

"By the way, Spence, ever hear of any of the old boys?" said he, addressing one of his staff, who had accompanied him. "And that reminds me, as I told you this afternoon, I am just back from my seventy-fifth leave. While there I ran to earth old Mac, who was looking the picture of health, if somewhat grey. He must be getting on some. Tells me that Colonel Catray was buried in the Abbey yesterday. He always claimed he would never get killed, but would die of old age."

"What's that? Eleven o'clock. Well, I must be getting along. They will surely think I have stopped one at last, at Headquarters. Well boys, here goes my last whisky and soda, a night-cap, and then home for me. Sweet dreams, boys. Well, well, those awful craters, they do bring back memories of the old days and nightmares, too, at times. Good-night, boys. Good-night."

McVAL.

## Homeward Bound.

### By One of the Boys.

"What boat's it going to be?" was the vital question, as we entrained at Rhyl, where for two weeks we had been so anxiously waiting to commence our homeward journey.

"Guess it's that old tub, the 'Corsican,'" growled a pessimist, recalling the ups and downs (mostly ups) of his last trip across the pond.

"No, it's the 'Olympic,'" chorused the optimists. But both guesses proved to be wrong, for as we alighted at the dock station the word "Baltic" passed down the line.

I was glad to hear it, as I had come over on her. But instead of the dark sombre monster which had brought us through the submarine dangers, she was now a thing of grace and beauty, with brilliant light pouring through every window and port-hole, and glistening on the white paint-work of her promenade decks.

Once aboard and located in our quarters we crowded on deck to get our last glimpse of old England. Liverpool was smothered in murky darkness, and little could be seen through the mists but the face of the clock tower, with the lights of a tram car gliding beneath it, and below us the wet landing stage glistening in the lights of the vessel. A shower of coins rattled on the landing stage, and were eagerly sought and grabbed by the members of the band, who, at lengthy intervals, endeavoured to entertain us, only to be drowned out completely by the singing of the boys.

At last a great roar went up, as the gangway was drawn ashore, and the last hawser holding us to Blighty was hauled aboard. A tug twisted us around in the Mersey, and then, with her bow pointing down the misty river, the "Baltic" gradually crept forward under her own steam. At the mouth of the river, about 10 o'clock, she stopped to drop the pilot and lower the "paravanes," or minesweepers. Then she started her long journey down the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel, and out across the Atlantic.

It happened that a number of the last men to come aboard were allotted to hammocks in the stuffy atmosphere of the forward mess room. I was one of them, and really had no kick coming, had this makeshift accommodation been necessary. But these conditions were supposed to have been remedied by the authorities, and when we found that a number of cabins were still unoccupied, we made a complaint to the O.C., and finally procured cabins or bunks for the volunteer mess

orderlies, and a guarantee that our complaint would be forwarded to higher authorities, and so save the boys following us from the same treatment.

After all, it seems hardly just that the men who have borne the brunt of this big "scrap" should have to travel home in the close, sickening atmosphere of an improvised mess-room in the hold, each sleeping in a hammock over the table where he is to eat his breakfast and where, if seasick, he will most probably have memories of recent meals; while above him in the strictly reserved first-class quarters, the pretty little Tanks Corps officer, who has had such a ripping few months' holiday in England, and never saw France, is now revelling in his spacious stateroom and gorgeous lounge, etc. If the officer who has been enjoying the "cushy" side of Army life can have such a perfect pleasure trip, surely our liners can provide at least a decent steerage passage for the boys who have roughed it for three and four years to beat the Hun.

It appears that the positions of O.C. troops have been filled by any officers who previously commanded a Battalion, regardless of the fact that on these ships the O.C. has to control a mass of unorganized men. With no chain of responsibility whereby he can approach the individual men he must, above all things, be a man of tact and initiative, and one who has been amongst the men and understands them. The iron hand which has been the shield of so many weak officers is now to the men as a red flag to a bull.

A little rough weather during the first two days gave some of us inside information of coming upheavals, but after that the "Baltic" forged steadily ahead over a smooth sea. A band was all that was required to make the voyage quite enjoyable, and I hope that it will in future be possible to provide the troopships with some kind of music, for where is it more appreciated than on the water? It would also tend to create order and satisfaction, and discourage gambling and rioting.

The last day of our voyage was a memorable one for us all. Many expected to see land that morning, and were up before the sun; but although no land was sighted until the afternoon, no one regretted their early rising, for Nature's heart seemed to pulse with ours on this joyful day. Towards the East the sea glistened like a vast field of wavering blue silk, with a silver horizon, from which arose a curtain of purple mist blending into dusky red and bright orange and yellow, then delicate emerald green deepening into blue, which gradually drowned the stars and scattered the night shadows over the dark western horizon. This impressive beauty and a morning of bright sunshine, filled the boys with a healthy, light-hearted spirit.

Early in the afternoon a few peculiar lumps, like icebergs, appeared on the northern horizon, but gradually they were connected up to form a solid-looking piece of real land, which we had been so anxiously looking for. Later in the evening we ran into a thin snowstorm, which made a fog and hid the land from us. The "paravanes," which had been put out about noon, were now hauled aboard.

About 6 p.m. we discovered two lights, and in a few moments the forward deck was crowded with men eager to get the first glimpse of Halifax. The waiting became tedious, and the boys became excited. Despite the cold, every pinnacle and perch was occupied, and some swarmed up the rigging. The lights of a few buoys and lighthouses could now be seen, and the "Baltic" gradually stopped and sounded her siren for the pilot. It seemed such a long time before anything approaching us could be discovered, and the boys were impatient. Then a light could be seen forward, swaying and coming