# "MAINLY FOR MOTHER"

58073
ARMINE NORRIS, M.C.
LIEUTENANT
CANADIAN MACHINE GUN CORPS

LIEUTENANT ARMINE FRANK GIBSON NORRIS, M.C.

# "Mainly for Mother"

BY

ARSENE NORRIS, M.A.

LIEUTENANT

CANADIAN MACHINE GUN CORPS

THE RYERSON PRESS

TORONTO

LIEUTENANT ARTHUR FRANK GIBSON MORRIS, M.C.

# "Mainly for Mother"

BY

58073

ARMINE NORRIS, M.C.

LIEUTENANT
CANADIAN MACHINE GUN CORPS

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## *MOTHER*

*Some girls have eyes of sweetest blue,*
*And some have brown eyes—just like you;*
*Some girls have hair of auburn hue,*
*And there are raven tressed ones too;*
*In England and in France I've met*
*A score of girls, but can't forget*
*The sweetest of them all as yet,*
*The one that Dad calls—Margaret*
*And I, call—Mother.*

*Some girls with serious mien beguile,*
*And some you love because they smile;*
*In simple garb you love some, while*
*Some more entice with latest style.*
*'Neath cloudy skies, on streets all wet,*
*Charms seem more charming still, and yet,*
*Of all the charming girls I've met,*
*The queen, my Dad calls—Margaret*
*And I, call—Mother.*

*Some girls are very nice, indeed;*
*To love them all, that is my creed;*
*Churlish 'twould seem, less than their meed*
*To e'er refuse what love's decreed;*
*But of my loves, the dearest yet,*
*Whose beauty dims the rest I've met,*
*The sweetest far—I can't forget—*
*Is she, my Dad calls—Margaret*
*And I, call—Mother.*

Written in the Trenches,
Dec. 25th, 1916.

# "MAINLY FOR MOTHER"

## INTRODUCTORY

In presenting these letters written by our son during the time he was taking part in the Great Fight for Liberty, Justice and Righteousness, we can introduce them in no better way than in his own words:—

"I have not written you anything that I did not feel, and if the letters are interesting it is only because of the way my emotions re-acted to the war.

"My letters are not merely descriptions. When I've been muzzling something over in mind, I wrote it, so I guess you have most of what I thought and felt, as well as saw.

"The descriptions were for you because you wanted to see things through *my* eyes—

"The introspective parts were written because I knew *you* would understand.

"I wrote when I felt like writing, what I wanted to write and about what you would be interested in—the marvellous thing manhood is—what really splendid fellows ninety-nine out of a hundred fellows are."

Of some of the letters that have already been seen by others than ourselves, one has written:—

"I am keeping this letter (of Sept. 29th, 1916) as it is the most vivid account I have seen of what our boys have to endure, so I want to read it often—*'Lest we forget.'*"

President Falconer, of Toronto University, wrote: "They show a remarkable quality of head and heart and must make you very proud to have had a son with such a spirit." Another says: "It might be hoped that through these letters the voice of Young Canada is speaking."

Because we know that the letters express the spirit of all

> "Whose faith and truth
> On war's red touchstone rang true metal,"

we are offering them with the hope and the wish that they may bring to our friends some of the consolation they have given to us.

Though

> *"The yearning of the mother and the father's mournful pride*
> *Cannot give back to his country him who for his country died,"*

they have left to us most precious memories.

"Dead, their work lives. The very sacrifice of their lives is bringing a new era of liberty and justice to the whole world. All their bigness and all their goodness did not come to an end when a bullet struck them. We mourn for them, but even in our mourning let us remember to rejoice and be proud, for if the grief is ours the glory of great accomplishment is theirs."

WRITTEN IN THE TRENCHES IN THE WINTER OF 1916.

It was about the first week of March that I attested. For weeks I had been waiting for the order to come down and sign up, and I had gone through all the experiences that a fellow goes through when he enlists. I had discovered new parents in the two I had taken so for granted; I'm a spoiled only son you see; but there had always been understanding between me and my Mother—that most wonderful Mother, mine is, that ever lived—and since I'd been away from home (I was away for over four years between High School and College) I'd begun to understand my father too.

But when I came home at lunch time (there were always just Mother and I at lunch—she cooked it just for me—the things I liked and never thanked her for by word or look—such is the habit of spoiled sons, I guess) I sat down opposite her and said, "Mother, I'm going to enlist in the morning." Then I knew my Mother for the first time.

She accepted it very quietly, only we both knew what each wouldn't say, because I was that awkward creature, a boy, and sentiment was hateful to show. Mother is a soldier's daughter and she had taught me that England was worth fighting for and that it was a privilege to rejoice in, the right to fight for her.

It was a quiet Mother; and a silent meal which neither of us ate; only when I got up and went to her chair, she cried over me, standing so awkwardly with my arm around her. It isn't nice to tell your Mother you're going; but mine understood and so did Dad. We'd had it out in the Fall and Dad had said, "Think

of your Mother" and Mother had said, "Don't go till you have to, but, if the war lasts and England needs you, then you may go."

And so I had waited till the papers started to print "Your King and Country need you"—waited until I was ashamed to walk on the street for fear other fellows were thinking of me what I was thinking of them. I fought it out many sleepless nights—what it meant to all of us if I enlisted. I wasn't sure I wasn't a coward; I thought I might repent having joined when lying in the rain and mud; I didn't think I wanted to go—but let me digress right here and say that I've been glad every moment that I did join and only wish I had come over with the first contingent.

To go back—I thought how my Mother would suffer, though I knew she'd be glad to suffer because she wouldn't want her son to be less than a man. I fought my way through and always I knew that I had to join, and had to tell Mother.

I was thinking of all these things as I walked down to the Exhibition Camp that lovely bright morning. Have you ever seen your own country? I never had before; but somehow the sight of those rows of comfortable brick homes, with here and there kiddies playing round in front and the housewives about the porches, got under my skin, and it came to me then and forever that *Canada* was worth dying for. It's a city of happy homes, *my* city, and it's worth any suffering to keep those homes inviolate, to prevent those kiddies ever feeling humiliated, or ashamed of the name "Canadian." There went the last of my doubts; I knew then that I wanted to help a little.

It's a fine sensation that of being able to look a fellow of your own age square in the eyes and think

"I've done it"; it's a fine thing to look straight at fathers and mothers of youngsters you meet and think "I've answered," and it's great to know that you're going to do your best so that those kiddies will take the same pride in reading the history of their country that you did.

ON BOARD *S.S. Megantic*,
MAY 14TH, 1915.

REVEILLE sounded at Exhibition Camp at four this morning; we left about six, got to Montreal around five p.m., and, as you see, I am on board ship and we sail in the morning at four.

There is a company of Engineers on board and I believe some School of Science men among them.

We are in the steerage but it's miles ahead of barracks, with nice, soft beds. Stew., Wes. and I are together in one room.

Don't worry about submarines as we will be well escorted. And we are coming back to see the maple leaves turn red this fall.

MAY 22ND.

WE are almost across. This morning we wore our life belts at Church. This afternoon, away to port, appeared a little smudge—away to starboard another smudge. A few minutes later a trim little destroyer dashed up on each side. Gee, they can travel and they surely look business-like and, I can tell you, many a heart feels lighter to-night. Canada's soldiers thoroughly appreciate Britain's navy. We are passing a light now which they say is the Lizard, and our port is Plymouth. I wish you could be with us.

SANDLING CAMP, MAY 27TH.

