

March 2023



"It's your New York!"

The Rondout Reader

THE BISON KILLERS



AN INDELIBLE SCRAPBOOK

by Kevin Ahearn



American Buffalo: largest extant land animal in North America that once roamed the Great Plains. Slaughtered by the millions, some 500,000 live in captive commercial populations, raised for meat and hides, on about 4,000 privately owned ranches. Only 15,000 are considered 'wild'.



European Wisent: heaviest surviving wild land animal in Europe, slightly lighter than American Buffalo with one less rib. Hunted to extinction in the wild, the last shot in Eastern Poland in 1919 and in the Western Caucasus in 1927, but have since been reintroduced from captivity.



"My great forte in killing buffaloes was to get them circling by riding my horse at the head of the herd and shooting their leaders. Thus the brutes behind were crowded to the left, so that they were soon going round and round."

William Cody (4,280+)



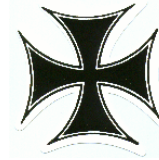
"...At the moment when the bull came near I had the same feeling, the same feverishness which seizes me when I am sitting in my aeroplane and notice an Englishman...The only difference is that the Englishman defends himself."

Manfred von Richthofen (1)





1906 - BONN, GERMANY



The one and only time I ever saw him, he made me imagine. First as a bearded centaur, a mythical being from a magical land.



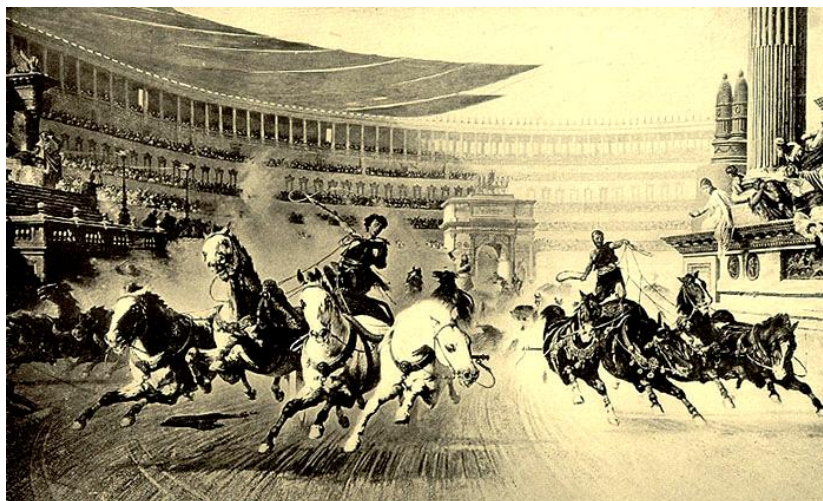
Then as medieval knight, a thousand triumphs and still the hero on a glorious quest.



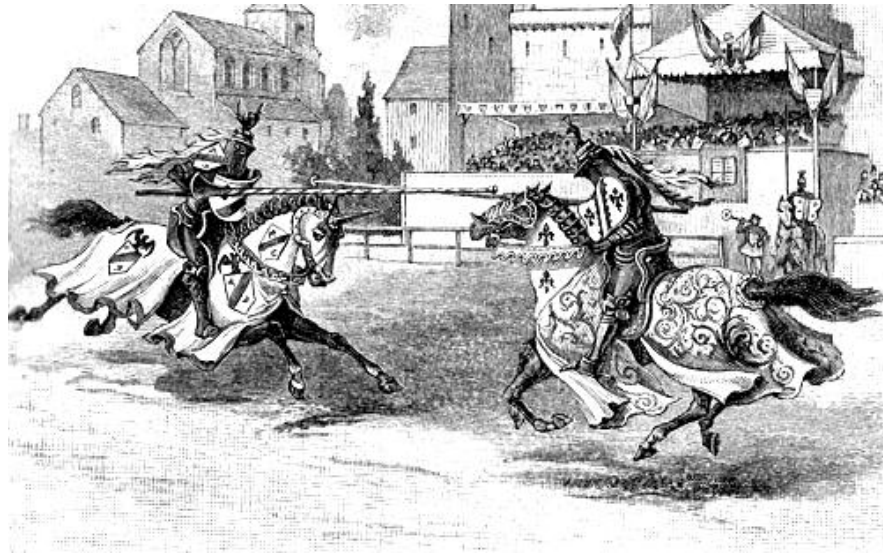
And as an invincible conquistador, full of confidence and bravado. The legend who had conquered my country.



Ganz genau! "Buffalo Bill" and his Wild West Circus on their final European tour and I found myself back in the Roman games.



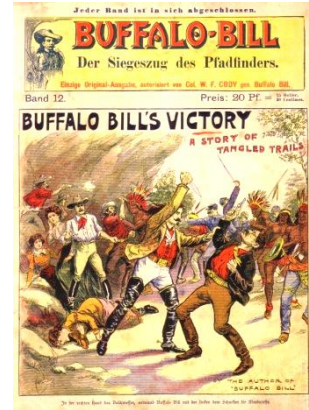
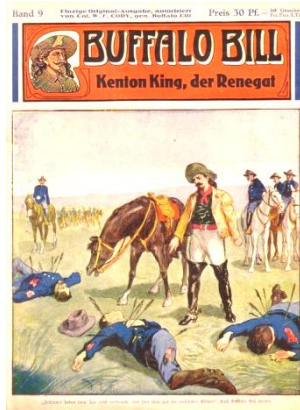
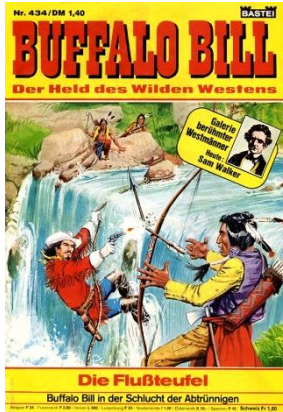
Then at a tournament of knights.



*But neither could match cowboys and Indians, cavalry and infantry, arrows and spears flying through the air, gunshots, a stagecoach robbery, and Custer's 'Last Stand'
-- The great American Adventure!*



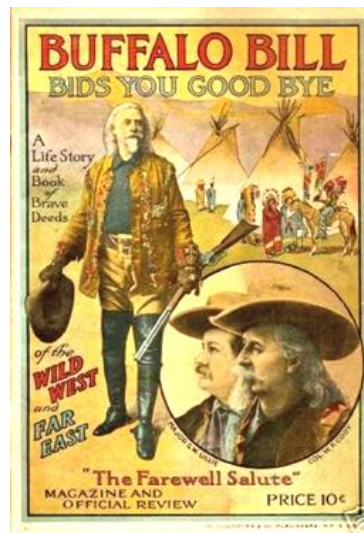
Within a year, I joined the Royal Military Academy at Lichterfelde. I had been at military school at Wahlstatt since I was eleven. Inspired to be a dashing horseman, my studies suffered. Or was it because I read every "Buffalo Bill" book and magazine I could get my hands on?



In 1911, my riding prowess earned me a commission in the 1st Regiment of Uhlans Kaiser Alexander III. Finally, my life had begun!

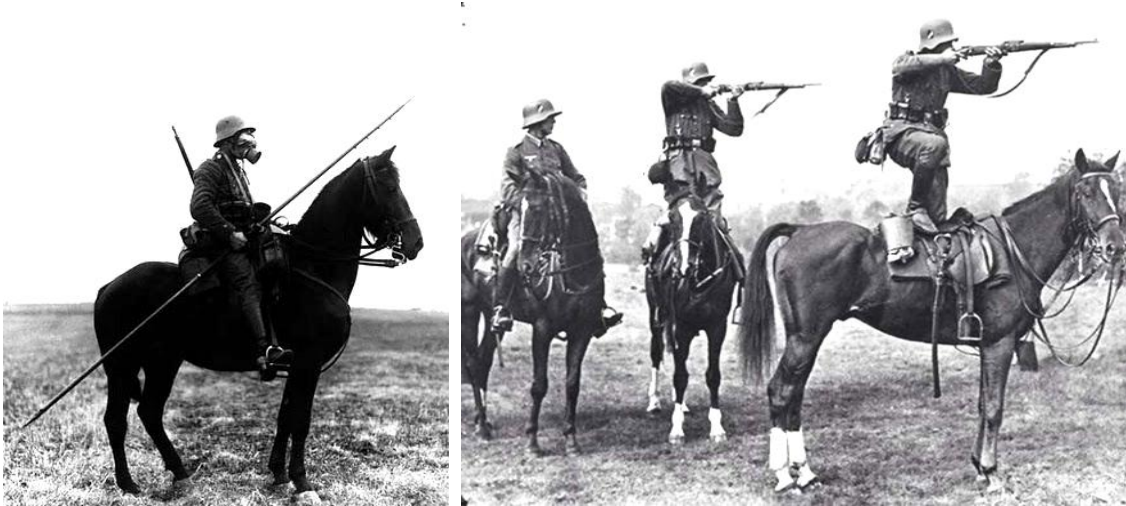


While in America...



More popular in Germany than in France and England, "Buffalo Bill" was immer news. Competition had forced the combining of circuses. A special seventy-eight-car train carried more than a thousand workers, seven hundred horses, fourteen bison and a small herd of performing elephants around the United States one last time.

After more than twenty years on the road, his pockets nearly empty, "Buffalo Bill" was riding into the sunset.



. Promoted to First Leutnant, I was riding high, ready to lead my men in defense of the Fatherland.

When war came, I was deployed to the Russian front, only to discover that after all my training, against the machinegun, the cavalry were bison!

