Letter No 5

Bournemouth
England.
Sept. 5th., 1941.

Dear Poppo + all at home,

Since writing last, I have, as you can see, arrived at my immediate destination but am not yet settled down to permanent digs. We successfully made the Atlantic crossing without even sighting any enemy activity, which is no doubt a tribute to the efficient manner in which our journey was conducted. Nothing worth relating happened on our last hop, except of course, the usual one or two false scares. Seas were calm all the way, but we met a lot of misty fog, which, though unpleasant, was ideal for protection, and may have assisted greatly in keeping the ferries at bay. Saw also, on the way over, some of our famous planes, which came out to keep us company, including the one + only Spitfire, and what a beautiful little she is.

Our first view of England was not impressive, as we ran into the harbour during a dirty smoky fog, but since then, our opinions have changed somewhat. I do not know how people can exist in these cities. I don't think they know what the sky looks like

One cannot imagine the thousands (really thousands) of tenement houses unless one has actually seen them. They stretch for miles as far as the eye can see, + all built exactly alike. They look clean enough, but how cramped no garden, no privacy - no fresh air. It is an education to see the chimney pots - each house seems to have umpteen chimney pots - what for I don't know, and so there are thousands of houses, you can well imagine what the East looks like - just a sea of chimneys. Of course when you come to think of it, there are three + four times the total population squeezed into an area barely the size of Wanganui.

But the country at this time of the year (late summer over here) is something marvellous it really is. The English countryside in my opinion is streets ahead of our own. Beautiful little farms, surrounded by magnificent trees. (I am just about running out of adjectives!) Trees seem to be somewhat sacred in this country, + they have left them where they grew. Where we are at the moment huge trees are in the middle of the footpaths + the civic authorities have had seats built around them - and they are not just here + there

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there are dozens of them. Of course, just now we are seeing all things at their best. Where we are now, is a beautiful seaside resort, but I should imagine, one would need an income of many thousands to remain here. Flats and hotels are everywhere, and huge, ostentatious places they are too. Private homes are like mansions, and the owners have chauffeurs, maids etc. Met an elderly gentleman in the street the other day who new NZ. and he invited us to his home for a glass of sherry. Naturally, we did not refuse! He had a great home, three storied ~~flats~~, beautifully furnished + carpeted, full of silverware, antiques + oil paintings of his ancestors since Adam was a boy. You see no wooden buildings of any kind - all brick or stone with tiled roofs. It seems unfair to see the difference between the houses of the industrial workers and the mansions of the wealthy.

Since arriving here we have had glorious, hot sunshine with a temperature something akin to our own at home. In a month or two, I understand, things will be a little different in that respect!

At the present time, we are just being fitted out with the rest of our gear, filling in

forms, having our photos taken for identification. etc., but no doubt we will be flying before long.

To go back a bit— did I ever tell you about the church bells in Halifax? If I did, I'm going to repeat it, just in case I didn't. Anyway, Fr. Wills there, a recently ordained priest, took us up in the belfry of the Cathedral situated at the top of the steeple and a long way up in the air. Here he offered to play the bells for us, so we listened. He started off with the Canadian Air Force song, then a couple of hymns, Land of Hope and Glory & finished up with "God Save the King". He asked us if we would like anything in particular & we suggested "Taps" is the hour to say goodbye. Cyril Charlands, who was with us, wrote out the music, & sure enough, that night, the "Maori Farewell" echoed over the City from the Cathedral Bells for the first time in Canada's history. All this took place on a Sunday, by the way! Just imagine that in N.Z.

To Return to where I was. Sunning here peacefully in the sunshine, one hardly realises that a war is on, but it is inclined to make one homesick— actually I have felt it more since being here than when I was on board ship. However, on the way here,

we had a few grim reminders of the war — balloon barrages, bomb damage etc. But, what we have seen so far, England is still very much alive, and still very cheerful.

We have met Australians, Canadians, South Africans and Englishmen, and also, Yankees, but take it from me, as a body, our own New Zealanders can "whack 'em all".

Pubs open at 11 am + close at 2 pm. reopen at 6 pm. and close again at 10 pm. and Sunday is just the same as any other day. But the beer is frightful — like water. I haven't tasted as glass of ale in this country yet. I understand though, that there is a shortage and that partly account for the poor quality.

Shopping hours are similar to N.Z. Gosh, I would like to have a wad to spend in some of them. There is some lovely stuff, especially chinaware + leatherware at ridiculous prices, compared with our own. Most of the goods are sold on the coupon system, each person being able to use so many coupons per months or per week. We can purchase anything simply by certifying that it is for our own use. Naturally we buy the place out of grapes at 10/- per lb. apples and peaches at 6/- and 4/- respectively! I am led to believe that

these prices are quite cheap.

Mod then, we cannot buy cigarettes tobacco or hair oil at all, so if any of my wealthy relations like to send me some Tobacco, preferably Park Drive, and a couple of bottles of hair oil, it will be very much appreciated. Also maybe sometime, a piece of fruit cake or biscuits or anything like that - you see, there is hardly any sugar available, and I've never get anything that has sugar in it like cakes, chocolate etc. I have got used to going without sugar in my tea so don't let that worry you. I shall expect a parcel by return!! Talking about that, I have not as yet had any mail at all, but I hope to get some shortly. I continue posting it to N.Z. House, as the Strand, and I will arrange for them to send it on.

If I can arrange a spot of leave I am going to try to get to London and endeavour to find my way out to South Croydon to see Rachel's sister. Also, I have located a Bonfield in the phone book, so I'll have a visit there also.

If anyone has any addresses out this way, please send them on as they will come in handy.

We are getting quite well fed, considering and I don't think any of us have had to do

in our huts as yet. Also we are well accomodated
in a room of my own, washand basin, H.C water etc
I possess a batman to clean my brass, polish,
my boots, make the bed etc. Messing expenses are
fairly heavy, but as I have not been definitely
posted, I am not sure just what they are -
they vary from station to station - but, in any
case, I don't think there will be much of our
pay left.

Pilot Officers are about 6 a dozen here.
Squadron Leaders, Wing Commanders, Group Captains
Air Commodores - the amount of board about
just about makes one dizzy.

Well, I had better ring off, else this
thing will be overweight for air mail. I had
to start writing on both sides even as it is.
I will be posting an air mail every now &
then, but I can't do it all the time, as the
expense is a bit heavy. Please let me know
how the Air mail compares with surface mail
as regards time.

As usual, my regards to all relatives
& friends. I dropped Teddie a line from
Halifax - just a short note, as no doubt he
gets all the news from home. Joe had
a birthday on the 4th. It is a bit late but
wish him many happy returns from me.

I hope you received my Cables OK. I had to put my full name on them - that is why it was there, although it made them look a bit frigid. Did the silk stockings arrive alright? I hope so.

I trust that you and all the family are keeping well as I am. Love to all, not forgetting the Colonel.

Remember me in your prayers,

Your affectionate Son,

Vic.

~~Don't forget to keep in touch with Cock & Pierce with the A.B. Club. How I could go a glass of good beer over the bar of those Adamsho pub right now!~~

Send also some cigarette papers, please.

V

(over)