

Letters from Commander T. McKenna to Captain Jerome
written during the trip of L.E. Macha to Nice.

L.E. Macha,
at Gibraltar.

30th August, 1948.

Dear Captain Jerome,

A rather informal narrative of our progress so far which I am glad to say, touch wood, is so far favourable.

Things have gone along very well indeed. On the first day out we certainly got a pasting, from the Tuskar to about 150 miles south but the ship behaved beautifully. Only on about three occasions did she ship it green. We had a number of casualties from sea-sickness including the midshipmen but after a day or so all were able to eat again. To give the Mids. their due they stuck it out on watch beating hasty retreats now and then.

After the second day the weather improved and the First Lieutenant set his crew to painting the ship from stem to stern. The weather was ideal and he now has the ship like a new pin. She certainly is a credit to him. The crew volunteered to work yesterday, Sunday, to finish the job and she is now fit for even your inspection. The communication end is so far a great success. We held Haulbowline until we rounded Cape Saint Vincent and up to Friday night their signals were coming in at full strength. The amazing thing about it is that we were able to communicate on radio-telephone up to 650 miles south of the Irish coast. We contacted Gibraltar Naval W/T Station immediately on rounding Cape Saint Vincent and they gave us our berth in the harbour. About half-an-hour after contact they gave us a immediate signal about a Halifax with engine trouble and worked us continuously until we spotted her and she passed over us and landed at Gibraltar. Apparently we were the only Naval ship out at sea on Sunday morning. There are no complaints so far from the engine-room. Everything is running very smoothly. The consumption of oil fuel is surprisingly low only averaging 16 tons a day. We have been making our 11 Knots with revs. for 10 these last few days with a southerly set and following breeze and since noon yesterday have only been dawdling along so as not to arrive too soon. The midshipmen have been kept at it with sights and are coming along very well. I have even taken a few sights myself to get my hand in again. This is being written late on Sunday night as we are approaching Gibraltar so that I can get it off by the first Air Mail and I will continue to write these private letters rather than a formal report which I will send in at the end of the mission. The ship's company are looking forward to landing in Gibraltar. They are already as brown as berries. The last two days have been cloudless and our tame photographer has been snapping them at all hours of the day. He is ready to go in Gibraltar as soon as I get permission for him to take photographs there which I suppose will be granted but I hope he keeps his camera ready for interesting shots. On Friday



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he missed two big whales which passed close to the ship and sounded with their huge tails up in the air.

The only fly in the ointment is our uniform. It is going to be pretty ghastly landing in Gibraltar in "Blues" in this heat. It is alright on board in shorts and shirts and I can see we will be like limp rags ashore.

I will write again in about 2 days.

Yours sincerely,

T. McKenna.

L.E. Macha,
Gibraltar.

31st August, 1948.

Dear Captain Jerome,

We arrived yesterday dead on time and proceeded to berth 42 quite close to the Signal Tower. The Admiral himself was on the Tower and returned our salute as we passed by. On arrival we were boarded by the Officer of the Guard as soon as the gangway was out. He told us it would be convenient to call on Rear-Admiral, Gibraltar, at 10.30 with swords! I quickly disillusioned him on that point. The next aboard were Reuters correspondents and the Editor of the local paper, a fellow called Ryan.

At 1030 accompanied by Thompson we waited upon Rear-Admiral Brooking and had a long chat. He suggested we call on the Arch-Bishop, one Dr. Fitzgerald of Midleton, Co. Cork. Afterwards accompanied by the Secretary, Lt.-Commander Palmer, we went to Government House, wrote our names in the book, saw his principal A.D.C. and had a drink. We have been invited to dinner with His Excellency tonight.

The flag returned our call in person at 1130 and I introduced him to all the Officers. He stayed a while and when he left his Secretary took us to the Archbishop's Palace (incidentally the Admiral suggested a present of a bottle of Irish Whiskey for the Bishop). The Bishop's Secretary met us with a real Cork accent - Fr. Devlin from Youghal - and we were nearly an hour with His Lordship. The bottle of whiskey certainly went down wonderfully. He said the last one he had received was presented by Mr. Gosgrave when Premier.

