

(October 8, 1919.)

Experiences During the War

BY SIR BERTRAM HAYES, R.N.R., K.C.M.G.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—I do not know whether you know the fact that this is my first venture in speech making and therefore I feel deeply the honour that has been conferred on me by the Canadian Club in asking me to make my first venture. But if anything goes wrong on my part don't blame me, but blame your secretary; he is the most persistent man I ever met.

I was not asked to make a speech. I was asked to try to relate some of my experiences during the war. I do not know that I had very many of an interesting nature, but I will tell you what I can, and if it fills out the time, that is all that is expected.

When war broke out I was in command of the "Adriatic" lying in New York harbour, and I was staying with my friend, Mr. Vickers, who you very kindly asked to be here to support me to-day, but unfortunately he could not come, being the middle of the week. If it had been the beginning of the week he would probably have come, and I probably would have done better. When war broke out it took the Admiralty some little time to find out where the German raiders were, and the ships were held up in New York for some few days, and it became a question of whether the "Adriatic" or the "Olympic" should be the first to sail. There were a few passengers crossing and the first ship was to take them. They thought perhaps because the "Olympic" was the more valuable ship that I should make the first venture, and we sailed (I forget the date) with about fifty people on board, with orders not to keep to the regular tracks, to choose my own way across, go where I thought best. On thinking things over I thought the raiders would be less likely to be able to maintain themselves up north than they would south. Therefore, I went north,

*Since the outbreak of the War Sir Bertram Hayes has been in command of some of the largest Ocean Merchantmen, and for the last three years has been in command of the Olympic, which safely transported two hundred and fifty thousand troops, many of them Canadians, and has sunk several submarines.

and I am glad to say we got home safely. When we arrived home, to my great surprise, they fitted us out with four six-inch guns, which—according to my way of thinking—was a mistake. We were about to take as many American passengers as could be crowded into the ship. You know they were crowded on the Continent at the outbreak of war, and they were travelling any way they could get, and we had some 2,500 of them on our trip to New York.

These guns were fitted, and I pointed out that I thought they were a menace to the ship. The protection to the ship was those 2,500 Americans on board, because I did not think at that time Germany would be so foolish as to destroy the lives of Americans and bring them into the war. However, I was over-ruled, and on sailing day the naval officer who was in charge of the fitting of the guns came to me, brought in by the marine superintendent, and he said, "Hello, pirate." And I told him that was what we were—pirates. We had no license to have guns, and then when we arrived in New York, which we did—or I would not be here—the Americans took exception to our having guns on board. The matter was transferred to Washington for decision as to whether we were a warship, and had to be interned or get out in twenty-four hours. It took them five days to decide that point. In the meantime we went on discharging our cargo, and loading, and when the loading was completed I went to the Customs House to clear the ship in the ordinary way. Word had not come down even then, but a telephone message was sent to Washington, and we received permission to sail, on the understanding that the two forward guns were to be taken off on arrival home, as merchant ships were only to be allowed to be fitted for defence, not offence, and they considered forward guns were for offence only. As a matter of fact the only defence for submarines is offence, because you probably have to turn your ship all the way round before using your after guns. However, when we got home all the guns were taken off, much to my relief. At that time there were no submarines about, before raiders.

Before we sailed from Liverpool if the passengers could have found any other ship to take I think they would have left us. The women, when they came on board, nearly went into hysterics, and when we drilled the crew the small boys caused a lot of excitement in telling everyone we were going to fire the guns—and all the women went into hysterics. It was the most uncomfortable passage I ever had. However, it ended peacefully.

I made probably eight voyages in the "Adriatic" without any guns. No submarine came on the scene, and we were told the best way to dodge them was to steer an erratic course, zig-zag, which meant altering your course every few minutes, so that the submarine could not tell in which direction exactly the ship was going. During these eight voyages we never saw any submarines, any real ones, but lots of imaginary ones.

