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I.T.S. No.32 S.F.T.S
Moose Jaw
Saskatchewan
Canada
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Dear Bill and Isa,

I don't know when this letter will reach you but, anyway, let me wish you both a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This'll be the first Xmas I've spent away from home and, believe me, it is not so good being so distant at this time. However, I will be thinking of you all at home and that may make up for it a bit.

I'm enclosing in this letter a sort of daily report which I kept since we left Tern Hill right to our arrival at Moose Jaw. I hope you'll manage to read it for I wrote it in some queer places in strange conditions. Perhaps it'll give you some idea of our voyage and train journey across Canada. Both were more or less uneventful but I found them interesting to a degree.

I don't think I can add much to the enclosed diary except that Moose Jaw is quite a decent town. It has 20,000 inhabitants and plenty of bright lights. The people couldn't possibly be more hospitable and friendly and they accorded us a really grand welcome on our arrival. We are the first English contingent of airmen to arrive in this part of Canada and, since most of the people are of British descent (or birth in some cases) they have tried their best to make us feel at home.

I'm now getting quite used to all the differences between Canada and Britain. Dimes, nickels, cents and dollars are child's play to me now and I am gradually getting into the much more modern way of living over here.

The airport itself is four miles from Moose Jaw and is right out on the prairie. The camp isn't properly finished but we're getting organised bit by bit.

The weather, which was incredibly cold on our arrival and on the next day, has taken a turn for the better and is quite mild, though gloves and balaclavas are still essential.

Altogether, my first impressions of Canada have been not too bad although there are lots of drawbacks. Last night we heard the news about Coventry's unhappy fate and I think most of us really wished that we were back in England in the thick of it. Still, it can't be helped and we'll have to make the best of it.

Well folks, I think I've given both you and the censor enough to read in this letter so I'd better draw to a close.

Cheerio

Yours affectionately,
Somie xx

FRIDAY 1ST NOVEMBER

Up this morning at 6 a.m., washed, dressed, and had breakfast at 6.30. Then made my bed and packed my haversack with cleaning material, shaving tackle and various things for the journey. Then we paraded at 7 a.m. on the square, had a roll-call, then, in the dim light of dawn, marched off. With our topecs dangling on our backs, we must have looked funny as we swung out of camp. As we passed through the gates I thought, as did all the others, in all probability, 'this is the last time I'll see Tern Hill.' So I had a good look at it as we marched along to the station.

The train came in just as we reached the station and we weren't long in getting into it and settling down. Then we were off, the officers on the platform saluting as we steamed out.

We speculated a good deal as to our destination as we went but we weren't long left in doubt as we saw that we were heading north-west, for Liverpool. We finally found ourselves right at the decks and, having been straightened out on the platform, we made our way aboard the big black ship which awaited us. After dinner, we set out to explore the ship and lost ourselves once or twice in the process.

Quite unexpectedly, we slipped away from the quay at 4 p.m. We had a last look at the towers of Liverpool and we were off along the Mersey. We had life-belt drill before long, and the sight of no less than four wrecks along the river did little to cheer us up. Darkness fell and we went to bed.

SATURDAY 2ND NOVEMBER

Slept very well that first night on board ship. After breakfast, we went on deck. Saw the hills of Scotland on the starboard side and Ireland on our port. I watched them go with more than a touch of sheer sentimentality. We are now part of a convoy consisting of about twenty to thirty ships and some destroyers and cruisers are now and then visible round us.

After dinner, the sea got a bit rough and I didn't feel at all well so I stayed in my bunk till 5.30p.m. when I had to get up and ease my feelings a bit. Early to bed.

P.S. The name of this ship is the Duchess of Richmond.

SUNDAY 3RD NOVEMBER

Woke up feeling a bit better this morning to spend what must be the strangest Sunday in my life. I was able to eat breakfast alright and had a morning walk on the top-deck afterwards. A Short Sunderland seaplane made an appearance this morning, and after circling round, made off again.

Lots of the fellows have been sick this morning, this sea-sickness has to be experienced to be believed. The continual movement of the boat does things to ones stomach which practically make you want to die.

But the trouble is, you can not, and the ship continues to roll and toss till you would actually welcome a stray sub or dive-bomber to put a stop to it. I went up to tea tonight but found that I could not eat anything. A Killie chap came to my bunk tonight and we talked about Killie and the Valley till I was home-sick as well as sea-sick. And, what a combination that is....

