

## **THE END OF THE RED BARON**

A One-Act Play for Radio

By

Geraldine Colson

### **SYNOPSIS AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

A one-act play depicting the first burial of the famous First World War German fighter pilot and hero, Baron Von Richtofen, known universally as the “Red Baron”. The Red Baron caused the deaths of well over a hundred allied pilots, the highest number of recorded deaths by one pilot in WW1.

When he was finally shot down over allied territory in France in 1918, the Australian Air Force recovered his body and arranged a military funeral. Some of the phrases used in this play are actual comments by journalists of the day. A film was made by an on-looker at the cemetery which shows the burial and the ceremony accorded to the Red Baron by the Australians (available on-line).

The people in the small village close to where his plane came down were recorded as being extremely angry about the honour given to the German pilot. They tried to desecrate the grave but did not succeed in removing the body. The Red Baron’s remains were later transferred to a military cemetery in Germany.

### **CAST:**

**Colonel**

**First Officer**

**Second Officer**

**Sergeant**

**Madame Dubois**

**Bayside U3A Writers Group 2018**

© Geraldine Colson

## THE END OF THE RED BARON

**SETTING:** Australian Army Camp, somewhere in France, World War 1.

**AUDIO:** Distant parade ground noises, indistinct. Door Opens, footsteps enter.

**Colonel:** Well, my boy, we gave him a great send-off, no doubt about that.

**1 Officer:** The slow march and gun salute went off very well I thought. The men of the Australian Flying Corps No. 3 Squadron did him proud!

**Colonel:** Ah Yes, The Red Baron. I thought the idea of taking the coffin in our truck to the graveyard was a great touch.

**2 Officer:** And we officers slow marching in full ceremonial dress.

**1 Officer:** Ah, What a man!

**2 Officer:** Courageous to the end.

**Colonel:** Managed to land his plane. Came down beautifully. Parallel to the road.

**1 Officer:** No wonder they called him the Red Baron, he was an aristocrat, no doubt about it.

**2 Officer:** There was a lump in my throat. Such a tragedy.

**Colonel:** Steady on, old chap. I was VERY happy with our wreath . It's hard to get anything done by these Frenchies, but we managed. I signed it personally "To Our Gallant and Worthy Foe". Yes, quite fitting I thought.

**1 Officer:** When a man has the presence of mind – after being mortally wounded - to take off his goggles and cut the engines! Well, sir, we pilots know what that takes.

**2 Officer:** The plane glided into the field. Extraordinary!

**1 Officer:** It was the Canadian, Brown, who got him.

**Colonel:** Ah, but our artillery men got a shot at him. I think they could claim the hit. We'll know more after the plane is examined more closely.

**2 Officer:** I don't like our chances of finding much, Sir. Most of it is already souvenired.

**Colonel:** Ah well, Brown is claiming the kill. Just how many of our allies did The Baron get in the end?

**1 Officer:** It was well over 100, maybe closer to 200. He had a go at Jones last week. Just luck that Jones shook him off.

**AUDIO: KNOCK AT DOOR:**

**Colonel:** Come

**AUDIO: SOUND OF DOOR OPENING, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS MARCHING AND TWO-STEP FOR SALUTE**

**Colonel:** At ease, Sergeant. What's the problem?

**Sergeant:** (Shouting, clipped speech) Sir, thought you should know, Colonel, Sir, there's been a ruckus in the cemetery. The Baron's grave has been tampered with.

**Colonel:** What! This is outrageous. What happened?

**Officer. 1** I thought there could be trouble.

**Sergeant:** Looks like they had a go at removing the body, Sir.

**Colonel:** Removing the body!?! How dare they!

**Officer: 2** Did they actually take it?

**Sergeant:** No sir, Must have been disturbed by our sentries. Made a mess of things though.

**Colonel:** Do we know who's responsible?

**Sergeant:** Brought her in, Sir. That Madame Duboyse, Sir. Got all the Frenchies riled up. Right cranky she is, an'all.

**Officer: 1** Hmm. Madame Dubois. Quite a woman. I have to say I told you so Sir. I mean, it's only natural. A great many French people have died too.

**Officer 2** They don't appreciate that Baron Von Richtofen is an officer and a Gentleman and we have our standards.

**Officer 1** They just see a Gerry who has to be eliminated.

**Colonel:** They'll just have to wear it. And pay for the damage. We are all brother officers, what? Bring her in, Sergeant.