On one occasion I was on the bridge, and we had a lot of passengers on board, and the poop deck, the after deck, was crowded with people. The after look-out man who was on the bridge on the after end of the ship reported a submarine. Well, I looked, and the officers looked. We could see no submarine. So we continued on our course zig-zagging. A few minutes later he reported the same submarine gaining on us and we could not see it. After two or three reports from the after end, I noticed that the wave cast—you know when the ship goes through the water it causes a wave, and in turning the course continually it, of course, turned the water over; and the way one wave was running into the other, just looked like a periscope going through the water. So we concluded that was what he saw, and had reported.

Passengers in the meantime were getting more or less panicky with this man telling them a submarine was gaining on us. Well, I thought a minute, and then I sent the third officer, the junior officer of the watch, to tell the passengers that any time they wanted to see that particular submarine if they would give me one minute's notice, I would show it to them. I told them to ring the telegraph when they wanted it. So somebody rang the telegraph and we put the helm over, and the same thing occurred again, the ripple came and they were satisfied it was not a submarine.

During the time I was in the "Adriatic," your Premier, (one of the best men in the world I think) crossed to England with me. This was in 1915. I think he went over to consult with our people, and the Australians. Everybody was gathered together over there consulting as to the best means of going on with the war, I suppose. The British Ambassador to the United States (who was then Sir Cecil Spring Rice) came down to see him off. Another gentleman from Washington came to see me in the shape of a secret service man, the head of the Secret Service at our Embassy. He came to tell me there was a very dangerous man on board, and that we had to keep a very strict watch on him as he was quite capable of

sacrificing his own life if he could sink the ship. He told me his name and all about him, so we took precautions. Of course I told Sir Robert about it. He had two secretaries with him, one Mr. Christie, and the other was known as John; and John was put to watch him and had to report at each meal to Sir Robert and myself, but he never discovered anything. Then Sir Robert kept playing with him to see if our information was correct, but nothing was found out. He had nothing in his room that would lead anyone to suppose he was doing anything wrong, so when we arrived in Liverpool, the Aliens Officer was informed. I dare say some of you have crossed, and have had experience with him,—he asks a lot of questions, impertinent most of them. We told him what we had been told, and he questioned this fellow as to his history, cross-questioned him and put him through his facings, but did not find out anything. He thought he was a reputable citizen and let him land. Some six months later, when I was in the "Olympic," the Purser, Mr. Palmer, brought me a copy of the Sunday Chronicle, a paper that specializes in divorce cases, and in this paper was the story of a divorce case, and this chap was the co-respondent. Scotland Yard awakened to the fact that they wanted this man, and declared they had been chasing him for two years trying to find him. We had handed him over six months before.

Sir Robert made his return trip with me, and was kind enough to send me a very fine photograph of himself, which I feel it an honor to have hanging up in my room. I had a lot of talk with him, he is an unassuming man, no side on him; a straightforward honest man, I would call him; a man to whom I would be perfectly content to leave the destinies not only of Canada, but of the whole Empire too. On September 20th we arrived in the "Adriatic" in Liverpool, and I was told that the "Olympic" was being fitted out as a transport and that I had to take command of her, as the man who had been on her had been appointed to take charge of the dummy fleet, which was composed of a lot of more or less old ships that were converted into dummy men of war, exact replicas of the ships they represented, wooden guns and everything.

You could not tell them from the real thing. I don't really know what the idea was; nobody does, I think. They were loaded with cement to take them well down in the water. Men of war did not have as much freeboard as merchant ships. He thought the idea was that they were probably to rush up to the Kiel Canal, and sink themselves there. But it

never came to that. I think the real reason was to relieve the men-of-war when they came in for supplies and coal, and to show you how like the real thing they were. One of our ships, the "Cedric," an armed Cruiser, was patrolling in the North Sea, and they saw what they thought was the "Iron Duke," and made preparations to receive the Commander-in-Chief, which would mean upsetting the whole ship. It was not until they got within a mile of her that even they, trained as they were, detected that she was not the "Iron Duke," but a dummy. That shows you how thoroughly it was done.

