

PEPPER LINK

July 23, 1941

Our group of nine cadets very anxiously board the "Steamer" at Montreal to cruise up the St. Lawrence River to enter the ocean. We left Montreal at 10:30 a.m., our time now is 11:15 p.m. We are not due to leave the mouth of the river for twenty-eight hours after Montreal sailing time. The trip thus far is very quiet, we have been quite busy tending the ship. To our surprise we are the only passengers aboard this English ship of English crew. Our cargo consists of arms, ammunition, Ford cars (treaties), and other war needed materials. Our crew is very friendly. We have many questions to ask of them and they are very eager to answer them. All the knowledge of this sailing and time convey needs we know, but it will do well to keep for we will not be allowed any shore leaves until we reach England.

Two hours back we passed Quebec where a new pilot for steering the river was picked up. All along we pass river tramps, they are very busy on this river. I wonder what this traffic will be like after the U.S.A. canal is opened that Canada and U.S.A. are negotiating the papers write about.

Tonight we played cards and drank light on English beer. We are retiring now after a gathering on Stern for a snack. We are told on the ocean in convey there is "black out" which means no smoking on deck, also all lights out (our first taste of "black outs"). This ship, the name of which is concealed, we'll call a "steamer" is a former German boat, a coal burner painted battle ship grey with guns mounted very appropriately

on deck. We volunteered our services for watch during the ocean trip. We believe the more eyes watching for ship, subs, airplanes and mines the better.

July 23, 1941

Today passed with little or no excitement. We arose at 7:50 a.m. to find our ship traveling down the Strait of St. Lawrence. Tonight late we will enter Strait of Cabot. All day our crew was busy rigging life boat nets and building a new raft slide. This afternoon we were busy playing deck tennis and shuffle board. P/O Halseid and P/O Sprague were champ among the P/O until a couple of deck hands were off duty and beat them very bad. After supper this evening P/O Lynch and myself were busy on the bridge talking to first mate about the war and ship- ping. He told of several times this ship was bombed and three other ships in convoy bombed. Today we viewed our guns aboard were closely. Tonight we played "Black Jack". P/O James Dorrator was winner as usual. He is our best gambler.

Tonight the mechanic mate is in room talking of twice he has gone down in the war and of his family being bombed, he said he has no home. I wonder if he realized as young as I am I am without a home and bombs are not the cause.

This afternoon we were supposed to have a practice life boat drill but it was called off. We laugh at the boats and even their use. I wonder what seriousness each one really thinks. I learn to jump in the first life boat in case---? I would like to see a gun in case---? They will not want us in the way. We can fly but not man a boat. Tomorrow we should meet the convoy---I hope.

This evening we had a few beers --I drank hard cider--- English sake for first time since '38 on my way to Africa. We are gambling with English money. F/O Peak and I are bank mates, I should say, as we have been in Mendota, California, and through Canada. This all seems so mixed up as I am trying to write and listen to mate and his travels. We travel, talk, travel and talk.

I awake to find the ship in quite rolling sea. It is now in Strait of Gabot. The crew fired the stern gun four times for practice at 10:15 this morning. The gang shows no tire yet of sea life after third day. We should be in Port Sydney tonight where we meet convoy. I have spent two hours on bridge this morning.

Tonight is midnight. We anchored in harbor of Sydney, Nova Scotia 10:00 p.m. This very important harbor really should be given more credit than our gang gave it, while we were piloted in the harbor we sit in the lounge beer and gambling ("black Jack"). We will pay our tribute tomorrow although we are not allowed to leave ship. I just came in - the city looks large as it is spread out on coast. The little mining (coal) town is very quiet and peaceful. As we pulled in our ship was inspected very close (might be Nazi). I hate to think how long we will lay anchor here to await a convoy (without shore leave). All afternoon F/O Peak and I were on watch on bridge. We were really entertained by such glasses etc.--I wonder how entertaining it will be in danger water---This is our last port until England. Our shoreabouts may take us to Iceland or the Captain's pro-see may decide.

F/O Coetter staked coal in boilers this afternoon. He said he was going back in boilers--I wonder--I'll take chance bridge any day. The rest of gang has gone to bed, guess I'll go too as I got very little sleep, my own fault.

(So-long Phoebe)

July 28, 1941.

The time now is boring us all, even crew, stiff. We missed a convey by a day. We do not know how long we lay another in the bay off Sidney's shores. The morning was nice--we were all swimming in very cold water 44°--your teeth would sure chatter. This afternoon and night (now) it is raining--disagreeable weather.

