

The Blue Max

The Blue Max is a 1966 war film directed by John Guillermin and starring George Peppard, James Mason, Ursula Andress, Karl Michael Vogler, and Jeremy Kemp. The film was made in DeLuxe Color and filmed in CinemaScope. The plot is about a German fighter pilot on the Western Front during World War I. The screenplay was written by David Pursall, Jack Seddon, and Gerald Hanley, based on the novel of the same name by Jack D. Hunter as adapted by Ben Barzman and Basilio Franchina.

In contrast to films that romanticize the flying aces of the Great War, *The Blue Max* depicts the protagonist as a man who appears to have no regard for anyone but himself. Set against the realities of modern warfare, the film also explores the decline of chivalry and the advent of total war.

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Plot

German Corporal Bruno Stachel (George Peppard) leaves the fighting in the trenches to become an officer and fighter pilot in the German Army Air Service. Joining a squadron in spring 1918, he sets his sights on winning Germany's highest medal for valour, the *Blue Max*, for which he must shoot down 20 aircraft.

Of humble origins (his father ran a hotel with 5 bedrooms), Lieutenant Bruno Stachel considers himself the equal of the aristocratic pilots in his fighter squadron and sets out to prove it. Meanwhile Willi von Klugemann (Jeremy Kemp) resents having a commoner as his rival. Their commanding officer, Hauptmann Otto Heidemann (Karl Michael Vogler), is an aristocratic officer whose belief in chivalry and the laws and customs of war conflict with Stachel's disregard for them.

The Blue Max



Original poster by Frank McCarthy

Directed by	<u>John Guillermin</u>
Produced by	<u>Christian Ferry</u> executive <u>Elmo Williams</u>
Written by	Adaptation: <u>Ben Barzman</u> <u>Basilio Franchina</u> Screenplay: <u>David Pursall</u> <u>Jack Seddon</u> <u>Gerald Hanley</u>
Based on	<i>The Blue Max</i> 1964 novel by <u>Jack D. Hunter</u>
Starring	<u>George Peppard</u> <u>James Mason</u> <u>Ursula Andress</u>
Music by	<u>Jerry Goldsmith</u>
Cinematography	<u>Douglas</u>

- Peppard learned to fly for the film and later called working with Guillermin "the most exciting creative experience I've ever had."^[13]

Director of photography Douglas Slocombe was hospitalized for three weeks with an injured back. Elmo Williams said Guillermin was "indifferent to people getting hurt as long as he got realistic action...a hard-working, overly critical man whom the crew disliked."^[14]

Stunt flying

The majority of the aircraft used in the film were converted Tiger Moths and Stampe SV.4s. Two Pfalz D.IIIs were produced (by two separate companies) for the film, along with three Fokker D.VIIs and two Fokker Dr.I triplanes. Other German aircraft were represented by repainted Tiger Moths and Stampes. Two SE 5 flying replicas were made by the Miles Aircraft company at Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex, England. Other British aircraft were mocked-up trainers made into British S.E.5s. The German lozenge camouflage was not universal to all units at the time the story takes place (Spring 1918), but, in the film, aircraft of all German units are shown in this scheme.

The Fokker Dr.I triplanes are purpose-built replicas. The Tiger Moth silhouette was more appropriate to British aircraft of the period, such as the S.E.5a (one of which Stachel shoots down during his first mission) and presents a good general impression of actual contemporary aircraft.^[15]

The "death-trap" monoplane at the end of the film, known as the "Adler" (German for eagle) in the novel, may have been inspired by the Fokker E.V, which was a late-war monoplane design which did indeed rapidly gather a reputation for poor construction of the wing, resulting in several crashes before being modified and re-designated the Fokker D.VIII. In the film it is portrayed by Patrick Lindsay's Morane 230 Parasol trainer, with a faired-over front seat to simulate a monoplane fighter visually.^{[16][17]}



Fokker E.V

The depictions of aerial combat in the film are particularly realistic. The aircraft ground scenes were shot at Weston Aerodrome near Dublin (which should not to be confused with RAF Weston-on-the-Green, England).