When I went on board the "Olympic" I was lost. I was five years in the "Adriatic," and I knew every hole and corner in her, and the "Olympic" was so huge to me that I felt kind of helpless, and could not find anybody. If you wanted the Chief Engineer you never knew where to go. There was a telephone which sometimes worked and sometimes did not. In three days we sailed for Mudros with Southern Counties Yeomanry, all going to Gallipoli. They were the finest men I ever had on board ship: men who were the pick of the country and in the old days had saved our country many times; farmers—who owned their own horses, and they had only had two weeks' training in infantry. They were officered by, I suppose, probably the leading men in England—country gentlemen and estate owners, and those kind of men.

I asked the Smoking-room Steward on one occasion how he was getting on in the smoking-room. There were no dry ships in those days. He said "Well, Sir, if they can only fight as well as they can drink, the war is finished." They were fine fellows, all of them.

In those days when we had troops on board we got an escort in the Channel, which is supposed to be a dangerous place—one destroyer. We got safely through the Straits of Gibraltar. That is supposed to be a dangerous neighborhood, which we were supposed to pass in the dark hours of the night, and of course we were going without lights or any glimmer of light showing, so that it was pretty jumpy work, but we nearly got through the Straits without being seen, when we saw some ship coming the other way, and it appeared to us that there was danger of a collision, and in that case it is permitted for you to turn your lights on to see which way to go. The patrol boat caught sight of our lights and we were ordered into Gibraltar and were kept there several minutes while we told our business and asked which road to go, or asked whether we were on the right road, which we were. We got safely along,

and as we were approaching the Ægean Islands we saw two boats in the water flying the French flag, and of course the first instinct is always to pick people up out of the water, so I eased the ship down and threw ropes to these boats, and we picked the men up (29 men). It was the crew of the French steamer "Provincia" which had been torpedoed that morning by an Austrian submarine, and I firmly believe that picking these men up was the means of saving the "Olympic."

We had come all through what we thought were the most dangerous parts of the Mediterranean, and perhaps our ideas on board were that there were no submarines and that kind of thing. A good look-out was kept, and a little later we saw the periscope of a submarine, the first one we had ever seen. In those days we were armed with one old 12 pounder forward and a derelict 4.7 aft. We had four naval gunners, two to each gun. One was a regular character, Old Puddifoot.

My idea was to get the gun off so that the submarine would know we had guns, because very few ships had them in those days, and Old Puddifoot would not fire the gun until he saw the thing that he was to fire at. That was his idea. Well, I told him the general direction, and finally we got it off. He made a bad shot, but the after gun was blazing away, and as a shell hit the water we saw him break surface and several competent observers declared we had put a shot into the submarine. Well, we thought we had done very well, that that was his method of sinking. We thought he had gone down. Later when we arrived at Mudros some of our submarine officers came on board to see the ship, and I was telling the story. "Oh no, my friend," said one of the naval officers, "that was not when he went down, that was when he fired his torpedo at you." The displacement of the water in the torpedo tube, and the weight of the torpedo causes the submarine to break surface if she is not very carefully handled. We thought we had put a shot into him, and we claimed that we had sunk a submarine, but they were not quite so optimistic. In Mudros they did not know whether we had or not, and they came to make enquiries, and I think decided we did not. To satisfy the Admiralty, you had to take part of the submarine or something with you, and there is no time to look for that with 6,000 fine men on board.

They were a little surprised at Mudros at our arriving safely. There was no escort in the Mediterranean. However, they asked what we wanted, and I told them all we wanted was about 800 tons of coal. Well, they were very careful of coal

in those days, and they said "You won't get it." I said "Well, I am sorry, but we can't get to our port in Italy without it." So after a little argument we got it. My orders were given me to sail for England, calling at Spezia in Italy for coal. We arrived off Spezia at daylight, one morning, just as day was breaking, could not see any pilot boats or anything, so I decided that I would poke in as far as the breakwater and by that time the pilot might wake up. We poked along a few yards going slowly, we were supposed to be in safe waters, when all of a sudden a gun started to go off creating great excitement. A little destroyer was seen turning circles signalling to follow him. Well, the "Olympic" was bigger than he was so we could not follow him so we stopped the ship and when he got his breath he shouted "Mines." We had no notice of any mine field so we backed her out the way we came in, and he came on board to pilot us through the mine fields into port.

