

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.

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Key Words

Brawl - fight

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