

1
Lieut. Colonel L.F. Toddler
Specialist Training School
Iceland (C) Force
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Most darling Ann - I have got such a lot to tell you that I will start this letter while I have the opportunity though I do not know when the post goes. Also I do not know how much the censor will cut out, though I hope nothing, as I shall not say anything which could possibly matter to anyone. I last wrote to you shortly after we had arrived & since that letter I have moved elsewhere & experienced a number of trials & tribulations. I had quite a lot of administrative work & arrangements to make after we arrived, but we eventually set off for a new destination in a small ship of about 1600 tons. We had a number of troops on board & I was O.C. Troops. All went well for a bit although it was cold & there was a fair sea running which got worse as time went on. I was lying in my cabin one night half awake & half asleep when I was jerked into consciousness by an explosion & the crash of stuff falling on the deck just over my cabin. It was then ten minutes to midnight & the sea was very rough. I got up & started to dress & almost immediately the

warning went for all hands to go to boat stations & a message came for me to go & see the Captain on the bridge. As I came out of my cabin I noticed a good deal of smoke, though I did not know what it was, & I fought my way up to the bridge to find out. There I saw the Captain & he told me the situation. There had been an explosion in the after hold & the hold was on fire. The cargo was highly inflammable. The engine room bulkhead had been blown in, & all the engine room hatch skylights blown out. A plate had been blown off one boiler & the donkey boiler damaged so that ~~so~~ they could not raise the full pressure for the fire hose. It was very difficult to work in the engine room at all as it was full of smoke & gas through the broken bulkhead. We were 23 hours steaming from the nearest possible calm water & the sea was too rough for there to be much chance of launching the lifeboats if necessary. It was bitterly cold with a strong north wind & snow squalls. Altogether as grim a picture as one could think of. Anyway the Captain decided that our only chance lay in rushing for calm water & hoping that the crew could keep the fire under & the engines going until we got there. The calm water was an

unfrequented fjord with a very narrow entrance which it was dangerous to navigate in daylight, let alone in the dark. Anyway at 1210 we altered course & steamed off hoping for the best. I went round the deck & saw all the men & told them the situation & tried to cheer them up without underestimating its gravity. They were magnificent & had all trooped up on deck very quickly & silently & without a murmur of any sort. After I had seen them I went back on the bridge & strained my eyes for the light which should be at the end of the fjord we were making for, though I knew we shouldn't see it for a long time. I looked at the very angry & cold sea - so cold that I knew one could not live in it for long - & then looked behind & saw the ominous pall of smoke from the burning hold, which seemed to be following us like a great vulture. And all the time the men were standing without a word of complaint on the open deck, in the most intense cold - remember we were not far from the arctic circle & there was a northerly gale & it was snowing. And time just crawled on. Every time I looked at my watch I found it was only 3 minutes since I had last looked at it. Reports came up from the fire - first encouraging; a lot of smoke, no flame & not getting any worse. Then bad; another minor explosion

Flames had broken out at the forward end of the hold & could not be reached without shifting the cargo; conditions in the engine room were getting increasingly difficult. Then a little better again - flames were not gaining, quite a lot of water was getting into the hold, there was a lot of steam but less smoke in the engine room. At about 2:15 we sighted the light - y-e-r-r-y There was a flash of hope that was it! At about 3:15 we were abreast of it & going dead slow while the skipper felt his way in. We then had our first bit of luck. Just at the tuckiest moment, the snow let up & the moon came out & gave us quite a lot of light. At 3:30 we dropped anchor in calm water & our escort vessel came alongside & got their fire hose into the hold. Thank God it was then practically over bar the shouting. We got the fire under control, shifted the cargo & dumped a lot of it overboard & had the fire out by 60. And then I went to bed, & I can't tell you just how thankful I was to be able to lie down in my bunk & to know that all the men could do the same. I dreamed about the cold, grey, venomous rough sea & I am sure a lot of others did too. — I must stop this for to-night as our lights go out in five minutes but

I will go on with my adventures to-morrow.