Fokker D.VIII

Pilots from the Irish Air Corps helped recreate the live dog-fight scenes, supported by number of civilians, including Charles Boddington and Derek Piggott. Piggott was the only pilot willing to fly beneath the spans of a bridge. Taking the role of both German pilots and with multiple takes from contrasting camera angles, he ended up flying 15 times under the wide span of the Carrickabrack Railway Viaduct in Fermoy, County Cork, Ireland, and 17 times under the narrower span. The two Fokker Dr.I triplane replicas had about four feet (1.2 metres) of clearance on each side when passing through the narrower span. He was able to fly through the arch reliably by aligning two scaffolding poles, one in the river and one on the far bank. Just before the scenes of flying beneath the bridge, one of the Triplanes executes what could be considered a near-perfect barrel roll as seen from aft of the two Dr.Is used for the scene. Off screen, actor George Peppard flew one of the Pfalz used in the movie.^[18]



Morane MS 230

The director had placed a flock of sheep next to the bridge so that they would scatter as the aircraft approached to show that the stunt was real and not simulated with models. However, by later takes, the sheep had become accustomed to the aircraft, and had to be scared by the shepherd instead. In the printed take, the sheep continued to graze, creating a continuity error which can be seen in the finished film.

The entire collection of aircraft, uniforms and supporting equipment was purchased from 20th Century Fox by ex-Royal Canadian Air Force pilot Lynn Garrison. He kept the collection together in Ireland under his company, Blue Max Aviation, Ltd. Over the following years they played a part in *You Can't Win 'Em All*, *Darling Lili*, *Zeppelin*, *Von Richthofen and Brown*, and various television commercials, including a classic Ridley Scott production promoting Opel's limited edition "Blue Max." Both of the Pfalz replicas and one Fokker D.VII now belong to New Zealand film director Peter Jackson's 1914–18 Trust, with the Viv Bellamy-designed Pfalz now being on display at the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre in New Zealand. All three aircraft are kept in fully airworthy condition. Another of the Fokker D.VII's is on display at the Southern Museum of Flight in Birmingham, Alabama.

Locations

The scenes where the Germans come into the French village were filmed on Calary Bog in County Wicklow, Ireland. For many weeks, the building of the village attracted the locals to watch it coming up. Then it was bombed and made to look destroyed. It was a local tourist attraction for a long time after the film had wrapped.

The Berlin scenes were shot in Dublin. Christ Church Cathedral and Leinster House, the seat of the Oireachtas, the Irish national parliament, are easily recognisable in the background of many scenes and Trinity College served as the army headquarters where von Klugermann's office is located.

Many of the flying scenes were shot at Weston Aerodrome (EIWT) near Lucan, Ireland, about 10 miles west of Dublin hence the name confusion with Weston-on-the-Green. Weston Aerodrome is also home to the *National Flight Centre*.^[19] There is also a restaurant named after the movie at the Aerodrome.^[20] The final scene where Stachel meets his fate was filmed at Baldonnell, the Irish Air Corps' main base. The hangars seen in the movie were built for the Royal Air Force in 1918.

The Carrickabrack Viaduct in Fermoy, Co. Cork was used for the scenes where Stachel and Von Klugermann flew several times under the railway bridge. The view from the 19th century railway bridge which spans the River Blackwater is spectacular and it was one of the reasons the producers of *The Blue Max* chose it as one of the locations for the film. The railway line linked Mallow, Co. Cork to Waterford City. In 1967 the railway line from mallow to ballinacourty, Co. Waterford was closed by CIÉ and the track removed by 1970. The line from Ballinacourty to Waterford city reopened as a freight only line serving newly opened Quigleys Dolomite mine until 1982 when the mine closed and the line was closed again until 2002/03 when the track to Kilmeaden was removed. Since March 2017(the 50th anniversary of the original line closure) the trackbed from Dungarvan to Waterford city is now known as the Waterford greenway, a leisure amenity sharing a narrow-gauge train line from Kilmeaden station to its terminus at Gracedieu, Waterford city.

Historical accuracy

In an article entitled "About *The Blue Max*" the author, Jack D. Hunter, wrote:

On the day of our arrival at the Bray Studios, we were shown to canvas director's chairs with our names on the back and treated to rushes of some key action sequences. And I was literally left speechless when I saw Fokker D-7s with inverted engines and 1916-style