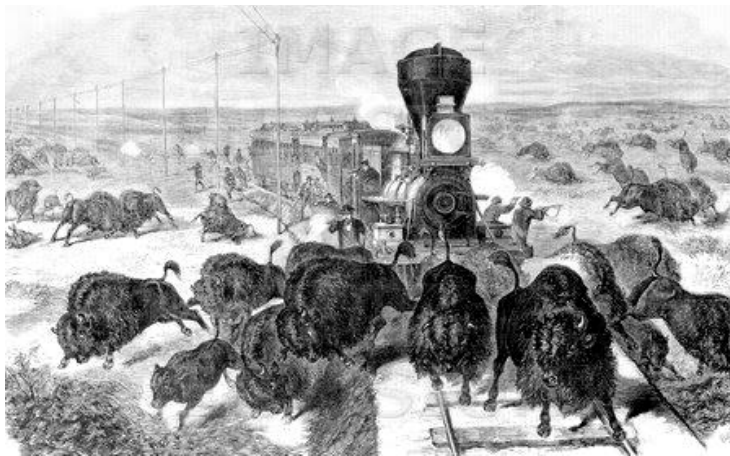
I was transferred to the infantry and stuck in the trenches. Massive herds on each side, I had become a bison!



In 1915, shorn of my horse and condemned to the ground, I volunteered for the Fliegertruppe. But I did not train to become a pilot. Instead, an 'observer' dropping bombs on the Russians.



From high above, enemy infantry appear as a meandering herd. When my bombs explode, soldiers jump up and fall over. As "Buffalo Bill" might have said, 'As easy as shooting bison from a train.'



I longed to fight, to be in command of my own plane. I had a 'Wild West' spirit, but my mentor and idol would be strictly German.



Oswald Boelcke was the first great fighter pilot in history, devising tactics and techniques for generations of air combat.

"It indeed is quite simple," he told me when we first met. "I fly in as close as I can, take good aim, shoot, and then he falls down."

Ganz genau! "Buffalo Bill" couldn't have said it better.

After twenty-four hours instruction aloft...

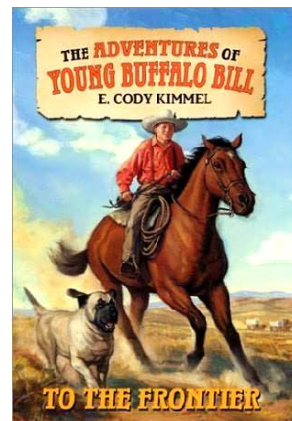
"You are ready to fly alone," my teacher announced that fateful morning.

I was afraid, but this could never come from a defender of the Fatherland. Good or bad, I had to swallow my cowardice and sit in the machine. . .

The engine started with a roar. I gave it the gas. The machine began to pick up speed, and suddenly I was flying. No longer an anxious feeling, but rather, one of daring. Now it was all up to me. No matter what happened, I was no longer frightened.



To all fledgling pilots about to take your first flight alone. Do not be dismayed if you fall short on your first attempt. On his first solo, Manfred von Richthofen crashed!



I imagined the young William Cody, first time on a horse, and falling off. He got back on blitzschnell and became "Buffalo Bill"!

I had to repeat training and take the test again. Again I failed! The third time I passed. I was a fighter pilot with the [Jagdstaffel Two](#)!



My early forays against the British were frustrating; I believed I hit a couple, but could not prove a 'kill' until the seventeenth of September, nineteen sixteen...



Jasta Two was outnumbered seven to five, but we were between the Front and our opponents. The Englishmen flew large bomb-carrying two-seaters. If they were Indians, it was as if they were riding cows.

Jastameister Boelcke led us in. Patient, he came very near the first English machine but did not shoot. I followed and picked my target, a large boat with bright

colors. Impatiently, I opened fire and missed! The English gunner shot back and also missed.

I had to get behind him, blast him from the rear. My Englishman twisted and turned, going criss-cross.

One single thought: "The man in front of me must come down, whatever happens."



At last a favorable moment arrived. Instead of twisting and turning he flew straight along. In a fraction of a second I was at his back and fired a short series of shots, so close that I was afraid I might dash into him.

A sudden joy shot through me when the propeller of the enemy machine stopped spinning; I'd shot his engine to pieces.

I imagined "Buffalo Bill's" legendary duel with the Cheyenne chief Yellow Hair, first shot with a rifle, then stabbed in the heart and scalped in the name of Colonel George Custer.



I couldn't help but cry out, "First 'kill' for Manfred von Richthofen!"



For "Buffalo Bill", every kill was a job. The hide skinned and the beef butchered, there was little trophy left for the hunter. To commemorate my victory with a 'scalp', from a jeweler in Berlin, I ordered a five-centimeter silver cup engraved with the date and type of enemy machine. Hopefully, I would soon have enough to fill a mantelpiece.



By the end of September, I had three 'kills'. Far from the war in America, "Buffalo Bill" had lost his Wild West Show to creditors. But he did not give up, making appearances in other people's circuses. Sadly, once king of the Great Plains, "Buffalo Bill" had become a mounted figurehead on his last legs.



Jastameister Boelcke called the Somme Battle 'The El Dorado of The Flying Men'. In just two months, our leader's score jumped from twenty to forty as we fought the English from dawn to sunset.

Boelcke's spirit animated us all and we trusted him blindly. He had his Albatross painted all black. But he didn't scare the English; they absolutely challenged us to battle and never refused fighting.



. The weather was very gusty and there were many clouds. Guided by Boelcke, we always had a wonderful feeling of security.

From a long distance we saw two impertinent Englishmen who actually seemed to enjoy the terrible weather. We were six and they were two. If they had been twenty and if Boelcke had given us the signal to attack, we should not have been at all surprised.



Boelcke tackled the one and I the other, but I had to let go because one of the German machines got in my way. Two hundred meters away, Boelcke had set up his victim. It was the usual thing. Boelcke would shoot down his opponent and I had to look on.

Then the unthinkable occurred. Close to Boelcke flew his good friend. Both were shooting. The Englishman had to fall at any moment. Suddenly I noticed an unnatural movement of the two German planes. A collision? The two machines barely touched one another.

Boelcke drew away and descended in large curves. The black Albatross did not seem to be falling, but I noticed that part of his plane had broken off. I could not see what happened afterwards.

"Boelcke is dead!" I was told when I landed.



The funeral ceremony was like that of a reigning prince. I carried Boelcke's medals on his Ordenskissen. Nothing happens without God's will. That was the only consolation which any of us can put to our souls during this war.

Back we flew into the fight. Seven silver cups and I wanted more.



The British claimed their own 'Boelcke', Major [Lanoe Hawker VC](#), an ace with eight victories.



Three Englishmen gone a-hunting. I would not disappoint them.

At a lower altitude, I waited until one of my English friends tried to drop on me. Then one attempted to tackle me in the rear. After firing five shots he had to stop for I had swerved in a sharp curve.

The Englishman tried to catch me up in the rear while I tried to get behind him. Round and round we flew like madmen after one another at three thousand meters.

First we circled twenty times to the left, and then thirty times to the right. Each tried to get behind and above the other. I was not meeting a beginner who would break off the fight. His crate turned beautifully, but mine climbed better and I got above and beyond my English waltzing partner.



The wind was with me, driving us more and more towards Bapaume, a kilometer behind the German front. Impertinent fellow full of cheek! At one thousand meters, he merrily waved to me as if to say, "Well, how do you do?"

Circling down to a hundred meters, I got a good look at my opponent. If he had not had his cap on I would have noticed what kind of a face he was making.

My Englishmen had a choice: land on German ground or fly back to the English lines. He tried the latter by loopings and such like tricks. At a hundred meters, he tried to escape by flying in a zig-zag course; that was my most favorable moment. I got behind him, firing all the time.



My opponent fell, shot through the head, fifty meters behind our line. His machine gun was dug out of the ground and I mounted it over the entrance of my dwelling.



My tally was up to sixteen when I saw the news.



"Buffalo Bill's" funeral made the front page. And when it was my turn? Who would know how quickly? No matter how many planes I shot down, besides to my family and fellow pilots and my 'kills', what difference had I made?



The hope of the heroic horseman, from the Romans to Roosevelt, had ended with "Buffalo Bill." If not in the saddle, where would our new heroes be?

William Cody had lived a long, full life. To know that when he closed his eyes for the final time, that his Wild West would die with him, must have been heartbreaking.



I remembered yet again seeing him for the first time. It seemed like an hour ago. "Buffalo Bill" had lived for his country. Bloeckle and Hawker and I, all of us, would be dying for ours.

*In the procession, the Wild West 'Cowboy Band' played a tune composed especially for "Buffalo Bill"...***PASSING OF THE RED MAN.**

At my funeral, what would be playing?

Weather had grounded us for two days. Once 'Bloekle's Jasta', the British were calling us 'Richthofen's Flying Circus.'



A cold wind sent the tents rippling, a chorus of clapping cloth. My pilots stood at attention in front of their crates. Young and brave, eyes full of respect and admiration, they understood that very soon most of them would be dead.

Who am I? Yet another air commander keeping score? When William Cody was younger than I, after shooting more than four thousand bison in eighteen months, he earned the title "Buffalo Bill". How many Englishmen would I have to kill before they named me anything?



Bloecke's black plane was a long forgotten memory. Maintained by the finest mechanics in the Fatherland, my own looked like yet another horse in the herd. Not the way I wanted to lead my circus.

My chief adjutant snapped a crisp salute and clicked his heels.

"Your orders, Herr Rittmeister."



"Paint it red," I said. "All red."





William Cody killed his first Indian when he was fourteen, but not until he was twenty-six, a full two years older than I, that he received his country's highest honor, the Medal of Honor.

For "gallantry in action" read the citation. Serving as a civilian scout with the Third [Cavalry Regiment](#) against the Cheyenne, the Army was outnumbered almost two to one. At Platte River, Nebraska, in the 'Battle of Summit Springs', Cody killed Chief Tall Bull and rescued a captured white woman.

When he got his medal, I knew how he must have felt.



The telegram from Headquarters was embossed with the seal of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, stating that His Majesty had graciously awarded me what would later be called 'The Blue Max.'

Horseman to horseman, "Buffalo Bill," from the saddle to the stars!



For the first time, I brought my victims down alive. After I stunk up the engine of their Vickers, down went the crate, but the pilot and the photographer managed to escape their burning wreck and it gave me particular pleasure to talk to them.



"Had you ever seen my machine before?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said one. "We call it 'Le Petit Rouge'."