WE got to Plymouth midnight, Sunday, and every one was up early to see the harbour. It certainly was an exquisite sight as the sun rose, and, though I can't

describe it, it looks about the same now as in Drake's day.

We anchored alongside two training ships and exchanged news and views by semaphore, and were told that Italy had declared war. We disembarked about four in the afternoon and entrained right on the dock. English third-class cars are more comfortable for a short ride than our chair cars, but pretty difficult for eight men to sleep in a compartment. It was so interesting though, passing through so many quaint old towns with every station and every window in the houses full of people cheering us, that we didn't try to sleep.

We passed through Kensington and got to Hythe about two a.m., and it was broad daylight when we got our huts allotted.

We have thirty-four men in our hut in which we eat and sleep, and dinner is ready now, so good-bye.

MAY 31ST.

SATURDAY afternoon was a holiday, so a bunch of us went exploring. We climbed a big hill back of the camp and could see many miles along the coast, Folkestone, Shorncliffe, Hythe, Saltwater and back of them, camp after camp.

Folkestone and Hythe are full of Canadians and Dover is equally full of English soldiers.

I'm not going to try and describe Dover, but it is just what you would expect. We keep wanting to "see something," when all the time we are seeing all there is to see. We explored the Castle, but were not allowed on the walls. It is just the pictures you've seen of it, life size.

England is scenery and soldiers—so many soldiers you don't notice the scenery. The soldiers to us, are, of course, the more interesting.

A man in civies is as conspicuous in Hythe or Dover as was a man in khaki in Toronto when we left. You can't forget the war in England.

We can hear the guns at night—a dull muffled thunder—for Dover is closer to the front than Paris.

Everywhere we look to sea are destroyers. England is well guarded.

JUNE 16TH, 1915.

OUR first Canadian mail came on the third and perhaps we weren't happy? We had been on a route march and came in tired and hungry, dusty and dirty, and, naturally, a grouchy lot; but, when the orderlies greeted us with "Canadian mail!" we were all smiles.

We are yet to qualify as gunners though we are all wearing our badges now, a white "MG" with a half laurel wreath underneath.

I don't think you need worry about danger till we are in France, and that won't be for a couple of months, worse luck.

When we get to France there is no use worrying and, if I was born to give my life there, surely there could be no higher destiny for a man than to die for all he holds dear.

I know, Mother dear, how badly it would hurt you, but at least you would be proud that your son gave his life willingly when the time came.

However, we'll hope that I will be one of the lucky ones to come home safe and sound, but I hope, still more, that I will be able to behave under fire, as *your* son should. And we will look forward to the day

"READY"

when we will come back to you victors in the greatest war.

JULY 1ST, 1915.

IT is rather hard to realize this war and what it means, yet. To me it seems impossible, like a story in a magazine, not real, but it *is* true, and the God who allowed it will finish it in His own time.

The cost is horrible, but victory must be England's and it is worth the price to gain it.

Don't worry about the "Impregnable" German trenches—There won't be any doubt about our being able to drive the Germans home. This, Mother, in case you may be tempted to take a gloomy view of things, for the end of the war is even now in sight and the outcome is inevitable.

When the finish comes, it will come quickly and the papers will be filled with news of victory after victory, for we can beat them.

Just try to think that my safety is in the hands of a Higher Power and that whatever happens to me will be for the ultimate good. After all, is life such a wonderful thing that one should hesitate to give it for the right, or that for our death anyone should grieve.

Who knows what comes after and whether it is not a change for the better?

So many sorrows will come to the living that those who die now will not see.

For England I will be proud to die if such is my fate, and I know you are proud to have a son to give to her in her hour of need. However, the odds are in favour of my coming through so there is no need

to feel gloomy and I'm coming home some of these days, to criticize with you, the peace terms.

JULY 5TH, 1915.

The First Division was very hard hit at Ypres, after Langemarck, and there is a terrible lot of casualties and a lot are prisoners, worse luck.

I hope when our turn comes there won't be many prisoners for it must be awful to be a prisoner.

One thing I was told to-day by one of the wounded was that there were no deserters among the Canadians. There may be those among soldiers of other nations but none among ours, thank God.

JULY 19TH, 1915.

Do you know why we are not worrying about the danger of this job? Well, we just don't think of the danger at all. That's the easiest thing in the world to do when it's your own danger.

I sometimes think how sorry I will be if Roy or any of my pals get killed, but I just refuse to think of it, and in spite of what we know and hear about the Front we are not in the least anxious.

There isn't one of us who wouldn't be heartbroken if he got sent home. We enlisted to fight, and all my life I've dreamed of lying with my rifle, fighting, and now I'm going to have the chance. And don't imagine for a minute, Mother, that we're terrified of these "awful" Germans.

AUGUST 1ST, 1915.

Do you remember last Civic Holiday? You and Dad and I went over to the Island to a ball game. And do you remember that it was that night the papers

carried the news of war? Just a year ago to-day, and looking at the year's fighting Germany certainly has had the best of it and yet, we are just as confident of victory as ever. Sobered a little by our losses, steadied by our reverses, but just as sure that we are going to win as we were the first of last August.

Here is something I think you will like to hear. The Canadians are popular and welcome everywhere because they behave themselves. They don't put on "Side" or pretend that they are better than other people and their manners are such as to make the maple leaf a distinction with the girls in the soldiers' clubs.

The Canadians haven't disgraced themselves in England any more than they have in France. It isn't boasting to say that the little bunch that wears the maple leaf is of the best fighting men in the Empire and the First Division has proved that to the hilt.

AUGUST 9TH, 1915.

I CAME up to London on leave on Saturday and am staying with Cousin P—.

Just about twelve B— came in and gave me a pass good from August 8th noon to August 11th midnight. S. and W. were going up for the week-end and were hustling around getting ready and I had a perfectly good pass—though to be sure it did not start till next day—so I committed my first *real* crime and beat it along with them. It took me just forty-five minutes to get ready, get dinner and catch the train; and you should have heard Grace's voice when I phoned and told her I was here.

Yesterday we went out to Hampton Court and for

a paddle in the river and didn't get back till the wee hours so you can guess how I enjoyed myself.

I wish you could see the restaurants, the river, and the tea gardens. It is just like living in a picture book. I was thinking I'd start a tea garden when I got back home, only I'd have to import some English people to show Canadians how to behave. Tea here seems to be the "hour of prayer" as the talking is just a murmur.

AUGUST 12TH, 1915.

GIVE credit, Mother, where it is due and to those who enlist now not less, but more, than to us, for the men at home must be beginning to realize,—as we over here do—just what they will be getting into—and if they see their duty now or later and obey the call, all honour to them. The men of the fifth and sixth contingents will prove themselves as good soldiers, every bit, as the men of the first and second.

The war will last plenty long enough for them to get their chance, for there is no use blinking at the facts that Russia has had a serious reverse, that Turkey is proving a much greater factor than was expected and that the German lines in France and Flanders are very strong. Break them we must and will, but the cost will stagger Britain.

Now that we have learned the weakness and strength of our Allies, Britain sees in what degree she will have to depend on her own efforts if we are to survive.

We can look back over this year of struggle and feel proud that not since Mons has our line moved back and on all the seas our flag still floats in triumph.

AUGUST 18TH, 1915.

I AM glad to hear that recruiting at home is brisk again. Conscription, under the name of "National Service," is in force here. At last this war is being entered into with Great Britain's full force intelligently applied.

