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113 F.A.
American Expeditionary Forces
Via New York.

North Atlantic,

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Dear Father and Mother:-

We do not know what we can, and what we cannot write, so we are all puzzled. I have just written a letter to ~~mother~~^{blank} in which I told her some of the things which I considered harmless. I do not know what the censor will think of it. Ask her if she has gotten a letter from me. We know so very little that I do not see how we could tell anything of value. We sailed from New York one bright day, ran right into a fog, finally picked up a convoy, stayed in a fog for a day or two, then struck some rough weather when almost all were sick, then some glorious weather when all got well, then Sunday some more rain and fog, and rain and fog. ~~we~~ have had ever since. The trip takes a longer time than I have ever taken before. Every precaution is taken to escape submarines, but nothing but Providence really preserves one ship more than another. I think this sea voyage has made all the men to realize man's need of God more than ever before. They have gambled and cursed, but many have been subdued.

Columbus has risen 1000% in the estimation of all the soldiers. Their minds played about him for several days. Now that we are in the danger zone, it plays about the destroyers. They are not in need of any entertainment at present. That, by

the way, has been quite a problem on board. The band has been the only source of amusement for the men as a whole. Reading, cards, checkers, dice - these have taken up much of the time. At night we have had singing. The men love the old hymns best, and even after singing "Over There," "It's a Long Way to Berlin" et als they almost always get into hymns before the singing is over with.

We have had some delightful services on board. Three on Sunday, one for the officers alone, and two for the men. It was raining during the two latter ones.

Imagine several hundred men gathered between decks in the fore port of the ship. The band playing and the men singing the old familiar hymns, and the men sitting at their mess tables, on the floor and ^{ladders} ladders and standing listening to every word. I never had better attention. The same was true of the service on the aft deck, or rather below deck. If anything the service was better there

But I wish you could have seen the service, if you call it such, last night. Can you imagine yourself going down the hatch way between decks. The only light comes from electric bulbs wired in close down to the end of the tables along the side of the ship. All the space from side to side of the ship is taken up with long tables and benches set across the ship. You can reach up and touch the deck above your head. The men's equipment is hung and stored everywhere. Above the tables are big hooks on which are already hung many hammocks. You have to bend double to get around without striking some man who has gone

to bed. At the end of the table next to the side of the ship where the light is, are little groups of men. Here a bunch playing the only Victrola on board - Here another watching two champion checker players - Here a big game of craps with a fringe of lookers on, at another place a poker game or else games for fun. Here a group reading with one or two writing. You could hear the thum of a guitar and the nasal sound of a song. A little group is around the instrument. I slid in with them and soon all who could were singing. All with life preservers on. Only one book so we picked the old ones. A laugh for the fellow trying to hit a high tenor note and failing. But soon we are going along "Will There be any Stars;" "At the Cross," "When the Roll is Called up Yonder." The crowd is thickening. Games are laid aside, the men in the hammocks wake up, others are sitting on the benches and on the tables all around and behind them they are standing. One tall boy from Eastern Carolina is in the middle beating time with his hand and the guitar is passed to the best player who is sounding it out.

And just before the men began to tire, the leader closed his hymn book, pulled his testament from his pocket and asked me to have prayers. I was wondering exactly how I could do that very thing when he very simply made the request.

I read them of Paul's shipwreck and how God stood by him. It was new to many of them. I guess in one sense it was new to all of us, and how they did listen. Then the prayer and then they lifted us, and sent throughout the hold of that ship, "God be With You till we Meet Again." Then I came up and went to bed.

If I get a chance I may write a few lines tomorrow too. It is getting quite rough again and I fear sea sickness if I remain below here writing. It is very cold, and raining. Have thought so much of you all - and hoped you were not worrying about us. It is a little more serious than I thought, but I hope we get through safe.

With a heartfelt of love,

Ben.

Addressed:

Mr. and Mrs. B. R. Lacy,
Raleigh,
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