Governor The Air Officer Commanding invited Thompson and I to a cocktail party up at the Peak given for the Spanish Military ~~Government~~ of Algeciras. The Admiral sent his car and accompanied us to the Mount where he picked up his wife on the way to the party. At the party we were introduced to the Governor General Anderson. Lady Anderson is from Rushbrooke. We also met the Colonial Secretary, Mr. O'Brien and the Guest of Honour General Barguira and the Spanish Consul General whose name was Maguire and obviously of Irish origin. Lady Mary Walker, the American Consul, Mr. Roberts with a good American wife from Belfast, and countless others whose names I never got. Our hosts by the way were Air Commodore and Mrs. Gordon. The apes obliged by playing with the cars below so I believe according to the legend we will never die in Gibraltar. After the cocktail party we returned to the Mount and had supper with the Admiral and his wife, quite an informal party and returned to Macha at 1130.

one for the other
The sailors were taken on a tour of the Rock yesterday and there is another tour laid ~~the other~~ the watch today. The Wardroom Officers were invited over to H.M.S. "Childers", a ~~class~~ class destroyer, yesterday and they have been asked



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to the Hospital for tea today by all the Irish nurses so everyone is catered for and I hope happy. Today's programme is as follows:-

At 10 o'clock I go over to see Captain Gilmore,
the Chief of Staff.

1100 - Call by the American Consul.

1200 - Return call of the Archbishop in person.

1300 - Official lunch party at Admiralty House.

2000 - Tour with H.E. The Governor.

Thank God tomorrow we sail ~~ship~~! I lost pounds and pounds of flesh already in this heat. What it is going to be like at dinner tonight in blue uniform I do not know. Last night it was quite alright. The party was completely informal and we wore plain clothes - my old Hong-Kong suit came in handy.

I must say our Flag has certainly caused a stir here and nobody could have been nicer than our hosts in doing everything for us. The lads are in their element. The Irish half of the R.N. are taking them around the place. I will try and drop you a line again just before we leave in the morning.

Yours sincerely,

T. McKenna.

L.E. Macha.
At Sea.

2nd September, 1948.

Dear Captain Jerome,

I am sorry I just couldn't manage to get a letter written before we left. Things were so very hectic on the last day but you could see this from the programme. Everything went off wonderfully well and I think we can count this visit a huge success both officially and unofficially. People could not have done more for us and it was genuine hospitality. The men behaved like veterans and are definitely a credit to the country. I felt very proud of them. Everyone remarked how clean, neat and well-behaved they were. Lady Anderson, the Governor's wife, said that she and the Archbishop watched them in town one afternoon and were very pleased and proud of them.

Tuesday Thompson and I called on Captain Gilmore, who was anxious for news of you and said he would send a letter to you by us on return. He is coming on board when we get back. The American Consul and his wife came on board at 1100 with a lady from Ballycastle and his doctor son from Coleraine. He stayed until 1155 and the Archbishop came on board at 12. He was a great success and made a speech about how proud he felt to step on an Irish warship. What took his fancy and, in fact, nearly everyone in Gibraltar remarked upon it, was not so much the Tricolour but the Jack. The Bishop said: to men of his generation that Flag meant more than everything else. He stayed until 1 o'clock and had three whiskeys which apparently marked a great occasion. Both himself and his Secretary were delighted with our reception here and when he heard that we were dining in state with the Governor he said that completed his happiness.

Just after he left, the Admiral called for us in his car and took us to Admiralty House for lunch. He had the American Consul, his wife, the Head Medico - Colonel Eccles also with wife, they both came from Delgany, to meet us and we had a very enjoyable lunch party. Later in the afternoon they took Thompson to the swimming club. I cried off as I wanted to get up town for a while and he thoroughly enjoyed himself.

