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LETTERS FROM OVERSEAS

Lieut. J. Koning Writes Description of His Impressions of Wartime Britain

The following interesting extracts are from recent letters received by Mrs. J. Koning, Roseview Ave., Richmond Hill, from her husband, Lieut. J. Koning who recently arrived in England with Canadian Active Service Forces:

Lieut. J. Koning,
No. 1 C.A.S.C.,
Reinforcement Unit,
Overseas.

July 30th, 1943.

"We had a marvellously calm trip over, no sea sickness, and although we were somewhat crowded we were happy. The meals on the boat were the best we ever had. The trip was made in record time. I left Windsor just 5 days after coming back from leave. The ocean was as calm as a mill pond and we saw nothing our whole trip over. Our first glimpse of this country was a majestic one, everything looked so green and orderly. The towns from a distance looked as though they were made of toy houses all neatly and methodically arranged. The grass is greener and the fields are laid out in squares. There are no miles of bush, but short stretches of woods and then cultivated fields. What impressed me too was that as we got closer to shore, you could see flowers everywhere. We stayed on board over night and were the second lot off in the morning. The next source of enjoyment was the trains. They seemed so low, but actually all station platforms are built up so that you can hardly see the wheels the carriages run on. Each coach has bumpers which come in contact with those of the coach ahead. Then first class coaches are made up of compartments with a door opening into each. Joe and I had one to ourselves although they normally seat six. The engines seemed small but are really powerful and after loading our troops with a shrill blast of the whistle we were away. From then on our eyes drank in the countryside with its lovely scenery. Every backyard, every station had its roses, its flower garden; every usable corner had its fresh vegetable garden. The train track seldom crossed main roads and when it did it had railway gates closed to protect any traffic approaching. We seemed to be continually passing through stations, through tunnels and overhead roadways and through cuttings and over bridges. There seemed to be trains everywhere. The only time the train whistle blew was when we were about to enter a tunnel or when pulling out of a station.

Tell mother and dad I like their country and Lou and I intend to spend our leave up there when we get it. Things are high over here. We are advised to avoid London except to sight see. A meal and show cost anywhere up to \$7 or \$8. Our quarters are peacetime married quarters. They are as narrow as they are long. You no sooner step in the front door than you step out the back. Our camp is an old one and the buildings are made entirely of stone with slate roofs, low slung, with many chimneys sticking out of the roofs. When you get inside you wonder why, because you see no stoves, only the odd fireplace.

I was completely on my own all week-end because my friend had gone to see his cousin who had escaped from Holland just four weeks ago and was now going in the merchant marine. I would have certainly liked to have met him especially since he was Dutch and probably couldn't speak English. He had some horrible experiences to relate about conditions in occupied countries. For one thing his cousin whom he last saw when he was 17 and is now 21 was just skin and bones and when he, his mother and sister took him out to supper he ate 3 complete meals and 4 rolls, remarking when he broke open a roll "Oh look, white bread." He actually wolfed his meals. He told of two friends of his not guilty of crime, being called for one day and being led away. He said they knew that they were being taken as hostages to be shot and he said their struggles, their desire to grab anything to impede their being led away was pitiful. He never saw them again. Another weak-minded kid who had turned Nazi and was receiving threats tried escaping to Germany but was caught up with by patrols and murdered. He said that he had waited 2 years to escape because means being difficult they had to work on a quota basis and many who got away were never heard of again. Even so others followed in their attempts at escape. He must have had a close call himself, be-

cause he said among other effects when he set out he had 1200 guilders (Dutch dollars) and he lost everything and landed in England with what he had on. At first he arranged a meeting with this chap's mother in England by finding out where they lived. Not knowing his way around the country he had the mother come to a hotel in London he knew the location of. So much had fear been instilled in him that he wouldn't talk in the hotel lobby, but insisted on going outside and walking up and down the street and then he continually looked over his shoulder. Thus did this pitiful example, by no means the worst, escape from Holland, filled with hatred even at his young age and completely astonished that his cousins were not so inclined.