The Italians are a leisurely nation. I think everybody knows that, and we wanted some 4,000 tons of coal. The work of coaling was not being done as fast as I thought it ought to have been done, as it would have been done at Halifax or New York, or at Southampton, so I went ashore to see if I could not hurry it up. The "Dublin," one of our men-of-war was there. She had been torpedoed, and was being repaired, and my duty was to tell the British Naval officer my troubles. I asked him if he could hurry up the coaling of the ship, as we were wasting time. And he very kindly sent his commander with me to the Italian authorities to interview the official in charge of the Dockyard. He was a very nice gentleman, with a red beard. He looked like a German more than an Italian. I talked to him and told him what my trouble was, but he did not seem to be very much worried about it. He said, "Well, we are fitted to put in 3,000"—(we were getting about 80 to 200 tons some days). "We are fitted to put 3,000 tons of coal in the ship per day. You are not fitted to receive it. You didn't build her, neither did I; there is another day to-morrow."

However, we got a little more speed out of them, finished coaling, and sailed for England. We were to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar at night time, but we had bad weather on the way and we were delayed a little bit and I was an hour or two later than I had hoped to be. Day was breaking as we made the Straits of Gibraltar. A patrol boat ordered us into Gibraltar, and an examining officer came on board and asked

the particulars about the ship, and so on, and asked where we were going, and I told him I didn't know beyond England. He said "I will go on shore and get orders." I asked him whether it was worth while anchoring. He said no, he would be back in twenty minutes. This was about 6.30 a.m., and we kept dodging up and down slowly, and about eleven o'clock this chap came off again and said "You are to proceed in accordance with orders." So I told him that I had not got any orders beyond England. I would go to Liverpool, but if they wanted to stop me they could send wireless instructions on the way. I suppose things were really confused then in Gibraltar.

So I went to Liverpool and got into the river and nobody knew anything about us. There was no more surprised man in the world than the Principal Transport Officer when I turned up in his office. He was a crochety kind of gentleman. He did not like being surprised, I think. And I could see he was racking his brains to find some way of putting the blame on me. All he could think of was "Have you brought your bedding return?" This was a return about how much washing and so on there was to be done for the ship. I said "No, sir." He said "Well you ought to have it."

We saw very few submarines in the Mediterranean; two we had a crack at that I know of. I don't think we got the second, but I think we did the first. We kept a very close wireless watch on the "Olympic." We had three operators and it was surprising how we always seemed to hear of submarines ahead of us attacking other ships and so on, so that we would get out of the way of them, and in that way escaped many dangers, I have no doubt.

On one occasion, the last voyage I think it was, we were just through the Ægean Islands in about the same position almost where the other one attacked us, when we saw a steamer displaying the flag which denoted that a submarine was in sight. So we looked through our glass, and we saw a submarine on the surface alongside another ship and the crew of that ship were getting into boats and leaving her, so of course we cleared out. In about twenty minutes we met one of our destroyers. But first we saw the submarine leave that ship and chase the first one we had seen going away from it. The submarine wanted two ships; it was not satisfied with one. We saw the destroyer about twenty minutes after, and gave him the details and he got back on the scene in time to prevent the submarine getting either. Both got away, I believe.

They wouldn't stay on the surface with destroyers about. We made four voyages through the Mediterranean and carried some 25,000 troops.

On later visits when we got there, our reception was not quite the same. I used to go to the flag captain to report. I went to the Principal Transport Officer first to report, but when I mentioned coal, he said,—"Oh, you can see the flag captain about that," so I would go over to the flag ship "Europa," she was then, and I was met with, "That damned thing in here again? I thought they would have got you this time, however, I suppose you want coal?" I said, "Yes, sir, 800 tons." He said, "Well you won't get it." And then we would have the same argument but eventually we would get it.

