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The Editor, Fly Past,

Key Publishing Ltd.,

Mothorpe Road,

Stamford.

Dear Sir:

It was absolutly fascinating to read: Wilhelmshaven Disaster, in the June issue. Group Captain Harris is to be highly commended for the excellent article which recreates, for me at least, this abortive fiasco exactly as it was.

The only small quibble I have with him is his assertion that, " only one squadron, 214, formated well". He seems to have forgotten that 9 Squadron was considered the prime formating bomber squadron having been practicing formation flying with 9 aircraft in three groups of 3 all summer in preparation for the XXV International Aviation Exhibition to be held at Brussels in mid July and at which we were to represent the R.A.F. I see that I did about 21 hours training flying for this which does not seem much these days but which in the pre-war R.A.F. was quite a bit. Our C.O. was W. F. Lloyd who was an extreme perfectionist. I would say that I was one of the best Wellington formation pilots at that time which stood me in good stead on Dec. 18th. It was also a fact that a good deal of local training, at least so far as 9 Sqdn. was concerned, involved what was called: 'fighter evasion tactics'. In this, sections of 3 a/c did such suicidal manouvers as 'rotating vic', in which No.2 a/c would gain some 30' and pass over the top of No. 1. to take up No.3s. place, while No.3. would lost some height and passed under No. 1. to take No. 2s. place. All of which was supposed to throw the attacking fighters off whereas I suspect that all it did was to make it more difficult for our own gunners to keep the guns trained on the target.

The above fighter evasion tactics lead to the collision of 2 of 9 Sqdn. aircraft right over Honnington village and which I actually watched from outside B Flight hanger. In this case, No.2. lost sight of the leader and reduced height to take up his new position too early. His port airscrew cut off the rear of No. 1s. fuselage just aft of the astro dome. This caused him to do an incredibly tight loop, his main plane coming down on No2s. tail plane and they both plunged into a small meadow right in the middle of the village. 9 crew members were killed and this included S/ldr Lamb - O.C. A. Flight plus four other pilots. Not that this has anything to do with the Wilhelmshaven raid, it is just an aside on this matter of the formation flying.

Harris is, of course, perfectly right in his contention that if 'Higher Command's' planning was for heavily armed bombers to fly in formation to and from targets in formation, ploughing their way through the fighters, then we should have all beeh adequately trained in such flying. As it was, the majority were hopelessly untrained in such flying.

As to the contention that W/Cdr Pellett flew too fast: I have heard this before and do not agree with it. I found his speed, whatever it was to be quite suitable and had no difficulty as was seen. I maintained tight formation as ordered even on the outside of turns. I kept tucked in behind Harris and would also have brought my three home if Ramshaw hadn't had some tanks holed. I had a port tank holed and transferred fuel to the other side. As it was, my ground crew said that the tanks had nothing much but the strong smell of petrol in them!

THIS CLEARS Pellett. LEFT

Like Harris, I saw very little of the battle except the criss-cross of tracer bullets and the occaisional fighter. We were hit several times though nothing serious, as I remember and I seem to recall being told that there were 52 holes in the aircraft.

This particular trip forms the preface of Max Hastings book: Bomber Command which I expect many of your readers have read. I had quite an exchange of letters and tapes with Max Hastings when he was writing it.

Enclosed is a photo to prove my point about the formation flying plus a couple of others which you might find amusing. They are photos of photos and may not be adequate for printing but you are welcome to use them if you wish.

Lastly: I was Mentioned in Despatches for this, I suppose it was for this as it is dated 20th. January 1940 and I certainly did not do any other operations between these dates. I did do the raid to Brunsbuttel on Sept. 3rd, got my 3 a/c back to England (and was within 20 mins. of dropping the first bomb of the war) as well as ~~a few~~ other sweeps looking for German navy vessels, though I do not think that these runs would have any contributing factor to this 'mention'.

Yours very truly,

Peter Grant. D.F.C., A.F.C.
S/Ldr retd.

A footnote: Should you print any of this, and it is seen by A. Harris or any member of my crews, I do hope they will get in touch with me if they so wish. I am not a subscriber to your incredible magazine and will have no way of knowing of any further writings on this matter unless you print my address of forward any correspondence arising from it.
As it chanced to turn out, I was visiting with my son and his wife in Ottawa. He is a charter pilot and flys for a company called Bradley Avitation who do charter work in the North. While there, another pilot of his aquaintance stopped by with the copy to ask if this F/Lt Grant was his dad. Well, as F/Lt Grant was actually there it turned out to be quite an interesting afternoon!