'The Little Red'? I thought, Oh, the French.

"The British are calling you 'The Red Devil'," said the other.



Because my Albatros had a forked tail? I wondered.

William Cody won the name "Buffalo Bill" after an eight-hour shooting match with a rival hunter. My rivals were all dead. I was the star of my own 'flying circus'... 'The Red Fighter Pilot' and no one can beat me!



There would soon be a new 'circus' in the war.

On April sixth, nineteen seventeen, I had thirty-six 'kills' when the United States declared war on Germany.

High in the sky, would I soon be fighting a 'Buffalo Bill'?



Fifty cups on my mantelpiece. For my twenty-fifth birthday I was invited to meet Kaiser Wilhelm II and our supreme commander, Field Marshal Hindenberg.

"Buffalo Bill" would have been proud.



A generation ago, his 'Wild West' graced Queen Victoria's Grand Jubilee and her Majesty bestowed him with royal gifts. Imagine how the modern media might have portrayed "Buffalo Bill" and me at our peaks.



MAN OF THE ERA

DER SPIEGEL



The Sexiest Man Alive!

I had become a national hero, the dashing young champion of the German people, and the engine of the State's propaganda machine. And it was my twenty-fifth birthday!

I could have anything I desired. Any castle, any car, any horse, any woman was mine for the asking.

What would William Cody want?

I had to sit and wait a long time. What did I want? What in my life was I missing? An ostentatious gift from the State might reflect poorly on the royal family and the army. A casual trinket could be interpreted as less than grateful.

At last, I was brought to the ornate room where the fate of the world was decided.



"Congratulations, Herr Baron," said Kaiser Wilhelm II, acknowledging my prominent [Prussian aristocratic family](#). "First on your success, and second, on your birthday."



"Thank you, Your Majesty," I said humbly.

"My heroic red fighter!" said General Field Marshal von Hindenburg. "We've given you courtesy presents. What is it you really want?"

I looked each in the eye, then...

"I want to shoot a bison," I said.

"A bison!" exclaimed the Kaiser. "Why?"

"The true test of a hunter," I said.

"On horseback?" asked Hindenburg.

It would be glorious!



"'Brigham' was the best buffalo horse that ever made a track!" said "Buffalo Bill."

The stallion would suddenly stop if a buffalo did not fall at the first fire, so as to give him a second chance, but if he did not kill the buffalo then, the horse would go on, as if to say, "You are no good, and I will not fool away my time by giving you more than two shots."

"Buffalo Bill's" one-day record was sixty-nine 'kills'. Once on 'Brigham' without bridle or saddle, he killed eleven bison with just a dozen shots.

Should I dare?

Having a horse under me I could trust might take weeks of training. And if I were thrown off in the hunt, injured and in hospital while the Great War raged, because of a bison? All Germany would never forgive me.

"On foot, Your Majesty, head to horns," I said.

"You must take a lot of cartridges with you," advised Hindenburg. "I have spent on such a fellow half a dozen for he does not die easily. His heart lies so deep that one misses it as a rule."



I arrived at the von Pless estate in the Bialowicz forest. War has taken its toll on the bison as well. Many a magnificent creature which ought to have been shot either by the Czar or by some other monarch had been eaten by hungry locals.

The gun collection was extensive; An eight-millimeter Mauser bolt action was recommended, but no fifty-caliber breech-loading Springfield, the 'needle gun' "Buffalo Bill" had used early on. Instead I chose his later preference.



I was driven through the giant preserve. After about an hour, we got out and walked to the elevated shooting place.

"Altitude advantage!" Oswald Boelcke had told me so long ago. "All else is rubbish."

I insisted on being alone. My escorts would return when they heard the gun shots.

After considerable time, I saw among the timber a gigantic black monster, rolling along, coming straight in my direction.

I cocked the lever action Winchester. A mighty bull at two hundred meters, too far for a shot.

"Patience!" my Jasta mentor would have said.

The bull came closer and closer. A huge fellow, I heard him snorting and stamping. I had no idea whether he smelt me or not. If he were an English crate, I'd aim at the pilot, but a head shot would deface the beast's trophy.

At a distance of eighty meters I fired. Although I knew exactly where the bison's heart was I had missed it. I fired a second shot and a third. Hit for the third time the bull stopped perhaps fifty meters from me.



Field Marshal Hindenburg had taken six shots to kill his bison; I did it in three. 'Brigham' would have abandoned us both.

I shoot a man in the air, seconds later he disappears forever. For five minutes, the beast kept breathing, pumping blood onto the earth, and I imagined the thousands of bison "Buffalo Bill" had killed dying before me, their bodies covering the estate, horizon to horizon, a bloody brown carpet.



The Sioux Indians had been life partners with the bison, used every part of the animal for food, clothing, shelter, tools and weapons. The Lakota were the genuine bison hunters; "Buffalo Bill" and I, just privileged executioners.

Bison for supper, prepared not in a royal kitchen, but fresh in the air over hot coals, "Buffalo Bill" style. That would take some cooking; scores of "Buffalo Bill" books, more than a few claimed that he favored the tongue and the tender-loins, but not one with a recipe.

Then again, legend had it that "Buffalo Bill's" favorite meat was fried chicken.

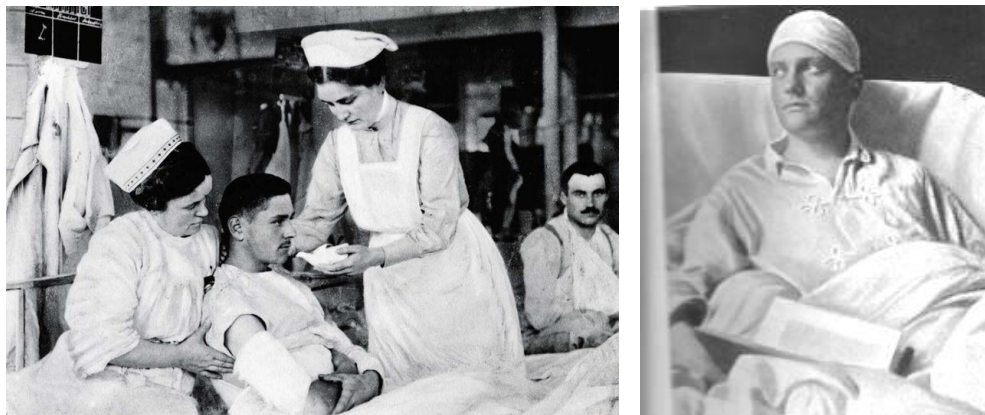


On the sixth of July, if I had been wearing a heavy, protective 'bison helmet', my Richthofen skull would have never had to prove its mettle.

From two kilometers, I spotted an English crate near Ypres, and the impatient fool began firing at me from three hundred meters.

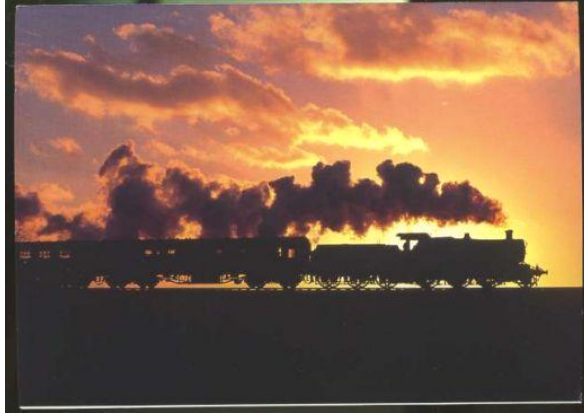
One wastes ammunition from that distance, I remembered thinking, when suddenly, a chance shot hit me. In shock and angry disbelief, I nursed my plane to the ground before blacking out.

Then woke up in hospital.



In his long life, "Buffalo Bill" was never wounded, not by a knife, a tomahawk, a spear or a bullet. Made many believe he was somehow invincible.

Until...



In nineteen hundred and one, the Wild West Show was chugging along on schedule through North Carolina, when due to a mix-up of signals, collided with a train coming the other way. One onrushing engine ran halfway inside the other and then they reared up on the tracks like two giant beasts in deadly combat.

No one was killed, but the wooden cars shattered. Horses, cattle and bison were lying in the wreckage with timbers run through them like knives.

When "Buffalo Bill" saw the carnage, he dropped to his knees and cried. Things were never the same after that.



An English bullet had dug a ten centimeter furrow in my scalp. Had the wind been blowing the other way, I would have been killed.

I got mail from all over Germany--idolizing children, encouraging old people, grateful soldiers, and pictures and marriage proposals from countless women and girls.

At age fourteen, William Cody had joined the Pony Express. Every day, I received more letters than he delivered in a year.



My head was aching. The doctors pulled out small pieces of my skull. While I recuperate, the State asked me to write my memoirs. I got a stenographer and literary expert at my bedside. The manuscript then would be sent to the General Staff HQ for editing. The plan was to publish my story in magazine installments, then as a book.

"Buffalo Bill" had a ghostwriter, a fanciful cowboy who penned hundreds of tales, even wrote a play for him to star in. The 'dime novels' turned William Cody into a worldwide celebrity.

That wasn't justice to him. So "Buffalo Bill" wrote his own book, the Wild West truth straight from 'Brigham's' mouth.

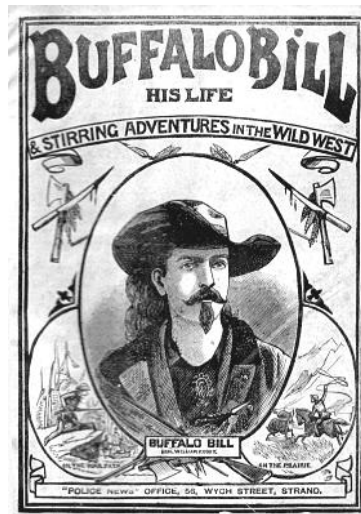
Cody's father spoke out against slavery. Young William saw him die for it. The only man left in the family, he made up his mind to be the breadwinner, and decided that his professional life would be as a plainsman, all before he turned twelve.