The Governor sent a car for us at ten minutes past eight. We were received by him and Lady Anderson. They were certainly both very charming people. Lady Anderson's aunt lives just near where we lived in Rushbrooke - Mrs. Beeton - and we had plenty to talk about. Incidentally their son was in "Cockatrice" when she was in Cobh with M.S.18 but has now left. There were 16 at dinner including the Chief Justice, the Commanding Officer of the Artillery (born in Fort Camden) and various other dignitaries whose names I am afraid I cannot remember. I was placed on Lady Anderson's left and we all thoroughly enjoyed the party. After dinner when the ladies retired General Anderson came over to me and had a long chat for about half-an-hour on all the topics under the sun. When we left at about half-past eleven they both said they wished to see us again on our return to Gibraltar and Lady Anderson wanted to send a letter with us to her Aunt. We took one of the A.D.Cs. and a Wing Commander back on board the ship

and filled them up with Irish.

Both the Governor and the Admiral were worried as to what honours they should accord us on our return with the body of W.B. Yeats aboard but I assured them that we would have our Flag at full mast and that as far as they were concerned we were just an ordinary warship entering for fuel and water. They both seemed relieved at that and I also told the Archbishop the same thing in case he might start something.

We hear that the next time we come back the harbour will have a British Task Force consisting of H.M.S. Phoebe and some destroyers also 10 United States Destroyers, and we have been told that we are being asked to lunch given for the Captains of the United States ships by the American Consul. I am also proposing to give a cocktail party on board to return some of the hospitality we have had. The Admiral's Secretary is helping me out by getting cards printed and arranging with N.A.A.F.I. to supply the savouries for us. He is also going to ask the A.D.C. as to whether we should invite H.E. The other people we are asking are the Flag Officer, Gibraltar, the Chief of Staff, the Captain of the Dockyard, the Naval Secretary, the Air Officer Commander, the Fortress Commander, the Officer Commanding, Coast Defence, the American Consul, the Spanish Consul General, the Officer Commanding, Medical Corps, and all their wives and, of course, the Archbishop and his Protestant opposite number have also been invited.

The Irish Christian Brothers are descending on us in force next time we come in. When the Bishop heard that I was an old O'Connell School boy said he was rounding them up as soon as they returned off leave. One of my old masters was Principal here up to 2 months ago. It certainly is a very small world.

We sailed dead on time yesterday and are going along nicely except that the heat is terrific. If the weather gets bad and we have to close our ports it will be insufferable. Incidentally the Rosbonite at the Liffey Dockyard put into our fresh water tanks is of a very poor quality and had melted so that when one takes a shower one is covered with a tarry substance.

The lads are as brown as berries and as keen as mustard. They bought the town up at Gibraltar and are becoming "old salts" by now. I can see the yarns being got ready for home consumption.

September 4th:

We have just put in the most frightful 24 hours we have had so far. Just after passing Majorca we ran into a whole gale which blew all night. Between 3 and 4 o'clock this morning we had to heave to. In addition at noon yesterday and until arrival in Nice we could not establish radio communication with any station due to the most abnormal static. The lightning during the storm was terrific and lit up the sky like day. However, we are now safely in Nice.

On arrival we were met by M. Benoist and the Officer of the Guard from H.M.S. Fierce, a British Destroyer, who is cruising in this direction. There are no French Naval Officers

around though we called and left cards on the Naval Officer of the port who was away for the week-end. Afterwards Thompson and I went to the Prefecture where we saw the Private Secretary, the Prefect being in Paris. M. Benoist fixed up about money for us and after a discussion told us it was not normal or necessary to call on the military bloke here. Later in the evening, Benoist and myself went to the Air Port to meet Mr. Seán Murphy, the Irish Minister. He came in on a plane at 2020 and we witnessed the near write off of an Irish Minister. She bumped heavy on landing, burst a tyre and amongst the screeching of brakes, smoke and rocks plunged off the runway over the beach and ended up with her tail in the sea. All hell was let loose but fortunately no one was hurt. A very near thing.

