FOR PAGE 1 OF THE ORSOVA STORY TO GO BETWEEN THE LAST TWO PARAGRAPHS. (After "...relief & joy at the end of the war.")

And please cut out the above part.

ORSOVA.

By the end of the 1914-18 war my brother, Oliver, and most of our friends had been killed. My father was in Australia and thinking it would be a good change after the disaterous years cabled my mother that we should join him in Australia and from there go for a camping holiday in New Zealand.

Continue → It was, of course, very difficult to get berths on a ship.....etc

I hope you won't mind doing this - will understand.

Lady Hamilton

My brother Oliver had survived all those terrible years of war, which had killed all but two of our closest friends, until the 10th of November, 1918, when he was killed in an accident at the RFC Experimental station at Butley.

My Mother did not know until Armistice day, but characteristically, though filled with relief, imagining that Oliver had survived, when someone said, as all the church bells were ringing with joy, "isn't it wonderful to know that it is all over ?" Mother had replied, "yes, but some mothers won't get their sons back." Later in the day when I arrived home to break the news to her she was incredibly brave and I could not understand her calm. She asked to be left alone. She did not cry, but went for a walk by herself round the Down above Pepperdon. In view of later events I think she could not, or would not, accept the fact of his death and when it would have been better if she could have given way to her grief, she carried on in a strangely brave way as though it had not happened, or that disbelief in what she had been told might prove it to be not true. After a while she came in and sitting at the piano, played some composition of her own which had, in some way, a connection with her feelings, hopes, fears, anxieties and love for Oliver.

Father was in Australia, and, on hearing the news, he cabled to Mother that we should all come out to join him in Australia and then go to New Zealand for a camping holiday.

Father, too, had not heard the news until a day or two after the armistice and the shock came as a terrible blow on top of his relief and joy at the end of the war.

It was, of course, very difficult to get berths on a ship, but Mother was incredibly efficient and eventually secured berths on the Orient Line ship, 'Orsova' for herself, my younger brother Matthew and sister Lucy. At the last minute Ursula, Oliver's widow, agreed to come with us. I was overjoyed. She and I had been together as munition workers before she had married Oliver and having been through so much together, we were very close. It was a good idea of my father's to get us all away from the long grey

years of disasters, anxiety and misery. Life must go on and it helped Mother to have so much to see to and arrange berths, tickets, passports, clothes. And when at last the day came for us to leave we still had no car; the luggage was sent down to the station at Moretonhampstead by horse and cart while we walked, or rather ran, down the steep hill known as Pepperdon Hole, the 2½ miles to Moretonhampstead, for we were late and saw to our dismay the train drawing away from the station. However,the engine driver saw us too, as we ran helter skelter, and being an old friend of the family, put back into the station for us. It is sad that that line runs no longer. It looked so small from Pepperdon Down we always called it the Toy Train, and being well known in such a small community we had often great fun with it. My brother, Matthew, very friendly with the guard and always up to mischief, made himself a key so that he could lock himself into a carriage and keep it to himself! Such was our exit and the start of our first long voyage overseas.

The good ship, 'Orsova' , 14,000 tons, was a troop ship carrying the first lot of fit men back to australia. The ship was full. The "diggers" packed like sardines and the lifeboats slun g out over the side to make more room. The diggers had the lower, poop and well decks and half the boat deck. The passengers, officers, wives and children had the promenade, and half the boat deck. Sentries were posted on each deck of the companionway, but at every port the troops swarmed over every deck.

There were several officers with their wives, some wives alone hoping to join their husbands in Australia, and 29 babies. Mother and Lucy shared a cabin with, for those days an unusual luxury, a bathroom. Ursula and I were allotted a tiny two-berth cabin

with a port hole opening onto the well deck. I remember the shipping office being concerned when we booked this cabin that it was not really suitable for ladies, since with the port opening onto the well deck we might hear language unfit for our ears! However, we insisted that we would not mind that. We were still young enough and sufficiently unspolied not to want anything better. We wanted to feel we were on a real ship and would not have tolerated anything better or beds at any price. The one disadvantage we had not realised was that our cabin, being so far forward, in it we experienced the full motion of the ship in rough weather.