By comparison, my Great War story was going to be a bit tame.

Higher authority had suggested that I should quit flying before it catches up with me. But I should despise myself if, now that I am famous and heavily decorated, I consented to live on as a pensioner of my honor, preserving my precious life for the nation while every poor fellow in the trenches, who is doing his duty no less than I am doing mine, has to stick it out.

The writing went on; nothing remained of the "fresh, jolly war" as they used to call our activities at the outset. Now we had to face up to a most desperate situation so that

the enemy will not break into our land. Thus I had an uneasy feeling that the public has been exposed to an arrogant Rittmeister and I was no longer that kind of person.



I've read "Buffalo Bill's" three times. Anybody who couldn't speak German would never read mine.

Yet the Kaiser demanded a sequel!



As a band played our national anthem, I stepped into the cockpit of my new Fokker DReidecker I. Not quite as speedy as the British crates, but the right color. Its small size and triple wings made it as maneuverable as the Devil and it climbed like a monkey.

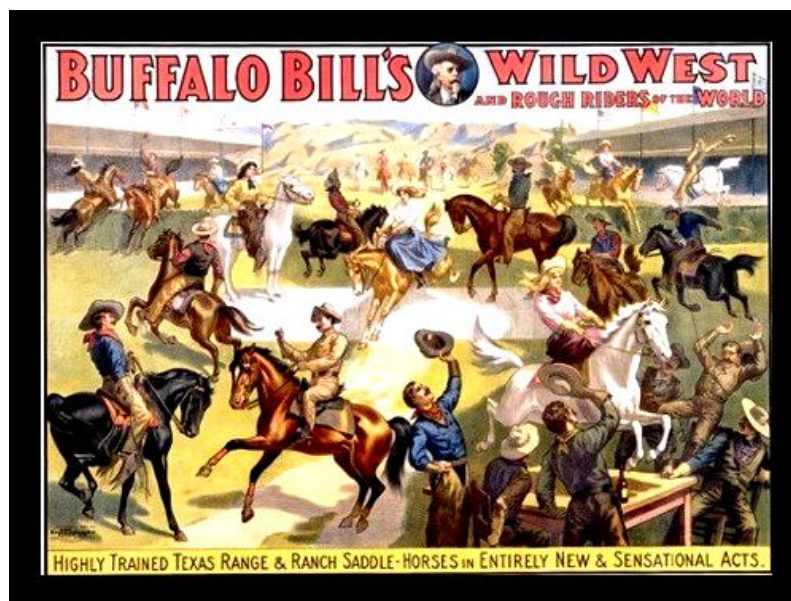
After sixty silver cups, my Berlin jeweler informed me that I can have no more; a shortage of the precious metal had impeded the German war effort. He offered to make them out of pewter, but I decline. My 'kills' deserve first class recognition.



But they had taken on a morbid tinge, a sight I'd never want to see.



"Buffalo Bill" never called his show a 'circus', but an 'educational exhibition'.



So would be our every sortie. In the spirit of Oswald Boelcke, I mentored my Jasta, laying down my rules of aerial combat before we took off.



I judged each pilot by what he accomplished and backed only those who passed. Whoever failed, or showed lukewarm on a mission had to leave the group that very day. Close behind me, Spandau blazing, the entire Staffel was a body subject to my will.



I felt terrible after every air battle, probably an after-effect of my head wound. When I again set foot on the ground I withdrew to my quarters and didn't want to see anybody or hear anything. I thought of the war as it really was, not "with a hurrah and a roar" as the people at home imagine it, but serious, bitter.





Four thousand, two hundred and eighty 'kills', every one scored by "Buffalo Bill", cash on the barrelhead. Once fifty million strong, the bison was the mightiest horned infantry God had ever created.

"Buffalo Bill" marked the beginning of the end. Wanton slaughter for only the tongues and the horns whittled the great herds down to barely dozens of straggling survivors.



And "Richthofen's Flying Circus"?

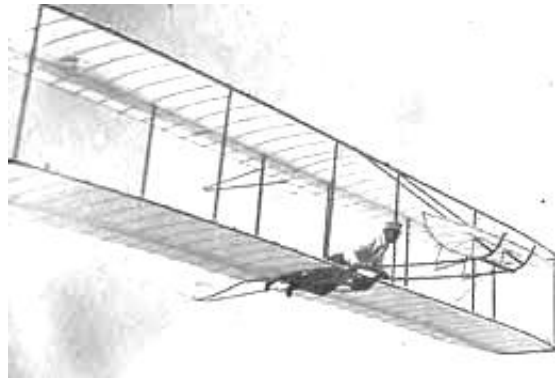


This Great War had made bison killers of us all!



By March, nineteen eighteen, I had seventy 'kills', but not a single American. Almost a year since the United States declared war on Germany and not one US fighter plane has joined the battle.

How could this be?



Aviation was born in America! The Wright Brothers had astounded the world, but not the US War Department. They had to come to Europe to sell their latest 'flyer'. France, England, and of course, Germany, took the lead and left the US sitting on its tailskid.

Blame "Buffalo Bill"? For more than thirty years for more than seventy million spectators...

"Ladies and gentlemen," he'd shout to the multitudes. "Permit me to introduce you to a Congress of the Rough Riders of the World!"



"Buffalo Bill" made too many Americans remember and too few imagine. He showed us that the West was not only 'wild' but "As old as 'Buffalo Bill'".

Yet he had always looked to the future, investing in projects to bring growth to the West. An Arizona mine, hotels in Sheridan and Cody, Wyoming, stock breeding, ranching, coal and oil development, film making, town building, tourism, and publishing.

Not to let any trail go untaken, "Buffalo Bill" was an early advocate of women's suffrage and the fair treatment of American Indians.

"Preparedness," was his motto and too many believed he meant protecting oneself from a fight.

To me, from the first time I saw him and for the rest of my days, the image and spirit of "Buffalo Bill" spoke to me, saying, "The Greatest Adventure is still ahead!"

And may it always be.

Pilots are a superstitious species. Many believe it's bad luck to be photographed before a mission, preferring to have their picture taken after they are back, safe on the ground.



With eighty 'kills', the most by any ace in history, I had become immortal. Destined for the military from birth, princely handsome and pure, Rittmeister of my fabled Jasta, beyond 'air superiority' and 'air dominance', I have achieved 'air supremacy.'

Imagine...

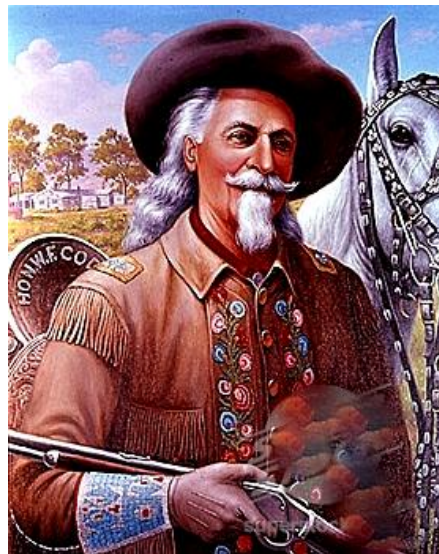


"Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to introduce you to Manfred von Richthofen, his pilot garb more costume than uniform, his triple winged plane like a crimson cape, lifting him up and up, his alter ego known round the Western Front, to fight and kill the enemies of the Fatherland.

"He is the world's first Uber-hero!"



*Thank you, "Buffalo Bill", I am **The Red Baron!***



At the very end, did he know that he would never die? That his name and his image, his spirit would live forever? I didn't think so. William Cody had to know when he was half my age.

Because that's how I felt right now!



The sky was filled with crates. I spotted a British 'Camel' going after one of my men, and got behind him. I fired, but my aim was off. Never one to give up, I pursued my prey.

Oswald Boelcke had told me again and again, "Never obstinately stay with an opponent whom through bad shooting or skillful turning, one has been unable to shoot down."

My mentor's spirit warned me as I flew over enemy lines. "When the battle lasts too long and one is alone and faced by a greater number of opponents..."

But in the end, as I had felt from the beginning, the decisive factor in victory is simple personal courage.



Another 'Camel' joined the fight, his Lewis machineguns rattling. I dove, lower and lower.



My opponent stayed with me. A quick, tight turn and my Dreidecker would reverse our positions.

Below, a sprinkled herd of Australian infantry...



The last thing I ever saw.

*"Gott forgive me, 'Buffalo Bill', **The Red Baron** has been killed by a bison!"*

The next day I was buried with full military honors in the village cemetery at Bertangles, near Amiens.



Members of the Australian air squadron served as pallbearers.

“Here lies a brave, a noble adversary and a true man of honor. May he rest in peace.”

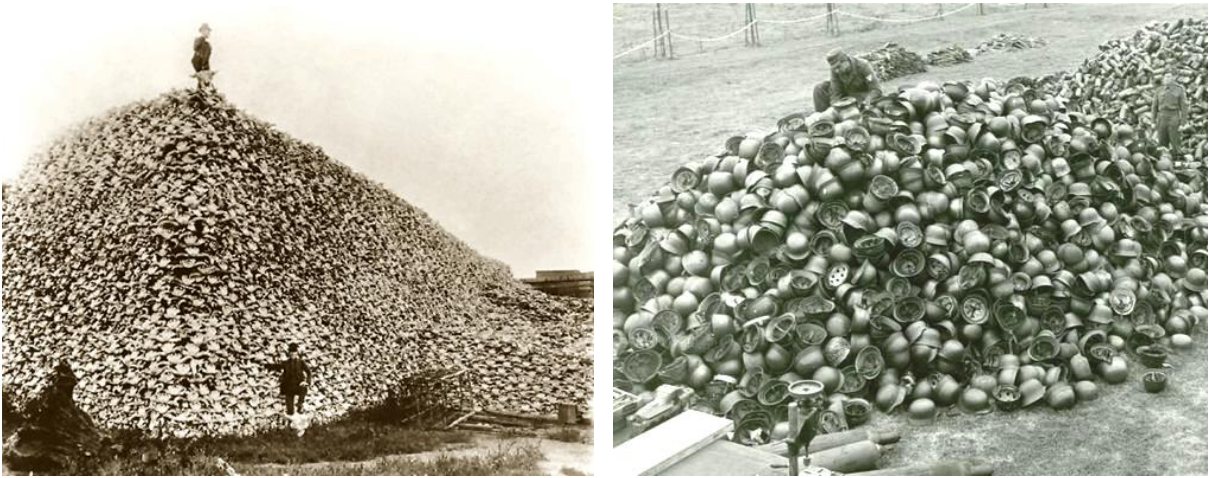


The photographs made Page One around the world. If only the 'Cowboy Band' could have been there...