For the first time in history, a British transport has been sunk by the enemy. It is too bad that such a record had to be broken and a shame that a thousand fit men should die without a chance to strike a blow. Submarines and gas are murder, not war.

England is wonderful, and the most glorious thing in this great war is the utter loyalty of the women—girls, wives, and mothers. Their sacrifice and devotion to the cause and the matter of fact, business-like, quiet way in which they do things are marvellous.

"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier" has been changed to "Thank God my boy grew up to be a soldier."

You wouldn't call me pale and thin now, Mother—I am in perfect condition, hard as nails, and fit as a fiddle. Route marches have ceased to trouble us. We march along singing and wishing they would send us over.

To-morrow we are going on three days manœuvres so you can think of me sleeping under the stars. This is called "hardening the men," but is really to accustom us to field conditions, especially as regards rations and transport. We are supposed to be fighting an enemy based at a place fifty miles away, so I sincerely hope we don't rout him and occupy his base.

SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1915.

MANY happy returns of your birthday.

We are getting ready for the front now and I expect you will have news of our leaving before this reaches you, for I should say our preparations for departure are almost completed. If, when you get this, we are in France, I know how anxious you will be, but don't worry any more than you can help, and try to realize that life in the trenches is not all that some of the papers make out. It is no worse than what I was doing out West and in fine weather it is rather like a picnic.

The men at the front are well fed, better even than we are here—some of the boys say—and I've heard them say also that the "terrible hardships" are pretty much of a myth.

We have so many men now in France that a battalion spends only about one week in four actually in the trenches and the "horrors of war" are not on our side of the line.

Apart from the actual fighting I am looking forward to having a better time than we have had yet, and the fighting—well, most of the fellows seem to like it and I came over here to fight. I don't like thinking of seeing my chums shot but I may get mine first and a hospital will be like heaven after a training camp.

SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1915.

THIS is just a postal card. I counted on getting time to write yesterday afternoon as we didn't expect to leave till to-day. However, they sent me with the transport and we left last night. I am writing from

the docks at Southampton. I am supposed to be hard at work loading but they seem to be able to get along without me. Where we are going I do not know, but we are going to-day and Jack, who got his commission Friday, will cable you on our safe arrival.

If my letters are irregular now don't be anxious as it will be unavoidable when we are constantly moving.

"SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE," SEPTEMBER?

I HAVEN'T had a chance to write until to-day. We were sent with the advance guard and we walked practically day and night until Thursday night. We crossed the Channel on Monday and had a fine passage. I am not allowed to tell you the names of places but I guess the newspapers will do that for me.

We picked up the rest of the battalion Wednesday afternoon and we had seven miles to march to billets. The rest of the battalion had been two nights without sleep and we had been four, but *they* had all been sea-sick coming across. We were marching arm in arm asleep on our feet.

We did about eight or ten miles Thursday afternoon and ours was the only section that didn't have a man fall out. Since it was formed no man has ever fallen out of it on the march, and that isn't because *our* feet don't get sore; but the bunch won't quit. That's the right kind of spirit for the work ahead, isn't it. Friday we moved our billets to H.Q. Had twelve hours sleep Thursday night.

Howard, Wes., L. and I fell asleep before supper but I felt fine yesterday.

Our crew are all pals and one of the six always manages to get bread or something to help out and

we eat, sleep, and loaf together; and five partners are better than one.

We hope to go in for a few days soon, then probably have a few days rest and get a place in the line afterwards. We are pretty close to the firing line and can hear the guns constantly, and yesterday we saw a couple of planes being shelled.

We had an inspection and General — made the usual speech and said something about the day we were to go forward and where, but I guess that wouldn't pass the censor. Anyway it is very soon and as you may imagine the men were all tickled to death.

France is so much like England that it is hard to realize we are at last across the Channel. The country is flatter, praises be, for I don't love hills to march over while wearing kit.

We are in "billets"—that is to say, we sleep in a barn or around a haystack, but it is warm and I haven't unpacked my coat. It is just a picnic. I am enjoying every minute, and as far as marching goes, my feet are good and I've walked farther and carried more, week in and out, when I was on the G.T.P. Perhaps if I were forty I might be enduring "hardships" but, as I am not, I have to admit that our hardships are no worse than what we often put up with in Muskoka for fun.

It is funny trying to talk to the people—they have a little English and we a little French and we manage to get along. They are good to us but we pay our way. The war has taken all the men and the country must be pretty badly impoverished. It is only in Canada that they can afford to *give* anything to the soldiers.

You are not to worry—I am coming back to celebrate when the war is over. Then we must take a trip through this country and see it properly.

SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1915.

I SHOULD be ashamed for not writing you oftener and I *am* but it is not easy to write letters that are to be read by the censor, and it is hard sometimes to get paper and envelopes. I may say to begin with that probably the things you will want to hear about either I don't know or must not say. We are "Somewhere in Belgium" and just back of the lines. I mean we are just back of a ridge, the front of which is within range and in sight of the enemy's line. The roar of the guns is continuous and everything shakes. It is quite like being in a construction camp again only this is a *de*struction camp.

I told you that at Sandling aeroplanes were so common we hardly noticed them. Here, the sight of an aeroplane being shelled is quite as common. Generally, the plane is almost invisible, but we can see the flashes as shells burst round them and the little balls of smoke hang for many minutes tracing the airship's path, but, so far as we have been able to see, the gun practice has not been very good.

Except for our officers and sergeants, we have not been "in" yet, but will be soon. Our sergeants were in last night and, although they were shelled all night, say "there isn't the slightest danger." It's the snipers that make it risky going in and out.

All last night we could hear a real bombardment going on to the south of us and it was officially announced in the trenches that the British had made an important advance and taken a town which the

censor wouldn't let me tell you the name of, but which the papers in Toronto will publish long before you get this.

There are two things that we see proven here—that our artillery is superior to the enemy's, and our air service even more so. The Zeppelin raids, like submarine "victories," are spectacular, but in the real business of war England is as superior in the air as on the sea.

Don't imagine me in hourly danger of death. We are more likely to die of ennui than of anything else if we don't get something to do pretty soon.

OCTOBER 6TH, 1915.

I'M not sure of the date but it is Thursday morning and near the sixth anyway. It is hard enough to figure out the day let alone the date, but we came out of the trenches on Saturday night I know and that makes to-day Thursday.

It was some mix-up that coming out of the trenches. The strafing gun crew, W., H., and myself, were relieved about five o'clock. We had heard just at noon we were to be relieved and we had some tea about four. You can bet we weren't going to carry any grub out, so we ate our eggs, roast beef, bread and jam, made some cocoa with the milk and had a real feast. We pay only three francs a dozen for fresh eggs just behind the line and fivepence a quart for milk which is at least a guarantee that we won't starve.

Though we were relieved at five, we had to wait around H.Q. till ten for the rest of the section. We are, I believe, nearly a mile back of the firing line and we are living in a barn. We have nine o'clock parade

to see that we have shaved and got the mud off our clothes, then lectures, tapping practice, fatigues, etc.—and the orders say "Men must take every opportunity to *rest* when out of the trenches."

Me for the trenches every time—there's less sleep but more excitement and the work we do *has* to be done. I mean it's of some *use*, but these dress parades get my goat.

However, I actually got a warm bath the day before yesterday and a change of underwear which was a blessing even though it meant a three mile march in the rain each way.