I had dinner with Mr. Murphy and he came down aboard afterwards for a drink. Tomorrow's programme is as follows:-

- 0800 to 0900 - Mass.
- 1130 - Irish Minister Aboard.
- 1145 - Secretary to the Prefect Aboard.
- 12.30 - Irish Minister and M. Benoist lunch with Thompson and myself aboard.
- 1400 - Tour for ratings arranged by Mr. Murphy of Monaco and Mentone with a swim at Monaco.
- 1500 - Similar tour for Officers with Mr. Murphy.
- 2000 - Dinner for Officers given by Mr. Murphy.

Monday - Self and Mr. Murphy proceed to Mentone and attend religious ceremony there for the late W.B. Yeats. Coffin to be brought to Nice by road and met outside the town by French military. Irish bearer party will take over from the French at the head of the Quay. Body then to be brought alongside and hoisted aboard by crane. We will have a Guard of Honour drawn up on the upper deck which will present arms as the body comes on board. A French military band to play both National Anthems and appropriate honours to be rendered. I intend to cast off immediately afterwards and proceed to sea. That is all for the moment.

Yours sincerely,

T. McKenna.



L.E. Macha.
At Sea.

7th September, 1948.

Dear Captain Jerome,

Just a note to say that everything in Nice went off according to plan and to give you the details. I am not quite sure exactly where I finished off in my last letter so if I repeat myself you will understand it is due to forgetfulness.

On Sunday morning we all went to Mass in a Church close by - one watch going to 8 o'clock and the other to 9 o'clock. M. Benoist arranged it for us and we had seats in the front of the Church. I believe that in the Sermon Ireland's piety was stressed and our example in coming to Mass.

Mr. Seán Murphy came on board at 11.30 and we received him with due ceremony. At 11.45 the Deputy Prefect arrived with M. Benoist and after a few drinks the Wardroom invited us down. Mr. Murphy incidentally was a huge success with everyone.

Both the Minister and M. Benoist had lunch with Thompson and I after which he took us on a tour. He had previously arranged for a 'bus for 25 of our sailors to take them to Monaco and Mentone and they thoroughly enjoyed it. We went to Monaco and after to Monte Carlo where we had a look at the gaming room; one look was sufficient.

Later that night he took Thompson, Benoist and I to dinner in a French café. After eating for what seemed hours we were just able to make "Macha" under our own steam. I forgot to say that early on Sunday morning the French Resident Naval Officer called. We had left cards on him on Saturday. He explained that he and his staff of 3 (a steward, a writer and a driver) were the only Naval personnel between Toulon and the Italian border and that he was responsible for all Naval administration in that area.

On Monday morning at 0900 I left with Mr. Seán Murphy and M. Benoist for Mentone. They were both complete with top hats. We went straight to Rocquebrun cemetery where Yeats was buried and found a military guard drawn up on both sides of the coffin. They presented arms as I put the Tricolour on the coffin and after a religious ceremony (Catholic) the local poet gave an impassioned oration. The guard presented arms again as the coffin was placed in the hearse and we returned to Nice.

On arrival at Nice we had to wait in a side street until the military turned up. The band was adrift and the soldiers of the guard had to be rounded up from the locals! The Prefect in resplendent white uniform, rather like that of an Admiral, was with the French Resident Naval Officer and the Colonel of the Regiment that provided this guard. At 11.15 we moved off to the funeral march and held up all the traffic. It was a very impressive and certainly a splendid band. As we approached the ship with the guard of honour drawn up on the upper deck, Officers and men have fallen in. She looked very well indeed. On arrival at the quayside a small party of sailors from the "Macha" took out the coffin, put straps around it and it was lifted on board by a crane. The French

Trumpeters sounded off, arms were presented by the French Guard and the Guard of Honour on board whilst the band played both the Irish and French National Anthems. Macha hoisted a French Tricolour whilst the French Anthem was being played which I think went down very well. The French military detachment moved off. Then our Minister made a short speech and brought the chief participants on board to say good bye to us. Whilst still alongside and until we were well out to sea we mounted a Petty Officer ~~with~~ resting on arms reversed on guard by the coffin. We went to sea immediately and there were literally thousands down to watch the ceremony and see us off.