On one occasion, when visiting the flag ship, the Captain of one of our cruisers, said to me—"You had better look out for yourself. I boarded a Greek schooner this morning, and he told me a submarine had hailed him and asked if he had seen a large four funnelled steamer going through the Straits. This was after daylight and the Greek fellow told him no. We had got up a little earlier than the submarine and we had got through in the dark. So that one missed us.

On the last voyage to the Mediterranean, the Peninsula had been evacuated, and some of the men I had taken out on the first voyage, some of the officers, were waiting for transportation to Egypt. They came on board ship and asked if they might be allowed to have a dinner. So I said, "Why not come and live on board while we are coaling?" It was better than living in a tent. So six or eight of them did. There was one colonel of the West Kents, and about eight or ten or twelve of them that accepted my invitation; they were just like school boys, taking about ten baths a day and having a good time in the smoking room. One morning I was up on the bridge with the colonel of the West Kents. He was evidently thinking of home and home folks, when suddenly we heard two shots go off. He said abstractedly, "Is that fellow shooting partridges?" He was probably thinking of what he was missing at home. I happened to be looking in the water and I said "I don't know what he is firing at but there is where he hit." We didn't know where the shots were coming from. I went into my room for a few minutes, and my servant came running in to tell me that an aeroplane had been dropping bombs on us. I went out on deck, but the aeroplane had gone away home by that time. He had dropped bombs at us from a height of 3,000 feet and missed us. When the colonel heard what it

was he said, "It would have been damned hard luck if I had been pipped on your bridge after putting in six months on the Peninsula."

Then we came home, and that completed our Mediterranean experiences, and we got back to Liverpool.

At that moment there was nothing for the ship to do and I took her to Belfast to be laid up indefinitely. That was about Christmas 1916, and after a short holiday they told me they wanted me to relieve some of the men in the other ships and I relieved the "Celtic."

We sailed from Liverpool, and got about sixty-three miles away, off the Isle of Man, when we struck a mine, and for a moment or two there was a very anxious time waiting to see if it were a submarine or a mine that had done the damage. However, no further explosion took place, so we took it to be a mine. Luckily it hit us in the chain locker at the forward end of the ship and the collision bulk head held, and I returned to Liverpool. The effect of a mine is tremendous. It jumped me about four feet up in the air. I was on the bridge but the cable, as you know, is very heavy, three and a half inch cable, and that is what took the force of the blow. It had hit on the port side and knocked the plates away from the frames on the starboard side, and all this with the weight of the cable to counteract it. It made a hole 28 by 34 feet long in her bottom. When we got safely back into the river we let go our port anchor but no cable ran out. It had shattered the cable, but the starboard anchor was all right and later on when we went into dry dock there were nine ends of that cable hanging out of the hole. It shows the force of the explosion.

Then I made a round trip after that to New York. I had relieved the "Adriatic," and I made the round trip in her. When we got back into the channel we received orders to proceed to Milford Haven as Liverpool had been mined. We went there and stayed thirty hours and started again for Liverpool, but had to return to Milford for the same reason. When I got back to Milford Haven the second time I was told to rejoin the "Olympic" at Glasgow, to go to Halifax to bring Canadian troops. Before going to Glasgow, I was called before the Managers of the Line and told that Canadian troops were to be fed in a different way to British troops. We got more money for them and they were to be treated as passengers. Such a thing had never been done before. Six thousand men as passengers—it had never been done anywhere, I didn't realize what it meant until one Sunday the Chief Steward came

up to my room to consult with me about something. He said "How many eggs do you think we cooked this morning?" I said I didn't know, probably about 1,500, and he said "Thirteen thousand five hundred." So you will realize what feeding 6,000 people means. The same instructions were given to our other ships, that we were to do everything we could for the comfort of the Canadians and to exert ourselves in every possible way to make them happy and comfortable while on board, not only my ship but other ships of the White Star Line.

I think the White Star Line have shown other people the way to feed troops and how to look after troops. There have been very few complaints in any of our ships regarding the treatment of soldiers. They have led the way in that the same as they have in looking after the comfort of the travelling public generally. They were the first company to put first class passengers into the comfortable part of the ship, middle of the ship. They were the initiators of the Turkish Baths and all those kind of things, installing anything that could be devised for the comfort of the passengers.