We boarded the 'Orsova' at Liverpool in January, 1919. I shall never forget the first meal on board after all the years of rationing. I can see the table now with jam, butter and sugar, as much as we wanted. For years we had had no jam because there was no sugar, we used saccharine in our tea, and margarine on our bread, the butter ration being so small it wasn't worth bothering about. Actually, though, it was not like the margarine of today, Blue Band Margarine had a rather nice nutty flavour and I grew to like it. We had our first meal while still in port and then Ursula and I went to unpack in our cabin. There was a water jug in the cabin but it was empty, so off we set with it to find a steward to fill it for us. Along the deck we met a man in uniform who asked what we wanted. "We want some water for our water bottle," we said. "I'll get you some," he answered, taking the bottle from us as we followed him down the passage into a sort of pantry with taps where he filled our bottle for us. Later we discovered to our embarrassment, this was the Captain of the 'Orsova', Captain Shelford!

It was a grey, cold, stormy day when we left Liverpool and as soon as we reached the open sea we were pitching and tossing, the seas splashing over the bows.

I seem to be blessed with a cast iron stomach and neither sea, air, scenic railways, roundabouts or switchbacks, can make me sick. Ursula overcame her sea sickness on a later voyage, but on this first, aboard the 'Orsova', as soon as we were in rough water she took to her bunk. One young woman with a baby had sent all her luggage by goods train which never arrived and she came aboard with nothing but her handbag, passport and three-month old baby. I had left Mother talking to her and listening to her piteous tale. An hour or so later I went along to Mother's cabin where I found her walking up and down with a very green face, the baby in her arms screaming its head off as she sang to it. As soon as Mother saw me she said "take the baby!" and rushed away to be sick. The mother of the baby had long ago succumbed to a violent attack of mal-der-mer and disappeared, leaving the baby to announce, as best he could, that his tea time was long overdue. I had once looked after a baby whose father had been killed in the war and whose mother was ill in hospital so I guessed a bath should come first. This proved correct for as soon as I put the baby in the bath it stopped screaming, feeling, no doubt, that at last events were moving in the right direction. Then I had to find the mother. With the help of the stewardess we discovered a poor young woman stretched on her bunk beyond caring whether she lived or died. "First one is afraid one is going to die and then one is only afraid that one won't." She told us all the baby's food had gone astray in the goods train and she had nothing to make a bottle with unless the ship could supply something. All the 'Orsova' had was Nestlés milk, and so with that the stewardess returned with a bottle, the baby cuddled in with its mother and all was peace. When I returned to Mother,

she and Lucy were lying on their beds looking very miserable, a whole bottle of eau de Cologne that had been given to Mother had fallen as the ship rolled, broken and the contents swishing to and fro with the motion of the ship carrying with it the contents of the dinner the stewardess had brough mother, a piece of haddock floating like a water lily on top.

"Mother," said Lucy, "I think it would have been better if we had not come." The smell of combined Eau-de-Cologne and haddock nearly proved my undoing and the boast of my cast iron stomach, so I lurched along the passage to our cabin and Ursula. A steward called in to see how we were getting on. "Where are we ?" , I asked. "In the Irish Sea," our steward told us. "Why don't they fill it in" came a despairing voice from Ursula's bunk. "Its nothing to the Bay of Biscay," said our cheerful steward . "you waits till you get there." But he was wrong, because when we reached the Bay of Biscay the wind dropped, the waves seemed to iron themselves out and a few more pale faces turned up in the dining saloon. While it had been rough there had been only a handful of us for meals and a young man had paid a great deal of attention to me up on deck until the Mediterranean, when young girls, more lovely by far than I, appeared from their cabins below and cut me out completely.

During the rough weather a middle-aged army doctor took charge of most of the babies while their mothers were incapacitated. I used to see him changing the babies' nappies behind the piano in the lounge. As the weather grew warmer and the sea calm, new faces appeared on deck. Everyone gave up some article of clothing to the poor girl whose luggage had gone astray and every mother of a baby gave her nappies and clothing. Mother made him a frock out of one of her nightgowns, embroidering a picture of the 'Orsova' on it. Then more and more diggers came to light all over the ship, some in

the lifeboats slung over the side.

