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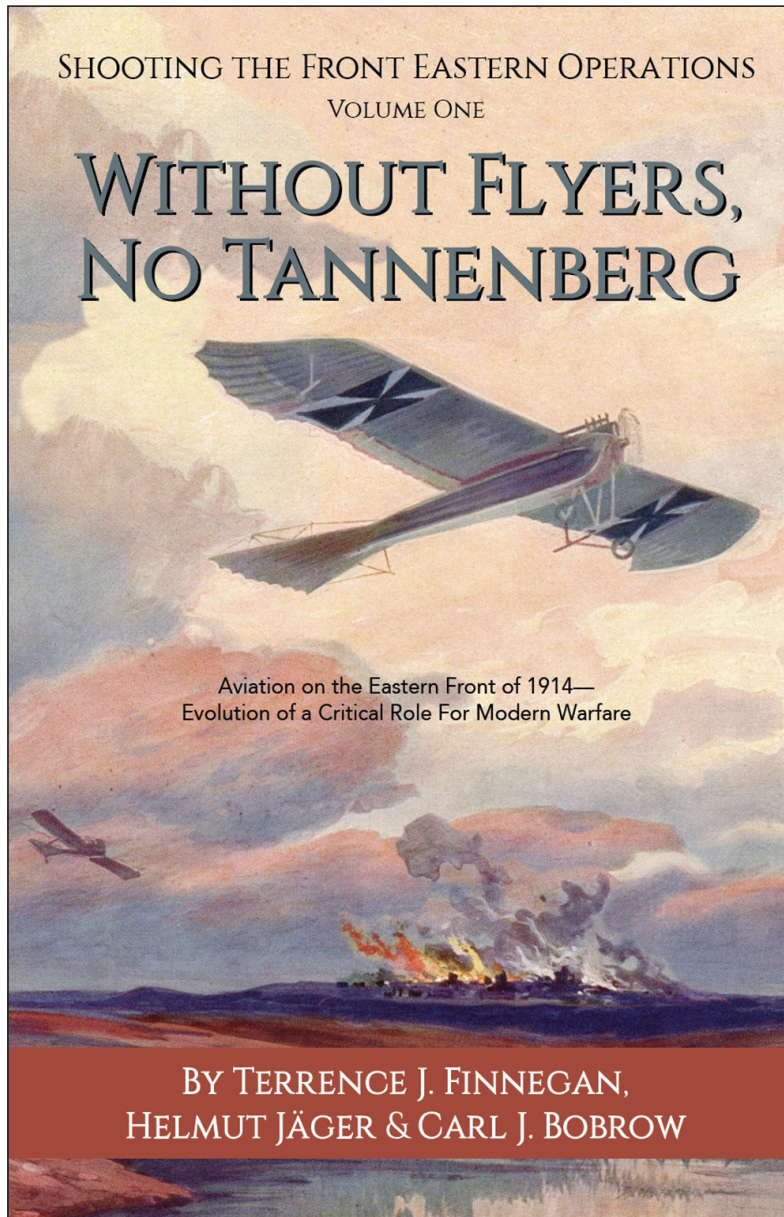
Book Review: Without Flyers, No Tannenberg: Aviation on the Eastern Front of 1914—Evolution of a Critical Role for Modern Warfare

Greg Pickell

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Reviewed by Greg Pickell, US Army lieutenant colonel (retired)

Military leaders are often reminded of the fundamental importance of historical context to current operations. Seldom is this problem more vividly demonstrated than in *Without Flyers, No Tannenberg*, the first volume in the *Shooting the Front* series by retired Air Force Colonel Terrence J. Finnegan, Helmut Jäger, and Carl J. Bobrow. *Without Flyers* offers a wealth of previously unavailable information and needed context to the German triumph over the Russian 2nd Army in the opening weeks of World War I. In doing so, it enables readers to understand the circumstances leading to the Russian catastrophe and provides important context to present-day events occurring in the same region of the world. The volume also dispenses with a few urban legends that color the Western understanding of these events.

Without Flyers offers several valuable features that aid in understanding what was a vast and complex military engagement. It begins by describing the early development of aviation in imperial

Germany, including its introduction by Orville Wright in 1909. Wright's visit to Germany was more than a novelty; his demonstration shifted German aviation perceptions from the belief that lighter-than-air ships were the best platforms for reconnaissance. The book's description of the evolution of German fixed-wing aviation prior to World War I is well worth the read all by itself.

While *Without Flyers* focuses on German aviation development and application, it also covers the Russian experience in detail. Chapter 2 highlights the early development of the Russian Military Air Fleet, which dates to 1885, noting that Russian aircraft numbered nearly 250 by the outbreak of hostilities. The authors' careful treatment of early Russian aviation development is illuminating, making the book a necessary component of any professional reading list of the period. The book effectively dispels the belief that Russian aviation was completely absent during the Tannenberg campaign. The logistics necessary to keep Russian aircraft flying were almost completely lacking, which partially explains the anemic performance of Russian aviation reconnaissance assets during the battle.

Where *Without Flyers* comes into its own is in the detailed, map/graphic intensive account of the events immediately before, during, and after the Battle of Tannenberg. Avoiding the lack of visual aids that often make understanding historical campaigns an exercise in frustration, *Without Flyers* includes a diverse offering of maps and graphics as it tells the story of the battle, allowing readers to keep up with the narrative. The graphics depicting the flight paths of the most important German reconnaissance sorties are especially critical in highlighting the role played by aerial reconnaissance throughout the events of August 1914. Best of all, the maps and graphics in *Without Flyers* can be downloaded at www.shootingthefront.com, allowing readers to enjoy hard copies of these fascinating artifacts.

Another treat for readers lies in the authors' treatment of the events immediately following the destruction of Russian General Samsonov's 2nd Army. Parts four and five of the book deal in depth with the lesser-known Battle of the Masurian Lakes and the subsequent campaign in the East, placing the German triumph in a necessary historical context.

Without Flyers, No Tannenberg provides crucial content to the art and science of aerial reconnaissance and a bookend for the types of activities currently consuming the nations of Eastern Europe and NATO. Much has changed in more than 100 years, but the criticality of reconnaissance from the air, coupled with the willingness to act on this information, remains virtually unchanged.

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