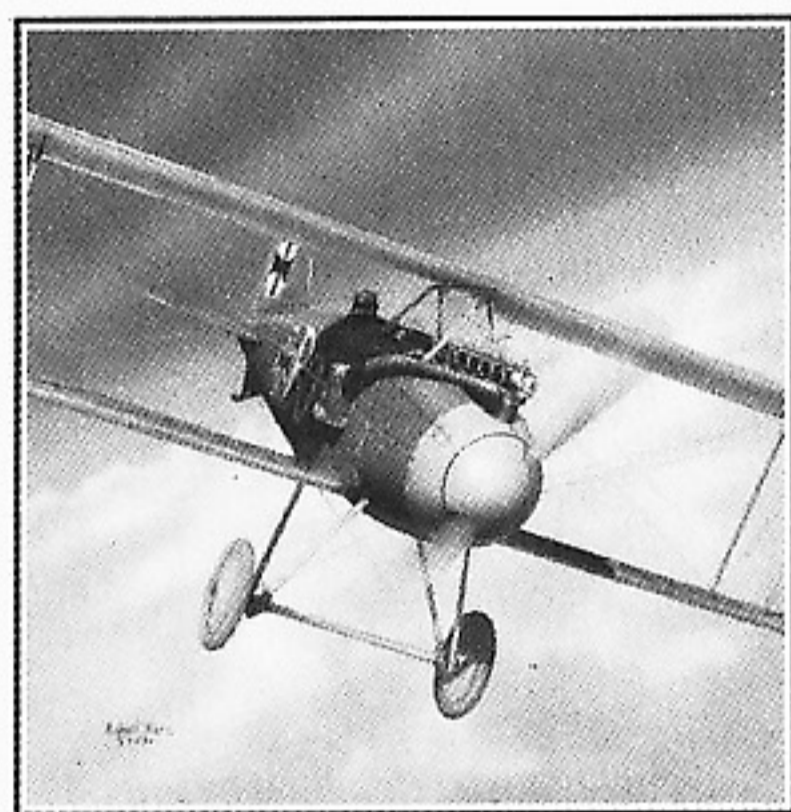
Type	Order Date	Qty	Albatros
D.III	June 1916	3	prototypes 387-389/16
D.III	October 1916	400	1910-2309/16
D.III	Nov. 1916	5	basket-weave fuselage
D.III	February 1917	50	600-649/17
D.III	March 1917	50	750-799/17
D.III(OAW)	April 1917	200	1650-1849/17
D.III(OAW)	May 1917	238	2362-2599/17
D.III(OAW)	June 1917	200	3056-3255/17
D.III(OAW)	August 1917	200	5022-5221/17
Total	Albatros	508	
	OAW	838	
Grand Total		1346	

