

6 June 1943 [estimated date]

Dear Haze,

It is so very much nicer now we are able to send airgraphs and these air mail envelopes. I do not know which are the quickest, but let me know if there is a great deal of difference in time taken and I will send accordingly.

I'm afraid I still have no good news for you Haze, but although things look just about as black as they could be, I am still hoping. I have heard news, but bad, this time that another body has been recovered two months after the disappearance of the plane, near Cherbourg, France, which is somewhere near the Channel Islands. It is impossible to guess how far it had drifted in that time, but I should not think the plane had crashed near land at all, as they naturally wouldn't go near enemy occupied territory. However, Haze, there is just a chance that a miracle saved several of them and that today they are alive, although there are so many things against it, things that are heartbreaking to consider for long. It was the middle of winter, it was in the night when it happened, and so it must have been hell trying to find anything to cling to if by a miracle they all didn't crash deep into the sea with the plane, and John would suffer more from his rib. I don't know if I told you but a week or so previously he had cracked one playing rugby and it hadn't healed, and had had to have it strapped.

Haze, I'm afraid from all the evidence I can't give you much hope, apart from the fact that John is one in a million and given any chance at all I know he would take it and not give in. On the other hand, had they been picked up by a German vessel (French would be German of course) we should have heard long ago, and that is why I am so very afraid they are not prisoners. I don't think I've known of a single case which hasn't been advised within three months. However, Haze, this just may be an exception, or else (faint hope though this is) they may have escaped and be at large. I fear, though, that even if they did manage to launch the dinghies and survive the cold for a few days, that they would be too far from land to make it. I am telling you everything as I see it, and I can only pray that my worst fears are not realised. Something very dreadful must have happened, that is certain. I do not know where the first body was recovered – I don't think the Germans reported the place to Geneva in the first place. The International Red Cross only report what reaches them – they can't make individual enquiries.

I suppose you are in touch with Bill and letting him know the information you receive. I have been in touch with Westie, and with the airgraph service he gets my letters in a few weeks.

By the way, in case you have not gathered as much, I know the names of the two men whose bodies have been recovered.

In my previous airgraph, I told you that your October letter had only arrive very recently, but containing a snap of Robert in his pram. I have had very little mail in the last four months, and for that reason I am so glad this airgraph service has become available to and from N.Z. as it does bring the

countries together somehow, and it is an incentive to write knowing the letter will only be a few weeks on the way.

I suppose you have told your Auntie Elizabeth about John, Haze. I know he was very fond of her at home although he hasn't written very much since he came over here, but that is mainly due to lack of time.

I am keeping in touch here with John's friends who are very anxious to hear any news I receive. He made a lot of good friends since he came – he has a happy knack of choosing the best folk for his friends. My people in Newcastle have been very concerned too and phone me regularly to see if there is news and to try and give me fresh hope.

I don't know if I've told you previously Haze, but I have a good friend in this office called Margaret Wynyard, a cousin of Wynyard of the Duff & Wynyard combination. She is a jolly good sort and I have shared all my hopes and periods of black depression with her, and she has meant a lot to me lately. Her brother Jim was killed last November. It is a great help to have such a friend at a time like this. She comes of quite a big family, and a sister has been nursing in N.P.

I haven't seen many N.P. lads lately. I saw Gordon Duff only the once, and a friend of young Quit's with a slight hare lip (forget the name completely at the moment) came to see me, but I guess he has gone abroad – Patrick! My memory isn't what it used to be, and makes me think I am getting old, in fact I've had grey hairs for many years now, but most folk still guess my age as 22 or 23!

I don't think there can be much room left on this page, but I am surprised at the amount I can write in such a letter care so I'm picking all my future correspondence will be sent this way.

My thoughts are often with you all as I know just how often you'll be thinking of John these days – keep believing we'll hear good news... it must be that way. Best love to all, Joan [signed].