

CANADIANS IN SIBERIA.

A Soldier's Letter to Mother and Dad.

BASE DEPOT,
C.E.F., SIBERIA.

We've landed, and in spite of the fact that everything is very strange, and different from what we've ever seen before, we are just as comfortable as it is possible to be under existing circumstances.

We are in a darned great barracks on the top of a hill, where the wind whistles, and the winter blasts blow, but there are enormous stoves, with which to keep out the cold, so we haven't much kick coming. This certainly is going to be an experience, and if everything turns out to be as interesting as the last few days have been, I shall not regret having travelled half around the world to get here.

This town is a fairly big place, and the most cosmopolitan it is possible to imagine. Will try and relate a few of the incidents since landing.

We pulled into dock, after coming into the glorious harbour under escort of an enormous Russian destroyer, at 7 a.m. (no date allowed), and no sooner had we docked than the process of unloading commenced. This was discontinued after 30 minutes, when a guard of honour from the Czecho-Slovaks came down to the wharf, and was inspected by General Elmsley, after which the boys nearly took all the windows out of the town with three cheers. When the noise subsided, the Slovak band struck up "God Save the King" and the Slovak National Anthem. The whole incident was very impressive, and it is certainly wonderful how that little handful of men—for there are very few of them in this town—have held together.

The feeling towards us is mixed. However, to get on with the story. After the diplomatic part of the business was over we got ashore, and got the men billeted in the long tin huts and sheds on the quay.

The feature of the day was the stevedores. Honestly, they were the dirtiest and most disreputable looking set of individuals I have ever seen, and if anyone had told me that such abject misery and poverty existed I would never have believed them. Their rags and filth beggars description.

We stayed on board all the first day—that is to say the officers and N.C.O.s did—and the next morning at 8.30 we marched out and through the town. There was no enthusiasm, except on the part of the Americans, who are apparently tickled silly about having us here.

Hot and Tired.

We landed in these barracks at 12 noon, very hot and tired, and prepared to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. The buildings are fine, but the sanitary arrangements are nil. We have to walk about a mile for a wash. But they say everything comes to him who waits, and out of all the lumber that is lying about I have no doubt our fellows will be able to fix up something. We are sleeping on the boards, but we shall soon get used to that. The weather is fairly good but it gets good and cold by the time night comes. We have a bunch of blankets, and we bank the fire up so we don't feel the cold very much.

There is a good American Y.M.C.A. here, and we make good use of it. The Yanks are great boys, and make us welcome wherever we go.

Of course, we can't make ourselves understood in the town, and you would laugh yourself hoarse to see us trying to get what we want in the stores. All you can do is make signs.

Then again the money is awful, and there are about five different currencies. For instance, the Bolsheviks have a circulation of money that can be changed in some stores and not in others. Then again some of the stores will not take the Czecho money. It all goes in kopaks and roubles. The value of a rouble varies from day to day. Yesterday we could get 9½ roubles to the dollar—but to-day it is only 8 to the dollar, and tomorrow it may go up to 12. Am going to get a bunch next time they go to 12, and sell them at 8. No! I'm not a Jew.

Beggars in Furs.

Furs are everywhere, and even the beggars in the streets—there are thousands of them—have the most glorious sables.

Haven't had a chance of looking around but as soon as we get going will try and get some furs—but can't make any promises. Could have got a sable last night for 10.00 dollars—about £1, but didn't know whether it was a good one or not—so didn't buy.

Scottie and I are thinking pretty seriously of going into the fur trade here—if we stay in the town—so there may be chances of the family being the envy of Sydenham in that line yet.

Don't be surprised if you don't hear from me for a month on end as the mails are the most uncertain thing on earth here, and there are times when the town is cut off entirely from outside information and communication for weeks on end.

We have about 200 Bolsheviks and German prisoners here, and they do all the dirty fatigues. Have never felt better in health since we left France, and if nothing else it has done me good in that sense.

Haven't any real news apart from what I told you, and as soon as any accumulate I will write again. Now must dry up.

The whole thing is a mix-up in this part of the world so don't know when it will be over.

REG.

RETURNING FROM PASS.

Tread lightly, close the door,
Hold the latch so,
Break not the Sergeant's snore,
Lest curses flow.

Where is my little bed?
Bump! what was that?
Only a comrade's head
Used as a mat.

Why should his passion get
Uppermost? He
Will have more cause to fret
Over the Sea.

Into the darkness I
Peer, but in vain,
There's not a blanket nigh,
To others the gain.

So in my clothes I fall
Holding my breath,
Just like a criminal
Sentenced to death,

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