I was up in crew's nest between rain -- the ship sure looks small from that perch. These daily writings bore me. I wonder how they'll sound after I reach shore--I hope. We are disgusted because we cannot go into Sidney. The town looks very busy, a mining town, right up my alley.

In a few days will have to do a washing--my suit case is leaking. We are gambling again tonight. We got papers today, first since Ottawa. Well will close (time 9:25 p.m.).

July 28, 1941.

With ship still in this damn dock there is little life. We are all very uneasy. When the convey sails, no one knows. I slept most of the day to sort of make up on sleep. Our gang would certainly like to go ashore tonight--a Saturday night in a mining town--a good deal.

It is raining still and tonight my head hurts. There's a rumor we'll leave Sunday night for sea. I sure hope so.

July 27, 1941.

Today we lie idle in the harbor. We sail tonight at mid-night for England. The weather has been hell all day. With heavy mist-the wind blows hard. The white caps break high. We will have "black-outs" after tea tonight. All the convoy is figured out-the ship on our star-board is the commodore of convoy--there is a numerous number of destroyers around. Our ship is ready, guns at hand, etc.

I heard a radio broadcast today--U.S.A. is in this war for sure soon. I hope the men stay out. All England needs is equipment. Americans must supply that "I believe".

I stayed up to see anchor pulled up - sailing 1:10 a.m. I miss my sleep again. Only P/O Peck and myself are up, rest in bed.

Today all day only sea in sight. The sea was very rough, our boat was and is rocking terrible. No one too sea sick yet. In reality everyone could feel better.

Today we all tried to busy ourselves. P/O James Gassetter and P/O Hugh Brown stoked coal. P/O Peck took bridge watch. I took a paint brush and painted the sides of deck houses. We are all quite tired of sea and anxious to get across. Of all my trips on sea this is the worst. P/O Don Helwood is sick I should mention but not sea sick--he says it is the food - "I say it is the liquor".

I spent some time in engine hold today. The shaft that drives the prop is 561 feet long and so universal in it. What an engine room. There's four stories of the engine room, large pipes two stories high. All in all just a coal burner. You should see

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Coxetter and Brown as they come out from stoke room "were black". We are all letting our beards grow - what a rugged bunch of pilots we are. Our clothes dirty and a far distant look in our eyes - yet we are determined to finish our job - a job that must be done. I still want a crack at the Japs, though.

Tonight is "black out" of all ships in convoy. If you open a port the ships across from you have a right to fire a rifle at your helm. (a pleasant thought.)

All day ships of convoy practiced war manuevers - doing shifts by flags and whistle blasts. The sea is so rough I can't write or think.

We are all in lounge playing cards and piano. I wish this trip were over. We have fourteen days more of this possible - what a thought.

I was out on deck - it sure is dark and sea tosses you all around, one has to hold on to rails and walk slow.

Was up in crow's nest today while ship was tossing. I am afraid I really would get sea sick up there. Tomorrow I have a four hour watch so have gone to bed - 12:30 a.m.

Photo - I almost am tempted to quit writing this as it seems so boring to me. Yet you can have it if someone say OK. Love, F.J.

Tuesday, July 29, 1941.

It is very odd I lost track of days - I thought day was 29th. At sea the days are all alike, Sunday included. Today the sea was very smooth. We are about 80 miles off shore of Newfoundland. We should have met another convoy four hours ago (a convoy

of 40 ships). but there's a slip somewhere. In our convoy we average nine knots an hour - today we figured to reach England by August 9th or tenth, the reason so long is due to our course. We go up to Iceland waters. We may even see Greenland. When and where and how etc. all is not commonly known. Today our command ship has let our ship lead. We have the fastest ship. After we meet other convoys we fall to rear.

Tonight is "blackout". Our gang tired - no cards, just talk-time is 10:40 p.m. I wonder how all at home are and if you have received my letters?

Well. Why I keep writing I know not. Our gang is all in the lounge - the place is very smoky. We all tell tell tales and of our home life. We are all from different parts of States so each has different stories and jokes. You'd be surprised how we talk, talk and talk. I hope we never run out of stories - The dam boat is rocking like hell now as I write - just started.

As destroyers on each side there is little to worry about in days. The mail wife follow in rear in day and slip along us at night to lay her eggs - you can't see a dam thing out at night - If I have to go for a life boat I don't be able to see it.

