

*Jan Behrendt*

# Three Pilots – One War (3p1w/#3p1w/3p1w.eu)

**War Letters from Three Young Men Who Served  
in the First World War**

3p1w.eu is a blog, run by the Royal Air Force Museum London, the Musée de l’Air et de l’Espace Paris-Le Bourget and the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (MHM) – Flugplatz Berlin-Gatow. Its purpose is to publish a total of 183 letters, each of them exactly one hundred years after they were written. The blog presents every letter with its digital image, a transcript of its text and a comment designed to explain the letter’s content and its historical context. All contributions are translated into all three project languages, i.e. English, French and German. The seemingly cryptic project name serves as a short and easy-to-remember hashtag on social media and facilitates finding 3p1w on search engines and on Europeana. The project started in August 2014 with the beginning of First World War in August 1914 and ended in December 2018, with two of the three pilots returning to their homes after the end of the war in 1918 (fig. 1, p. 123).

The three men we are getting to know intimately in the project are Peter Falkenstein, a German miller, Jean Chaput, a French rugby and tennis player, and Bernard Rice, a British car enthusiast. By reading their letters, we are with these young men, in moments of joy and of grief, of boredom and of anxiety.

The editors of the project didn’t want to look at aces or well-known propaganda figures; they were not interested in “knights of the air”. 3p1w is about ordinary men who made their way into the often perilous cockpits

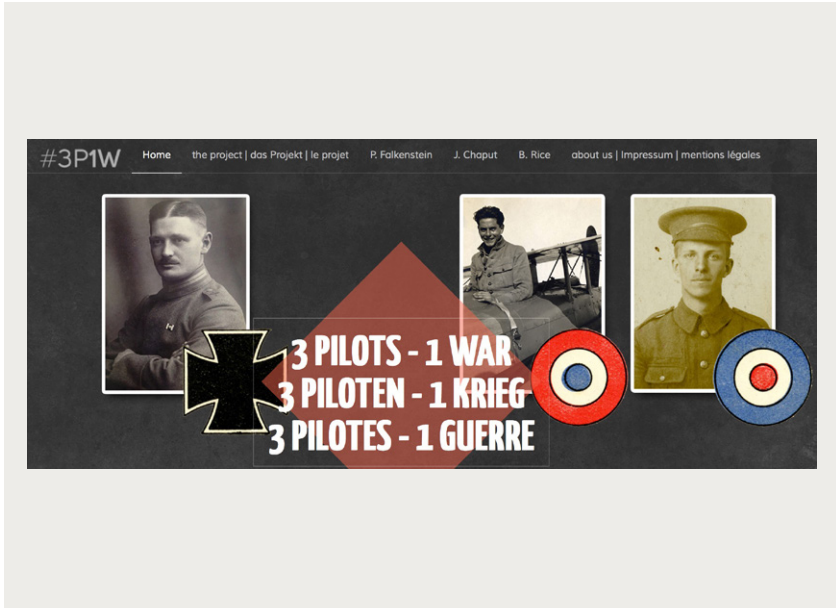


Fig. 1: Header, 3p1w.eu website. Christian Nimpsch, MHM Gatow. CC-BY-SA, by kind permission of MHM Gatow, 2014

of the First World War. It allows us to learn how a normal man got into the war, what he lived in his everyday life and what worries he had.

The protagonists are individuals and do not represent their respective nations intentionally. They come from different social backgrounds and have received different educations and professional training. In the First World War there will have been French Peter Falkensteins, just as there were English Jean Chaputs and German Bernard Rices.

One thing that was crucial for the project design, however, was that the protagonists were reliable and steady writers of letters and that they provided documents throughout the whole of the First World War, so that the three-sided project could remain balanced on a quantitative level.

In times when a pilot didn't write due to illness, holidays or other reasons, imminent publication gaps were filled with representations of museum objects related to the contents published before or after the respective gap.



Fig. 2: Exhibition space. 3PIW: Falkenstein 1914 and Ralf Heldenmaier. MHM Gatow CC-BY-SA, by kind permission of MHM Gatow, 2014

With 205,000 individual visitors and almost 7.5 million hits on the website in 2018 alone, the online project exceeded all expectations on a statistical level. But more importantly, manifold responses by an interested public, especially students and teachers who were using the website as resource in class, have also shown that 3PIW was able to address its readers on a personal level.

All three museums have, therefore, decided to use the online project as a starting point for physical exhibitions. MHM Berlin-Gatow has opened a successively growing exhibition with the title *Peter Falkenstein Is Going to War*. The German exhibition started in 2014 with three exhibition spaces, addressing a political history of the First World War (as a context for the 3PIW narratives), a prologue (addressing childhood in the German empire) and the year 1914 in Peter Falkenstein's life (fig. 2). In the following years,

four additional rooms were opened successively, allowing the museum visitors to follow up on Peter Falkenstein's life, similar to the online project. The Royal Air Force Museum chose to collaborate with schools in the greater London area to present *Three Pilots – One War* exhibition in their education space, open 26 March to 9 December 2018. The Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace was presenting their *3PIW* exhibition to the public, with a remarkable amount of objects directly linked to Jean Chaput, from October 2018 to March 2019.

Visit the project website on: <http://3piw.eu>