*...To play "Buffalo Bill's" favorite tune, **PASSING OF THE RED MAN.***





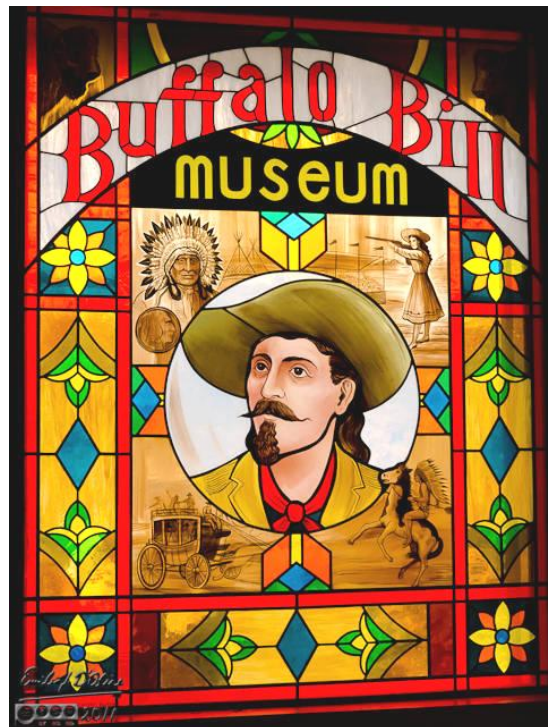
We've been hunting bison for tens of thousands of years, for as long as we've been killing each other.



Millions upon millions of majestic creatures roaming the European interior and the North American plains...

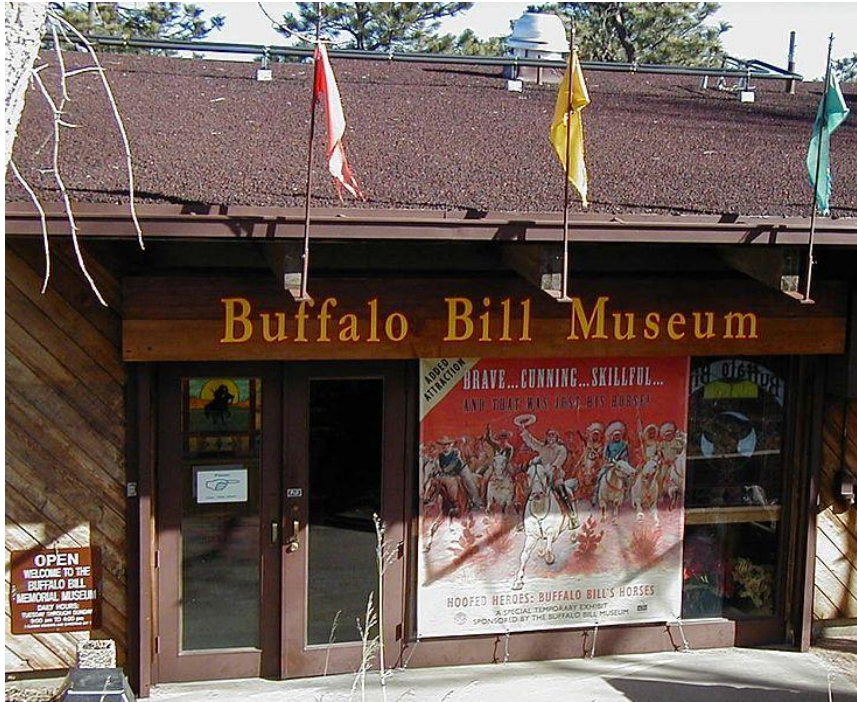


One can only imagine how the few left might judge William Cody and me.



"I began to think my time had come, as the saying is," he said near the very end. "But if I have brought the Great Adventure of the 'Wild West' to young people everywhere, then it's been worth it."

"It sure was, 'Buffalo Bill'," America replied. "It sure was!"



Denver, Colorado



LeClaire, Iowa



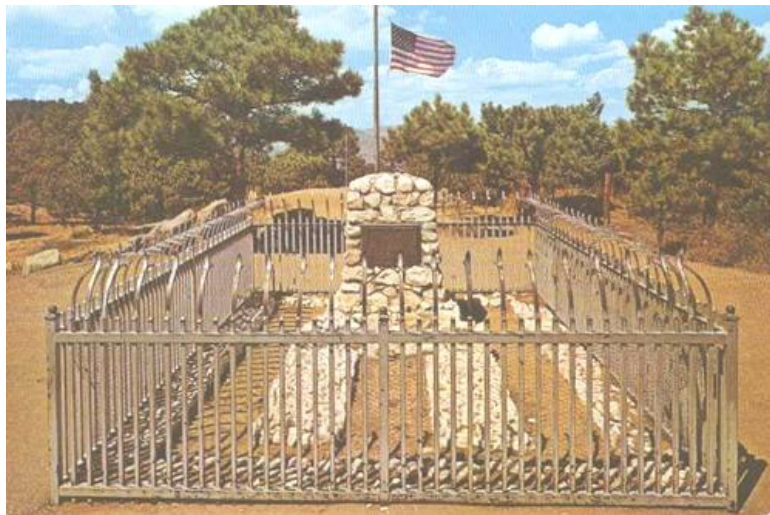
Cody, Wyoming

There is no **Red Baron** museum, only the Historic Richthofen Castle.



Conceived before I was born by my uncle and godfather, Walter von Richthofen, the fifteen thousand-square-foot gated mansion has eight bedrooms, seven bathrooms, five fireplaces, a bar, drawing room, library, servants quarters, butlers' pantry and billiards room. An additional wing was built while I was riding a horse.

*In the basement, the largest known collection of **Red Baron** memorabilia was displayed until the castle was recently sold. Located in Denver's Historic Montclair Neighborhood, it's just a short flight from "Buffalo Bill's" grave.*



First buried by the French and Australians, my remains were then moved to the Invaliden Friedhof in Berlin.



But after World War II, the Communist Wall passed directly over my grave site, and my family moved me to Wiesbaden where, this time, I was reburied with full military honors by my countrymen and the British.



Oklahoma City



Oakley, Kansas



Oakley, Kansas

*There are no larger-than-life statues of me, not even a single life-size one, but **Red Baron** desktop miniatures can prevent documents from flying away.*



"Buffalo Bill's" signature legacy was his "Wild West" 'educational exhibitions' and they're still going strong.



*'Richthofen's Flying Circus' is forever kaput, but **Red Baron** 'impersonators' flying replica Dreideckers continue to make guest appearances at air shows.*



*If history has given us justice, it would appear that the spirit of "Buffalo Bill" is soaring while I, the **Red Baron**, can barely stay in the air.*

Bison-scheisse! "Buffalo Bill's" greatest achievement was not as a scout, a Pony Express Rider, a bison hunter or as frontiersman, but as a showman! His 'Wild West Circus' celebrated the American past with real life! And every zealous promoter since, in sports, entertainment or politics has looked back on William Cody as an American Original, and "Buffalo Bill" as the first superstar!

Against the future did he have a shot?

*Commercial or military, private or corporate, every pilot who ever lived knows my title. The noble and the brave emulate me, but all agree on one thing: the last man they want gunning for them is the **Red Baron**!*

Only one way to settle this 'The Wild West versus The Western Front'!

"Buffalo Bill" himself would make the introductions.



"Ladies and gentlemen, I formally announce my positively last appearance, my final shot from the saddle..."

A courtesy fly-over at fifty meters as the packed stadium...



...Hisses and boos Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen!

Yesterday's Legend duels Tomorrow's Hero---the horse and the rifle versus the Dr. I with twin machineguns.



One quick pass and it would be over. My Maschinengewehr fired ten bullets per second automatically with a range of two thousand meters, but Boelcke had taught me that I had to get to within one hundred and fifty meters to hit anything.



The effective range of an Eighteen Ninety-Four Winchester thirty-thirty was one hundred and eighty-three meters. That would give "Buffalo Bill" one shot, maybe two before I shredded him and 'Brigham' like pulp novels.

Down I dove, closer and closer, five hundred meters, four, three...I cock my guns. Two hundred meters and I see a puff of smoke from "Buffalo Bill's" Winchester, then another.

My dream ended suddenly.



"Danke, Gott und 'Buffalo Bill', forevermore, the **Red Baron** was killed by a Legend!"



"Buffalo Bill" got a full 'Wild West' life and rode off, his special place in history reserved forever. I was quickly replaced...



...by an heroic pilot who became a pompous buffoon, ending as a groveling bison damned by his deeds.

Oh, "Buffalo Bill", if only I had lived!

Gone on to shoot down ninety, even one hundred planes, Germany would still not have won the Great War, but I would have risen from the ruins as the nation's lone hero.

Deutschland Erwache!



As for my political competition...



That maladjusted, mustached bison and his pathetic herd would have been swept from the streets faster than prairie tumbleweed!



"Buffalo Bill" got to have a full family and always wished he's been a better father. If I'd gotten the chance, perhaps a famous actress or champion athlete...



*And in my **Red Chancellor's** dreams...*



What a Kreuzschmerzen story we would have been!

Danke, the German people have enough Lebensraum, but not their bison.



Under my leadership, national preserves would be established to protect the species forever.

