

As I Think Back

It was 06.45 hours and already the sun was high in the sky. The grease-monkey said, “It’s almost an hour since the first kite landed. We’ve lost another.”

Toward the middle of April 1943 rumours started to circulate that our squadron, ‘The Tigers’ was going to move and how rumours travel when they deal with some new venture which the squadron is about to tackle! Soon more oil was added to the flame when a newly appointed commanding officer W/C George Roy called us together at the RCAF station at Leaming Bar, Yorkshire, and said, “Lads, I am glad to have the honour of becoming your CO and I might as well break the great news to your now – the squadron is going overseas.”

Hurrah!! Something new, something different, something upon which to base the new and ever growing rumours. ‘The squadron is going overseas.’

In a brief period, we were reequipped with tropical kit, given a 72-hour embarkation leave and were soon all set for whatever might lie ahead. On the day that General Alexander advised the government that the last enemy troop had surrendered in the African theatre of operations and that it had been brought to a successful conclusion we had a pay parade at the Dalton RCAF station and were all set to leave the next morning. The next morning arrived and around four thirty W/C Roy personally wandered through the huts and woke the lads up and got things moving. There was a rip-roaring breakfast waiting for us...at least that is what we thought that morning. By six we had our final rollcall again. W/C Roy personally called the roll. By six thirty were boarding one of those NE Special trains at Thirsk and soon were snorting along the English countryside ... it was a lovely day ... bright and warm ... around noon we arrived at Liverpool and almost immediately started to board the former luxury liner Duchess of York. This was on Saturday May 16th. At seven thirty that evening the Duchess pushed away from the pier and moved further out in the harbor only to drop anchor and sit there until the following evening at eight thirty when again the anchor was lifted and we steamed out to the wide open sea. The following morning only to awaken and find that we were steaming in the harbor of Greenock... this was Monday May 17th. By this time rumours had things well confirmed that we were heading for North Africa. Indeed, we had plenty of time to collect these rumours because it wasn’t until Wednesday that all was set. Boats were coming and going ...

including some of 'Joe's' subs and other boats such as the Aquitania. On this day too, Churchill addressed the American Congress ... and so at six thirty the boats began to move ... a battleship, destroyers, an aircraft carrier ... about fifty all together steamed westward ... what a feeling ... what confidence in our sea power .. the old Englishman with a tear in his eye ... the odd Canadian giving the odd cheer that he was getting to hell out of the country ... and so we plowed on westward. It was a grand evening ... and so to bed in our hammock.

Our sea journey although quite uneventful did have its highlights. May 20th the first day out was described as, 'Grand day, slightly rough'. The following day was windy, misty and dam rough ... several depth charges dropped ... Saturday, May 22 was a bright day, rough and choppy and the fish were fed several times by many. Yours truly contributed to the goodwill fund twice. To the best of our knowledge we were cutting across the corner of the Bay of Biscay. Next morning it was warm. We saw a couple of 'Cats' out on patrol and on the next morning the weather could be described as wonderful. The majority of the boys changed into their tropical uniforms. Swallows were sighted in the evening. Around four a Jerry kit was hovering around the convoy. Kits from the aircraft carrier went up and as far as we could find out no damage was done. The following day, May 25th, conditions were described as wonderful. It was warm, in general there was no reason why you could not enjoy yourself. Land was sighted at 6.30 ... and around ten that same evening we went through Gib. It was an impressive sight ... the lights on the south shore, Spanish Morocco ... on the north, Spain. As we were passing through the straights, we passed two hospital ships going in the opposite direction. They were fully lighted up and presented a sight that will long be remembered. The next day our trip through the Mediterranean continued becoming more of a pleasure cruise. We had a talk by the adj ... E/L Gingras and MO F/L Lindsay ... two ships left the convoy possibly going to Iran ... the carrier left at Gib. The following morning, Thursday May 27th we arose early and wandered around the decks. What a sight ... along the south side there was that great mass of white rock rising up from the blue Mediterranean ... an impressive sight never to be forgotten. In addition, it was warm and bright ... but from the Med you got a refreshing and satisfying breeze which made you say, "oh boy, isn't this wonderful." By ten a.m. we had docked at Algiers ... some began to disembark immediately however we had a pay parade at one thirty and began to shove off two fifteen.

A word about Algiers. Built on the slopes of a mountain one could not help to realize the size and importance of this city. There were her big buildings, her fine hotels, her large stores and other public buildings ... it was a sight that those of us coming from North America had never seen before ... white buildings and huge ones at that. Sitting there on the slopes of those barren hillsides ... what a contrast to the smokey and misty Liverpool which we had left not quite two weeks previous. In looking over the harbor facilities you were impressed with the facilities ... there was plenty of room and things were humming with business of getting the convoy unloaded.

When we disembarked, we marched approximately four and a half miles to an RAF receiving depot ... it seemed like ten miles to some ... it was blistering hot. We had full kit and gone was the cool refreshing breeze which we had enjoyed while on the Mediterranean. For supper we had bully-beef, jam, bread, cheese, tomatoes and tea. Then we wandered back to the train and went out to a small town called Boufarik...there we took up residence in a girl's school ... our bed was the marble floor ... our pillow was

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-Lyman A. Roberts, RCAF 424
Bishops University, Lennoxville, 1946

(left) Photo of the Tigers in the girl's school