Nov 8th After going to bed at 6.0, I was up again at 8.0 the same morning & found everything a pretty fair shambles but to the eternal credit of the steward, breakfast was produced for us at the normal time. By about 10.00 most of the merr was cleared away & the cargo re-stowed when it was found that we had a leaking steam pipe which had to be patched up. We eventually sailed again at 1.30. Meanwhile the weather had been getting worse & worse & outside the fjord it was blowing a full northerly gale. The skipper really had no choice but to go on as owing to the varied and unexpected delays we had only one more days food on board. And so on we went straight into the gale. The very first sea that hit us, we rolled so much, that everything came off all the tables in the saloon quite regardless of the fiddles round the tables, & there was the most frightful mess of broken cups & glasses. I retired to my bunk, not because I was sick, but because it was impossible to stand or sit anywhere. It was almost impossible to remain in my bunk but I managed it by jamming myself in. I have never seen such seas & I think I was more frightened than when we were on fire! It was quite terrifying

to see the most enormous sea towering over the ship
& then to remember that she was only 1600 tons & that
we had no skylights on the engine room or after hatch.
At about 6:00 pm the sea got worse & shortly after I
heard another crash & we started going dead slow. I
fought my way up to the bridge, a most perilous procedure
I may say as there was snow on the decks, & there saw
the Captain. He told me that one of the after life boats
had broken loose & the crew were trying to secure it,
while the ship was going dead slow. Unfortunately
the sea was so rough that she would not steer, going
dead slow, & he had to keep on going full speed ahead
in order to keep her head up to the wind. From the
bridge the seas looked even worse than before & when
going dead slow we were rolling about 42° each
way! I was almost hypnotized by the size of the
seas & stayed on the bridge just looking at them &
unable to tear myself away! Incidentally I did
not feel in the least sick - probably because I was
too frightened! The life boat was eventually secured
& I went below about 7:15 & we went ahead again. I
did not think the sea could get much worse but
it could & about 10:30 we ran into the roughest

water we had yet had. Ever since we had sailed it had
 been snowing, but it got worse & all one could see was a
 curtain of snowflakes screaming horizontally past. For a
 bit life was pure hell - some of the port holes were stuck in &
 the rails smeared so you can imagine a bit what it was like.
 And then miraculously at about 1100 pm it seemed to be getting
 less rough. I refused to believe it at first & expected it to blow
 up again, but I gradually realised that we were rolling &
 pitching less & by midnight there was no more than a good
 swell & I went to sleep. I woke at 1.0 am. to hear the noise
 of the chain as we dropped anchor in the calm water of a
 fjord & I have never heard a more blissful sound! I went
 to sleep again & woke at 8.0 & wondered why we were
 so still & why I could not hear the engines! We still had
 not arrived at our destination but only had to go further
 down the fjord in calm water & we eventually got in
 about 10.30. I think, in fact I am sure that the 24
 hours between midnight one night & midnight the second
 were the longest I have ever spent. It seemed much more
 like a week. When we got in we heard all sorts of
 stories about what had happened to us. Rumours had
 been rife with nobody knowing anything for certain. The
 most popular was that the ship was blazing from end

to find that we had abandoned her & were all marooned on
the coast without any food, & in a snow blizzard! Generally
speaking there was considerable surprise when we turned
up safe & sound. I must admit I was somewhat surprised
myself & offered up a very genuine prayer of thanks
when I felt my feet on dry land again. The odd thing about
the whole experience was the detached way I found myself
regarding the events even when I was personally most
frightened. I felt the whole time that one had read about
disasters at sea, & no doubt would read about them again,
but that it was impossible that such a thing should
be happening to me personally at that very minute. I felt
that it happened to other people but never to oneself. I
suppose everybody feels like that - right up to the very
last moment. I have always hated being on the sea
as you know & one of my nightmares used to be the
awful trapped feeling of being on a ship on fire at
sea. It is not often, fortunately, that one has a
chance of finding out if ones feelings in a dream are
really true to life, but in this case I can assure you
they are not a bit exaggerated. However - I might have
been a lot worse & we were very very lucky to arrive with no
more than one serious & a few minor casualties.