

Private and Confidential

21st January, 1969

Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park,
P.O. Box 3389,
Auckland,
New Zealand.

Dear Sir Keith:

Further to my letter to you of the 17th of January, I spent yesterday afternoon with the "Battle of Britain" film people in an interview with the Reuters representative.

He wanted from me a story on the book that Lord Dowding and I are doing, and about the part that you will play in it.

I told you in my letter that Lord Dowding is most anxious that it should be made perfectly clear in the book, as well as the film, that you had his unqualified support in your tactical handling of the battle. He held that view at the time and he has held it ever since. I made that absolutely clear to the Reuters correspondent in our talk, and I stressed to him Lord Dowding's belief that the winning of the Battle of Britain was so largely attributable to your work as A.O.C. No. II Group.

So far as the controversy and the reasons for it are concerned, I am not making any statement about that because they form a vitally important part of the book. The material that Lord Dowding and I have now at our disposal reveals a situation that puts everything in a very different light from that which so many people have been guessing at, and more than vindicates the cause of both you and Lord Dowding. The Reuters man accepted the necessity for my silence on that point, other than what I have just said above, and was very sensible and generous in not pressing me for more information. He understood, for one thing, that I am bound through my contacts at the highest level in my research to exercise the greatest discretion in speaking to the press. I enjoy the confidence of the authorities - the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Air Force - and I must honour that confidence by watching carefully over everything that is said.

I gave the Reuters man the statement made by Lord Dowding about you at Hawkinge last summer, which I quoted to you in my letter, with permission to use it. By now, I should imagine that all that I told him about Lord Dowding's views - all of it, I stress, greatly in your favour - has already appeared in the newspapers throughout the Commonwealth. He told me that he was putting it out on their wire services last night. May I now ask, in your interests and the interests of the book that Lord Dowding and I are doing and the support that we are giving you in that book, if you would join us in maintaining silence about what happened in November, 1940. In the book you and Lord Dowding are linked together in the stand that you had to make against everybody else. You were both right and everybody else was wrong. That is what we are trying to prove in the book. But silence about that is essential at this stage so that we can develop it correctly and in full in the book.

After that session I had another long one with the film people on matters in which I am also asked for advice. I mentioned to them that you had inquired about the date of the premiere of the film. The date is firm now at the 15th of September: Battle of Britain Day. I have been asked to inquire if it is possible that you will be in London at that time, or will have the time to be free from your commitments for a few days then, so that you could, perhaps, attend the premiere. It would be of the greatest interest if you could be with Lord Dowding on that occasion, as we are arranging for him to be there. Is that possible?

As you know, Lord Dowding is now very frail as a result of the severe arthritis with which he is afflicted, and his eyesight is very poor. He is restricted in his movements to a wheel chair. But his fortitude in the face of these severe afflictions is as undaunted as ever. I now spend an average of one day a week with him, and I never cease to marvel at his great courage and the clarity of his vision and his good humour. There is never a word of complaint.

With kindest regards,

Very sincerely yours,

Robert Wright