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Dear Paul,

Thank you so much for writing and I will attempt to answer the questions which you have about Wilhelmshoven.

As to the flying: Certainly, I'm really flattered what you say about my own flying in my section of 3, though with real modesty I feel that I did ~~as~~ no more than was required or more than was quite reasonably and easily obtainable. Though I didn't think much about it at the time, I must have been a pretty competent pilot as right from my EFTS days at Yatesbury I had rated 'Above Average' and 'Exceptional' in that little block that was stamped in the log-book each year. Anyway, we did what we did and it turned out that we were mutually supportive as we emerged from there with little more than a few (or quite a few) bullet holes! You complement me on my flying, though I knew full well that it was made easier and possible for me to do it by your own good and steady flying of the leading aircraft in your section. And, for this I thank you too. My Nos. 2 & 3 pilots — Sgts Purdy & Hewitt were also first-rate pilots. Sgt Purdy & I were the only 2 of 9 sqdns 9 a/c to get back to Honnington. Hewitt, with Sgt Rawshaw as 2nd pilot, came down in the sea just off Grimsby, or was it Cromer, and were picked up by a trawler.

The a/c in my section were as follows:

N.2983 -WS-J.
Sgt Hewitt. R.
Sgt Rawshaw J.
LAC Connolly D.
* Lac Lilley W
Acl Driver CR.

~~SR~~ N.2964 -WS-D
Self.
Sgt Douglas. K.
LAC Jackson R.
Acl Grafton L.
Acl Williams CL.

N 2981 WS-F
Sgt Purdy T.
Sgt Witson W.S.
Sgt Wheatley W.
LAC O'Neill G.
Cpl WARE J.
LAC Peters J.

* I believe Lilly was drowned in the ditching or he could have been shot or injured

Nice that you should have been asked to write the foreword to the book and I will naturally do all I can to help you though after all these years I am not able to recall too many details.

I have only the vaguest memory of the trip over to 3 Group HQ with my flight commander, one Roy Cole, an older almost fatherly, non flying type; so he seemed to me, a mere 22 year old! I do not think the other two Sqn. captains came along, though I could be wrong about this, though come to think of it one section was led by a F/Sgt so I suppose all 4 captains were there. There is probably not much point in my trying to re-create and recall in detail the actual briefing; as I suspect you can do this as well or better than I. In fact I can't remember much about it. The usual preamble by an intelligence type of some sort about the flow of flow ships along the coast, and almost nothing about fighters. In fact I doubt if we heard about the existence of the He 110s. Whether she a bit and we were all enjoined and entreated to keep close and particularly not to let any bombs go on land. I can just remember you speaking to me - being a S/Ldr and somewhat taller than my 5'-6" I seem to remember being somewhat overawed by you!

So, we went home and in due course, the next day, we climbed aboard our Wimpeys with that fought-apprehensive, feeling in the pit of the stomach! at least, for me. Then we were forming up somewhere over the Wash, I think. Some of the Feltwell contingent were late, as I recall it, though they caught up with us.

Having paraded down the Dutch Coast in full view of the enemy we eventually did our leisurely pass over with the bomb-doors open waiting for the order to bomb which, unbelievably, never came. There were several groups of targets as I remember it, so presumably the Lieut Cdr. with better either did not know his stuff and couldn't identify the Ships or had not the confidence to make the necessary decision. * Once out of flak range, the fighters fell on us as you know very well. As I said in my first letter, I was too busy attending to the flying to see much of the battle. One of my most vivid impressions is that quite suddenly the fighters all left us and turned for home. And I remember feeling enraged that we were still flying along quite peacefully under the clear blue sky.

* Another possibility is that it would not have been possible to turn such a large formation to bring it over the target in time.

To answer some of your questions:

1) No. I kept up just above your slip stream most of the time even though most of the attacks seemed to be coming from slightly above and from the sides. The most murderous and dangerous attacks came from the ME 110s Mid-upper turrets which could turn 360°. They sat along side us at a point where neither front nor rear turrets could cover, as they formed somewhat less than 180°, so creating a blind spot. † See footnote.

2) Now, why did'nt the others keep station? Ask me another. I have'nt the faintest idea. The notion of breaking formation and trying to dive away from the fighters was utterly ridiculous. Any School boy would know that there is no possible way that our aircraft could out-run the fighters. In the case of 'Cheese' Lomax and his cock-up with the flaps, I suppose all he could do was to dive away to the sea surface to make himself a more difficult target. But why they flew in such open formation I've no idea and they didn't live to tell!

37 Sqn

The other aircraft on the port side, were made up thus:

N 2939 WS-H
Fo Challes. *

N 2941 WS-?
Fo Allison *

N 2940 WS-? *
P/O Lines

N 2873 - WS-C
Sgt Delts.

N 2872 - WS-?
S/Ldr Guthrie *

N 2871 WS-B
Fo. McRae.

I have the complete crew lists if you should need them.

* Lost in the action - NO survivors.

Delts & McRae got back to UK, though didn't make it to Honnington. (only Sgt Pordy & I did) Their two a/c were write-offs. My a/c had to go back to ~~Breach~~ Vickers for repairs and I had so little petrol left, due to holes in the non-sealing fuels, though I transferred some in flight when I saw it streaming out, that the ground crew said there was nothing in the tanks but the strong smell of petrol!

!!

As to our CO.: I think that by Dec 18th H.P. Lloyd had been posted and my flight cdr, S/L Rae Cole, had been made C.O. of 99th. Both were very

definately non flying types (though I did give Cole some dual when he was posted and he did at least one solo!) I sometimes flew Lloyd in the Stn. Cdrs Magister to Northolt or some such place. Squdr Ldr Mellor was our Stn. Cdr. by that time or thereabouts.

I was slightly disappointed that you didn't say anything about yourself. It would be interesting to hear how you are keeping. Are you farming your place how many acres have you? etc etc. If you write again it would be so nice to have some personal news of you.

Yesterday was a bad day for me. I chopped the top off 3/8" of the middle finger of my left hand. Someone distracted my attention and stopped to talk while I was using a mowing machine sharpener. - A grinder specially made for sharpening reel type mowers - I turned back towards the machine which was still running while I was still looking at Bob Young. Though I did not see what happened I think I caught my finger between a fast running drive belt and the pulley. All I felt was a bang on the finger, and the top of it was gone. The person I spoke to is the owner of an enormous sod farm which is on our country road. It was his machine I was using!. I had longer it sewed up in hospital and today it is only slightly sore. But I cannot use the typewriter or use my hand very much at all. Hence my scrawly handwriting which I hope you can read.

† Food-for-Fire. Did you know that after this trip I was asked to speak at some gunnery school about the German fighters and their tactics. Well, I told them like it was. I said amongst other things, that even a close well organized formation has not got much of a chance in a long running battle & that single aircraft were easily out gunned. What else could I have said? Nothing. At least. Literally right.

A couple of days later I was called on the carpet by our Stn Cdr, a G/C Herring and reprimanded for giving a talk detrimental to morale and he put a bad note in my documents to that effect.

That being the end of the sheet of paper it will become the end of the letter! Do write again, in any case, but if I can help any more I'm always glad to have a short at it. Sincere in Yours Peter.