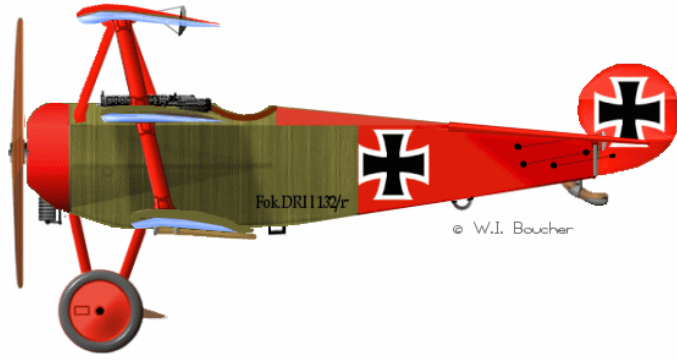
Still there would have been a Second European War. Before there could be a strong Germany, there had to be a united one! Every German is welcomed under the tent in 'Richthofen's Circus.'

First, I would have attacked the Poles and then the French, not to conquer, but to win back our sacred soil stolen by the hated Versailles Treaty.

Germany had no fight with the English, the Russians or the Americans. Let them make war against Japan. Imagine the weapons that would have never needed to be created.



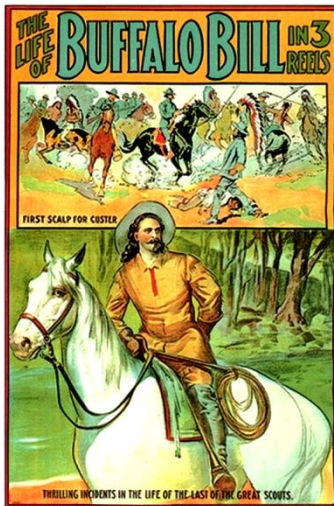
Great Britain and the United States would then quickly ally themselves with my Germany, Europe's 'Sword and Shield' against the Soviet Union.



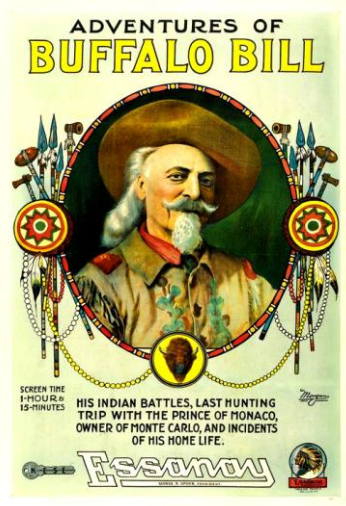
But history fell into a deeper, darker track.



Over and over, the world's first movie star stressed preparedness!



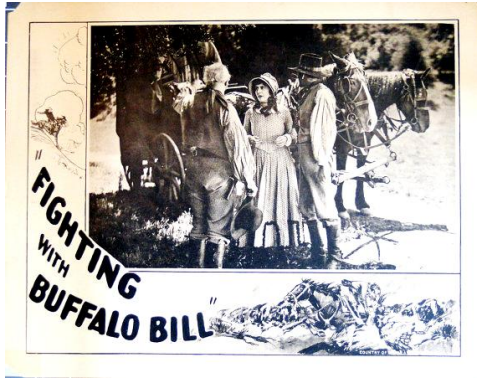
1912



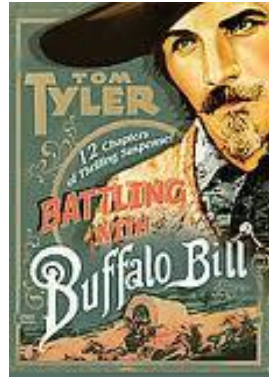
1917



1922



1926

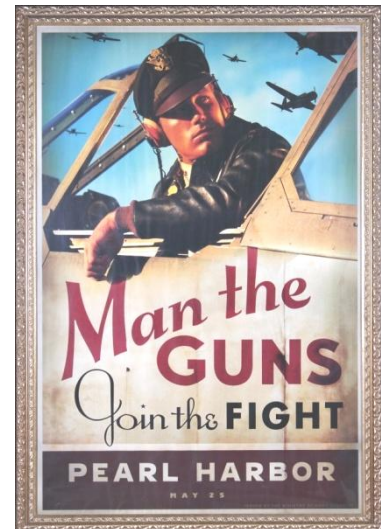
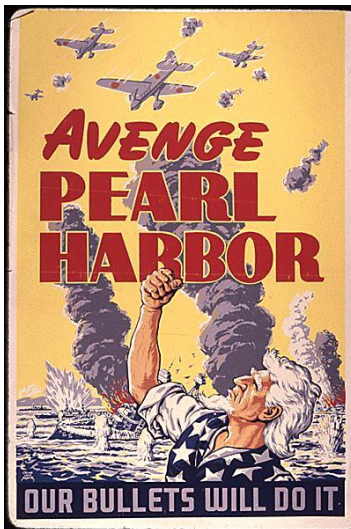


1931



1940

Yet again, the United States suffered from 'Air Inferiority'.



Not my country!





1944

The Americans finally won "Air Superiority", but the beautiful Mustang, mated to an English engine, became history making history.



The last 'kill' scored by a Nazi fighter - flying for Israeli Independence!



Those who would deride "Buffalo Bill" as a symbol of the past forget that he started his Wild West Show by playing "The Star Spangled Banner," before it became America's national anthem.

"I'm leaving you the old west," he'd say, always implying that the greatest adventure was still ahead.



Yet again, the world had entered a new age. Stung twice by 'Air Inferiority', America's quest for 'Air Supremacy' would be at all costs. Finally, the **Red Baron** would be leaving "Buffalo Bill" in the dust.







We Europeans were first to kill the bison, long before all Indian and buffalo ancestors came to America across the land bridge from Asia. From Mexico to Canada, the first white men described the Great Plains as "one black robe...and appeared as if in motion."

A bison herd crossing the tracks could hold a train up for days. Roads, tunnels, bridges, the vision of the Interstate Highway System...Paths had to be cleared.



For Indians, the bison was a gift from the Great Spirit.

"When the buffalo went away, the hearts of my people fell to the ground," said one chief. "After this, nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere."

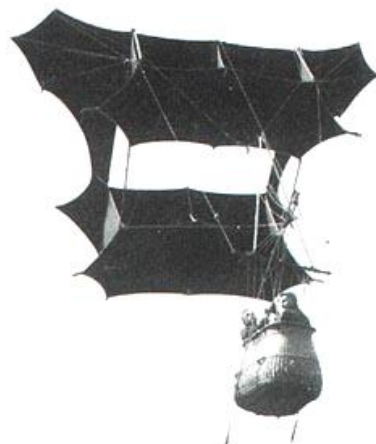
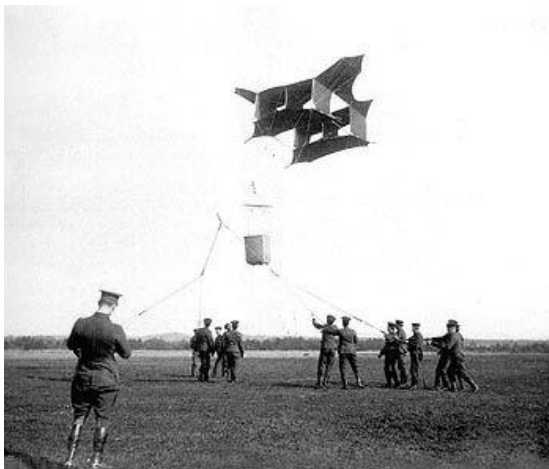


King George the Fifth called him "Colonel Cody". Born in Iowa, a crack shot and a superb horseman, his 'Wild West' performances had thrilled audiences in England and in the United States.

When he died, his coffin was carried on a gun carriage drawn by six black horses, escorted by the pipers of the Black Watch and a cortege of mourners a mile long. Coming from far and wide, one hundred thousand people lined the route.

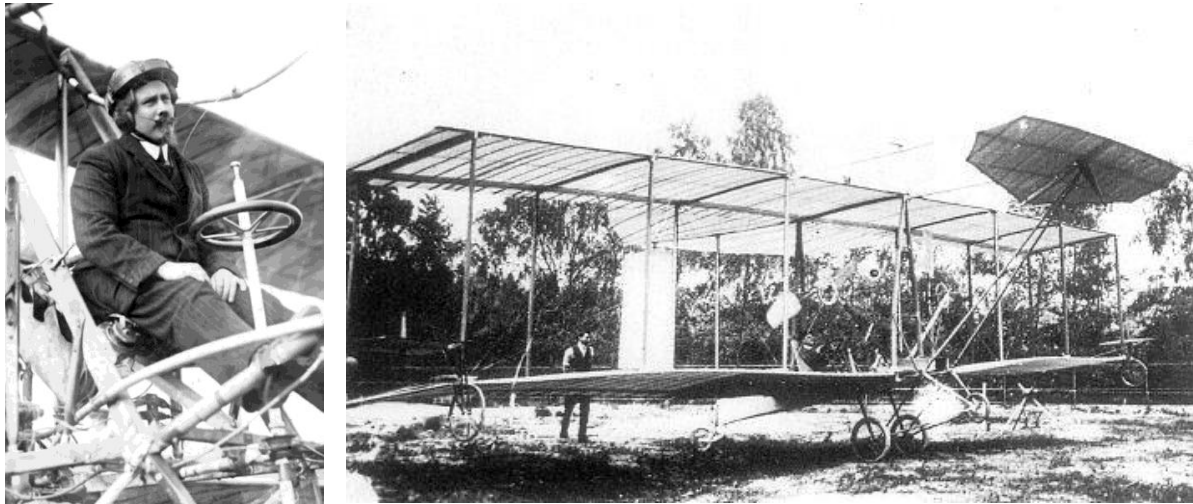
But "Colonel Cody" was neither a "Colonel" nor a "Cody". Born Franklin Samuel Cowdery, he changed his name to match his idol's, then exploited spectators who believed they had paid to see "Buffalo Bill."

As his cowboy career was winding down, "Colonel Cody" took off.



He conducted his first kite experiments while he toured England with his stage play, then ensured the success of Britain's first military dirigible.