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ALBATROS D.I/D.II

By P M Grosz



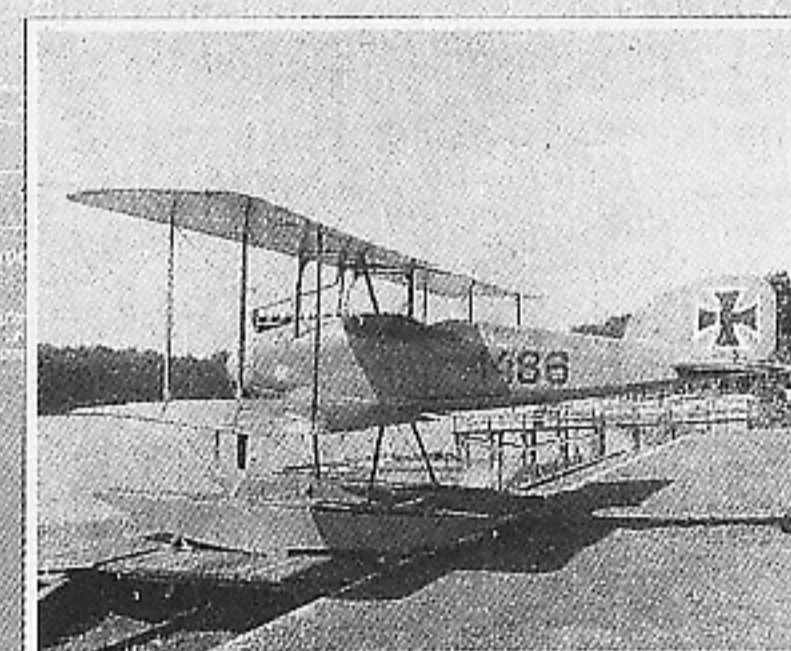
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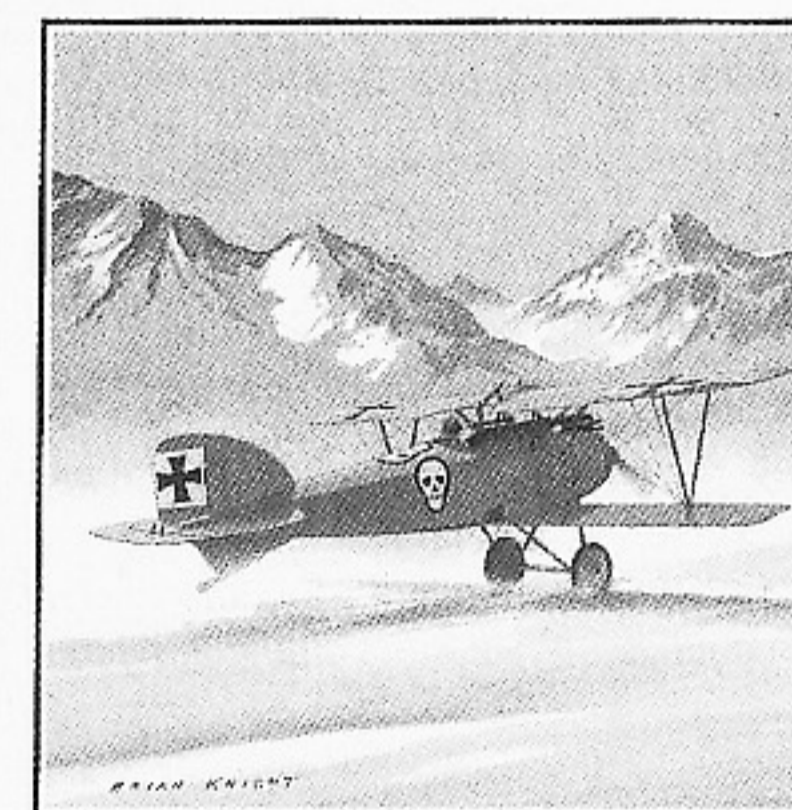
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ALBATROS D.III(OEF)

