

Letter from Mr F.W. Edge - 5th November 1991

malcolmravenhill.co.uk

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Dear Mr. Ravenhill,

With reference to your advertisement in the winter issue of 'Air Mail', I enclose herewith photocopies of newspaper cuttings and a letter from the Ministry of Defence, which I trust may be of interest and use to you.

As a background to my knowledge of the late F/O Ravenhill, I was posted to 229 Squadron at Digby, Lincolnshire, direct from recruit training, in October, 1939, to take up duties as one of the two Orderly Room clerks. At this time, the Squadron was still being formed and was non-operational but was being armed with Bristol Blenheims. On becoming operational, the Squadron was mainly engaged in North Sea escort and patrol duties. Subsequently, the Squadron re-armed to Hurricanes which of course resulted in an influx of new flying personnel, the then remaining Blenheim aircrew being posted to other duties.

Whilst at Digby, part of the Squadron (aircraft and essential air and maintenance crews only) were detached to the Advanced Air Striking Force, and I believe were, for some time at least, at Abbeville in Northern France. The overall situation in France deteriorated rapidly and disastrously, and personnel and remaining aircraft returned to England more or less as and when they could. The ground crew however, were largely able to keep together apart from a few exceptions.

The return took place over several days, and F/O Ravenhill was amongst the last to return, having encountered 'travel difficulties'.

It was at this time that the Squadron suddenly 'acquired' a Lysander aircraft, and I have a strong feeling that F/O Ravenhill was, at some stage, involved in its 'acquisition'.

I am sorry I cannot be more certain, but after fifty years it is not always easy to differentiate between what you think happened, and what actually did happen. Additionally, the Orderly Room tended to be physically separated from the 'Flights' (hangar working areas), so that contact was not always frequent.

What I am very clear about however, was F/O Ravenhill's personal appearance at this time (engendered by the extra interest created by the fact that we both originated from Sheffield). When I saw him his face was drawn and almost yellowish, and his eyes were heavily marked with dark, almost bruised, circles. His whole attitude was one of complete and utter tiredness and strain. Sleep had obviously been lacking for some considerable time.

Some time later, the Squadron moved to R.A.F. Station Wittering, Northamptonshire, for re-organisation etc., subsequently moving to R.A.F. Station Northolt in early September, 1940. Other squadrons at Northolt at this time were No. 1 Canadian Squadron, 601(?) Squadron and, I think, 303 Polish Squadron.

As an aside, at this time it was part of our duty in the Orderly Room to ring No. 11 Group Headquarters at 18.00 hours each day with a summary of aircraft availability and serviceability, i.e. aircraft fully and immediately serviceable, serviceable in six hours, damaged (and extent) and aircraft written off. Replacement aircraft were flown in by 10.00 hours the following morning. At a stage in the Battle when all resources were stretched to their limit, and the need for replacements desperate, aircraft were being flown in direct from the factories without their normal pre-delivery checks and tests.

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Due to the circumstances of the time, there was not much very direct contact between the Orderly Room and flying personnel, although the Flight Commanders were not infrequent visitors when flying permitted. It will be appreciated therefore, that my personal contact with F/O Ravenhill was slight.

Amongst my original cuttings there is a faintly pencilled note in the margin which reads - 'Penny - daughter in Sheffield. Telephone 228909 - 6 Graham Knoll, Graham Road (Sheffield)'

I cannot remember the circumstances of this note, but believe it to be connected with the discussions I had at the time with Messrs. Parkin and Marshall. I wonder if it could be the daughter of the cousin's widow referred to in the cutting dated 10.9.80.? Perhaps of course, you are already aware of any connection.

One other, and very tenuous connection comes to mind.

My wife's grandfather jointly founded a wholesale fruit and vegetable business in Liverpool - Bellis & Meeke - in the early part of the century. At some time prior to 1970 they employed a Jack Ravenhill as a representative - possibly even the cousin referred to. The firm was bought out by Ross Frozen Foods, but I believe that Jack Ravenhill continued in their employ for some time after the take-over.

A rather rambling letter I am afraid, and liberally besprinkled with 'I think(s)' and 'if I remember', together with the vagaries of a memory subjected to the wear and tear of some seventy-odd years. However, I hope that the cuttings (which need not be returned) at least will provide some small items of information which may be of use.

If it is possible, I would be very interested to hear the results of your research at some time in the future.

Very sincerely yours,

F. W. Edge

(Sometime A.C.2, A.C.1, L.A.C., Corporal, Sergeant, P/O and F/O)