It was a dry ship. One could only buy soft drinks at the bar which was on the passengers promenade deck and out of bounds for the diggers. It was forbidden of course, but we used to shout them drinks when no one was looking. They were a very good and well behaved lot, except at ports. What was called the 'Spanish' influenza was raging through Europe and so no one was allowed, or supposed, to go ashore at the ports, but nothing would keep the diggers on board. At Port Said they swarmed over the side and into the empty coal barges. I do not know how many men we started with, but I was told some missed the 'Orsova' when we left, in spite of which I believe we carried more than we started with, some men having missed the previous boat the same way made sure of the 'Orsova'! Although it was the cool time of the year, it was terribly hot in the Red Sea. We had no fan in our cabin and only punkahs swinging to and fro over each table in the dining saloon. Two soldiers took on the job of nannies, finding the job of sitting on a rug with a baby on the promenade deck cooler and more roomy than packed as the men were on their own decks. Awnings were put up and that was a help.

There were many concerts and entertainments given by the passengers and the troops and much boxing of course. One night in the Red Sea the stokers suddenly rushed up on deck with their faces black and put on a most amusing show. Captain Shelford was a very popular man with everyone. He was kindly, cheerful and lenient. He probably felt, like everyone else, the need to relax now that the dreadful war was over and so there were few restrictions. Ursula and I were sitting in one of the lifeboats one day reading, when the Captain came by and seeing us there, stopped. "Bless me soul!", he said, "whenever I see you you're doing something wrong. If

you're not up the rigging you're in the lifeboats. If you're not in the lifeboats you're somewhere else you shouldn't be!" . We were too; I remember how small the 'Orsova' looked from the crow's nest. The Padre and the YMCA man were splendid and I think the wisdom and popularity of those three men did much to keep it a happy ship, for the diggers had so little room, no comforts, no beer or even soft drinks and at one stage, no soap. Such lack of ordinary necessities seemed unwarranted. I remember even Mother ordering a case or two of soap for them to come aboard somewhere along the route.

Mother seemed to spend most of her time rescuing babies from a variety of disasters. One day up on the boat deck she found a babe of two, or under, all alone on the wrong side of the rail with nothing between it and the sea below. Mother was very clever. The baby didn't know her and might have stepped back if mother had given way to her instinct to climb over and grab the child. Instead, she just sat down on the deck near the rail and opening her gold watch to show the works, she held it out towards the child. After eyeing Mother suspiciously for a few minutes, the babe edged closer to look at the watch and Mother was able to grab her. Mother said they were the most awful minutes and seemed interminable as she waited for the baby's reaction, only a few inches the other way and it would have been overboard. One night, as we came up the companionway from the dining saloon we found the sentry on guard with a baby in his arms. It had somehow climbed out of its bed and had crawled along to the sentry who was obviously thoroughly enjoying his new role.

The sea was still not safe from mines and so until we were through the Mediterranean the paravanes were swung out from the bows. One day a depth charge was to be fired and just in time Mother found a

few months old baby left asleep within a few feet from where the depth charge was to be fired. Fearing that the concussion might deafen so small a child Mother quickly picked it up and took it as far away as possible. The Captain one day found the same baby left sleeping in a hammock, one end of which was tied to the rail of the ship. A brisk wind was blowing and the baby was having a fine rockabye "If the wind gets up any more," said the Captain, "that baby'll go overboard." Again Mother went to the rescue. The diggers sat or lay around stripped to the waist, in shorts or some in pyjamas.

As Britishers, or Pommies as they call us, we received quite a shock one day. We had always imagined Australia, the great wide open spaces where everyone was free. No top hats and pin-striped trousers. England was (so we supposed) stuffy and old fashioned, so that when one day we overhead two diggers talking together about the girls in our Land Army during the war and one said, "disgusting the way they went around in breeches!" the other agreed, "you wouldn't catch our women goin g around like that!". I couldn't believe my ears. But it was true, for when we arrived in Australia, hoping for a ride, we found to our dismay that young ladies only wore divided skirts to ride in and alas all we had were breeches with very (so we thought) respectable coats which covered our knees!