One day in three we have to do guard duty in the reserve trench and I am writing this on guard beside the gun. One of the older men and two of the newer ones have to take turn on guard all the time. It is kind of lonely at night and my two new men did their turns on together. You wouldn't fancy that a soldier would be "afraid of the dark," would you? But I guess what they were really afraid of was going to sleep, which on duty is the most terrible crime a soldier can commit. I manage to keep awake all right for at night quite a few stray bullets find their way back and every time one does, you hear it whistle and that wakes you up. The marvel is that so many thousands of bullets find their way past all our men and practically never hit anyone. Certainly not one bullet out of every ten thousand kills a man and yet our lines have men on duty every few yards with their heads over the parapet at night, and back of the line there are men on the move everywhere, for night is the busiest time in the field, and it is only at night that any shooting is done with rifles.

OCTOBER 18TH, 1915.

STILL here and going strong. This is my fourth week in the trenches, two in the first line and two in the second or supports. Only two nights since we first moved in have we slept out of rifle range.

Our first line trenches were fierce when we took them over and the second worse, from the standpoint of comfort, but what's the odds? We manage to make ourselves fairly comfortable and get along fine. Our battalion has certainly made a great improvement in the first line and now there are really spots where the parapet is bullet proof. The trenches here are not really what you would think from the term—the land is low and so the trenches are *built*—not *dug*.

There are a million or two sandbags in our line and the face of the bags has been cut away by bullets but we have backed them up by another row and now rifle fire can't come through. Our trenches are old German second line turned round. The Canadians took them last December and we are so far advanced on a salient that we can't push any further ahead until those on our flank move forward.

Last week some of the second contingent made a little progress in that "Great Smoke and Gas Attack," as the London papers called it, but the "gas" was mostly in the papers and the smoke didn't hurt us. It blew back and filled our trench but we didn't have to move and we took it as a joke. But, gee, how the bullets sang! Rapid fire on both sides, our artillery pounding them effectively and theirs pounding us ineffectively—most of their shots went high. It was a glorious scrap for thirty minutes and we couldn't see for smoke or hear for the noise.

After the celebration we were all loading belts in our roofless kitchen behind the trench when Heinie started a perfect storm of shells which raised a lot of dust. One lit five feet from the edge of our hole and we *moved*, but it was the last one.

So far, in a month, we have had three men killed by shells, one the other day by a shot that came through the parapet, and one died of wounds. That isn't very heavy loss.

Oh, tell Dad I should worry about what it cost to send that money by cable. The whole crew says it was well spent. We were broke and we ate and drank it all.

Your letters aren't frequent enough—I want one *every* mail.

OCTOBER 23RD, 1915.

Roy was hit by a bullet this morning in the ribs. It was almost spent, however, after coming through the sandbags and didn't hurt him. He only said, "What the H— is that?" and I'm afraid he's learning to swear, too. He has a souvenir now anyway, though souvenirs aren't much use to us as we can't mail them out and it's too much trouble to carry them around.

The French had some heavy fighting around here last year and there are many unburied skeletons lying about. I found one in a ruined barn three days ago. As you say, I have been "under fire"—in fact I have been so continually for over four weeks, but it doesn't make much difference as all the bullets go high and there are not so very many shells. I came to France to *fight*, but I have remained to *dig*, and we are working like slaves to improve these trenches, but work

is good for us I suppose. I am getting fat so can't talk of "hardships" yet.

Do you know that one of the most difficult things to do is *not* to take fool chances, as the impulse to cross the open rather than walk a mile through a muddy communication trench is almost irresistible.

We would like to have a try at the "Big Advance" but the losses by reason of the weather would be greater than by reason of the fighting, so I guess until next spring we will just keep each other amused.

NOVEMBER 1ST, 1915.

THIS letter is written from a Belgian farm where Wes., "Old Soldier," and I have taken possession. We have actually had a *rest*. We came out Wednesday and since then have loafed at our own sweet will, except for a twenty-four-hour guard each in the first line.

How would you fancy being under continuous shell fire? Our artillery is behind this farm and yet the farmer and his wife go on with the same old work and life. Shells have lit all around and the guns are never quiet, but the shells don't seem to worry the Belgian farmers any more than they do us, which isn't a great deal. It is marvellous how they *miss* hitting someone, but they do miss.

I have spent two afternoons with a Belgian artilleryman, an electrical engineer from the University of Pennsylvania. His people live in Virginia and he is, of course, an American, but he came over here and volunteered.

I thought the Canadian papers knew about where we are until I saw some of them since we have got across and, generally speaking, they are away out.

I understand we get bars on our medals for four engagements, although we were not really in them except as reserves.

NOVEMBER 4TH, 1915.

WE are "in" again and after trying everybody else in the section, Wes. and I have been elected cooks, or rather elected ourselves very unwillingly, there being no other volunteers. As cooks, we are relieved of some other duties, and there being two of us it is not such a bore. We have a good big dugout to cook in, with two fireplaces, and high enough to stand up in and, although not shell proof, it is *rain* proof, and "we should worry" about the shells.

The rain now has brought it here to a contest of endurance, the trenches are blocked with mud and it's difficult to get around, so there's not much fighting, but it's not so bad right around "home."

I started this letter while waiting for the potatoes to boil. Now dinner is over and the gang is having a songfest with Goldie's mouthorgan as accompaniment. Someone is now singing "Navaho." Do you remember when I danced to that at the Soo? There's no hurry about supper so I'll finish my letter. For once in their lives the gang had too much to eat. Lord! what appetites we have. It keeps the cooks scurrying for rations and if it wasn't that Dan and I buy most of the bread, that Wes. steals most of the potatoes, and that there is a turnip field behind us, it would be impossible to fill up this bunch. I wish some kind Providence would produce a bag of oatmeal and a sack of rice, but, of course, you can't send those things to us.

It is astonishing how well we get along and how jolly the bunch keeps in spite of rain and mud and wet clothes. If other fellows are going out with rheumatism, etc., I think it is because they lack the initiative and *esprit de corps* of our crews who are just like families and make themselves at home and as comfortable as possible under circumstances.

NOVEMBER 7TH, OR THEREABOUT.

I AM sitting beside a crossroad waiting for Dan and Art. to come out with the gun. We came out early this morning as the mist was heavy and we could come across right back of the line.

Stew. and I made two trips yesterday. Would you imagine it is almost safe to climb out of a fire trench and walk around behind it within two hundred yards of Heinie? Everybody's doing it since the mud got so bad and up till now only one man has been hit. Yesterday morning Stew. and I had a grand trip in. The mist had thinned and we could see three-quarters of a mile or so. We had to, or I should say we *did*, because it was shorter, cross a field about 800 yards from the enemy and the bullets were "sputting" in the grass as we went and so I suppose they were shooting at us, but, the light was poor. We were following a creek up to the second line when Fritz started sending over "whizzbangs." I'd be willing to swear one shell didn't miss me by more than six feet and we were getting real scared before we got to cover.

NEXT DAY.

HERE we are in the cellar of an old brewery. It is on a corner called, like most crossroads in Belgium,

"Suicide Corner," for the reason that once in a while a stray bullet crosses, which is also not unusual.

But we are *really* comfortable in *beds* like we used to make on the G. T. P., and I'm sorry we'll only be here till to-morrow. I made two trips from the firing line to-day and was on the move from five this morning until two and after so long in the trenches I was soft and my feet are knocked up. For the first time in six days, I have dry socks and my putties off. And, gee! it feels great. I only wish I didn't have to go out to billets to-morrow to those silly dress parades and route marches. It is so long since I've had a bath and clean underwear it would shock you to tell, and I'll be glad to get clean again.