MONDAY 4TH NOVEMBER

After breakfast we went up on deck for a sing-song. The ship, being in convoy, has only been doing 10-12 knots an hour. We had a parade and, very unexpectedly, an inspection. Was caught unawares and reprimanded for being unshaven and not having my buttons polished. I'll have to make up for that tomorrow morning.

I have found that the best way to counteract sea-sickness is to eat as much as possible so I had an extra helping of dinner today. Spent the afternoon reading on deck, still nothing to see but sea and sky.

All clocks on board have been put back 20 minutes, 3 times today.

Early to bed.

TUESDAY 5TH NOVEMBER

The steward had his hands full in wakening me today. We get porridge every morning, which is very well made, and I thoroughly enjoy it.

We had to wash out our room this morning for inspection then we had our own inspection at 10 a.m. I had washed and shaved with particular care this morning and my boots and buttons are shining so, although he gave me a thorough scrutiny, I pleased the officer alright this time.

I forgot to mention that we woke up this morning to find we had left the convoy. Yes, we are on our lonesome now and the other ships have made off on their respective courses. We are now hitting up rather more speed but keeping up a zig-zag course for some reason or other.

Spent the afternoon playing cards. Killing time is one of the major problems aboard ship. Shortly after tea, we had a stand-by order and all the lights except a bare minimum had to be put out. It was rumoured that an armed raider was somewhere around. So, we went on deck and true enough, away in the distance to starboard, we saw occasional flashes as from gun-fire. The flashes stopped about an hour ago but the warning is still on. We have been advised to stay dressed tonight so it looks rather cheery. Apart from all that excitement it is a lovely night.

There is quite a wind rising and the sea is fairly rough but I don't feel at all sea-sick so perhaps I've found my sea legs at last.

WEDNESDAY 6TH NOVEMBER

Rather surprised to wake up this morning and find myself intact after last night's excitement. It has been suggested that, since yesterday was Guy Fawkes day, the flashes we saw were merely a celebration on the part of some ship's crew or other. I'm afraid that it wasn't so innocent though. Outside there is nothing to see but the angry waves with their white tops and I think that everybody is pretty fed up with that view. We had a parade this morning and it was comical to see us trying to stand steadily in three ranks on the heaving top deck. Nevertheless, we had our usual inspection (a snow storm would not interfere with that). I had my hair cut today by the ship's barber as it was getting a bit long.

There was a concert tonight and the artistes were composed variously of airmen, passengers, and crew. It was a very good show and an amazing amount of talent was brought to light. A little Scotch girl, about twelve years old and complete with kilt, gave us a piano solo. She played all the Scotch songs and had us all singing them with a joyful noise.

We are not allowed on deck at all now after dark so I am going to bed without my usual 'breather.'

THURSDAY 7TH NOVEMBER

The sea has been very calm today but there has been a thick fog hanging around and our fog-horn has been blowing almost continuously.

This afternoon we were all assembled in the ballroom to hear a talk by the Canadian Minister of War Services. He was a really wonderful speaker giving us the history, then geography of Canada. He told us all about Moose Jaw and. From his description, it appears to be quite a nice spot although pretty cold in winter. The thermometer goes down as far as 50 degrees below, so that sounds promising.

Tonight there was another concert with completely different artistes so it looks like there is plenty of talent on board. I hear that we will sight land tomorrow and it is possible that we will dock at Quebec sometime during the day. If so, I hope they give us an hour or two ashore for I am dying to walk on good solid ground again.

FRIDAY 8TH NOVEMBER

We caught our first glimpse of land this morning. It was only a very distant, hazy view of the Newfoundland coast but it was land and I was pleased to see it. So, we are now in the Gulf of St Lawrence. Tomorrow we should enter the St Lawrence River proper then it is estimated that we will reach Quebec sometime tomorrow evening. We have been told however, that we definitely won't be allowed ashore. I suppose they are scared that some of us will miss the boat.

It seems queer when we think that last Friday we left Liverpool, and here we are a week later, in sight of Canada. I just can't believe it sometimes for I feel as if I'd been on this boat for weeks.

England seems very far away now and I am rather inclined to agree with the chap who said that he wished we could hitch-hike back.

SATURDAY 9TH NOVEMBER

I was rather surprised to find, when I went on deck this morning, that land was plainly visible on both sides. We were steaming down the middle of the river and on either side we could see the thickly wooded mountains with their snow-caps and little shacks dotted here and there. We even saw a train this morning and it was a welcome sight too.

