Source 11 (LAP 1/2/17)

Extract from a letter from Sir Lawrence to his mother Mary Pattinson in which he discusses a 'street corner brawl', and describes taking a young observer along the lines only to find himself involved in a fight with four German planes. He admits he didn't manage to incapacitate any of them, but feels he has 'shown the superiority of the British pilots'.

13 Feb 1917

I am sorry to say that I was involved in street corner brawl with 4 Huns yesterday. I was taking one of my young observers along the lines who had never seen a shell or Hun before to see if we could cut one off on our side and presently a scout hove in sight about 3 miles over their side. We cleared the decks for action and it dived on us closely followed by two more and a very fast two seater.

We had the most heated and hurried discussion imaginable which lasted for 20 minutes which varied in range from 150 yards to 5 and in height from 11,00 to 5,500 feet. It was fearfully quick because as soon as I charged one machine I had to swing to meet another diving for the deadly position under my tail. None of them ever got fairly there or I shouldn’t have been writing this letter. Eventually an induction pipe on my engine was hit and I retired to our side turning frequently to growl at the Huns on the way.

The shots were very difficult and rather beyond any inexperienced observer and I am afraid we didn’t incapacitate any of them but the fight was of enormous value as it clearly proved the absolute superiority of the British pilots that I could fight 4 faster machines for so long and hold my own and also it gives all my young gentlemen who haven’t been in action a warning against thrusting in too boldly and a primary contempt for the Huns as fighting men. It was much the hottest fight I have been in and was the only one so far in which really “all out” manoeuvring was necessary.
I am sorry to say I was involved in a street corner crash with a truck yesterday. I was taking one of my young observers along the lines who had never seen a shell or their before to see if we could not cut one off on our side & presently a scout came in sight about 3 miles over their side. We cleared the decks for action & it dawned on us closely followed by two more & a very fast two sealers. We had the most heated & heated discussion imaginable which lasted for 20 minutes and varied in range from 1500 yds to 5 and in height from 11,000 – 5,000 feet. It was painfully quick because as soon as I charged one machine I had to swing to meet another coming for the deadly position under my tail. None of them ever got fairly there or I should not have been writing this letter. Eventually an extraction pipe on my engine was hit & I returned to our side turning frequently to cooling out the series one way. The shots were very difficult to return beyond my inexperienced observer & I am afraid we didn't incapacitate any of them but the fight was of common value as it clearly proved the absolute superiority of

But with pilots that I could fight 4 fighter machines for so long & hold my own & also it gives all my young gentlemen who haven't been in action a warning against thrusting in too boldly and a enormous contempt for the thing as fighting men. It was much the hottest fight I have been in, was the only one so far in which really "all out movement was necessary. I walked out at my old
Key Words

Brawl - fight

Hun - a derogatory term used by British officers in the First World War to describe the German armed forces