We came to know quite a number of these men playing deck tennis with them where we shared the boat deck. One, a sailor, I remember we found very entertaining. "Tell us how many times you've nearly lost your life, Jack, " we'd start him off and then sit enthralled for hours with his stories probably made up on the spot. And he knew more patent languages than we ever imagined existed. I one day addressed him in what I had always understood to be our own private

family language, the "Laragwanggaraguage" but he replied to me in it about twice as fast as I could speak it myself!

We used to enjoy going to the diggers Sunday Service which usually ended with cries of "Good old Padre, better luck next time," and so on. Hymn singing in the evening was especially enlightening. The tunes were familiar but the words, the diggers' own compositions, quite enchanting !

The concerts were fun and there was much talent on board. The Captain had a fine voice and was always the most popular performer. Ursula had with her a lute to which she and I used to sing old folk songs. We really only sang in our cabin or in the lifeboats and once or twice were persuaded to sing in the lounge. Our efforts may have sound alright in a small room, but we were quite untrained with small, huskey voices and an enormous repetoire of old ballads and folk songs. The entertainment committee asked us to do something for the diggers. We said we couldn't possibly, we were only amateurs and only sang for our own amusement and anyway it wasn't the sort of thing the diggers would like. But the committee went on and on at us, so that in the end, against our better judgment, we agreed to try and do something. Finally, on the night of our performance, we dressed up as two 16th century farm lads from Somerset (as we pictured them) in smocks, breeches, big boots and red handkerchiefs round our necks and wide-brimmed hats and when our turn came we trundled down the ladder onto the well deck which served as a stage and bravely started off with "The Robber's Lament" , followed by such things as the "Raggle Taggle Gipsy-O","High Germany" and some old Scottish ballads. Well, we got more encores even than the Captain. They cheered, clapped and whistled us back again and again. We retired feeling very pleased with ourselves indeed; but

the next day we were talking to one of the men we knew fairly well and he said "You know what we liked about your show was we couldn't hear a thing and you looked so darn funny down there opening and shutting your mouths!" . I suppose we would have been as audible in the Albert Hall.

My sister Lucy, aged 14, was a great favourite with the diggers. When we had a fancy dress evening we had to parade round the deck for the diggers to vote the prizes. Mother had dressed Lucy as the God Mercury. The diggers called her 'The Peace Girl' and unanimously voted her the first prize.

One evening after dinner as we came out onto the promenade deck which was supposed to be reserved for passengers only, there at the far end was a small group of men. One of the officers walked up rather angrily, but there in the centre was Lucy with the boxing gloves on having a boxing match with one of the men!

At Colombo we were all asked to stay on board to set a good example to the men; which we did, but within half-an-hour there was not a single digger left on board. Some had a trip to Kandy, some made for the nearest pub. One lot took a taxi asking to be taken to Kandy, but alas arrived at the police station instead!

We were sad not to be able to see Colombo. Land looks so enchanting from the sea, but we promised ourselves a week there on the return journey.

We watched the C.O. give chase in a motor boat to the first bargeload of men to set off for shore, but he was not able to stop them and soon returned to the ship. We were told that he had been on court

marshalls in France and therefore was a very unpopular man. He certainly had no control over the men. The officers also told us that they could do nothing with them either because they were not their own men. The only three who held their respect were the Padre, the YMCA representative, a man called Opie, and Captain Shelford who was tremendously popular. However, I do not think the diggers behaved badly considering the circumstances. The disastrous war was over at last and they were on their way home, and after the horrors of the war, all this fuss about the 'flu seemed ridiculous. We were a clean ship too, with no sickness on board at all.

After Colombo the next stop was Perth and so from time to time temperatures were taken and we were taken in groups of perhaps 12 (I cannot remember for certain) and shut in a small hut temporarily rigged up on the deck, and fumigated. I don't know with what but it was filled with steam until it was like thick fog inside and one could not see. It was not very pleasant and one woman fainted. I found a knot in the wooden wall beside me and pushing hard, was able to push it out and my nose through, which was a great relief !

I shall never forget the scent of gum trees and bush fires as we woke one morning off the coast of Australia. The smell of land after a long period at sea is something one seldom experiences, especially in these days of air travel, and we found it extraordinarily exciting.