'The Flying Cathedral', the first aeroplane to fly in England, was his crowning achievement.



Known as the 'father of British aviation', and a founder of the Royal Flying Corps, Cody was honored with a silver medal by the Royal Aeronautical Society.

Cody's son flew against my 'Flying Circus' in the Great War, but somebody else shot him down and killed him. Franklin Samuel Cowdery would later be killed when an aeroplane of his own making fell apart in the air.

The only martyr in the history of aviation who never learned to read and write, the "Colonel" left his mark on every crate since, including my Dreidecker.



*The **Red Baron** had always flown the 'Cody' brand!*

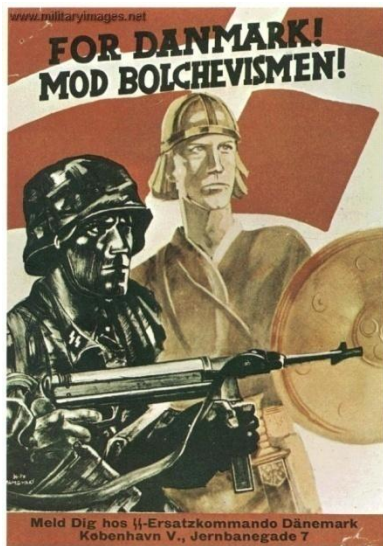
Prost to the euro-bison, greatest jumper in all the animal kingdom!



German efficiency killed every last bison in the country. Not just for meat, hides and trophies, but during the Middle Ages, drinking horns. After the Great War, only fifty-four bison remained in zoos and private parks.



But Europe was not about to lose its grandest beast. Poland introduced two cows and a bull from Sweden and Germany to a breeding station in the Bialowieza forest, but before the comeback could take hold...



Nearly forty million people would be slaughtered as Nazis and Communists battled for the future, yet the Germans and the Russians protected the bison; killing one was punishable by death.

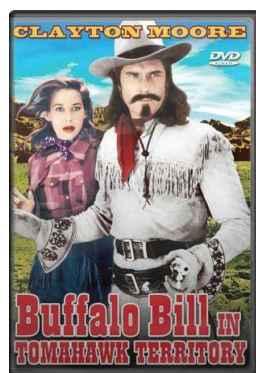
After the Communists took over, two bulls were released into the Bialowieza National Park. Several cows followed. The first calf was soon born into the wild. More than twenty herds have since been reintroduced into Poland.



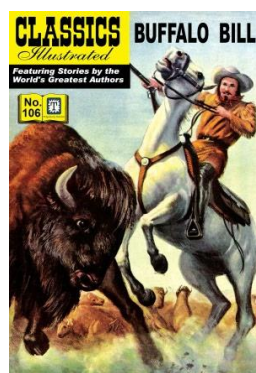
Fantasy propaganda! Extinction staring it in the face, the euro-bison jumped over the Iron Curtain!



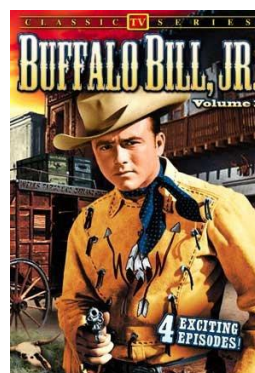
1947



1951



1952

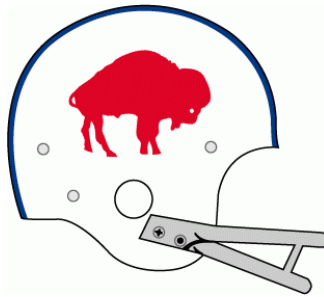
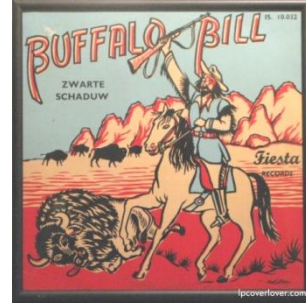
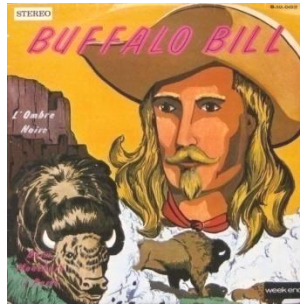
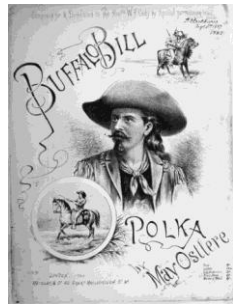


1953

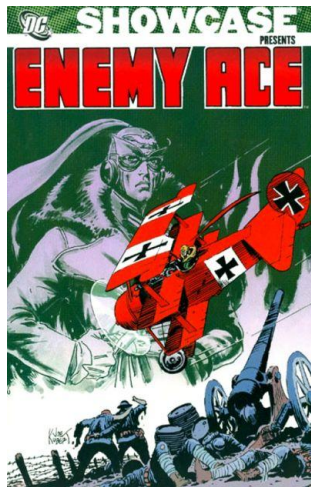
A jet-to-jet war started half the world away from Europe and North America: US Sabres, greatly enhanced by German genius, against USSR MiGs, also influenced by German technology and powered by an English engine.



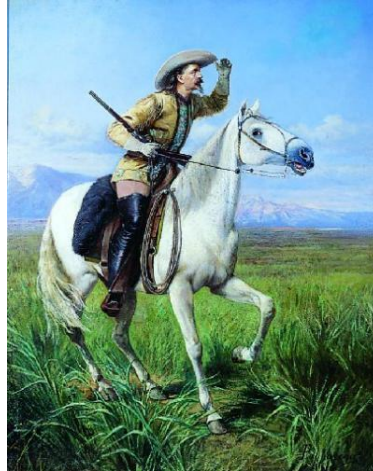
Superior crates, better pilots and the best mechanics won America 'Air Superiority' over the Koreans and the world.



1960



1965



*'Boy Scout' was first mentioned in eighteen ninety-nine in The New Buffalo Bill Library and appeared in **Buffalo Bill, Boy Scout Detective**, and he's been an inspiration to young boys ever since.*

I inspired the killer instinct. During the Vietnam War, faster, advanced American crates were falling to Russian MiGs.



*Had US pilots lost their 'dogfighting' skills? To retrain air combat, the Air Force launched Project **Red Baron**. The Navy soon joined in.*



Imbued with the Richthofen spirit, American pilots quickly achieved 'Air Superiority.'



I had a dog, Moritz, a genuine Danish hound, prettiest in the litter

Moritz slept with me in my bed and received a most excellent education. Month by month, my tender little lap-dog became a colossal, big beast.



Once I even took him with me. My first 'observer', and he behaved very sensibly, much interested in everything as he looked at the world from above. Only my mechanics were dissatisfied when they had to clean the machine.



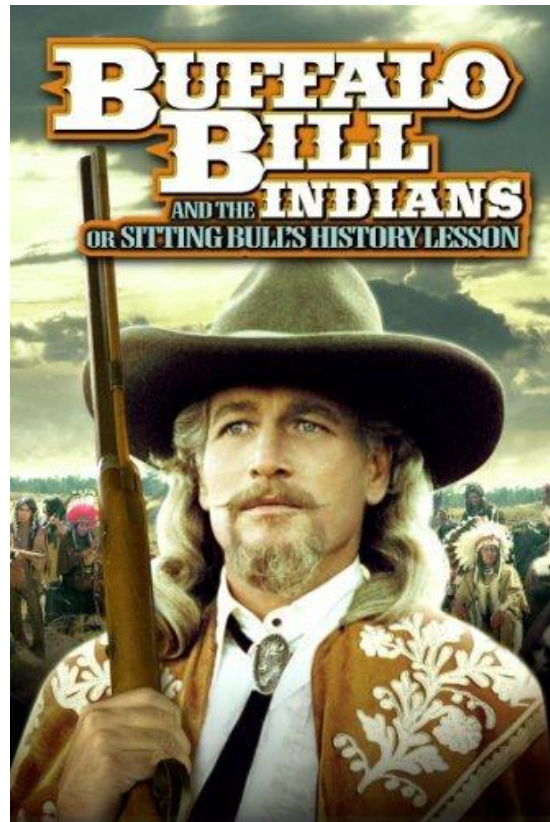
Moritz had a great passion for the chase, especially hares which my mechanics would skin and cook. I didn't much approve of his hunting proclivities and he got a whacking if I caught him at it.



Moritz liked to accompany our flying machines from the start. One day he rushed in front of a crate which had been started. The aeroplane caught him up and a beautiful propeller was smashed to bits. Moritz howled terribly. One of his ears was cut off by the propeller. A long ear and a short ear did not go well together.



1971



1972

"Buffalo Bill" never flew, not even as a passenger. Some said he was afraid. I think I understood his fear. In the saddle for more than sixty years, he was not about to trust a mechanical flying horse.

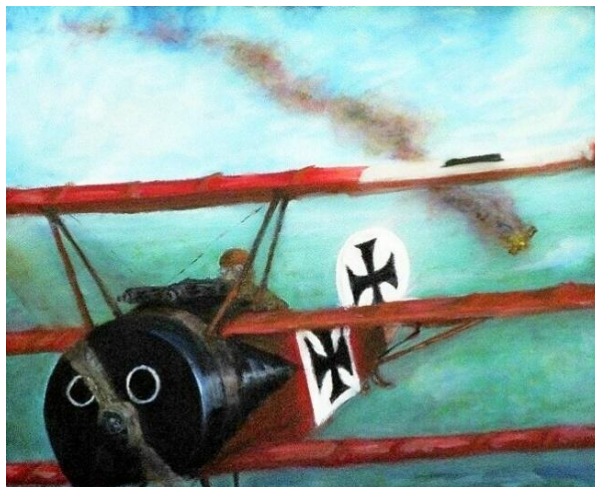


I lived and died in my cockpit, knew every centimeter and smell of it. To sit at the controls of the latest fighter crate and not know how to fly it would terrify me!

What if I could go back? I killed seventy-nine men in the air. If I had survived the war, what could I have said to their families?