Wish there were women on the boat -- it would be much more interesting. But well. All men. There is one ship among us that has all nurses aboard.

July 30, 1941.

Today was quite a day. Last night our destroyers left us here in ocean and returned to Canada. Early this morning three destroyers from main convoy were on patrol to find us. This main convoy had over fifty boats in it. They came up from South America and States. About noon we joined the convoy. We are now sixty-eight boats strong now. We have ample protection. Four of our ships have Hurricane Fighter Ships that can fly off deck if necessary. Our position is 26 (the ninth row and fifth ship from front. We are at back on corner.) He believes if a ship is picked off by Nazi ours will probably be it. Now as we approach danger waters we wonder if our gang will ever see England? I sure would hate to go in this water (it is too cold.)

The time is 11:00 all are in bed except P/O Peck, Sprague, Malood, and myself. P/O Peck and Sprague, Malood and myself played cards. We played bridge, rummy, and even a couple games of "Old Maid." It is lucky we play cards to pass away time. P/O Fox-tatter and Brown are still stacking coal. P/O. J.J. Lynch is very sea sick (guess he blew his boilers). P/O Peck is now trying to play an accordion - he does quite well.

The sea has had very large swells today and now. The boat rocks continually. I never am sea sick any more since '36. One of crew told me of his part in battle of Bunkirk. Too much to write here. I was tempted to take a picture of convoy today but censors would take it from me in England. A good ten days should see us there. I hope all goes well. We're not worried, just wandering. We have a fifty-fifty chance they say. I I die,

as six men at a time can go over side of ship if it sinks and get in life boats. In peace time only one rope ladder is used and one man at time goes over side. Before a boat is ever lowered only women and sick men are allowed in boat. At many points on ship large rafters are on slides for dumping in sea to use in emergency.

It is quite warm today, we have been in a moderate fog most of day. P/O Peck and I had a good watch on bridge today, at least the wind was slight. Thus far today (3:30 p.m.) has been just another sea day. Our gang sleeps quite irregular hours now and we are never all together during the 24 hours.

Some time soon we have a practice shooting with our anti-aircraft guns. Today while on watch I heard shots all day from other ships in convoy. They were just testing the guns and gunner crews. If ever a ship was attacked whistles would ring throughout the convoy and every ship would man the guns. The officer of bridge said if and when a dive bomber came, all ships would fire at once - it could be like a net in the sky. Our own anti-aircraft guns are 30 MM and fire 600 rounds a minute in bursts- besides with our cannons and machine guns we could make quite a racket.

Our ship really has no danger at present from airplanes, but only subs and battleships. The dem subs spot us in day and try to sink us by night. By 48 hours we will be in range of bombers (airplanes). I sure can see now where the B 1F is needed. I'm sure for big bombers now. If we even had more B 1F's now England could play hell with German convoys. We are due not to arrive England in a week. I sure hope so. We have now taken 11 days for a 7 day crossing. In all told I'll be on sea 80 days.

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We are having a special dinner tonight (liver.) We still eat good and plenty.

Our ship is making 8 knots most of day. As we follow ships in fog - the ship in front has a drag. This drag consists of two crossed pieces of board and have hole in middle so as it is drag under water it shoots a spray through hole. This contraption is on a cable and drag behind ship.

I am very sleepy tonight - (1:30 a.m.) P/O Lynch, Peck and myself are the last here in the lounge. We have been discussing the war with the 3rd. mate. He tells us how terrible Liverpool looks - he even states the condition of the docks as terrible with parts of ship bulk sticking up here and there.

P/O Sprague is on watch now - Sprague is from San Diego - by the way he has the best looking beard among us.

We had a little excitement a couple hours ago. A ship far over on our port side fires several tracer bullets. It was a signal for a destroyer to look for a possible sub - we were quite tense and did a lot of very quiet looking (serious). Nothing came of it - thank the Lord.

Tonight for first time in my life I witnessed a truly midnight sunset. Tonight our night will be only three hours long. We are quite far north to avoid German raiders. We are up quite near Greenland and Iceland. I know the exact course -- but due to censors I have throughout this leg tried not to reveal any courses so if ever no German agent could gain anything. We do go far north and Germans know that - so.

Things are not as they were - our gang are so separable. We are never together.

