

FROM VALCARTIER WITH THE FIRST CANADIAN CONTINGENT.

The following account is written from extracts from a diary, and from letters, of a Sapper in a Field Company, Canadian Engineers, belonging to the First Canadian Division. The narrative begins on the day the Company left Valcartier Camp.

September 29th, 1914.

We left Valcartier at noon today and embarked at Quebec about five in the afternoon. Our transport, the "Zeeland", is one of the Red Star liners and, although not the best on the Atlantic, is quite better than we expected for a troopship. I have been very fortunate as, along with three others original Fifth Company men, I have been assigned to one of the Second Class cabins. We expected to be in the steerage but our section was lucky enough to be allotted this portion of the ship. Our cabin is about eight feet square with two berths, one above the other, about two feet wide, on each side of the cabin. At the end opposite the door there is a combination dresser, washstand, and writing desk. We are situated at the beginning of an alley-way branching from the main passageway leading to the deck. It is about ten paces from our cabin to the door opening onto the main deck so it would not take us long to get out if we were torpedoed. I think we leave here for down the river tomorrow. There are several more transports, including the "Franconia", and the "Meganitic", still here. They will probably leave the same time and no doubt we will be close to one another all the way across. Nobody knows our destination but I think it will be some port in England from where we will be sent to some training camp. It is just ten o'clock and

I am looking forward to a good sleep between sheets again after my six weeks in camp.

All day September 30th was spent loading freight and ammunition. Our signallers got in some work wig-wagging to signallers on the other transports. There are two Field Companies and the Ninth Infantry Battalion on board the "Zeeland".

We left Quebec at six o'clock the morning of October 1st. Had it been possible to select a day for our trip down the St. Lawrence we could not have chosen a better one. In the clear, bracing air with a breeze ruffling the surface of the water we lined the rail to see as much as possible of this country that we now realized we were leaving.

Would we see it again?

With the alternations of steep, rocky, and flat, low-lying shores the river seemed to narrow and widen out again. But the north shore gradually drew away from us and was lost in the dusk of evening. It was quite dark at six when we passed Father Point, where we put off the pilot with the mail.

Next morning we were sailing along the south shore of the river. At nine we entered Gaspé Basin. Here we found awaiting us twenty-nine transports with four cruisers to act as convoy. Among other liners in the Basin we could recognise the "Alannia", "Alsation", "Andania", "Arcadian", "Carpathian", "Corinthian", "Empress of Britain", "Franconia", "Ionian", "Lapland", "Laurentic", "Meganitic", "Royal Edward", and "Royal George", probably the largest fleet of passenger vessels ever seen together. We lay at anchor here all day, which was clear and fine. In the afternoon we were assigned life boats.

Next morning we found that one more transport had arrived, making in all, thirty-one transports. At three in the afternoon the whole fleet weighed anchor and started on its trip across the Atlantic. A cruiser went first, then, at intervals of four hundred yards, followed ten transports, another cruiser, ten transports, third cruiser, the remainder of the transports, and the fourth cruiser bringing up the rear. The "Zeeland" was the third transport behind the third cruiser. It was very impressive to see the long line of ships file out ahead of us. After reaching the open sea three lines were formed, each line led by a cruiser, the fourth cruiser guarding the rear. Our line was on the south

flank of the fleet. We ran through a school of herring about six in the evening.

Sunday, the 4th, there was quite a sea on. Felt a little dizzy but reported for all meal parades. Our Routine is Reveillé at 6.30, Breakfast 7.00, Parade and Physical Training 9.30 to 11.00, Dinner 11.30, Parade and Physical Training 2.00 to 3.30, Supper 5.30, Lights Out 9.00. We have to be particularly careful that no lights are shown on deck. We show only a masthead light, port and starboard lights, and bow and stern lights to indicate our position in line.

Monday the sea was comparatively smooth in the morning. About nine o'clock a man fell overboard from the "Royal Edward" opposite us in the middle line. She put about, and the cruiser leading our line went over to investigate. The man was picked up by the "Franconia" immediately behind the "Royal Edward". Early this morning we met a larger warship, probably a dreadnought. She is now accompanying us and has taken up a position just in sight away off to the starboard. A steamer was sighted off to the north east this afternoon. One of the leading cruisers immediately sailed over in that direction and the steamer disappeared. The cruiser has taken up a position to the north of the fleet and can just be made out. We now have two cruisers in front, one behind, one on our left and the dreadnought on the right. At night the sea was getting rougher.

The next morning, the 6th, weather foggy and damp, but the sea was not so rough. We found that one more transport had joined us and it is thought to be that containing the Newfoundland contingent.

On Wednesday the weather was fine but cool. Sea not very rough. Between nine and ten this morning we saw a fish about six feet long leap clear of the water one hundred yards from the ship. We passed two freight steamers today, one a tramp with its deck loaded with lumber.

Thursday, October 8th, was fairly clear and cool, with quite a roll on. About nine the "Royal George" came up from the end of the line to a position on our starboard quarter, evidently to act as a scout. She was rolling quite a bit and appears to be top-heavy. Soon after we noticed smoke off to the starboard. The ship soon appeared over the horizon and was seen to be a battleship with three funnels, evidently a British ship

as our cruiser did not take any notice of it. It sailed up to the head of our line flying a white ensign, then came slowly down on our starboard side and passed about two hundred yards off. It saluted as we passed by dipping the ensign. We all crowded to the railing cheering and waving, and the blue-jackets who were lined up on the deck acknowledged by giving us a cheer. A person without knowledge in naval affairs could feel the power that was represented in this battleship. About three this afternoon while on parade I noticed the fin of a shark close to the ship. There are probably a lot of them hanging around the fleet.

Friday, the 9th, was fairly clear and cool with not much of a sea on. Nothing of interest occurred.

On Saturday the weather was wet and cloudy in the morning, but cleared up in the afternoon. A dreadnought crossed our bows this morning and took up a position on the port, or north, side of the fleet. Being detailed on guard duty I was not able to see much of what went on outside of the ship. We had no prisoners in the guard room all day, but just before supper a private belonging to the 9th Infantry Battalion was brought in. He had been a sheep herder in civil life and was out of his mind. He was an exceptionally big man, and we had quite an exciting time with him. He was the Prince of Wales for a while, then he was



Whene'er I see a scene like this
I marvel, gape, and grin.
'Cause God made some so tall and
fat
And some so short and thin.

And oh you lads of Comp'ny "C"
Don't it jus' take your breff,
To think that we as here you see
Have got our "Mutt and Jeff"?