

Church Fenton, Feb 25, 1940

Dear Mike,

Well here I am writing again and I hope you won't feel offended because I haven't done it sooner but we've really had or rather have so little time to ourselves now that I don't very often get the chance to write. We are off to France soon now and we spend all our time in the in the air brushing up on our attacks, formations, etc. and then when night comes we generally fly all night practicing night intercept times – we started our flying formation at night about a week or so ago and it's the most hairraising thing I've ever done. Before the war you could use the navigation lights of the leader as a mark to (formate?) on but as we're not allowed to use navigation lights we have to use the exhaust flames as a guide. Most of us have grown half a head of gray hair since we started and hope we never have to do it again once we've got it "buttoned up."

We get a hell of a kick out of the Canadian pilots over here – they're bloody near frightened to death because our aerodromes are so small and can't see how we land Hurricanes and Spitfires on them – one bloke overshot in a (moth) trying to land here and we're still laughing about it.

I've been inquiring about your brother-in-laws squadron and as far as I can find out there are no Canadian flight squadrons in the country yet only "Army-co-op." They're giving them six weeks to two months course in up to date fighting and flying when they came over anyway before they will consider them fully operational and by that time we'll be in France so I probably won't get a chance to see him before I am home on leave. (home=London).

My flight commander and I had a little heart to heart talk not long ago (he did most of the talking) and we've been getting along marvelously since. I'm being made a section-leader which means I lead one formation of three machines in the flight (there are six in a flight) and it sure is good fun except I'm not so keen on the responsibility. It's alright but I'd sooner be no. 2 in a formation any day where you've got the best position and only half the responsibility.

I don't know whether I told you about the chap we had killed but I suppose I did and another friend of mine – I went through civil school and F.T.S. with him - was killed the other day at a station not far from here. A bloke in a Spitfire collided with him and smashed his machines all to hell. Two other blokes whom I also went through with (spurn in on a Mayister) about a month and a half ago fooling around shooting up a train and both of them came out with spinal injuries and have been in casts since. One of them is being court-martialed out of the service for it and the other chap will probably be sent (drag?) towing or something like that. I guess it isn't worth fooling around much through we all do it. The machines they were flying was scattered over about three fields and when the wreckage finally stopped they were left just sitting in their seats – no wings, no undercarriages, no fuselage, no engines – just the seats.

(Name Thes Mitchisism?) – he's one of the chaps I came over with, he's with a Blenheim squadron – had an accident the other day. Both his engines cut while he was flying and he went through a small wood, four hedges, and a stone wall before he stopped – and wasn't hurt except for shock. They say it was a

wonder he ever got out of the wreck. He's just got married a month previously too. Still they don't always happen and its generally your own fault anyways so it never (bothers?) anyone – they just say what a lucky devil the bloke was and forget about it.

Has Barnes taken the R.C.A.F. offer yet? The air-ministry said they weren't going to give them commissions not even for the duration unless they were super-skilled pilots and very highly recommended and that they rest were going to be given sergants rank. I don't know if its time but it sounds quite lodgical (sic) as that's what they're doing here and I definitely know thats what they intend to do in the Empire Air scheme. I feel like an old hand now being in the service for more than a year well over two-hundred hours flying and looking towards the three hundred – its sure a lot different from my first two or three months with my whole fifty flying hours.

I was glad to hear that you had a good Christmas and New Years and enjoyed yourself. Also very glad to hear that you had been given a better job – I know darn well you'll make good in it – best of luck anyway. Hows Olive and all the rest of the Riley's – Ma and Pa especially – I often wish I could take a trip back and see you all again. I sure miss you at times but I've got so used to being away that they don't come very often now.

I got a swell letter from Louise not long ago and was glad to hear from her. I think I passed up a good thing in her. I must write to (Glover?). I haven't for two or three months now - I keep meaning to them. I forget all the time so now I just don't do it any more.

Well, so long for now but write soon and give me all the local "dope" and gossip. Also give my regards to Aunty (Bea?) and Uncle Frank.

Until the Next Time,

Yours,

Bill