

ROYAL AIR FORCE STATION,  
CHURCH FENTON,  
TADCASTER,  
YORKS.

Tadcaster 176.

25/2/40.

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 a rather hard 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 air brushing up on our attacks, formations etc. and then when night comes we generally fly all night practising night interceptions - we started our flying formation at night about a week or so ago and it's the most hair-raising 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

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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 aerobomes are so small and can't see how we land Hurricanes and Spitfires on them - one bloke overshoot in a month trying to land here and we're still laughing about it. I've been inquiring about your brother-in-law's squadron and as far as I can find out there are no Canadian fighter squadrons in the country yet only "Army-Co-ops". They're giving them a six weeks to two months course in up to date fighting and flying when they come 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 come 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 marvellously since. I've been 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 machine all to hell. Two other blokes whom I also went through with open in in a Magister 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 charge towing or something like that so ~~it~~ I guess it isn't worth fooling around much though we all do it.

The machine they were flying was scattered over about three fields and when the wreckage finally stopped they were left just sitting in the seats - no wings, no undercarriage, no fuselage, no engine - just the seats. The Mitchem - 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 ~~at~~ 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'd just got married ~~two~~ month previously too. Still they don't always happen and it's generally your own fault anyway so it never bothers anyone - they just say what a lucky devil the bloke was and forget

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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-diller pilots and very highly recommended and that the rest were going to be given sergeants rank. I don't know if its true but it sounds quite logical as thats 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 damn well you'll make good  
in it. - best of luck anyway. Hows Olive and all  
the rest of the Rileys - 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 sure glad to hear from ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> I  
think I passed up a good thing in her. I must  
write to Glen I haven't for two or three months  
now - I keep meaning to then 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 Outy Bea and Uncle Frank

Until the Next Time.

Yours  
Bill

25/2/40



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From - P/O W.L. McKNIGHT.  
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25.2.40





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