

No. 8. A.M.L.

received Aug 9th

c/o B.W.M.S.,
32, Nicol Road,
BOMBAY,
Saturday 22-5-43.

My dear All, It seems only "right & proper" to write to you today, so as to commemorate the completion of one year's "foreign service".

Difficulties with regard to post are seemingly arising; the chief one being that we may only send one A.L.C. per week, & that must be obtained from shore. We are not always able to do this. The A.G's. have to be signed, censored & what-not, & it really is confusing what we are supposed to do with them for the instructions vary in almost every port! I only hope they reach you. Anyway, I'm taking a pretty safe step by writing a letter, even if it does take some time. The news will be stale because I shall repeat it on A.G's., etc., but never mind that.

Our ~~new~~ surroundings seem to be considerably better than of late, despite the now prevalent monsoons.

A few nights back we had rather an amusing time. We had a voyage of abt. 15 hrs. to make. The sea was fairly heavy (heaviest I've seen out here) & it was mostly on the beam, so we rolled quite a bit.

During the night, a certain amount of damage was done through lack of preparedness. The O.M. refused to alter course while the men battered the hatches, which signified that he was going a little crackers. The next day, when only a few miles from port, he suddenly headed into the sea, saying that she was straining herself! Finally, however, we arrived. Everyone, except John & I thought it was terrific. Such remarks as, "O boy! What a night. I couldn't sleep for rolling out of my bunk," etc., were being said by everyone. I thought it best to keep quiet as one can never convince these people that what we had was nothing more than a heavy beam swell in the Atlantic. Actually, it was supposed to have been the tail end of a Cyclone but it must have been the end of its tail!

We did finally reach port one evening at abt. 5. The Doc., Purser, J. & I went to the pictures. While there, I asked an R.A.F. fellow where I could get Bert's address from. Luckily he knew. We were supposed to leave the next day, but fortunately we didn't, so I

found out where he was (10 m. out of town) & the following day rushed off to see him. The evening before that, however, J. & I went to see "Mrs. Miniver," which we thought lived up to the ~~the~~ extravagant things said abt. it. The only major faults seemed to be "a middle-class family" & the fact that Greer Garson looked rather young. By the by, if that's how a successful architect lives, all should be well! I thought the "nicest" pieces of acting were when W. Pidgeon told his son off for being rude to the girl & the way the girl told the boy off.

Returning to my visit to Bert: I managed — very cleverly I thought — to obtain a free ride there in an RAF lorry & a free ride back. I was wearing khaki & no stripes, so they thought I was in the RAF. I till I put them wise. I had no difficulty in getting into the camp. I just said at the gate, "Do you know a Bert Lancelles, & Co. & behold, he was opposite me!"

We spent abt. 3 hours talking, but I had to go back, as we were sailing at 4 pm. I ~~to~~ sent him

a wire the day before & so he had arranged to have the evening off. It was a great pity, but I expect we shall come back some time, though not for a long stay, I think.

He told me of his adventures & his friends added theirs, & but I'm afraid I can't repeat them. He seems very fit, has a passably comfortable existence — as far as anyone can — & seems to be in good spirits. He ~~isn't~~ being killed by overwork so he says he does a lot of "political" thinking. I imagine we all do these days.

I don't know when I shall receive your mail, but I have hopes of it being forwarded here.

Since the last Chief Officer, 2nd Officer, No. 1, & the Purser left, the Old Man ~~hasn't~~ ^{has} ~~spoken~~ to anyone — except J & I occasionally. He isn't popular & often does silly things. It would be better for him to retire.

28-5-43:- Well, well, well! Life certainly does vary in the Marconi Co! Since last writing we have been swinging round an anchor for 5 days, in lovely

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weather, swimming, sailing & playing deck quoits - besides doing some studying. At first, the effort of rowing a heavy lifeboat with an incomplete crew, was awful. We ached all over, but the swimming at 7am soon helped to remove it. I am so glad that I find no difficulty with floating these days. It's so lovely just to lie out flat, and drift! What a life, eh? Up at 6am. An hour's studying, a 15 minute swim. 15 mins getting the news. Half-an-hr. study. Half-an-hr writing, etc. 30 mins Washing, etc. Then breakfast! This is something I never expected. However, with the next phase of the war so near at hand, I do feel like being somewhere where I might be useful. ~~They~~ That may come about yet; I can't be sure.

