

Wednesday, October 20.

Dearest Richenda,

We are still on the high seas and are headed for someplace in North Africa. How we shall proceed to our destination, no one knows yet. We might fly, altho I think we shall^{be} by water. It is possible that part of the journey will be by train or truck, but this is only a guess on my part.

We are part of a convoy that, as far as we know, has been unmenaced so far. I cannot tell you what kind of protection we have, except that it is so very comforting to see it from time to time.

Our big problem on board is food. The first weeks were pretty bad. We have only two meals a day, as required by Army regulations. There is not much sense eating more, because we have practically no exercise. If we ate too much, probably it would be impossible for us to even waddle ashore. However, if you chance to meet some one who runs a navigation company, he'll probably have a lot of money, part of which he made from the often stinking meals served to us.

We have a mess officer on board who is one of the passengers-- or should I say part of the freight. There isn't much he can do except supervise and hint about the proper preparation of the meals. The ship's steward gives out the food, the cook prepares it and we eat it. Yet the officer's on board unanimously appointed me to be assistant mess officer, and one of them said that if I couldn't improve things, they would be satisfied that no one could.

I knew I couldn't do anything, but I made friends with the steward and the cook and took a real interest in their work. We got together and talked food and cooking. Every meal I make it point to talk with the cook and stimulate his thinking. I know that after I talked with him about our daily menu of powdered eggs, he began to experiment and now his eggs are about as good as they can be. All our food is cooked in huge steam kettles, except for some of the meat dishes we have had the past few days.

Our cook, a regular member of the merchant marine, is a negro and a really fine fellow. I know you would enjoy meeting him. He enjoys cooking and is rather sad at the thought of having to feed us poor food, but he has so little to work with. I don't hesitate to praise him when he turns out a good dish--like the meat loaf we had last night.

Besides being assistant mess officer, I am special services officer, too. That doesn't mean much, I only see to it that cards, checkers, and chess games are available to the men. I was going to put on a show of some sort, but talent seems to be lacking and we have no musical instruments, so I decided that no show was better than a poor one.

I have also given a series of 7 or 8 lectures on China and what we might expect to find there and how to take the change in our usual way of life. Before we get to our destination, I shall make an attempt to explain some of the Chinese customs and to teach those who want to learn something of the language.

Otherwise, my life on board has been occupied by cards and ~~deet~~ detective stories.

I sent the anniversary card to my mother and dad while I was at my secret station. I have forgotten this occasion the past two or three years, but thanks to you, my darling, not this time.

My birthday was most uneventful, but I did think of you as I do every day and every night.

The enlisted men have to go below as soon as it gets darks, but officers are allowed on deck, so of course being a fresh air fiend, I have spent most of the nights on deck sleeping in a life raft with one of the fellows--Lt. Lyon. Lyon is quite a gentlemen and one of few good companions I have. He is a flyer.

Every night we sleep out. The stars and the moon have been wonderful. I lay on my back and pick out the few familiar constellations that I know and each night I think how wonderful it would be for us to be together and sleeping under the stars.

I am looking forward to arriving in North Africa. I am going out and befriend an Arab chieftan. Then he is going to invited me to one of those fabulous desert feasts feasts. You know the kind--A great, deep pit is dug. A huge fire built in it and stones thrown in to heat. Then chickens are stuffed and put into to sheep. The chicken-stuffed sheep are put into a camel and the camel is put into the pit. After 12 hours we sit down and eat. That sounds as if it would be mighty interesting.

One thing I do want is a Chinese meal, but it may be weeks more before I get the chance.

I find that most of the fellows on board have a very hard time getting used to the food. It isn't good of course, but I usually eat my full share. Why not, eat or go hungry and one can't starve. But then most people still expect things to be the same no matter where they go and if they are different, they are very much at sea and lack the mental elasticity to change their way of thinking. Happily, I am endowed with the ability to get along any place and under almost any conditions.

There is one thing though that I can't get used to. We have to wear our life preservers all the time when we are on deck. They are so very filthy that I shudder at the very thought of touching one. And they do stink to high heaven. Yet, we have no pillows and we all use the preservers for such. I cover mine with my rain coat, but then I sleep on deck and the fresh air wafts the orders from my nostrils. I get very nauseated from the smells below deck and I can't stay below very long, but I could get used to that if I wanted to, but I prefer the wonderfully fresh air and the beautiful sky. And I can have that with a minimum of inconvenience.

I wonder if sleeping on hard surfaces does one any good. If so, I am very healthy. I not only sleep on hard boards, but there are slats in the bottom of life raft and the corners of the boards get pretty uncomfortable during the night, but Lyon and I don't mind.

one day, the 13th

I was officer of the day (the OD)/and I arranged to have the guards fed about 12 at night. Ever since then, the guards have been

5.
been getting their midnight snack. Sometimes there is soup left over and we serve it to the men who are still up. Darling, it is pitiful to see the fellows come setr storming to the door for what little there is. We never have enough for everybody and some do without. I remember one soldier who got out of bed with sleep still hanging around his eyes. Just as his turn came, the soup ran out and he was the saddest sight I ever have seen. I managed to get some soup for him, at that.

One thing I object to very mch, is the fact that the officers always manage to get extra food from the ship's crew, but they do not think of eating it when the men are not around. The Mess Officer and both do not like this. One the officers got two big cans of cheese and the Mess O. trotted right up and got four cans for the enlisted men. Bully for him. Of course we are just a few compared to the enlisted men, and it is easy for us to get a few things extra. But where food is such a precious thing, it is not right to virtually flaunt it before hungry men.

We can't expect all men to be thoughtful and considerate, can we? One of the men paid me a fine compliment. He said the soldiers all spoke highly of me and that, strangely, no one had a thing to the contrary. However, I suspect that is altered a little now, for since I was told this, I have had occasion to speak rather sharply to some of the men. Some people are so thick that they take advantage of anything you do for them and others are just dumb.

With all my love to you. Keep well and write me often. I miss you as I always do when we are apart, sweetheart.

*Always,
Fawcett*