This letter is just full of grousings, but, really, I'm having a good time and enjoying myself wandering round the open for there's a fascination in being in danger that makes it really fine, and the thrill and nervous tension are like what I used to have in shooting rapids, but more so.

Dan. says they fired twelve shots at us this morning coming out but I only heard two, at least only two came anywhere close, and I thought they were strays. I knew they were shooting at us yesterday but they were all wide misses. My worst scare was when Stew. and I were walking along discussing how hard it was to hit us at eight hundred yards when "bang" went one of *our* guns behind us. We jumped ten feet and when we quit stuttering we sure cussed that gun.

D. and I have it all worked out how easily we could take the trench opposite in this misty weather and Stew. and I have a dandy plan to end the war, but—we're not "running the show."

I agree with you that it would be fine if our rations were being handled by women, but they aren't so bad as it is, and it's quite a proposition to feed so many men.

NOVEMBER 11TH, 1915.

THIS is the first letter I've written on a table since we landed here. It is in the Y.M.C.A. hut at our rest camp at —. I'd like to tell you *where*, but I mustn't.

We came out of the line on Sunday starting early to take advantage of the mist which, however, was a little too thin, and some chump in our line insisted on firing at nothing, as he certainly could not see across to the German line, with the result of drawing their fire all the time we were moving, though we got out all right.

The Germans shelled the building that I told you we were in, the other morning and hit it five times, or at least five shells burst in or near it, but nothing came through downstairs so no harm was done.

Personally, I do *not* like shells. Bullets, like mosquitoes, are interesting, but shells are different. For one thing you can hear them coming and you wonder *where* they're going to light, and *when* they do light they make an awful muss. I was glad, therefore, to get away from that place.

Whom do you think has just walked in on me? Jno. Mac— he's been doing police and frontier guard duty and hasn't been in the front line yet. Charlie has been in the line—in some trenches we first went into. I *hope* he enjoyed the mud.

We have quite a Canadian Army here now and a Canadian "front." We had quite a frost the other day so we can't lie round much outside, but it isn't half bad.

NOVEMBER 17TH, 1915.

WE have caught it this week for fair. We have been building a new trench—work is only possible at night. The wet clay is awful to handle and progress is fearfully slow.

Sunday we relieved at noon, and the communication trench being impassable, we had to come in over the open. Personally, I ran across from the second to the first line and no one shot at me but the three men we relieved tried it and one got hit in the foot.

Poor little Tim, our "rollicking, frolicking, lad from Lancashire," the life of our section on our marches and in camp, always singing and happy, was shot through the arm and spine the other day and died in about an hour. They told him it was only his arm had been hit and that he had hurt his back falling, but he knew he was dying. He was game and bore his pain without a murmur and joked with the stretcher bearers as they took him out. They told me he sang on the way out:

"When this bloomin' war is over
Oh, how happy I will be.
When I get my civie clothes on
No more soldiering for me."

He and Frank, whom you know, had supper with us the night before at "Rachel's," a farmhouse near our billets. On Sunday, having been told that Tim had a broken arm only, Stew. and I went down to the hospital to see him and were shown his *body*. He was an especial friend of ours, too.

I have been transferred to another gun so there would be three "old" men on it. Frank and Charlie M., the other two on the gun, are old friends of

course, but it *hurt* to leave Stew. He and I have been like brothers for so long and have never been apart when we were in danger. He is a *perfect* friend, a Canadian, and a "School" man with lots of nerve and grit. Mother, I was too hurt to talk when the order came that separated us.

This morning, about nine, we were all standing around outside—the emplacement is an island in a sea of mud, inaccessible by day except with hip boots on—when we heard someone cry "Stretcher bearers, help," behind the screen which has been put up to hide us from the Germans while working on our new trench. B., the only fellow in hip boots, ran down. They got the chap all right. He has only his "ticket," a shattered wrist and a flesh wound in the thigh; but one of the fellows who came to help him was shot in the leg. That makes an even two dozen casualties around that screen in eight days.

Wes. got *some* parcel from home the other day, by express—roast duck, in a sealer; crab apple jelly; peanut butter; cake; corn flakes—oh, a whole grocery store—and we all made pigs of ourselves.

I got a *bath* last week and clean again, thank heaven. It isn't so much the physical discomfort of the dirt as the mental disgust that we feel.

This is a pretty long letter, so out of pity for the censor I'll quit.

THE WESTERN REDOUBT—IN BELGIUM, NOVEMBER 20TH, 1915.

I GUESS this address will hardly convey much information to you or to the enemy if he saw it. It isn't on the map by that name.

I don't know whether I've written you since Sunday or not. Days fly and I'm always writing to someone, so I kind of lose track. There is so much happening and we live at such a pitch that time goes by like magic. When we are on duty, day and night alike, one day merges into the next and dates are meaningless.

I'm sure I told you about Tim's death. His real name was Evelyn, but "Tim" he was to all the bunch. I told you also that I had been transferred and didn't like to leave my old friends. In this job, you know, every man is trained to his special work and each depends on the other to do his part, just like a machine. For instance, if the ammunition supply fails in action, the gun stops, and it's fine to feel that your belt loader knows his job and that the supply *won't* fail. Without meaning any reflection on any of the rest, I think there is no belt loader in the section equal to Wes.

The gang was relieved the night before last. Everyone except Frank and me went out in the morning. Just after dark our relief came and we started. We had to come to this redoubt via no — emplacement and the creek bed. I knew the way, at least till we got back to the farm where we found the dead Frenchman, and I knew where we wanted to go from there, but not the *path*. The worst, however, was getting to the farm. It was dark and muddy and slippery and where we crossed fields there was a two years' growth of grass. There were two barbed wire entanglements, in which I knew the holes, and several trenches to cross, also the creek which is about eight feet wide and swift and deep, with just two poles to walk on as a bridge. That is good enough bridge for me but Frank slipped in and got soaked. Then, worst of all, one of our "strafing" guns was firing

and we were going towards it not knowing how high they were ranged, and between our gun and the German's reply there was a fiendish uproar. Going from the first line to the creek we had to drop every time a flare went up and they were quite frequent. It's no joke dropping when you have a pack, a rain coat, a bag of junk, and the spare parts of a gun. Believe me, a machine gunner needs a lot of pegs to hang things on. There were telephone wires along in the grass everywhere and as I was leading I found them all by the simple method of tripping over them. Gee, it was a *lovely* walk, perhaps a mile in all, but it seemed like a hundred.

However, we got to the redoubt and after we got to bed and nicely asleep, a man alongside me took a fit, stopped breathing and nearly scared us all to death. We used artificial respiration and in about fifteen minutes he came round and we went to sleep again, and he repeated the performance about five in the morning. By the way, I don't know if a fellow *would die* in an epileptic fit, but we took no chances.

Now, mother, you speak of the " terrible danger and awful horrors." Leave that sort of talk to the newspaper correspondents. The danger is not terrible nor have I in my personal experience of over two months in the trenches seen any " horrors " and I really like it. All the details of my experiences I write you are just so you can see the fun in them. There is nothing to marvel at that the soldiers are the most cheerful men in the world to-day. We have no worries of a financial sort; we have no misgivings as to the outcome of the war; you can't be among British troops and doubt that we are going to win; we are taken splendid care of—why, if a man has a *cold*, he can report sick

and go to hospital, though few fellows *do*, of course, as it's slow at the hospital. If we get scratched with a bullet or shell splinter—it's back to England, unless we insist that we're all right and would rather stick it. We are well fed, warmly clothed, over supplied, generally speaking, with things and the life is fascinating. Now, were we ever warm watching a football game or hockey match? And yet we liked it. Did we never go fishing or sailing in the rain? This beats sailing or fishing.