I often wonder if I mentioned two Frenchmen that boarded our boat at Sidney? They are going to join the "free forces", They are not able to speak English any better than I speak French - so by that our conversation is very drawn out in sign language. One of Frenchmen is a former Lt. of French forces.

The weather was very cold today - my feet get cold on watches. Our watches are all four hours long. Tomorrow I go on 1:00 am. to 5:00 a.m. That sure is a hell watch and cold. One thing good of night watches is you can get off the boat easily if it is such whereas if you were asleep down in "hold" you might not make it --some thought. And I still want to say that water is dem cold. Will sleep and retire (2:00 a.m.)

We gained an hour tonight. I have watch in bridge tomorrow 8:00 am. to 1:00 p.m. with P/O Peak. The same gang is here tonight. P/O Peak, Sprague, Lynch and myself. We are discussing celestial navigation I learned to use a constant (?) long ago.

We are now in danger zone. I am sleeping, as well as rest of gang, with clothes on. All of crew has many stories to tell of ship accidents. One on crew saw Bismark go down. The Bismark fastest battleship of world, it sank English fleet.

Our gang is now betting as to who'll get first Nazi. We even are dividing our property to each other in case a Nazi gets us. P/O Peak gets my prize camera. He also gets my watch. P/O Sprague gets my suit, etc. etc. He was to write my sister and Floeba in case. (some thought).

We heard over radio of P/O Steel, a kid we knew at

well, my 22 years have been scattered so all I regret is I can't visit Alton any more.

Today a quiet day. The sea is acting up - we ran into a very bad fog - our convey luckily sticks together. A radio reports Bismark sister ship loose in North Atlantic. (Bismark 38,000 ton battle ship.) If this report is true they may even run our ship back to Halifax. I hope we don't turn back - just as soon go ahead and take my chances.

We played a game of shuffle board today in spite of coldness. We are all sleeping with clothes on, we don't fear anything (not wash.) It is a long main house. Yeah, this boat gives me the creeps as it rolls - the wood on inside corridors like hell. All gang feels well. We eat very good on ship. There are no sweets though, we even have our daily tea (as English) at four o'clock. We even awake on morning with tea at our bedside. Tea - tea - hell, more tea. I see I never mention P/O London - the reason he sleeps all the time.

August 1, 1941.

Today is the birthday of my brother Joe Jr. If he was living he would be 27 years old. Many times I have wondered what my life would have been if he were living!!! Today barometers show "Fair" (50.8). All day sea very smooth and sky clear. We had another life boat drill and to my amazement P/O Peck and myself have been going to wrong life boat. We are very ashamed - yet in funny in serious side. We hope for another drill soon so we can go to right boat. It takes the crew three minutes to dump the boats. The ship has a rope grapovine over side of ship so as high

school was shut down over France. The war is over to him. We all in our hearts wonder when war is over to ourselves and people.

August 4, 1941.

Today the sea is very quiet and sky clear. I have flu today, my head hurts--coughed all last night. Today doctor gave me some pills and cough medicine.

If you were near here today you would have thought it July 4th. For a couple of hours all the ships in convoy tried their guns. We fired all the guns on our deck too. The first time I have witnessed anti-aircraft guns in action. I wonder if they are the rate that will get us. It sure was wonderful hearing all the fire. From now all the guns are loaded and ready for action. Hope they are not needed but it is inevitable they will get used. Twice today some smoke was sighted on the horizon, it was checked by destroyers (found a ship there that got lost from convoy in a fog a couple days back).

All the halls in the below have lanterns lighted - so crew can see to get out in case. The power plant may be damaged.

It is near midnight now - the sun is just again setting. P/O Peck and I go on watch in another hour. We watch from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. - it will be a cold watch.

We should be in England next week this time - I hope so.

Also today the Hurricane on the ships catapult were warmed up--that was mailed to my car. Last airplane I flew was in Canada. Will close till later.

Tuesday August 5, 1941.

We are blessed with a quiet sea and fair weather - the sun even came out for a couple hours this afternoon. There has been no excitement today. All day a Hudson and P B X (Catalina as called by England) has circled our convoy. These ships have come out from Iceland. These were probably U.S.A. patrols as U.S. has taken Iceland unoccupied territory over so as to release British troops. The U.S. is really in it with Japan the radio said today. I sure want a crack at Japan myself sometime in the future.

No guns were fired today. No smoke on horizon appeared so all was quiet. These aircraft from Iceland stay 1000 yards away from convoy or they will be fired on. No aircraft allowed over us. Tomorrow some Sunderland ships will be out from England.

