

Letter from Midshipman R. H. Cowan.

H. M. S. Venerable.

March 12. 1915

Dear Dad.

We left Sheerness at 9-30 on Tuesday night under sealed orders. We arrived at Dunkirk about 6-30 & proceeded up to our old anchorage off Neuport de Bain. As the Channel was not reported clear of mines we did not fire that day. In the evening three of our steamboats went away to act as buoys to the minesweepers during the night. On Thursday we furled nets at 7 a.m. but did not get under way till 1 p.m. on account of a heavy mist. Admiral Hood was in H. M. Destroyer "Crusader." At about 7-30 a floating mine floated by, which was at once sunk by rifle fire from the G. D. About 2 p.m. we sunk another mine & commenced to fire 1 shot per  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. Each shot was spotted by an aeroplane who reported to the trenches who in their turn telephoned to the Shore Wireless Station. The guns ashore gave us a beastly lot of attention for about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour & fired more shots than the whole number fired last time. We had several frightfully narrow escapes. Several pitched within 5 yards of us but we were not hit. We left at 4.30 having fired 6 shots & having about 100 fired at us. As soon as we had anchored a beastly B Bomb-dropper came & dropped 4 bombs which pitched within 2 yds of our starboard side, & exploded on reaching the water. Luckily no harm was done, but it was touch & go. We got off 1 3-pounder at it but did not hit it. All the fish floated by dead, killed by the explosion. It was pursued by French & English machines. During the afternoon several

destroyers were very nearly hit. The "Kangaroo" was splashed by a shell & the "Crusader" with the Admiral on board was very nearly hit. Our boats went away again at night. This morning a beastly fog again & no luck; not even a Bomb-dropper, although we saw one pursued by ~~one~~ English Biplanes flying towards Ostend. On Wednesday the Belgians near the coast were going to advance to make the Germans think they were advancing under cover of our guns, but really Sir John French was going to advance at Ypres instead. We really calibrated our for'ard 12". Everyone was down below & no 6" guns were manned. This morning the Destroyers found 7 floating mines floating down on us on the tide. A German had sent them down on the tide from Ostend. They were within  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a mile of us when discovered. I don't think they would have exploded if they had hit us on the strength of the tide.

I believe we are returning tomorrow night (Sat) but I hope not. I will add to this tomorrow. R.H.C.

So you see I have had a taste of everything; they were firing 8" & 8-2" yesterday. R.H.C.

The Aerial attack was great fun, the bombs looked like cigars falling. I thought it was going to hit me at first but it did not. We have had extraordinary luck & I hope we may yet have a mark to show after all our efforts. Robert Hamilton Cowan.



Midshipman  
Robert H. Cowan.  
H. M. S. Venerable.



CHANNEL FLEET.