I've danced all night and then walked home from Eglinton to get a chance to have a smoke, and never worried about being tired, and six hours sleep are all a fellow wants or needs when rations are plentiful.

You need not worry about our suffering or being terrified, and don't go too much on the stories the papers print.

How would you like to see an aeroplane fall? One fell yesterday right close to me—just skimming over our heads coming down, and the plane is perfect. The pilot is a prisoner, and now we will have a chance to learn to use a German machine gun which may come in handy when we capture some more.

The prettiest sunrise I ever saw was the day before yesterday as the day was coming over the ridge behind the German line. It was an exquisite sight and it helped us in our moving out as the Germans could not see us.

It is but the shattered houses and the shell torn trees that show this is a battlefield. Only a hundred yards apart, our trenches are here, yet you could not see the German trench unless you knew just what to look for—a straight dark ridge in the fields. On

bright sunny days, when only the distant thunder of the guns disturbs the stillness, it is very hard to remember that the penalty for sticking your head over the parapet may be sudden death. But that is only a chance as there isn't a man in the trench who hasn't had his head over the parapet several times in a day. The chance is whether their sentries will see us. They have to expose themselves to take aim so that most of the shots are snapshots and go wide. The danger is there, of course, but we all live in hope and play our luck against theirs.

Accept my belated congratulations to you and Dad on the silver anniversary of your wedding.

Roy, Stew. and I are safe and well.

NOVEMBER 27TH, 1915.

OUT again and back in rest camp. These twelve days certainly did not seem long and yet, Lord, the battalion has suffered since we went up from here last. We are getting "seasoned" all right for we have now had more killed than any battalion in the brigade.

It is strange how quickly we get accustomed to seeing death and hearing of the death of men we know. We have enough to keep us busy without worrying about the Germans.

The last four days we had fatigue after fatigue. We are building new emplacements and it means lots of work.

Our artillery got their chance the night before last. A flare went up and a mass of Germans was seen moving down a hillside towards their line. Evidently their communication trenches are as bad as ours used to be. The artillery was on them in a second; shrapnel

just streamed over them; and they must have suffered very heavily. For our part, we are now in fair shape. The new line trench is finished and the communication trench is in good condition so that it is not necessary any longer to cross the open, though now that the men have learned how much shorter it is, the most of them still do it.

We've had very little rain lately and the mud is frozen hard except in the bottom of the trench so it is not so difficult to keep dry as to keep warm. I sincerely hope, though, it stays cold as I am a Canuck, not a fish.

I got the parcel of underwear the other night and had a bath this morning, so I'll put the new stuff on to-night. The clothes they give us at the laundry *may* have been washed, but they don't *look* it.

My fingers are freezing so I can't write any more.

DECEMBER 4TH, 1915.

I BET you're having a time getting that Christmas parcel packed. Half the fun of Christmas is the buying of things. Say, Mother, what the deuce will I do if I get three or four parcels at once and they *each* have two pairs of socks? I'll need a dray. But your socks are dandy and I have a reserve of two pairs I haven't worn yet.

There is much talk of the war being over by Christmas. All rot, of course, and I don't know as I would be so awfully glad if it were. I *like* being a soldier and I've never been so spoiled and looked after; never knew I had so many friends. Seriously, it's a great experience, and we would be disappointed if we did not get into a fight over the bags.

We were very heavily shelled this afternoon, and it was quite a sight also to see our shells throwing up the dirt in Fritz's line. We had a dugout blown in down on the "Mobile Reserve"—three men buried and three men hurt in — platoon, the unlucky bunch of — company. They have had three killed and five or six wounded.

Last night the mail carrier said there was a big Canadian mail in and all day we've been building our hopes on it, and to-night he says he hasn't had time to sort it. He ought to be shot.

I gather from a letter from C. that H. is sending me an air pillow. Say, listen to what I have to haul around now—a sweater, spare tunic, overcoat, sheepskin, blanket, rubber sheet, raincoat, and my small things. What the dickens can I do with a *pillow* in a dugout? And I'll have to write and *thank* H. for the pillow—see the joke?

A happy Christmas and a glorious New Year—peace year—to you and Dad and all.

MUD ISLAND, FLANDERS, DECEMBER 11TH, 1915.

*My Dear Cousin:*

LAST night I went on guard in the pouring rain at eight o'clock. Our gun is on an "island" in the old trench. We had to abandon this line when the rains came, as the trenches filled with water and the parapets filled in, so for almost two weeks there was a gap in our front of several hundred yards held by bluff—because the Germans didn't know the trench was empty—and by two machine guns—mine, about fifty yards up on the left, and another on the right of the break, about three hundred yards.

Details are like this—at six a.m. "stand to," otherwise, get up and outside, clean rifles and generally kill time for an hour during which it is raining, of course, and your cape is wet *inside* because you left it inside out on the last guard. At seven, "stand down," meaning go back to bed or wait for breakfast, which *should* be ready, but the wood is wet and won't burn and the poor guy doing cook duty (meaning *me* to-day) is crazy trying to get the water to boil over a smoky heap of sodden chips. However, eventually, we get breakfast. By this time it has cleared up, but you are wet through anyway and, as it's colder in the dugout than outside, you stay outside.

Dinner is at twelve, or later, according to how the fire burns or does not burn. I try to make a stew over a coke brazier—the fire is good at ten o'clock but the stew hasn't boiled by twelve, so I dump the coke and light a fire and we have dinner at one o'clock.

Dinner over, we have more killing of time or "fatigues," usually on a new emplacement and at 4.30 stand to again till 5.30, and afterwards pretend we are comfortable in a dugout.

Guards—mine were, last night, 8 to 10, and this morning, 4 to 6; and to-night will be 10 to 12; and from 6 to 8 in the morning.

This is a fair description of the daily routine.

During guards we look over the parapet and shoot at rifle flashes. We are "in" four days, or six, as it happens, and "out" the same; and, periodically, we go back to rest in "Brigade Reserve." "Rest" is a humorous term, meaning route marches, physical drill, lectures, etc.

Yesterday we were in camp and Fritz shelled us, dropped twenty-two six-inch high explosives right

among our huts destroying four and wounding two men—one fatally. The shelling lasted half an hour and I was glad to come in to the front line last night for there we can at any rate hit back.

That is, in part, life at the front, true in every detail. What makes it bearable is the hope that perhaps in the spring we'll get some *fighting*. However, don't start now to pity "the poor boys" and imagine "how they must be suffering" for the astonishing part is, we're not suffering at all. Personally, I'm getting fat and one can't be suffering much and developing a tendency towards corpulency at the same time, can he? Sad to say, therefore, that, in honesty, I must reject pity, my dear Cousin, and alas for human vagaries, we like the life; and the cheerfullest, happiest, jolliest bunch in the Empire is *not* the college boys with their worries, but the fellows over here. It is inexplicable but true.

I have neglected to tell you about the guns, though you can never forget them here, day or night—either right over your head or miles away—always you can hear the crash and always the earth is shaking, and it's quite interesting to watch shells break.

"Whizzbangs," otherwise eighteen pounders—cast iron, high explosives—are about the only kind thrown at the front line and they always go over and have no "come back" like the six inch stuff that goes in a circle with fragments scattering over a large radius. To watch a battle at night is better than being on the Grand Stand at the Exhibition.

