

NAME: John

RANK: Pilot Officer (U.S. Volunteer)

ORGANIZATION: Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF)

OVERSEAS WARTIME SERVICE: Multiple Theaters of Operations

- The following text is directly from two original wartime period letters written by John. These are the only letters from John in the site curator's possession.
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- No controversial material has been omitted from the following text aside from edited profanity for the protection of younger readers. No grammatical or spelling errors have been corrected.

John, a U.S. volunteer serving with the RCAF, writes a friend in the United States:

“XXX. XX. 1941.

As if I'd forget you, you old mud hen. Where have you been all this time? D _ _ n good to hear from you again. Really I'm glad you wrote...

...Am writing to you from an hospital bed. Have been in a month now but expect to be out in a fortnight. Nothing serious – just that old knee trouble again. Did a real job on it this time.

You sound just a bit jealous of me – but don't kid yourself either. It's wise of you to finish college – that's an old line but its true. Besides you can learn to fly in your odd hours. Nothing to it – I ought to know. And aren't I proof that any dope can learn to fly. The smart thing to do is not kill yourself.

Think I'm rather lucky – but not boasting, understand. Was in the air force 1 yr. and spent the last 2 wks in a hospital. Two out of 52 isn't too bad -- & I'm not going to make an habit of it, tho I've already started my second year flat on my back.

Have had plenty of shaky do's -- & some close calls but have managed to come thru OK & in 1 piece which to me is just as important.

Not unscarred tho – my forehead looks as if some one has been playing tit-tat-toe on it with razor blades. But then I never was much to look at – was I? My knee is badly banged up & raw, but I'm getting electrical treatment & the leg muscles are developing again.

This was my third crash landing & the only one to have an bad effects. And the funny part is I was the only one unlucky this last time – my crew are out on 'sick leave' waiting for me to come back.

I'm stationed at -- [censored] Eng. You can write to me there if you like. Perhaps you hear about the daylight raids carried out by bomber command of the R.A.F. Well that's my style. Trained for SEF single engine fighters I get put on 'twins' & bombers at that.

They didn't give me much trouble – 3 circuits & bumps & I took it around myself, solo. You should see me throwing my weight around the skies & low flying – all our do's are done at 50' & less – much less.

I fly Blenheims made by the Bristol people & they are OK for my money. Not too much on speed but they can take it. Have come back twice on 1 engine, once from the Fresian Is. & once from Dunkirk each time made it to base.

Am enclosing two photos – hope you can receive them. [censored]

We've had 3 almost in the same spot & as yet the rear-gunner hasn't been touched. That same day xx we got hit 3 times – one taking the port motor off & it necessitated a 1 engine return & a crash landing to boot as our under cart was knocked to h __ l.

It gets rather warm at times. I've got some swell pictures I've taken on 'ops' (operations against the enemy) And also of riddled kites of mine. Wish I could have gotten a picture of this last one. Hardly enough left to photograph, tho.

Have gotten a souvenir from all three crashes – including this last which was quite a feat when you consider we were 20 miles off shore. – still I don't care to add any more to xx my collection.

The work we do is the most exciting in this war – take it from me. Day light raids at low level are no child's play. I suppose its safe to say now that I've taken part in daylight raids over the invasion ports, raids into France, Holland, Belgium, Germany & the naval bases during this late offensive of the RAF. And equally numerous goes against shipping. That it dangerous goes without saying – just a point: my crew was the only one to come back from that shipping raid we were last on & then 'they' almost wrote us off, too.

Still I'm anxious to get back – its going to be h __ l if I don't pass this medical board. You get keyed up doing a trip every other day that this last month almost did me in mentally. Must have been nerves I guess as I feel myself again now – yet the thought of having to stay in one spot for more than a week almost knocked me off my beam. (not too hard a job at best of times – eh?) Just couldn't stand not being in the show. Turned down a week's leave day before my last trip. Funny isn't it.

Due for some convelescence leave probably & should be able to see London again. Some village. Have seen quite a bit of the country – the more I see the better I like it over here.

This military hospital isn't too hot – you know what service institutions are like. But that 'civilian' hospital I spent 3 wks in – oh heaven! Those nurses treated us swell. Still as the Cockney's say: 'I should worry I should fink' I'll be out soon enough. Do me a favour & write again soon...

Cheerio for now

John”

John writes the same friend again in the United States:

“XXX. XX. 1941.

