

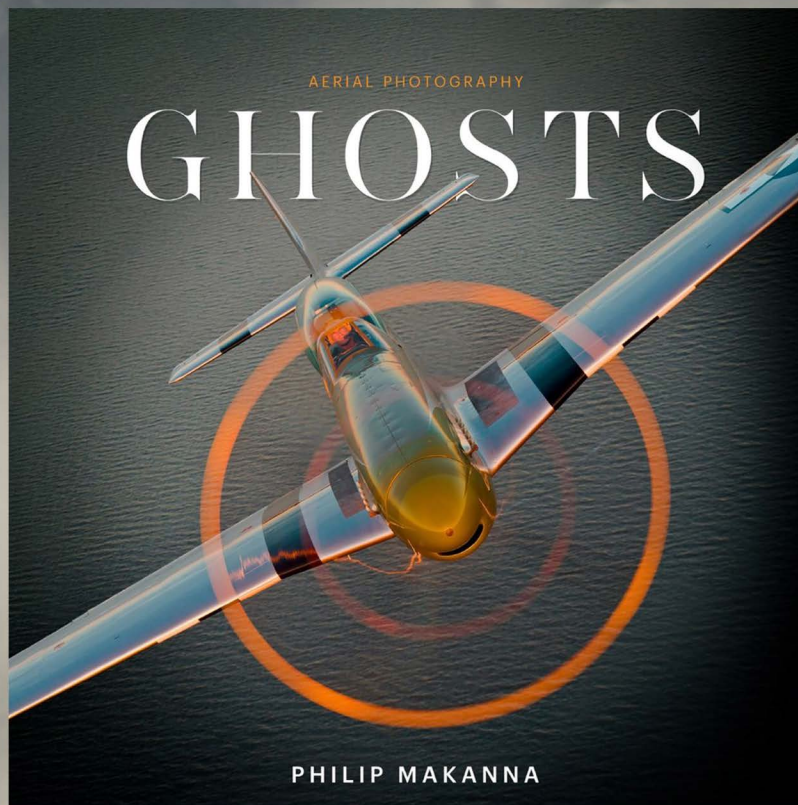
# GHOSTS – Four Decades of Aviation Photography Magic

by Richard Mallory Allnutt / November 28, 2020



Philip Makanna is one of the world's finest and best known aviation photographers. Indeed it is hard to imagine anyone visiting his website who hasn't owned one (or many) of his superlative calendars and books – or given them as gifts. He has been publishing these glossy, large-format calendars since 1980, and they are renowned for their quality, both in terms of content and in their execution. His aviation photography books are no less magnificent; the latest, simply entitled GHOSTS, is a summation of a lifetime's achievement in aerial image making.

While many of the images depict WWII aircraft, Makanna's own father fought in The Great War, so it is unsurprising that his photographic interests extend into covering flying machines from that era too. With the advent of world-class original restorations and the authentic reproduction of WWI airframes in Britain, the USA and especially New Zealand over the past few decades, there are now worthy, representative examples to capture in the air, set against justifiably fabulous backdrops.



Makanna has taken to the skies with vintage military aircraft for almost a half century now, capturing images of these historic flying machines in their element. Much like his legendary photographic forebears [Edward Steichen](#) and [Charles E. Brown](#), Makanna's work so often transcends its genre, becoming true art rather than simply a pretty picture with an aeroplane in it. These artists, and a handful of others, have transformed the field of airborne aviation photography far beyond the mere mechanics of photographing aircraft aloft. At his best, Makanna portrays his subjects with such visceral authenticity that they appear almost sentient, rooted firmly within an equally dramatic aerial canvas that more fully reveals their character. These images are also filled with the language of history, harnessing the life stories of those who once flew, fought and too often died in such aircraft, not to mention the multitudes whose hard work and sacrifice helped design, build and maintain them under frequently arduous conditions.










Makanna's is a rare creative gift; only a handful of currently active air-to-air photographers could measure their own body of work favorably against his. But despite his illustrious career, Makanna is unpretentious and approachable, being extraordinarily generous to other photographers with his time and advice, despite the often cutthroat nature of this highly competitive endeavor.

SUPERMARINE "SPITFIRE" LF Mk. IXB	
Wing Span:	32 feet, 10 inches
Length:	32 feet
Height:	11 feet, 7 inches
Power:	One Rolls-Royce "Merlin" 61 1,325 hp
Weight:	7,500 pounds
Maximum Speed:	405 mph
Service Ceiling:	44,000 feet
Range/Endurance:	414 miles



Squadron Leader R.E. Lane  
Commander of No. 19 Squadron  
Fleet Air Arm, HMS Hermes  
September 20, 1940

SUPERMARINE "SPITFIRE" LF Mk. IXB  
G-ASJF, MHF14

*"The defense of southeast England will last four days and the Fleet Air Force four weeks. We can guarantee extension for the Falster within a month."*

**HERMANN GOERING, REICHSMARSCHALL**  
NAZI AIRMAN, ESTIMATED QUARTERS-OF-STAFF MEETING AT AIRFIELD,  
July 11, 1940

Makanna selected the best of his photographs from the past five decades to illustrate this book. He held nothing back in its production either. The heavy-weight paper he chose and image reproduction standards are first rate. While the photographs are almost universally extraordinary, as one would expect, the design and layout are every bit their complement. I also loved the passages of text he chose from historical figures as companions for both his work and the period images he included. What struck me also was the poetry of his own language in the retelling of personal experiences, both in the air and with veterans. The prose is elegant, spare, and devoid of hyperbole, but so rich in sensory detail that it places you almost perfectly in the moment beside him.



**FOKKER D.VIII**

Wing Span: 27 feet, 6 inches  
Length: 19 feet, 2 inches  
Height: 9 feet, 3 inches  
Power: Oberursel Rotary  
110 h.p.  
Weight: 3,258 pounds  
Maximum Speed: 115 m.p.h.  
Service Ceiling: 20,669 feet  
Range/Endurance: 1 hour 30 minutes  
Armament: 2 Spandau Machine Guns  
Year: 1918



FOKKER D.VIII



Lieutenant 1st Sgt Carl Koenig  
of the III Marine Field Jagdstaffel  
with his Fokker E.V. 143/18  
August 11, 1918

*"A glorious death!  
Fights on and fly on to the last drop of blood and the last drop of petrol  
— to the last beat of the heart and the last kick of the motor,  
— a death for a knight  
— a toast for his fellows, friend and foe."*

**RITTMESTER MANFRED VON RICHTHOFEN**  
REFERRING TO A BRITISH R.E.2C FLYING WITH A DEAD CREW

GHOSTS is a marvelous achievement; if this is to be his magnum opus, then it is worthy of Makanna's career. No serious vintage aviation enthusiast's bookshelf should be without a copy!

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