**Sergeant:** Sir. Yes Sir!!

**AUDIO:** Two-step for salute. Marching footsteps followed by door closing. Voices, including woman's voice high-pitched, protesting, in distance

**Colonel:** (Speaking over noise outside door) These peasant types don't know what it is to have a real code of conduct.

**Officer: 1** Some of his exploits were utterly unbelievable. There was the time when he ....

**AUDIO:** KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

**Colonel:** Come!

**AUDIO:** DOOR OPENS AND LOUD FOOTSTEPS. LOUD TWO STEP FINISH.

**Madame Dubois:** Mon Dieu. Enlevez vos mains de moi vous euffian.  
Unhand me sir.

**Sergeant:** Sir!! Madame Duboyse, Sir.

**Colonel:** (Irritated) Yes, yes, man. At ease.

**Madame Dubois:** (Speaks in strong accent, broken English)  
I sank you, Sir. I must speak.

**Colonel:** Well, go ahead, madam. Spit it out.

**Madame Dubois:** (Angrily, voice rising) I speak Sir. Not spit. J'étudie l'Anglaise. I not spit.

**Officer 1** (Laughing) Yes, Yes. Please get on with it, Madam

**Madame Dubois:** Sir, the village, we are not happy. We are very, very angry. Nous sommes Furieuses.

**Colonel.** You'll have to speak English. We've been waging war. No time to learn the lingo.

**Officer: 2** (very good French accent) Pardon Madame, lontement. Just take it slowly.

**Madame Dubois: (Shouting, gesticulating)** No German, no kraut in our cemetery. We are proud people. We fight the Germans. Put le criminal in the field. This is good enough. He will do good. Le merde pour les vegetables!!

**Colonel:** I am sorry, Madame. This man has shot down many of our planes, and killed many good pilots. But he is a gentleman. He is not a common fighter, he has been exceptionally brave.

**Officer 1:** And he is a Christian, he must be buried in consecrated ground. We gave him a proper burial, a funeral for a hero.

**Madame Dubois:** Bah! You crazy English!

**Officer: 2** I say, Madame. Nouse sommes Australien.

**Madame Dubois:** This man not hero. He bombed our fields, destroyed our crops, killed our people.

**Colonel:** (Angrily) He would not have deliberately killed a civilian. I know his background, he is a Gentleman.

**Madame Dubois:** Phfffft. Now I spit, sir! We will not allow. Nous sommes ..... Argh (Speechless with anger, she mutters in French under her breath)

**Officer: 1** (Speaking over Madame as she mutters away)

Madame, there's no need to take that attitude. We have our standards you know, the Colonel here is just doing his duty.

**Colonel:** Yes, I'm sorry, Madame, but there is no more to be said. You can tell the villagers we will punish those responsible for this crime. See Madame Dubois out, Sergeant.

**Sergeant:** Sir!

**AUDIO:** Two-step salute. Footsteps marching

**Sergeant:** This way, Madam.

**Madame Dubois:** (Voice fading) We will get him out. (Continues muttering in rapid French). Nous sommes furieuses ... nous

**Colonel:** Damned impudence!

**Officer: 1** I'll put a guard on the cemetery, Sir.

**Colonel:** Very good, very good. By the way, did we arrange for a message to get through to the Bosch.

**Officer: 2** Yes, Sir, I flew over myself personally and dropped a message on to their airfield. Appropriately worded, of course.

**Colonel:** Well, we've discharged our obligations.

**Officer: 1** There's not much left of the Baron's plane though. The locals got to it pretty quickly. And our chaps had a field day too.

**Colonel:** Make sure some of those souvenirs make their way back to Canberra. After all, we have made our mark in history with our actions in this damnable war.

**Officer 1:** Australians will be remembered as civilised men of honour.

**Officer: 2** Yes, Sir. Your decision to bury Baron Von Richtofen with full military honours in the midst of this ongoing war has done wonders for our morale.

**Officer 1:** Pity the French don't see it this way too.

**AUDIO:** ('Rule Britannia' plays in the background).

**Colonel: (Raises voice)** We have to do our duty at all times, we have to show the world that Australia is part of the great British Empire which has civilised the world and treats every man with dignity - according to his status in life of course.

**Officer 1: (Raises voice higher)** We Australians recognised that the Red Baron is an aristocrat and a true gentleman.

**Colonel: (Louder still)** We showed our superiority in going above the normal crass feelings of the common man. We gave our worthy foe a burial fit for the hero he is!!

**Officer 2: (Excited)** Hurrah!!

**AUDIO: Music swells**

**THE END.**