As the day went on, we were never far from the rails for a wonderful panorama was presented as we carried on down the river. The steep slopes are covered with spruce trees and have very few clearings at all. Away beyond we could see a range of mountains and, at places, the swept right down to the waters edge with a breathtaking majesty.

At 4.45 approx we rounded a bend and we were confronted with the city of Quebec. What an excitement there was and I am sure our roar was heard for miles as we came sailing in. The town (it can hardly be called a city) wasn't at all like a British town. Somehow there was an appearance of newness about it all which is absent from our towns. Nevertheless it was a striking view and there were some very important buildings to be seen.

Our shouts and hails brought scores of people down to the dockside as we were made fast. When we came up on deck again after tea we saw, for the first time in many months, thousand of lights. It did 'me ole heart' good to see it and I shan't easily forget tonight's view of Quebec after dark.

SUNDAY 10TH NOVEMBER

We must have left Quebec in the night for this morning found us, once again, sailing down the St Lawrence. A welcome surprise awaited us at 10 a.m. for we had a pay parade. We each got \$25 but nobody knows what it is for as we got a months pay before we left England.

Noon found us entering Montreal harbour and we paraded ready for disembarking. The train was waiting for us just outside the Custom Shed and we were all allocated to our various cars. After all our baggage was aboard, we steamed out of Montreal. The train isn't very comfortable so it looks like we are in for a 'rattling' good time for the next day or two. The train stopped on the outskirts of Montreal and, in a field by the line, a baseball game was in progress. Naturally, we made ourselves heard and the game was forsaken by the spectators who came up to the train to speak to us. Most of them were French but they all spoke English very well. We gave what English money we had left to these people for souvenirs. Finally, we started off again, with the game stopped and everybody waving and yelling.

Round about 7.30 p.m. we stopped for half an hour at a town called Smithfalls.

As we were dying to stretch our legs, we didn't wait for permission but merely scrambled off and had a look at the town. Being Sunday night, it was very quiet but we wakened it up a bit. We visited a handy drug store and got rid of some of that Canadian money we have. We only just got back to the station before the train left and had a chewing-up from the officers who had been getting quite grey-haired in our absence.

My bed tonight is going to be a sort of luggage rack above the seat so 'me poor old bones are in for a rough night of it.

We have just passed through a town called Renfrew so, just for old times sake, I opened the window and gave them a yell as we passed.

MONDAY 11TH NOVEMBER

When I wakened this morning, sore all over, a vastly different scene presented itself outside. The ground was covered with snow to a depth of 3 or 4 feet. At 9 a.m. we stopped at a small town and indulged in snow fights with the locals as we marched. There were girls selling poppies on the station and it reminded me that this is easily the most unique Armistice Day I have ever spent.

About 9.30 p.m. we approached the town of Port Arthur. We saw its lights from 3 or 4 miles outside the town and, when we finally entered it, we were in the midst of a very cheering blaze of light.

A few minutes later we reached Fort William where we stopped for quarter of an hour. We again went out on the platform to look at the part of the city which was visible. We saw electric street cars and some other signs of civilisation which we found most heartening. It was snowing heavily and it was bitterly cold but we stayed outside as long as possible to stretch our legs. The people here are very different and I think we have seen a representation of nearly every nation in the world.

I feel as if I could write a book about everything I have seen here and on the Atlantic but a train speeding along at 60 mph is hardly an ideal place to write it so I will have to postpone.

TUESDAY 12TH NOVEMBER

At last I have made Moose Jaw and I arrived with mixed feelings at 9p.m. The 'drome is four and a half miles from Moose Jaw and when we got there we were immediately taken to our quarters. These are big wooden huts, asbestos lined inside and complete with double doors and windows and three big oil stoves in the centre of the floor. Each hut holds 86 airmen and the beds are easily the best I have encountered since I joined the RAF.

Now I am sitting on my bed, which is next to one of the stoves, writing this. I got a shock though when I got a bottle of ink from my kit bag. It was frozen stiff and I had to thaw it out with warm water before it became a liquid again. That's an idea of how cold it is here. My toes have felt as if they are dropping off half a dozen times already.

Moose Jaw appears to have three cinemas, two dance halls, an ice rink, two or three beer parlours and innumerable drug stores and hamburger counters. This weather will put us to the test and it will be a long time before we need out topecs and tropical clothes. There are about 20 of the fellows who were here first in hospital with frostbite and we have been issued with a long list of 'Cold Weather Precautions'.

Well, better get to bed and have my first night sleep on solid ground.