As usual the weather turned bad on us last night again and we rolled all the way shipping heavy seas. Today, however, it has taken a turn for the better and everything is going nicely. If the fuel consumption which brought us home is anything like as low as on the run down, it will not be necessary to fuel "Macha" before she goes in for her leave period and I propose proceeding to Cobh as soon as we have landed the remains. Incidentally "Picture Post" flew two men to Nice to cover the removal from the cemetery to the ship and are flying them to Ireland to complete the series. Some film company is doing the same and I believe "Life" and "Time" of New York are also interested.

September 8th.

We are going along very well today - flat, calm and cloudless sky. We have to make our E.T.A. to Gibraltar and hope to be in dead on time if we don't strike fog. We have just received our berthing signal from Gibraltar. We are to go to Berth 41 near our last berth. They certainly are being very good to us about berths seeing that the place will be pretty full this time.

Yours sincerely,

T. McKenna.

L.E. Macha.
Gibraltar.

11th September, 1948.

Dear Captain Jerome,

A short final letter before we leave. Everything has gone according to plan in Gibraltar and gone amazingly well. We arrived on time on Thursday afternoon and had a quiet evening. They gave us the best berth in the harbour right under the Tower. H.M.S. Phoebe, a British Cruiser, had to move in order that we might have it.

Yesterday we stored up fuel, water and had our gyro seen to. It had a small defect and I asked for an expert advice. An E.A. worked on it all day yesterday. It is now running sweetly but requires further parts on arrival home, time here being insufficient to make a 100% job.

Thompson and I had lunch at the American Consul and met Captain Frost, U.S.N., Senior Officer of the 6th Division of Destroyers. In the afternoon five officers were taken on a tour of the Upper Rock.

Our party given to return the previous hospitality was a howling success. All hands put their back into it and transformed the starboard side of the boat deck with flags, screens and lights. All the people invited accepted but the Colonial Secretary who had a previous engagement. A full list is as follows:- His Excellency, The Governor and Lady Anderson. Mrs. Brooking (Admiral Brooking is in hospital with a poisoned arm), Air Commodore and Mrs. Gordon, Brigadier and Mrs. Ebsworth (Fortress Commander), Captain and Mrs. Gilmore (Chief of Staff), Captain Colville (Captain of Phoebe), Commander and Mrs. D'Arcy, the American Consul and his wife, Captain Frost, U.S.N., Archbishop Dr. Fitzgerald, the Rev. Nason (Protestant Dean of Gibraltar), Lt.-Commander and Mrs. Lloyd Hirst (Staff Officer Intelligence), Colonel and Mrs. Eccles (P.M.O. Lt.-Commander and Mrs. Milward (Naval Signal Officer).

Everything went very well. I had N.A.A.F.I. fix the eats and perfectly they did it. The only trouble is that we are now practically a dry ship as there was no whiskey to be had in Gibraltar. However, everyone was happy and when Lady Anderson came to the Governor and said it was already 8 p.m. he told her it wasn't exactly 8 yet and that he wanted to hold on a while! The Archbishop and the Air Commodore were the last to leave us at 8.30. The Wardroom also gave a party later for the Irish nurses. Two or three Priests, some Christian Brothers from the School and the Officers of H.M.S. "Childers" which went off very well but we could not stay as we had to go to Admiralty House where Mrs. Brooking was giving an "At Home" for the combined British and American Squadrons. As a result of this we did not get back on board until 2 o'clock this morning.

All is well that ends well and, touching wood, I think we can say that the trip so far has been a complete success. We are leaving in half-an-hour so I will close and get this off.

Yours sincerely,
T. McKenna.