So far I see no scarcity of things over here. Sure there is a rigid control on things but this country is really at war. My trip on the train from the boat really opened my eyes. I saw factories at many points along the way, really busy with smoke pouring from their chimneys, many women busily employed at various duties in railway yards, women busy along the way helping men who were cutting down timber in some of the woods which could be seen from the railway carriage windows. There was activity everywhere and many rather young fellows were noticed in the cabs of railway locomotives acting as firemen. But behind it all was the peace and quiet of the countryside, the orderliness of everything, be it railway stations, private homes and gardens or farms. Roads are narrow and winding with hedges growing along all the country roads. Many parts of the country are divided with low stone walls instead of fences as we are accustomed to at home. It's amazing and different.

Last night after blackout (due to double daylight saving time it's not dark until somewhere after 11) we watched the searchlights probing the sky, crossing and criss-crossing until they picked up an airplane. It was high up but was plainly visible in the searchlight beam. It apparently was friendly because the searchlights went out immediately. But it looked like a small butterfly. You know we are in the war zone over here, nearer than you may realize. Balloon barrages over vital areas, anti-aircraft defences, searchlights searching out hostile aircraft, the blackout, all make this war strike home to you. But it's as safe and secure over here as you are in Canada. There is no hysteria, no hurrying about in confusion, just a determined, sure confidence in our ability to win the outcome. I was and am rather shocked at the price of things over here as I mentioned previously. But on further dealing, I find that the pound which is worth \$4.77 of Canadian money actually has only \$2 worth of buying power.

Incidentally you can't get a cold drink over here. There seems to be no ice. Nothing is served ice cold be it water or the very scarce soft drink you occasionally can get. Oh dear, my kingdom for a cold drink. But I shall get used to it, I shall soon adjust myself to the ways of my English friends. I have met a great number of my Canadian army acquaintances and they are friendly and help to pass the evenings. Monday we are beginning our refresher course and shall see a great deal of the English countryside.

I have been travelling a fair amount around the countryside in lorries and although we have never been very far from camp yet the roads are so numerous that we seem to be continually taking a different route. We went out this evening after supper and after arriving back in camp about 10 o'clock we went into the mess and all had some toast, peanut butter (which contains soy beans and few peanuts but taste fairly good) and cheese, tea and milk without sugar. We have sugar for breakfast and supper. The lack of it works no hardship however.

Last night I went out for my first bicycle ride and went over roads I had not covered before. We cycled from 6.10 in the evening and arrived home at 11.10 just after dark. I felt quite good and not at all stiff when I got up this morning. Rather amazing when I figure we covered about 25 miles and haven't cycled for at least 15 years. I saw some pretty country, one part was particularly beautiful. There were fairly large houses on rather small estates along the road with beautiful flower gardens and one straight stretch of road which was downhill for about 1/2 mile was lined on both sides with

cypress trees. These trees formed a perfect line on either side of the road. They have beautiful cone shaped trees, about as tall as our own elm and as green as grass. They looked somewhat like our Spruce trees. We wanted to stop for a bite to eat but could get nothing. Things to eat are hard to get between meal times and impossible at night.

DOLLAR

Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd B. Gohn and son David and Miss Ruth Gohn spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Gohn.

A number of friends and relatives of Gunner David Millen, R.C.A. gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Giles Saturday evening to wish him a safe return trip to Newfoundland where he has been stationed since January.

With the opening of the high schools Misses Betty Delf, Lois Sherman and Betty Hamilton have returned to Earl Haig Collegiate. Misses Phyllis and Joan Lanthier are attending Loretto Abbey and Hyndman Russell returns to the Toronto University on Friday. We wish them all a highly successful school year.

Messrs. Alec Fletcher, E. Sherman, H. Cunningham, C. B. Boynton and Alvin Robinson attended Lindsay Fair. Mr. Boynton and Leitchcroft Farms are to be congratulated on winning many prizes.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Ward have left our community and taken up residence in Leaside.

Mr. and Mrs. R. Giles, Gnr. and Mrs. David Millen and Mrs. Frank Pratt had dinner on Monday night with Mr. and Mrs. George Barrett at Oak Ridges.

Miss June Fligg of Willowdale and Miss June Elcombe of Toronto were visitors here recently.

The five things most wanted as gifts by Canadian soldiers overseas, according to an officer just returned, are: Cigarettes, toilet soap (rationed in England), shaving soap, chocolates and candies and more cigarettes.

Training films created by Walt Disney, "father" of Mickey Mouse, are used by the Canadian Army.

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