Your last letter came to the convalescent home and as they discharged me a few days later & my sqdn gave me a week sick-leave which I spent in London this is my first opportunity to answer.

All the news of the old crowd was d __ n interesting and welcome. It's good to hear from home and what everyone is doing these days.

About those photos you requested. My secretary usually attends to these matters but she got

married so I'm sending along a couple myself – one at the stick of a Blenheim which is what I fly & the other on a seat at the convalescent home. In this last you can see the sign of the cross on my forehead & other scars about my right eye. (Wearing R.A.F. blue battle dress)

It's great to be back but they've grounded me for awhile. This last crash indicates to them that perhaps I need a medical exam. Of course getting shot up several times & then shot down they figure its for my own good. Don't tell my mother but they want me to instruct at a training sqdn. But I turned that down so they insist I have a medical.

So now I'm a 'duty pilot' doing time in the control tower checking flight times, new arrivals, dishing out weather reports, putting up traffic regulations & using the radio telephone. Not too bad but it had not better last too long. I can go up with new crews and teach them low level bombing but can't fly myself yet.

It's almost 3 months now since I went into the drink & I can't wait to get cracking again.

[censored]

There's an outside chance I may get to fly on these new Bostons and do I ever want to. Not that a Blenheim isn't so hot because they are but a change into the heavy class would be better. And the experience gained valuable.

Have time on five types now and would like a chance to try them all – at least once anyhow. That's a large order but then its only possible in the R.A.F. [censored]

...too far ahead. If I feel inclined tho I can go to the East or go to a training sqdn in S. Africa, Egypt or maybe back to Canada. Then there's Coastal Comd., ferry service, or an operational training unit here. And of course that outside chance of my being transfered to Fighter Comd.

And many of other things can happen too. But just now I'm concentrating on this medical exam coming up next week. Strict affairs and tough if you come up against a stickler for form M/O.

In London had a great time and met a swell girl. The type who makes you think seriously of settling down. You know me tho – never serious about anything. It's funny how you can come so far & then by mere chance meet some one who appeals to your finer instincts (ahem!) But that is the gist of that much talked of state called life.

And is the big city the place to have fun? In 7 days 27 pounds or about \$110 to you, departed and in good style too, never had such a time.

Saw many of the gang and did a lot of 'line shootin' – compareing tall tales to you. Tho most of them were on actual fact.

Just as an example of what London is like I met in one of the big bars a Canadian whom I had last saw in Regina Can. And as we talked & drank – new vice indulged in only on leave, it developed his first 'op' (operation against -) was in a sqdn of 'Spits' escorting 3 Blenheims against a convoy [censored] As it happen this was also my last 'do' and he saw the 3 of us get shot down. He was the one who reported our position to the rescue launch which ½ hr. later fished us out.

So we had a drink on that and perhaps he didn't catch a load of h _ _ l – all in fun tho. It's surprising how many chaps I met who thought I'd had it. And of course they all had to buy the ghost – me, a drink. There's no taboo on talking shop and there were some real hair-raisers told...

[censored]

When I got back – with over 150 little ventilation holes in the fuselage & tail & the tail trim control broken so I had to fly for 2 hrs with my arms locked forward to prevent the kite from climbing – well I told the Intell. Off. I had straddled it. Only 2 have gone off so maybe this pic was taken too soon but it still looks good. As we were at least ¼ mile away it was hard to say & see, but I gave myself the benefit of doubt and was disappointed to know I hadn't got it.

That 'pic' is pucker gen as we have that print in our intelligence room. I intend to send a copy to my father it should go by the censor so if you can't get one drop down to the old nest sometime in the future and take a glimpse. Nothing spectacular understand just my personal contribution...

...Just now am broke awaiting pay day (too much poker) So this won't get mailed until Fri. No retaliations please, write again soon. You come thru fast haven't heard from my mother since your first letter. Maybe you ought to give them the gen on how to post a letter.

Cheerio for now old boy

John"

- John died later in the Second World War.
- **For visual context, this link connects to original wartime footage in the public domain that covers the type of mission which John describes above (viewer discretion advised):**
<https://archive.org/details/ADC-136c>
- **For additional detail, this link connects to a Wikipedia article that covers John's wartime organization, the Royal Canadian Air Force (reader discretion advised):**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Royal_Canadian_Air_Force