

Noppen, Ryan K. *Blue Skies, Orange Wings: The Global Reach of Dutch Aviation in War and Peace, 1914-1945*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016. 338 Pp.

If one were to judge this book by the proverbial cover, it might not appear a likely choice for a scholarly review. Both its dimensions and plentiful illustrations suggest that it belongs on a coffee table. Yet beneath the cover is a long-overdue study of the vital role Dutch enterprises played in the development of global aviation in the twentieth century. In weaving together archival records and earlier scholarship from both English and Dutch sources, Ryan Noppen makes a valuable contribution to aviation history.

Noppen begins his study by comparing Dutch success in twentieth century aviation to the nation's "Golden Age" of commercial dominance in the seventeenth century. Success in aviation was due primarily to the national airline (KLM) and the Fokker aircraft company. The accomplishments of these two enterprises would allow the Dutch to play a leading (and disproportionate) role in global aviation.

The advent of Dutch aviation started with World War I. The conflict stimulated interest in military aviation, but limited resources and other factors left the Dutch lagging in the field. After the war, however, they moved quickly to the forefront. Anthony Fokker founded his aviation company upon his return from Germany, where he had spent the war building military aircraft. In addition to a legendary reputation, Fokker brought with him extensive design and production experience, which he quickly put to good use in his homeland. He would continue to produce warplanes, but his interwar success was largely the result of his commercial designs. His airliners became ubiquitous, dominating even the American market during the 1920s. They also proved invaluable to the other key enterprise, KLM. The Dutch airline was remarkably successful in building an international network; most notable were the routes it developed connecting the mother country with distant colonies in Asia. KLM's services were a point of national pride and imperial prestige; they

were pioneering, reliable, and efficient. Coupled with Fokker's aircraft, KLM made the Netherlands a global aviation power.

The 1930s, however, would bring new challenges. KLM would score a notable success in 1934 when one of its airliners, while carrying passengers and competing against a number of purpose-built aircraft, finished second in the MacRobertson Air Race from Britain to Australia. Yet this airliner was not a Fokker, but an American-built Douglas DC-2. This demonstrated KLM's flexibility in pursuing commercial success, but also Fokker's struggle to keep pace with new technological developments, most notably in all-metal aircraft construction. While Fokker adeptly negotiated for license production of such aircraft, his company no longer held its once-dominant position. The company did respond to the growing threat of war with some notable military designs, but as a result of overly frugal Dutch officials, it produced these in very limited numbers. When Germany invaded in 1940, the Netherlands was soon overrun. The story was much the same in 1942 when the Japanese conquered the Dutch East Indies. World War II thus greatly disrupted Dutch aviation. KLM would provide vital wartime services, and the Dutch would contribute to the Allied air campaign against the Axis, but the conflict would leave the homeland devastated and bring its empire to a quick end. Still, Dutch aviation interests did not disappear. Fokker's company resumed production and KLM rebuilt a far-flung international network. While the "golden age" of Dutch aviation had come to a close, it left a remarkable and ongoing legacy.

Noppen's work has many strengths. Foremost amongst these is its overview of Dutch aviation's rise in this formative period. Such an account has been notably absent in the scholarly literature; considering Dutch prominence in twentieth century commercial aviation, this work meets a desperate need. Without question, it will be an invaluable resource for aviation historians. Furthermore, Noppen's research merits praise. He marshals an array of primary and secondary sources, in both English and Dutch, to craft this account. His argument that Dutch prominence in aviation was due to the combination of KLM and Fokker is particularly compelling and avoids the flawed tendency of many aviation histories to focus on just one enterprise.

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Nevertheless, this work does have its limitations. While the scholarly research is evident throughout, the narrative may not appear consistently scholarly. For example, his chapter on World War II, unlike the preceding chapters on the interwar years, does not sustain the scholarly focus on Dutch aviation interests, instead dedicating much space to individual combat missions. While interesting, their connection to the larger narrative is weak. Moreover, the overarching narrative, while good, does have notable gaps. For example, in presenting KLM's efforts at establishing services in the 1920s, the work does not provide sufficient political context, specifically in terms of the aviation policies of the various powers involved. It seems evident that unlike some of its rivals (e.g. Britain's Imperial Airways), KLM was not hampered by international policies and rivalries, yet there is no explanation as to why this may have been the case. Such context is vital to a fuller understanding of how Dutch enterprise flourished.

Even with such limitations, this work makes a significant scholarly contribution with its overarching account of Dutch aviation during this formative period. This is no small matter, as the Dutch enterprises would leave a legacy that persisted long after their "golden age." The Fokker company outlasted many of its contemporaries, and KLM remains one of the world's foremost airlines. Thus, Noppen's work is a valuable study in the field of aviation history.

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