I saw one on the hills to our left and the fireworks were grand. It was a squabble over a German flying machine that fell between the lines. Fritz tried to

get it, but failed. Our fellows did likewise, and in the morning the machine was completely wrecked and the remains are still there.

*Dear Mother:*

I GOT the flashlight from Dad and I can scarcely tell you how useful it is, though, of course, in the trenches they are forbidden. The idea is, I think, to lead the enemy to believe we have gone home, for we must not smoke (at night), whistle, sing, talk loudly, or show a gleam of light. Fritz has a mean habit of sending us little souvenir "sausages" packed with lyddite when he learns where is a dugout or cook-house or where a number of men are gathered.

Among other things this mail, I got a Christmas pudding from Grace. The first mouthful I took contained a threepenny bit which I nearly swallowed. After that I carefully prospected the rest, but it was merely a "stray," not a "lode."

Rain every night for a week. Oh, this is a fine country? I think the Germans should be punished for starting this war by being compelled, after it is over, to *stay* in Belgium for the rest of their lives. But, we are used to mud now, and, as C. says, "It's healthy."

Out of the twenty-two shells Fritz fired at us last night, four did not explode. Any guy that goes ploughing indiscriminately here, after the war, should carry heavy life insurance.

Now, it's pouring rain *again;* darn the weather.

DECEMBER 14TH, 1915.

THIS is written out of doors with my greatcoat on. It's below freezing and it's hard writing with cold

fingers, but having just finished Christmas dinner No. 2, I must let you know that it arrived O.K.

It was on the things in C.'s parcel that came the day before yesterday I did my overeating. I gave a lot of the things away but my weakness is for salted almonds and I finished all those myself and as, afterwards, I had no appetite for tea, I must *surely* have been sick. We had a swell dinner from the parcels and it would have been a perfectly enjoyable meal if it had not been for the darned artillery which had to start blazing away and you can't absolutely enjoy a good dinner when you're expecting sudden death every minute.

However, we really did enjoy the grub and are sorry it isn't always Christmas time. And you can tell Mrs. T. that her cake was highly approved by experts, and we're waiting for the *other* half of it.

Our new emplacement is nearly ready and I hope we'll be using it by Christmas day.

I am putting no faith in the rumours about going back for a rest, for why should we after only three months in the line, when there are battalions that haven't been out of the trenches for more than a year?

Last night I was using the gun by "my ownself," as it was so cold I had to warm up some way and there's a listening post of theirs nearer to our parapets than their own. I put a belt into the place but my shooting must have been bad or their cover good as they kept on sending up flares and several of them nearly dropped on the gun itself.

In the three months I've been in the trenches do you know I've never seen a German over my sights in daylight, so you see how well men are hidden in

trench warfare. If you could see me now you would not worry about "discomforts" any more, and as for the Fritzies, they are rotten bad shots, and we'll hope that if a stray one finds my address it will only mean a "Blighty," which is considered good luck you know, though, personally, I want to be in the "Big Drive" next summer, and if I'm in at the beginning of the end even—well, "I should worry."

DECEMBER 28TH, 1915.

WE came out of the front line this afternoon, or at least the battalion did, for I was sent down Christmas eve and so after all did not spend Christmas day in the trench, though I was in with rations in the evening. We called a truce on Christmas, or at least we were given orders not to fire from midnight of December 23rd to midnight of December 25th, and the Germans responded by murdering in cold blood two of our stretcher bearers.

It was this way—on the afternoon of the 24th a six-inch high explosive shell lit in the cookhouse of No. — gun, sending the cook over the parapet and wounding three men, none of whom you know as they were not of the old bunch. One of the men was terribly hurt and had to be got out and, as the communication trench was impassable, Lieutenant F. called for volunteers to carry him down the road we call "Suicide Road," which we use a good deal at night to get in and out, and on which we have had about forty casualties.

The lieutenant thought the Germans wouldn't fire on the red cross and four men hoisted the stretcher on their shoulders so that the enemy could see that

they were carrying a wounded man, and started down the road, the lieutenant going with them. They got about half way to the turn where the Germans deliberately shot two of them, one through the stomach and the other through the lung, and wounded the lieutenant in the arm. Two of the stretcher bearers crawled back and another lieutenant and one man crawled to the four men out there, made two trips with blankets as they did not dare to try to bring them in. A party of bombers later crawled up the road and dragged the stretcher around the curve into our second line.

And we were under orders not to fire on the Germans even if they exposed themselves—"Peace on earth, goodwill towards men."

JANUARY 5TH, 1916.

WE are having perfect weather. It is just like April—showery and mild. We are agreeably surprised after looking forward to a really hard time this winter.

We were just settled down into bed last night when an order came to report at once in the front line, every man, and we really thought that this, the third stand to in a week, meant a scrap, so up we went in the pouring rain and found we weren't wanted at all, but it busted up our night's rest. I was better off than the rest of the bunch because I crawled into a dugout and had a bit of sleep, not much of a one truly, with neither coat nor blanket and soaking wet, but I'd been working like a nigger that night and was pretty well done up.

I crawled out about seven, and, Gee! I was cold, but a cup of hot tea fixed me up all right. The next

time anybody puts a thing like that over on us he'd better have his life insured.

I've got a bigger pair of boots now and no longer suffering with my feet, and this fatigue stunt means a permanent home for three weeks out of four which is a vast improvement.

As you will say, a real bath, a real bed, and a real rest, would seem mighty close to being heaven. But, cheer up, I have less worries, I imagine, than lots of fellows at home, and there's a good time coming after the war.

JANUARY 16TH, 1916.

I HAD a new job this afternoon—pushing a crosscut saw—I hadn't seen one since I left the Fraser River but I hadn't forgotten how to make it go.

The weather continues glorious—cool, sunny days and moonlit nights, and it doesn't rain more than once a week. As a winter home, Belgium has got it over Canada for climate, but it isn't very nice living underground with your front door in a sewer.

The trenches are now in good shape and the troubles of the past forgotten. Even the communication trenches are better walking than across the fields.

Too bad I never told you my feet were getting larger and I don't know whether I'll be able to wear those boots you sent. Stew. is sitting over there with such a sympathetic grin for they just fit *him* perfectly.

While we were "out" this week, we had a two days bombing course, which was interesting and a change from this eternal "mounting gun." It was amusing to see the different fellows handling the lit bombs. Some just shut their eyes and chucked them wildly, while Wes., on the contrary, took so long to make sure his

fuse was going that, when he let it go, it exploded right over the target—a perfect throw—a lucky "fluke." The idea was to give us confidence in the bombs as, in the advances and defense, bombers and machine gunners work together.

I could give you a dissertation on bombs which probably would not be very interesting, but the ones we use are light, small, easy to throw, very effective, and almost fool proof, and are superior to those of the Germans both from points of safety and effectiveness.

Last week I saw a trench mortar in action against Fritz. The shells are worse than artillery shells, but you can see them coming. Fritz returned the compliment by shelling our bay, and out of ten shells, two lit in his own lines, four in between the lines, one in front of our parapet, and three behind our trench. Results—nil. The German artillery fire is deadly if you're *not* the target. If you *are*, you are reasonably safe.

JANUARY 22ND, 1916.

My last letter was held up by Censor—too much in it—so you'll understand why you have not heard from me, but as I mailed a letter to C. at the same time you will not be worried.