By P M Grosz



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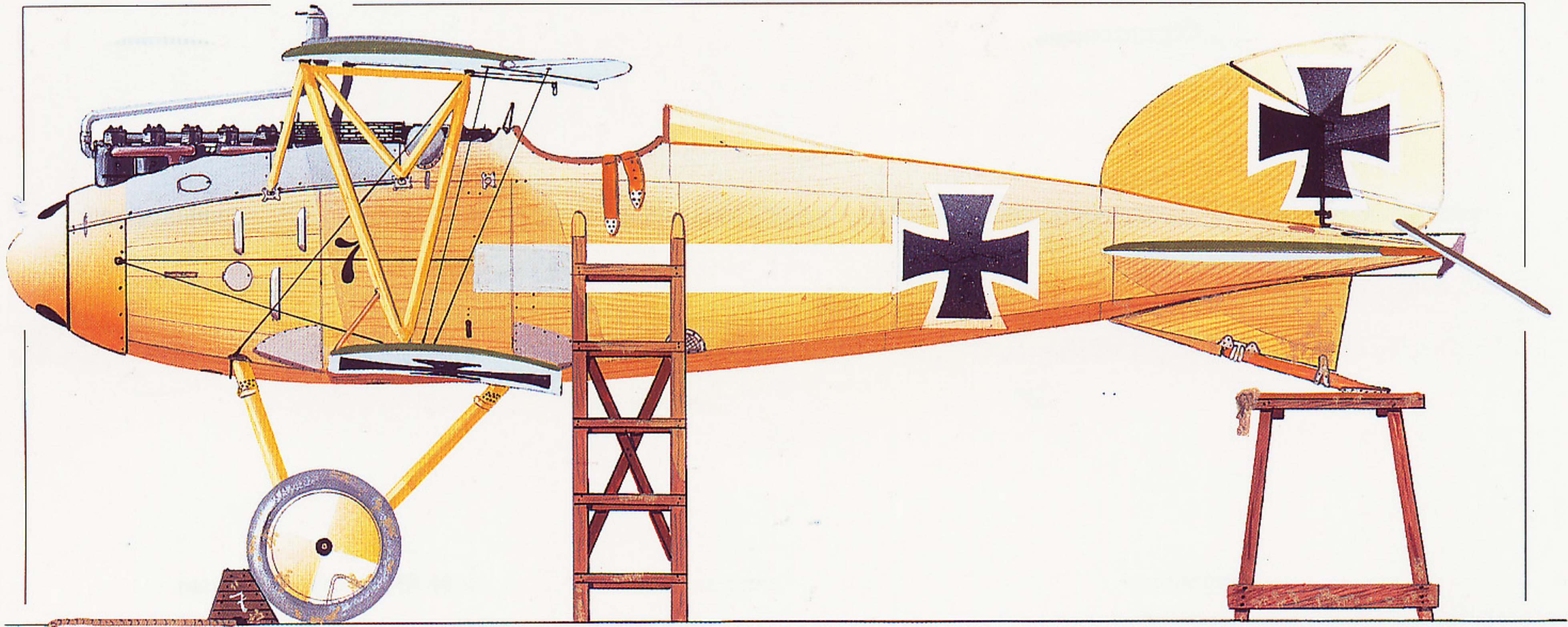
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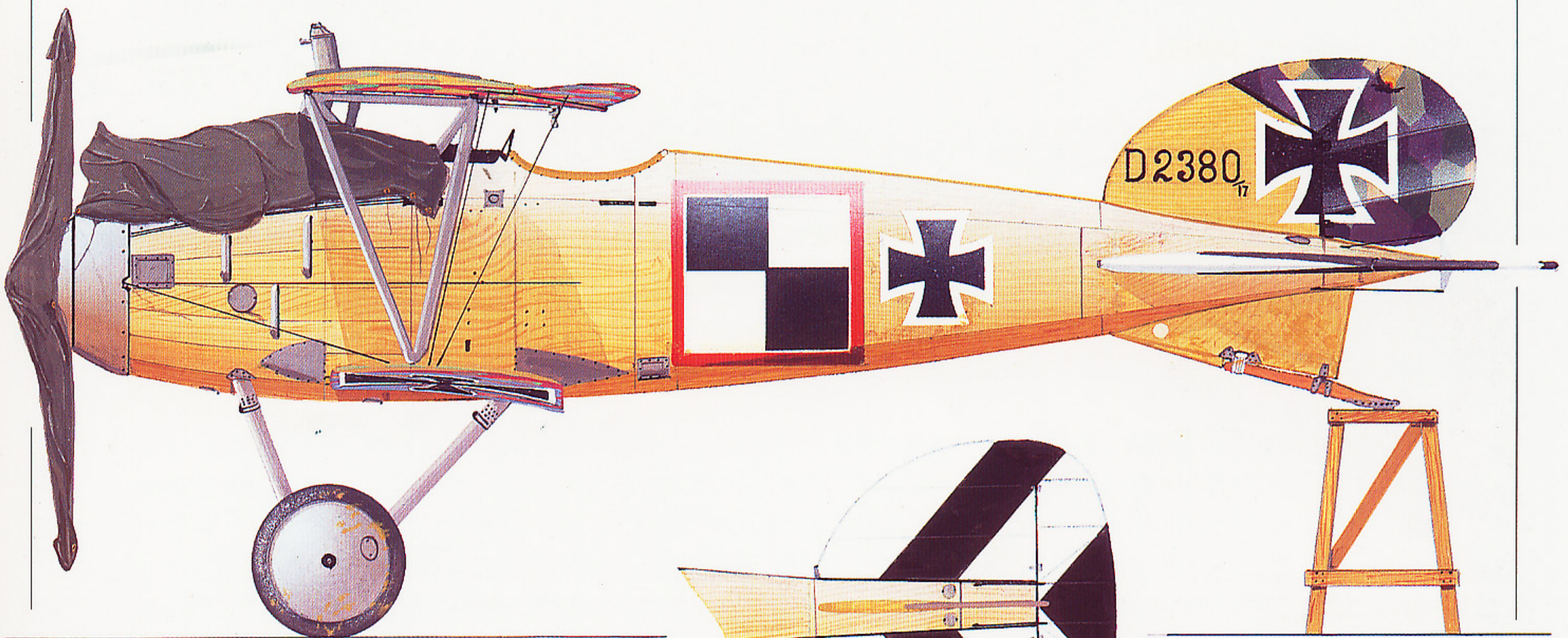
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31.08.03



16). ALBATROS D.III.



17). ALBATROS D.III (OAW), D2380/17.

Tail detail ▲



18). ALBATROS D.III (OAW).

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ALBATROS D.III



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