

19/11

Dear Bob

Yours of 18/2 1941. I would always be glad to make any contribution, however small, to any responsible history of any aspect of the late war. But quite honestly, I don't think I am in a position to be the smallest use to you in this context. As I of Plans I was really in no way concerned with the conduct of the Battle of Britain. That was the job of the Ops Branch of the Air Staff and I was fully occupied with my own job of future Planning - the ERP 21 expansion scheme, how and to what extent we could build up the strength of the RAF as Dominion Air Forces in '41 and '42, the Beaver's fantastic estimates of what we could get from American industry - and so on. Actually I left for Washington in the latter context quite soon after the 17th October and was detained there in connection with the ABC conversations, allocations under Lend-Lease and so on till early April '41.

Now you mention it, I do recollect being at a conference - which I suppose was the one on 17 October - but I cannot imagine why I was there at all. My rather hazy recollection is that the object of the exercise was purely tactical, to resolve a difference of opinion between Park and Leigh Mallory about the reinforcement of 11 Gp by 12 Group and particularly the employment of what I think they called 'Balbos' - i.e. putting up whole wings to meet the German attacks. If I remember rightly Sholto was in the chair. And I recollect some feeling of astonishment and resentment that L-M should have brought along Douglas Bader - feeling that a young and junior officer was out of place at such a high level meeting. I have no recollection of what conclusion was arrived at - I rather fancy the outcome was that Keeble should be left to get on with it in his own way.

I have no notes of the meeting, and never lived my memory, particularly on a matter in which I had no responsibility. I was of course intimately concerned with the supply of aircraft and pilots to meet battle wastage,

in fact that was one of the main reasons for my visit to Washington
just after; maybe it was in that connection that Newell or
Wilfrid told me to attend the conference. But I knew nothing
about Fighter Tactics; all my recollection is that I felt some
slight resentment that L.M. (though he was a friend of mine)
should be trying to tell Keith Park how to fight a battle which
actually I thought he was fighting rather well. I don't remember
anything that Dowding said - in fact I think he did not say
much. But honestly my hazy memories of a meeting
28 years ago are hardly worth the paper they are written
on, and certainly can not be of any use to you in this context.

Dowding was one of the very few officers of his seniority
whom I hardly knew. I was out of England when he gave
up Fighter Command and have no knowledge whatever of
the circumstances. I think he was shabbily treated by
W.S.C. - compare the latter's handling of that worthy
man Ironside, a Baron and a peerage for his part made
a monstrous balls of cigs and Cinc Home forces.

But the Battle of Britain was not my business
and I had more than enough of my own to keep me
busy. I still can't imagine why I was at that
conference at all. I certainly contributed nothing to it.

By all means do look in if you are visiting
Monkton Combe or Bill Elliot - give me a ring
that as I am often out. But you will see that
you can't expect to glean any information out
of me that will be any use.

Yours sincerely

Keith Stammers