Wednesday, August 6, 1941.

The British Navy is here! Six destroyers came out to meet us this morning. Also our Coverite (8) are still escorting us. Our two stock gunner ships left us for Iceland.

Two ships have dropped out of convoy (engine trouble). They will have to cripple in the best they can for England. Our convoy waits for no one ship, I thought it cruel to leave the two ships stranded in these troubled waters but the Captain said can't risk sixty ships to save one. We are far north of England and making a dash for it. We still have 3 days before we dock.

All day PBX and Hudson bombers patrolled the sky around us. We seem to have quite a lot of protection now. Also we have

passed the worst sub area and without mishap.

Our gang anxious to arrive. We are worn out, dirty, unshaven, and still doing our patrol watches. The whole outfit is tired and weary of this life. I for one will be dam glad to get on firm soil even if that soil is shaking under boot ride.

The sea quiet and weather warm--no sun or fog.

Today I had a machine gun to my shoulder (M3). I'd like to shoot it at a school of porpoises I saw. These porpoises were in a school of several hundred-- leaping out of water. They were frantic at so many ships. This fish is large - often weighs 1500 pounds.

Thursday, August 7, 1941.

The sea has large swells today - all ships are rolling immensely. The weather is quite nice - not too cold and clear, no fog.

Tomorrow our convoy breaks up - half goes to Northern Scotland or such place, to Norway and Sweden etc. We will probably leave the ship Su day (maybe).

Today there was quite a novel. Our gunlighted a man (corpse) in the water with a life jacket on it. We were all reminded that after a torpedo that body could of been any one of us. We really should have shot it and punched it so it could have sunk to welcome Davey Jones. It passed only 40 ft. from our boat.

Late tonight a sub was sighted, our convoy broke up and the destroyers sped to the scene of action. An action was staged too far away for us to see, we heard what we thought was one depth

charge although we are not certain. There is another convoy near us that had an air raid as we've told. All in all tonight I sleep with my clothes - so here goes to bed. We are really in troubled waters now.

Friday, August 8, 1941.

Today land is sighted. Is Lewis or such - the one interest is we spotted a sub. You could feel the depth charges going off - they rocked our boat. It was music to ears to have some excitement. I'd almost welcome a dive bomber this trip has been so boring. Tomorrow we will sight parts of England. We should dock Sunday.

Several mines were sighted and shot off. Those mines sure are rough on ships - one doesn't have a chance if ship hits a mine, to get off.

All day friendly aircraft has flown over head. Tomorrow should be a hell've interesting day.

I have (9:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.) watch tonight - if any action starts I'll be up alright for I want to see it for sure.

I just came off watch a couple hrs. ago. We are rounding Pt. Lewis of Lewis Island (time now 3:00 a.m.). I am sitting on bed side. P/O Peck and I are leaving our clothes on. We aren't afraid but in case. You know it is a strange feeling now - wondering if you'll wake the next day. If a torpedo hits us we would never know what happened. On our watch - a few planes flew out, dropped their signal flares, indicating friendly craft. Sea very rolling now. We took a few pictures today. For a background the

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Snipper gave us a British and an American flag to hang. Hope all is well with customs. Tomorrow should be swell excitement. I have learned to handle guns aboard - so if we are attacked I can run one; may get a dem German before I even get to Iceland. (I hope).

We are sure nearing there at last.

Our food is quite above average aboard ship - although there is no sweets aboard. What wouldn't I give now for an Almond Hershey Earl Seal I sure like candy as does the rest of the gang. We have plenty of cigarettes, they say you can't get them in England. I have almost a thousand in my possession that I'm taking ashore. If you're there long guess one will quit smoking.

We have our watch set to Greenwich time - P/O Peck and I just came off watch - it never did get dark last night. Time 11:30 p.m. and sun isn't setting yet. I have read all magazines on board - now most of books. (I got rid of cold.) P/O Halder and London on watch now.

August 9, 1941. Saturday.

Today convey broke up. We are in double file going down between Is. of Lewis and Northern part of Scotland. Late tonight we are up talking about "Black Magic" - there's a book. P/O Peck is very skeptical so we all act as if we believe in it. P/O Brown goes below as we talk and gets dressed as one would imagine a witch to look and he comes up, lowers lights and attacks P/O Peck. He sure looked good. We couldn't recognize him.