

Source 7 (LAP 1/2/12)

Extract from a letter from Sir Lawrence Pattinson to his mother Mary Pattinson in which he describes his morning spent doing mixed patrol and photography, during which time his propeller broke and he was confronted by German planes known as "two tails". He remarks on firing rounds at the German planes, and they fly off in a "most extraordinary case of German lack of enterprise". He includes detailed drawings and annotations of the "two tail" planes.

19 Dec 1915

I had quite an exciting mornings work today. I was up 2 ½ hours mixed patrol and photography just over the trenches. Just as I was starting off my propellor broke, which as we have to go over trees with the wind in the present direction, was quite sufficiently exciting. I got back to the aerodrome and started off at once in another machine. When we had got our height and were just going over the lines to start photography we saw 3 or 4 machines, higher than we were, circling round each other apparently fighting, just over this side of the lines. As we started going towards them one glided down steeply and made for the German side so we went to cut it off opining it was a Hun. We got fairly close and saw that it was one of the big double engine German machines known as "two tails" which the Daily Mail etc. refer to as the enemy's battle planes and which carry 3 machine guns.

The machine came towards us and just before we got within range I circled round so as not to be taken in the rear by any other Hun and saw another one of the same kind coming some distance off behind us. I must say, faced by the possibility of taking on an armament of 6 machine guns with only one, I felt, to say the least of it, pretty excited and thought surely, if ever, it was to be a proper "death or glory" show. We got to within about 300 yards and fired about 40 shots and then the Hun, who didn't answer very vigorously, shoved off and we turned to see what the other two tails was doing. It had not approached to within range apparently waiting to close when we were fully occupied with the other. The first Hun then came within range again and fired with its stern guns and we got off about 80 more rounds at it, I feel sure getting all about it, and the Hun then put his nose down slightly and drew away, joined a minute or two later by the other. P.T.O. for diagram of twotails and of Vickers showing disparity in armament.

In the meanwhile, we went on taking photos and being shelled like mad but keeping a sharp lookout on the other machines which continued to manoeuvre about together some two miles from the scene of our operations. After we had taken 2 or 3 photos we saw the enemy side by side and about 200 yards apart coming towards us and I of course thought that they meant to attack us simultaneously and had previously kept away so that they could join forces. However, they did not come close and finally went home. I think it the most extraordinary case of German lack of enterprise I have ever heard of as they had the odds so immensely their favour.

Christmas card which he sent.

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favour. After we had finished with the Germans

Key Words

Lines - refers to lines of trenches nearest to the conflict

Opining - to hold as an opinion

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