

A  
LETTER  
FROM  
FOREIGN WATERS

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Written by Edith E. Appleton

Ostende,

October 11th, 1914,

My dearest Mother,

We left Southampton Friday night and got here at 3 a.m. to-day, Sunday; were detained seven hours at Dover for orders; had three pilots, one from Dover one from Dunkirk and one from somewhere else. We were originally told to go straight to Calais, but were stopped at Dungeness and told to go to Dover for orders.

The journey to Dover was calm and uneventful. We left there in the dark. A dark ship racing full speed through the night. No light was allowed to show from any of the cabins, no lights at all on deck, only one much-shaded one from the mizzen mast. When I saw our dark ship and heard the Pilot give the order, "Full steam ahead" I felt a little eerie; especially as we had been saying perhaps the crossing was unsafe and that was why we and many other boats were held up at Dover. Nothing happened until we were nearing France, then two shots were fired from a French cruiser who said she had challenged us twice and we had taken no notice. She asked many questions before allowing us to go on. Soon we met another cruiser and it turned a powerful searchlight on us carefully examining all round us to see the name was genuine and not just painted on as a blind; after the same questioning we were allowed to proceed. This is a very steady boat. I knew we had arrived when I woke - first I heard a dog bark, then a little later heard Church bells ringing, and should have been quite pleased to attend the service to say, "Thankyou for a safe crossing." We dressed. early and came on deck. Then the interest of the day began.

Do you remember Ostende at all? The Quay now is lined double bank with boats chiefly English, used for transport. We have a boat between us and the Quay, so our view is across her and about 20 yards of grass.

All the Belgian Army that was at Antwerp, and all the refugees from the destroyed parts have been pouring in here all day. It is like watching a procession only it started early and hasn't finished yet, 1/4 past 4 p.m. First refugees, poor dispirited things dragging their children, then the soldiers - Infantry - Cavalry - Ambulances - guns - London busses and waggons and carts by the hundreds, full of stuff - motor cars with officers - men dirty from the trenches, carrying their spades they have been digging with - and then it all seems to begin over again - infantry - cavalry - London busses etc. Priests wearing Red Cross armlets - dogs drawing gun carriages and ambulances, dear creatures they look - troops of horses, nothing on - and so it keeps on. The men look very worn and glum. Their uniforms are very varied and bright.

I believe we are to go back to Dover to-night for different orders.

I am the only one not ashore this afternoon, but thought I should enjoy the ship to myself to write, bathe, have tea, which I have just had - hot toast, ship biscuit and butter - we are not given bread in our allowance so what we get must be out of the goodness of their hearts - all right inside, a bit musty on the crust - I expect they don't scrub out their bread bin often enough. I went ashore this morning, jostled along in the crowd. of Belgians pouring into the place. Went to the Cathedral for service; just over at 11 o'clock. The priest was standing at the Altar rails holding what looked like a picture in a small silver frame, and the people kissed it as they passed out. Then we went to a Café and had some wine and biscuits, and looked about the place a little bit.

Two little Belgian boys came on board this morning selling “Daily Mail Times”, they had a great reception.

I will leave this open in case of further news. The others will be back soon and my quiet afternoon ended.

A steamer with Belgian refugees has just come alongside out-side us. Poor things! they do look miserable! Some of them can speak English and have been telling us about their village; it is burnt to nothing now, and most of them have only the clothes they are wearing. Our orderlies did not leave them sad for long. They clumped together and sang all sorts of songs to them, Tipperrary etc. The women cheered up and begged for trophies, and now every one of them is wearing a soldier’s badge, so is every baby, even a ten month’s old one has its shawl pinned with R. A. M. C. There is a badly wounded man among them whom our Officers have been to see.

We saw two Taube Aeroplanes fly over us and heard heavy gun firing about 30 miles off.

We left Ostende at 2 p.m. and pursued our calm, slow way back again; as soon as it was quite dark all lights were put out – and you’ve no idea what It feels like, being in such darkness –

By the way have you seen the Comet? Last night it was here –

North Star

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Great Bear

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Comet

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We were challenged several times and finally stopped altogether somewhere, and anchored off Dunkirk. But the next thing I knew were going again and a bright searchlight was sweeping in at my port-hole about once in three seconds - there is such a sharp look-out kept here - Then a little later I looked out and saw a slate coloured lump which might be land - a little later was distinctly land - with a beautiful sunrise - crimson and storm clouds going on behind it; then I just watched day and the strange land come, and finally we came to Boulogne, looking very beautiful and clear. Here we are, and I hope to get the Pilot to take this to post for me at Dover.

I hope I am not greedy, but after four days of boulli, roast mutton and lamb begin to sound very delicious, but we should be thankful for all the care taken of us - in provisioning - and torpedo boats - and searchlights. It has been a great eye-opener of the seriousness of navigation just now. We have special pilots because of the mines.

Much love and I will write when I can.

Your loving daughter.

Edie.