That I'm sorry? All soldiers, every last one who would have killed me if I hadn't got them first. In a way, they were lucky. Unlike the endless lists of ordinary Great War dead from a thousand battlefields, my victories have been preserved forever.

*Sons, fathers, husbands and brothers, you didn't die to ever be forgotten. You were killed by the **Red Baron!***



Only reason I never killed an American: I never saw one. But I did kill a bison. Some skill, but not a shred of courage. The beast had no chance. I wanted to do it and I did it. Once was sufficient. To shoot one after another after another after another for money...I could never have been "Buffalo Bill."

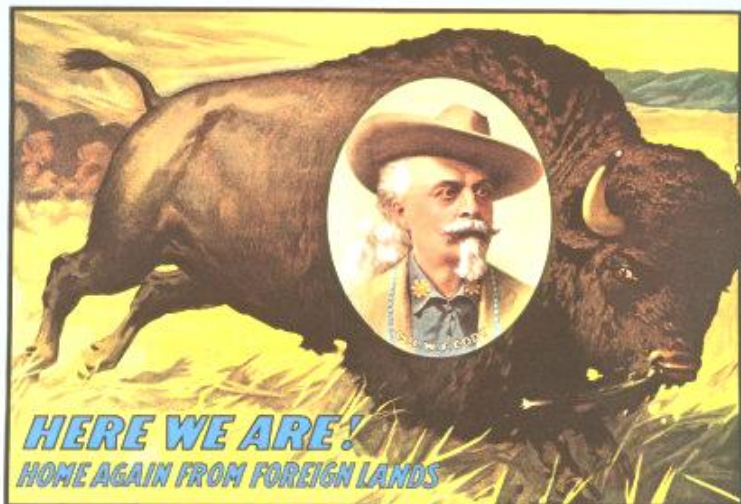


'Manifest Destiny' doomed the herds. The animal was in the way. So were the Indians. It's a wonder a single of either survived. America's humanity exceeds its efficiency.



Americans fled before politicians took action, persuading Congress to establish wildlife preserves and help private bison owners. A century later, the American Bison Society was re-launched by the Wildlife Conservation Society.

"Buffalo Bill" saved many more bison than he ever killed. Before the eyes of millions, he turned America's marauding horned beast into a 'Wild West' circus star.



Wenn wir Glück haben, *circuses will never be extinct.*

But fighter pilots?



No US fighter plane has lost a dogfight in a quarter of a century. More than one hundred 'kills' without a loss. No national air force in the world can hope to match America's "Flying Circus".

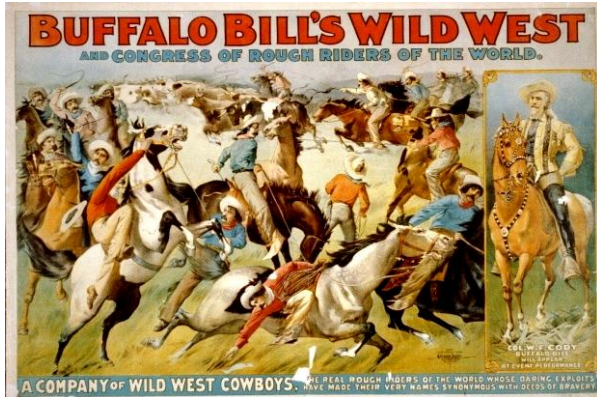


Not even the Richthofen Squadron flying Russian MiGs.

But could any crate survive the ever-improving SAM?



A drone was like mounting a machinegun atop a horse to automatically kill bison, "Buffalo Bill" no longer needed.



"Buffalo Bill" realized that it wasn't just the bison that had been killed, but the Lakota way of life. Confined to reservations, they had become prisoners of war in their own country.



The 'Wild West' gave dozens of Indians jobs promoting them as "The Former Foe--Present Friend, the Americans," skilled horsemen and warriors who had defended their lands.



The biggest star was Sitting Bull, the Sioux visionary who had wiped out Custer. Before I was born, he toured Europe with the show, earning fifty American dollars a week for riding once around the arena. An exotic and romanticized warrior, he gave speeches encouraging education and better relations.

In only four months, Sitting Bull sold hundreds of autographed pictures, then gave most of the money to the homeless and the poor.

"Buffalo Bill" gave the Lakota chief a special bonus: a circus-trained stallion that would prance about at the sound of gunshots.

Years later, when Sitting Bull was murdered, gunshots sent "Buffalo Bill's" horse prancing about. Legend had it that the chief's spirit had made a quick stop on his way to the happy hunting ground.



Unfortunately, "Buffalo Bill's" efforts to help his former enemies had little lasting effect. Since the 'Battle of the Little Big Horn', the only thing the 'Americans' won were the casino rights.



Did the bison have to be changed to be saved? Some were bred with cattle to make 'beefalo'; if the bison tasted better, there'd be money in breeding them.



Has crossbreeding made for a tastier animal? Will there be any 'pure' bison left?



1975



1979



1980

Flying Russian MiGs and French Mirages, twice the Iraqi Air Force had to defend their country. Outnumbered and outgunned, I knew how they felt. Late in the Great War, Jasta morale sank because of our sorry machines. Replacements would fly and die within two weeks.



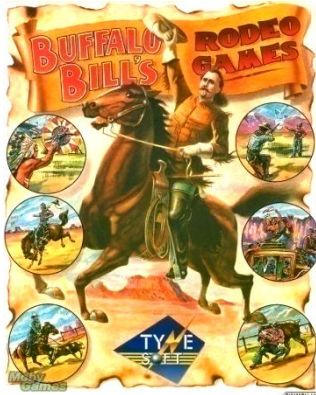
American 'Air Supremacy' had whittled down the lifespan of an Iraqi pilot to two minutes, sixty seconds with the wheels up.



Das macht nichts! Two years, two months, two seconds...Fight on and fly on to the last drop of blood and the last drop of fuel, to the last beat of the heart!



That's 'Buffalo Bill'? Looks more like Eddie Rickenbacker!

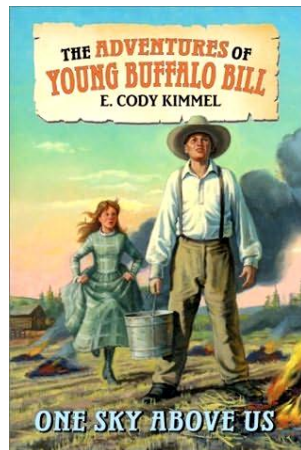


1989



1998

I envy most your American freedoms, "Buffalo Bill" got to choose his adventures. As a little boy of eleven,. I was not particularly eager to join the Cadet Corps. My father wished it. I would rather have been 'William Cody', but no one ever asked me.



United States' History could be written in two volumes; Before and After the Bison. And "Buffalo Bill", you galloped your long life through both. And if not for you, the bison might have disappeared without a trace.



While, just for months, I was flying a red crate and killing people. You became William Cody over and over again before you achieved "Buffalo Bill" who's been honored by his country ever since.

I didn't grow up like that. Once I could walk, I was ordered to march. Always in obedient step. Who I was going to be had already been decided, without a parachute.

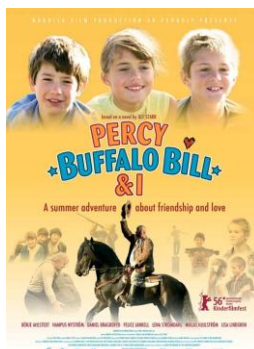
Into the air, I escaped!



*Beyond any ace that ever flew, brave and pure, a knight, a prince, a merciless killer in the sky...I was 'Air Supremacy', I was the **Red Baron**.*



2004



2005



2008

Bless you, "Buffalo Bill", you defined and celebrated an ideal, but it is my spirit that is flying while yours has been run into the ground.



Meine Damen und Herren, allow me to introduce the F-Twenty-Two Raptor, a single-seat, twin-engine fifth-generation supermaneuverable aeroplane that combines stealth, speed, agility, precision and situational awareness, air-to-air and air-to-ground combat capabilities -- the best overall fighter in the world.

Each costs more than a small city's education system. What have you learned from it?



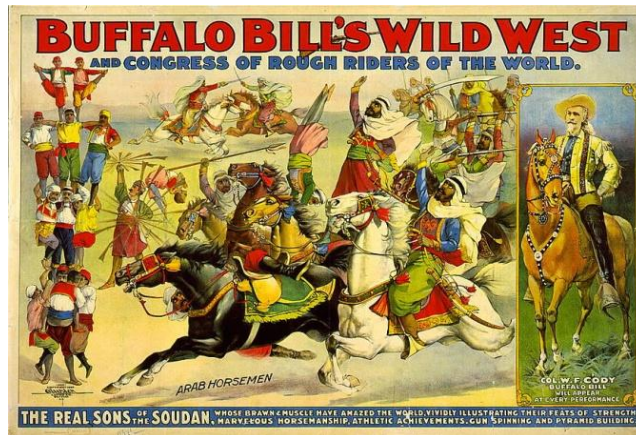
'Preparedness!' The nation uber-listened to you, "Buffalo Bill"!

The F-Thirty-five Joint Strike Fighter is a family of single-seat, single-engine, fifth generation multirole fighters to perform ground attack, reconnaissance, and air defense missions with stealth capability and comes in three models; conventional takeoff and landing variant, short take off and vertical-landing variant, and an aircraft carrier-based crate.



Over the coming decades, taxpayers will buy nearly twenty-five hundred for the US Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy making America's 'Flying Circus' far more expensive than repairing and rebuilding every mile, bridge and tunnel of the whole Interstate Highway System which is crumbling coast to coast.

For this forty million bison had to die?



Auf Wiedersehen, "Buffalo Bill." Your immortality is only as strong as your ideals and your values. Both have long since left the prairie. Only the bison may care and there's not enough of them left to make a difference.



Jawohl, *the greatest adventure is still ahead. 'Air Supremacy' at any price, America would rather be me.*



Ganz genau! *The **Red Baron** flies forever!*



“All my stories are free to read and they always will be.”

americananthologies.wordpress.com