

Cowan indicates that almost 50 years after the event, Caldwell expressed strong doubts in a personal letter to Sqn. Ldr. Warne about Bishop's record and the raid, the report is also significant for what it does not say. It does not allude to the existence of skepticism among Squadron mechanics or Bishop's fellow pilots; it does not draw attention to a suspicious grouping of the bullet holes in the aircraft; it does not draw attention to the fact that the aircraft's machine gun was missing on Bishop's return from the raid. Unlike Major Scott, Captain Caldwell was not a close personal friend of Bishop's. If doubts about the raid had surfaced in the four-week interval, he was in a position to raise them with his superiors and in so doing, perhaps prejudice them against the award of a Victoria Cross for an exploit attested to by "personal evidence only".

The above official documents, in our view, establish that Bishop's aircraft did return from his raid seriously "shot about", but there is nothing in them to suggest that the damage was so serious that it could not have been repaired routinely and in time for Bishop to fly the aircraft later the same day. The *published* memoirs of W.M. Fry, one of the last surviving pilots of 60 Squadron who flew with and served under Bishop, clearly suggest that seriously damaged aircraft could be repaired surprisingly quickly. Referring to two entries in his flight log book he notes that on 25 May: "Right hand bottom wing came off. Landed at 12 Squadron." Nevertheless, the next day his log book shows him flying the same aircraft into an action during which he claimed an enemy aircraft was shot down.<sup>(1)</sup>

Relying on his memory, Fry recounts how Bishop invited him to participate in the raid — the previous evening and before first light the next morning — and how, just after the dawn raid, Bishop came into his room to tell him of it. He notes that he remembers "clearly seeing a group of about five bullet holes in the rear half of his tailplane, the elevator, within a circle of not more than six inches diameter at the most". Concluding his account, he comments:

This must surely be a very unusual case of a Victoria Cross or any high honour being awarded on the word of the recipient only as to his exploit and without any witnesses or participants. Our CO knew Bishop so well as to believe in him implicitly, as did the whole squadron and higher authority.<sup>(2)</sup>

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<sup>(1)</sup> W.M. Fry, M.C., Wing Commander, *Air of Battle*, William Kimber and Co., London, 1974, p. 132.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135-137.