

Was It a Match made in Heaven?



Above: Lady Dowding in front of photo of Lord Dowding

In her book, *Beauty Without Cruelty*, which dealt with the prevention of cruelty to animals, the Rt. Hon. Muriel, the Lady Dowding, who was married to Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, the World War II hero who masterminded the epic Battle of Britain, tells of receiving the news that her first husband, Jack Maxwell Whiting, was missing in action and presumed dead in 1944, during World War II. She decided to consult a medium to see if anything more definitive could be known about the fate of "Max," as he was called. "*Presumed* is a cruelly lingering word in such a context," she explains her decision to consult a medium.

Without making an appointment or giving her name, Muriel went to the College of Psychic Sciences in London.. "Before entering, I took off my wedding ring, my diamond RAF brooch, and was shown into a room on the top floor of 16 Queensbury Place, South Kensington," she recalled. "A little old woman, whom I later came to know as Miss Topcott, was sitting there. She seemed like a kindly person, and barely before I had seated myself opposite her, she said, 'I have your brother here - Max. Oh, he is annoyed at being called your brother - he says he is your husband. You know he is on the other side?'"

The medium then went on to relate that Max felt his wife was "rather unbelieving." He held two rings over Muriel's head, one of them glittering, Miss Topcott observed. Although it was true that Max had married her with a platinum wedding ring and a diamond eternity ring, Muriel did not consider this particularly evidential, as the information was in her mind and could have been discerned telepathically.

Miss Topcott then said that Max wanted her to know what happened. He said that he was in his Lancaster (plane) and had been flying toward the coast of Norway when

the plane was shot down by German fighter planes. He recalled that he had a moment of thinking "This is it!" and then he thought he called Muriel's pet name, Poppet. He then described what seemed like a fall down a dark tunnel with a light at the bottom.

What was surprising and confusing to Muriel was the comment that he was flying toward Norway. She had been informed that his plane was on the way to Germany while participating in the Duisburg raid. When she questioned Max on this point, he replied: "I will try to get you the evidence. But I assure you the last I saw with my physical eyes was the coast of Norway. I did not go on the Duisburg raid."

It was not until two years later, after the war had ended, that Muriel received word that her husband's plane was indeed headed for Norway and crashed on the coast of Denmark after being attacked by German fighter planes. This information came to her in a strange way. Her stepfather happened to be travelling on a train when he became engaged in a conversation with a fellow passenger, a Danish farmer. The Dane mentioned that one of England's Lancaster bombers headed for Norway had been shot down near his coastal farm, and that he and his neighbours buried the bodies and built a memorial. He took out a photo of the monument, which was inscribed in Danish, "To our gallant English Allies." One of the names inscribed on the monument was J. M. Whiting.

Muriel's stepfather asked the Danish farmer if the British Air Ministry had been informed and was told that it had not. After the Dane was persuaded to report it to the Air Ministry, confirmation came that it was Max's plane.

"Naturally, having originally heard on the radio that Lancaster's had been sent on a raid on Duisburg that same night, I had found the medium's message about Norway hard to believe," the future Lady Dowding ended the story. "Yet, in the end, Max appears to have produced the evidence I needed to be convinced."

Well before receiving the information from the Danish farmer, Muriel wrote a letter directly to Lord Dowding to request his assistance in determining the status of her husband. It was that letter that put Hugh Dowding and Muriel in contact with each other, leading to their marriage. Some time after their marriage, Muriel asked her husband why he had contacted her directly and invited her out to lunch when he was so busy and there were so many others seeking help from him. Lord Dowding, who had been investigating mediums, explained that he had visited a medium and that Max came through to him, identifying himself. "I wish you would take my wife out to lunch," Max told him. "You will like her."