



CHAPTER II.

Across the Continent—Steamer Hardships— Six Weeks in England.



OUR journey across the Continent was unmarked by any untoward incident. Accommodation was good on board the train and the messing arrangements were excellent. Two trains sufficed to transport the unit, the first being under the command of Major Worsnop and the second under that of the Colonel. Two stops a day were made of sufficient duration to enable the men to get exercise by parading through the main streets of some town and it was not until we reached Ottawa that any event occurred to break the usual monotony of a long train journey. At the Capital the battalion was reviewed by H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, then Governor-General of Canada, accompanying whom was General Sir Sam Hughes, then Minister of Militia. On the same day the journey was resumed and on Sunday afternoon, June 18th, we reached Halifax and embarked on the C.P.R. S.S. "Empress of Britain," which pulled out into the fairway on the same evening but did not leave Halifax until the morning of June 20th, when, with H.M.S. "Drake" as escort, she started off upon her submarine-infested course.

Of that voyage the less said the better, but common decency demands that some criticism be offered on the accommodation afforded the troops. In addition to the 102nd Bn. the steamer carried the 65th and 84th Bns., together with some Medical Details and a draft for the Pioneers. It was freely stated that in the Mediterranean the "Empress of Britain" had carried 6,000 troops; if that were so, she must indeed have been a living hell. With only two-thirds that number on board the conditions that prevailed were well-nigh intolerable, and this is written after two and a half years in France and Belgium where the writer had some experience of hardship. The 102nd Bn. was the junior battalion and also the last aboard, but that should not account for the fact that there was literally not sufficient accommodation for all below and that, if the weather had been bad, so that men could not have slept on deck, there would have been no place for them to sleep at all. The food was atrocious. Apart from the fact that we had to eat in the bowels of the ship where the atmosphere was stifling,