I do hope my mail will reach you, it is so difficult to arrange things because we have to give everything to the Purser (without stamps), to post. I sent off an A.G. to Iris yesterday.

The deck quoits is going on in great style. I won my first two singles matches, but lost in the semi-finals. I am still in the doubles. We are arranging a cricket match with the shore people.

As you can imagine, I am feeling in the pink. I'd be hard to please if I wasn't!

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John sent some A. L. C.'s ashore here to be posted, but they were returned two days later. Apparently one has to obtain the forms from the ~~the~~ naval people ashore, & can only have one a week. This is a bit thick when you may be at sea for 6 weeks, & therefore unable to post any mail. I am waiting until everything is quite clear because some fellows have had their ordinary letters returned for not putting an address on the back. They say the name of the ship should be there, but I have always understood that to be the greatest offence!

I might mention here that I did not win either the Singles or the Doubles of the quait tournament.

The Purser has arranged a cricket match with some naval people & also - believe it or not, a Water Polo match. Oh what fun! Cricket is more my line these days compared with rugger, though ~~my~~ my muscles are in a bit better condition now.

6-6-43.

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The sun has just set. The young moon has risen in a clear, pale blue sky. The sea is quiet, & blue also. Above the low hills, the sky is tinged with pink. Just another perfect evening; just another repetition, & yet perfect just the same. How easy it is to let familiarity breed contempt!

While this gorgeous picture of colour is taking place outside, I am inside writing! Of what, I can't say! I am writing in the smoke room, to be more exact, where a game of bridge is in progress & where "Little Chic" is mournfully playing mournful tunes on a very so-called gramophone. Have I introduced you to Chic before? Well he's our 3rd. mate — born just outside Poona — & he was the first educated Indian acquaintance that I made. We first met soon after we had sailed on our first voyage. He used to have his lunch at the same time as I did, after everyone else had gone. I remember how I used to be afraid to talk to him in case he was unable to speak English well (I didn't want to embarrass ~~him~~ either him or myself).

However he saved me the trouble one day, by saying, "Hallo Sparks! Its warm today, isn't it?" Since then we have been very close friends. There is however one thing abt him - as abt. all Indians - & that is what they call in the B. I. "Indian Temperament." Sometimes for absolutely no apparent reason at all he will stop speaking to you for maybe several days & then start again as if nothing at all had happened! It puzzled me at first. With one of my own countrymen I probably wouldn't be bothered, but I wanted to be nice - or as nice as possible - so I made every effort to break down these silent spells until finally he stopped them with me altogether. He told me once that he just dislikes something a person says, so in order to teach them a lesson, he stops speaking to them! This is only 5 ft high but very strong, & good at all sports. Taken all round he is a likeable fellow & easy to get on with if you give way plenty.

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The four people forming our bridge party are, Doc, 2nd Engineer, 4th Eng. & our 2nd Officer.

Doc is nice enough, but sufficiently old to be anti-British. His arguments in this connection are always unanswerable but it is difficult to say how better solutions to certain problems could have been arrived at.

The 2nd Eng. is from the N. Shields district, as is the 4th & so they can be relied upon for a bit of humour & general good nature.

The 2nd Officer is an objectionable person as far as nature goes. He is Welsh which leads to the time-honoured cliché "that accounts for everything". This is his first trip as 2nd O., & has he got a swollen head? He is nice enough to those on his own level but looks with contempt on people like the gunners, which gets my goat. However, he is not one to be afraid of.

The water polo match

has been played off but I'm afraid I can't go into it in detail as I'm tired & must close this as soon as poss., but I did tell Henrie all abt. it, so you can ask her.

I hope the Evans etc are still keeping fit, that Gma & Gpa are not ~~ex~~ ill or anything. I've an idea that someone has a birthday abt. now, but I'm not sure. Possibly it's Joan.

Anyway, please give my love to all, keep your chins up, keep smiling & God bless you,

Your ever loving son &
brother,
Len.