After the wholesale exodus from the 'Orsova' at Colombo, the authorities were not going to risk a similar invasion of Australia and so we dropped anchor well out from Fremantle and the medical officers came out to the ship in a motor launch to inspect us on board. Furious at being prevented from going ashore, when at last they reached their home-

land, the diggers decided they were not going to allow the doctors on board and every time one emerged from the cabin of the launch he was greeted by a hail of potatoes and was obliged to return, ignominiously, into the shelter of the cabin. Out would pop another head to cries of 'hullo bunny" and a shower of potatoes thrown with great accuracy and strength. The doctors did not make a very impressive sight, in fact they looked extremely funny masked against possible 'flu infection by long pieces of muslin concealing the face like a yashmak, hanging at least a yard below, with just the eyes peeping out over the top. "Oh let 'em on board, its a lot of ladies from a harem," someone called out. But they could not face the potatoes and finally the Captain went down the gangway to talk to them. Not a potato was thrown as he walked down the gangway to cries of "breathe on 'em, Skipper!" The doctors were never able to come aboard and so only the men leaving the ship for Perth and Western Australia were allowed ashore to be quarantined for 10 days before going home. As punishment for the potato throwing, the troops were allowed no potatoes for several days.

At every port the same thing happened. Only the men actually leaving the ship were allowed ashore and then only to be quarantined. We were to meet Father at Sydney and as we arrived at the Quarantine station at Sydney Heads he came out alongside in a launch to wave to us and bring us fruit and mail.

The quarantine station was a disgrace to Australia and its welcome to her men who had been away for so long to that cruel war. It consisted of a rough wooden building, or huts, which would not have been bad if clean, but everything had been left as the last people went out. It was absolutely filthy. In one room there was even a chamber pot which had not been emptied. It was unbelievably dirty and unhygenic. There were no mosquito nets and one little baby,

whose parents were both doctors, was so bitten she looked as if she had measles. It was the kind of filth in which all kinds of diseases could have germinated.

This was the passengers quarters and a few stewards from the 'Orsova' were put ashore to look after us.

The diggers were in tents a little way along the shore and their conditions were the same. Everything had been left as the last quarantinees had left it. There were piles of greasy dishes left with only cold water and not much of that, to wash them with. One man told us he found a brown snake in his bed. "OO." , he said, "I'd rather have a poached egg any day." One of the officers said "If I can't get conditions improved in 24 hours I'll lead you out of camp" .
We were supposed to have our throats sprayed everyday, but we kept ourselves clean and healthy by bathing in the sea and sitting on the beach where our tender English skins became terribly sunburnt. We played water polo with the diggers and at night they built fires on the beach round which we sat story telling.

On the journey out Ursula, Matthew and I had learnt semaphor and morse. In the evenings at the quarantine station we used sometimes, after dark, to sit up on a rock with an electric torch endeavouring to contact some of the ships in the harbour. Most were too proud to answer us, but one day, some lonely, bored young "sparks" did reply. We found this great fun. After some conversation he asked, "where do you come fron?" . We replied, "Heaven". "Where's that?" he asked. "Devonshire" , we morsed back. He suggested we must meet when our quarantine term was ended, but of course we never did.

Revolted by our conditions it was decided to break camp. A Naval doctor among us promised to lead us out to medical headquarters and make an official protest. To be in line with orthodoxy he wore a conventional mask. Not a "yashmak" , but a piece of muslin over his nose and mouth. He was a big man and wore his navy cap at a jaunty angle like Admiral Beatty. No one else had a mask and we all followed behind him like a flock of chickens going to be fed. Mother made a magnificent drawing of him as he entered the medical headquarters with his little band of protesters saying, from behind his mask, "I Sir, am the mouthpiece of this assembly." Many journalists from the various newspapers were present, scribbling down all our shocking stories of what we had found in our various compartments. The last woman to air her long-bottle-up grievances said "All I can say it is not fit for human habitation." "Take it down, take it down," someone told the Press. We never saw what came out in the papers but I think there must have been a hullabaloo and we were all let out of quarantine early.