When we went to Glasgow the ship was commissioned as one of His Majesty's ships under the White Ensign, and we had six inch guns then and regular gun's crews for them, naval ratings. Up to February 1918 we carried 25,000 British troops to Gallipoli, over 100,000 Canadians, 45,000 Americans, and 13,000 Chinamen, and when the ship was taken out of commission we had carried 251,000. We never lost a life, I am happy to say. And I only wish that we could have brought all back again. But it was not to be. Some men had to sacrifice their lives, others had to sacrifice their fortunes, and I think even the men who have been killed gave their lives gladly for the sake of beating the Germans.

You never saw a more cheerful set in your life, happy as they could be, the Canadians, going over to the rescue of civilization practically. And I felt very deeply the loss of so many of them. Now I had better skip some and tell you about the most exciting trip we ever had.

We sailed from Southampton on my birthday, as a matter of fact an hour before it commenced. There was no pilot boat outside, so that we couldn't land our pilot. We were bound for Halifax with Canadian soldiers, women and children, and next morning, my birthday, a submarine was reported on our starboard side by a destroyer, that was then on our bow, putting up the submarine flag. Most of us congregated to see

the destroyer drop the depth charges on the submarine, but luckily not all of us rushed to the one side. The second officer was on the other side and he reported a submarine on the port side. Well, we went hard apart away from it and if we had gone another minute, another half minute, she had two periscopes and we would have gone right across her line of fire and that might have been the end of us. However, we got away from it, and it turned out afterwards that the first report was a false one. It was one of those "baby" chasers with looking glass sides that nobody can see. It just looked like froth coming alone.

On the return trip we were being escorted by four American destroyers and got into the channel. When we were off the Lizard at four o'clock in the morning just as day was breaking, luckily for us there was a low clear line of light, (you have seen it I dare say when dawn is breaking and the rest of the sky all black) and the lookout man reported submarine on the starboard bow. We could see the submarine half a mile away and I happened to be standing in the place where the order had to be given from and ordered helm hard apart, and we got heading for the submarine. Up till then I do not think he realized we were there. But when we were headed for him I saw his propellor start to work and he went full speed ahead and tried to turn inside our circle. However, I went hard apart again and I am glad to say we biffed him. During the time the ship was laid up, my Commander, Capt. Thompson, had been transferred to the "Afric," and he had been torpedoed so I turned to him and said, "There's 40 of the brutes gone to hell anyway so you have got a little bit of your own back."

Well, they made a fuss over it in England. The Commander in Chief came on board to congratulate me, much to my momentary annoyance because I was asleep, and I got the D.S.O.

Well, now I think there is something that all Canada ought to know, and—if it is possible—ought to be recognized, that is the work done by the ladies of Halifax for the troops going away, and for the troops returning. If there is any possible way of recognizing it, it ought to be done. These ladies were out, not only on fine summer days and fine summer evenings, but on bitter cold nights, seeing to the wants of the women and children, seeing that the children got candies and the men periodicals and newspapers, and every comfort that could be

given when they arrived, and welcoming home the troops; and we participated in that welcome.

In Halifax we were called the "Old Reliable." We were all very proud of that title. Everybody was glad to see us when we arrived, and we felt at home there. It has been with me an honor and a pleasure and a matter of satisfaction that will live with me for the rest of my life, the good relations that have existed between the ship and everybody that has ever come on board of her. Officers and men of the ship were glad of the privilege of transporting so many of your fine Canadian soldiers.

One day when the "Olympic" was at Southampton, and I was going for my sailing orders, a train was just pulling up and it was loaded with Canadian soldiers. One man stuck his head out of the window and called out, "What ship do we sail home in?" One of the men on the dock answered, the "Olympic," and a cheer went up all along the train because they were going back with us. That was the greatest compliment we ever had paid us, greater than a decoration. I have occupied all the time allowed. I could tell you some more stories but they would all be of the same character.

Thank you for your attention. I don't know what you think but I have done much better than I ever expected to do.