We were close enough to the recent fighting to see the shells bursting over the lost trench which exists no longer, being absolutely blown out, and great was the news that came over the (barbed) wire, but all we *really* know is what the papers say. We thought we might get into a scrap ourselves but it didn't materialize. Our trenches are pretty strong—the best

on the front now, and perhaps that is why Fritz has left us alone.

It snowed to-day—the first I've seen this winter—and the trenches look like snow forts with their caps of snow. During the last two nights it got down to nearly zero which reminds me to tell you that those malted milk tablets are very nice things when on guard. Your last parcel had nuts, raisins, cookies and candy in it. That's the *real* sort of parcel. That new cap came and is fine, but send no more mufflers. I got one from D. too, and I gave them both to a Belgian woman who made a shawl out of them.

Will write you a "more" letter soon.

JANUARY 23RD, 1916.

I WANT to tell you again that if it is given to me to meet a soldier's death in this war, I am content. These lines have always appealed to me:

"How can man die better than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods."

The papers say so much about the "waste" of useful lives caused by the war. Now, I am just primitive enough to believe that the two greatest virtues are—courage and generosity. And I can think of nothing better a man could do with his life than to lay it down, if necessary, in defence of his country.

There is not in me a spark of hatred for Germans as individuals, not even for the Kaiser, but it is that we either win this war or cease as an empire to exist, and there is nothing attractive enough to me in life to make it bearable as one of a beaten people. For ten centuries England has been the ruler of the world and your ancestors, my ancestors, without number,

have gladly died that she might continue to be so, and I in my time, thank God and you, my Mother, am able to do the same that she may be so forever. I am sure you feel just the same as I do and that I could be doing nothing better than taking my small part.

The sympathy of the Americans is with us, not really because we are right—God alone can decide that—but because they also are Anglo-Saxons—Britons under another name—and none hold more strongly than they the belief and pride in the Anglo-Saxon race.

To change the subject and return to your letter, it isn't really hard to think in the "noise of battle"—at least during a bombardment. You can't help thinking. It would be easier if you could. The last letter I wrote was under a bombardment. One gets tired of waiting and listening to the shells, and any kind of employment is a relief.

JANUARY 24TH, 1916.

WE have been here now for three months facing the ridge whose foot is the battle line. It is the last of the hilly country and if we could cross it the Germans would be forced to retire miles back across the flats to find a place where our artillery couldn't overpower them, but it would probably cost a great many men to take that ridge, though it is not more than three miles from where I'm writing to its summit. It doesn't seem much of an obstacle, just a long gentle swell, say a hundred feet high, with patches of woods here and there on its slopes, and yet if we could only climb that summit the battle of Flanders would be over.

This part of Belgium is very much like the southern and eastern counties of Ontario, a rolling country, every inch cultivated except the "parks" here and there, and densely populated. Back in our billets we can see for miles, for, back of us, the country is flat and seemingly it is just one vast city, the buildings are so numerous. Near here are two chateaux—ruins, of course—but splendid ruins. Fritz has wasted hundreds of shells battering them but they still stand, with their entire front walls and floors gone. They must have been magnificent buildings. These ruins supply us with wood for fire, lumber and beams for dugouts, and bricks for paving, for, just imagine—we pave the paths we use, for trench warfare surely is a permanent affair.

We have entirely rebuilt this part of the line since we took it over and made of it *some* job. We moved enough dirt to have made a hundred miles of railroad, and after we've got it all in good shape, chances are that we'll be moved, though I wouldn't mind that very much for I know the country around here, that is, of course, within a few miles, as I do around Orillia.

Shrapnel is not as "modern" as high explosives and machine guns, but it is the most terrorizing of the lot. Machine gun bullets come horizontally and if you flop you're pretty safe, but shrapnel comes from the skies down, and the feeling of pure terror inspired by hearing the "sput, sput" of shrapnel around your feet beats anything I've experienced yet. The Germans do not use it *very* much, thank heaven, for I don't like shrapnel. "Whizzbangs" are futile but they come so quickly that you jump before you have time to think "Shaw, it's only another whizz-bang." Of course, if they hit the parapet they'd

probably bury us in dirt and might hurt us, but we've got used to them and they rarely do get anybody, though they are as noisy as an express train going over a steel bridge. High explosives, by which I mean 4.9 and six-inch percussion shells, invariably attract attention and interest, and if within two hundred yards the interest is intense. But you can hear them, like the rumbling of a street car, for a mile or more before the "bang" tells you where they have lit, and I never, *intentionally* go near where they are falling, you can bet. But the H.E. isn't really much of a man killer, for, if you're flat on mother earth, and the shell doesn't happen to flop right on you, the chances are many to one against being hurt.

The things that annoy us most, really, are our own guns. We are just in front of the field artillery and the little brutes keep barking all day, and a gun makes an infernal racket when you're in front of it.

This dissertation on artillery is inspired by the fact that Stew. and I to-day got in front of two six-inch shrapnels—*well* in front, but still near enough to hear the bullets hitting around us—and we got through a wire entanglement and back here in record sprinting time, for, as I have said, I don't *like* shrapnel.

It is just lovely here these days, apart from the artillery, for the weather is nearly perfect—cool and clear—just like April should be, but usually isn't, at home. Eight weeks more till we should have spring and I wonder what next summer holds in store.

It's bedtime and that battery nearest us has started up again, hang it. I *hope* that they're really hurting Fritz; they *might* by chance, but seeing what little harm the German artillery does in our lines, I am somewhat skeptical.

JANUARY 31ST, 1916.

THE Kaiser's birthday has passed and without excitement except for some rather heavy shelling. Fritz has evidently got a supply of shells and for four days has been making it noisy up and down the line with, so far, no casualties. It is wonderful how many shells can explode around places where there are so many men and not hurt any. The other day they shelled one of our artillery brigades but none of the emplacements were actually hit. Wes., Stew., the "Old Soldier," and I went down after they got through to see if they had done any damage and I never had seen such shell holes. They must have been twenty-five feet across and ten feet deep.

We've had several discussions about what to do with that flag you sent me. One suggestion is to put it on the parapet and get some holes through it and keep it for a souvenir. Another one is to put it in our wire to coax Fritz into an attempt to pinch it, with disastrous results to Fritz. And another is to go over and put it in *his* wire. But, at present, I have it hanging over my bed where it makes a little touch of colour and I think I'll leave it there.

I wrote G. the last time I was in billets, after we had been reading Sir Ian Hamilton's report and about the abandonment of the Gallipoli, so you may imagine it was *some* letter. He is really an American but he says he will be with us before very long.

I suppose it is getting unpleasant in Canada for young fellows wearing civies.

By the way, I've succeeded in breaking in the shoe-packs, so Stew. don't get them.

When you read some of the stories that are appearing in the papers about the hardships "our heroes in the trenches" are undergoing you can take 'em *cum grano salis*. I'm not altering the truth at all, Mumsie, when I tell you I am quite well, quite happy, and not suffering any hardships of any kind. One reason for our comfort is that we are having splendid weather and our lines are in splendid shape.

We have a big sandbag hut about eighteen by twenty-five feet and five feet high in the centre. There are five "stalls" on each side, two of us in a stall, and I have a bed seven by five along with Wes., so you see we have a pretty comfortable home. For breakfast to-day, I had bacon, bread, jam, and coffee; had lunch in the line; and for dinner to-night had steak, spuds, turnips, rice pudding, punk, jam, and cocoa. Don't you think that is pretty fair rations? And, though some of the stuff is extras from the parcels, it is a fair specimen of a day's grub.

It is not my body, but my temper and patience that are taxed at times and that isn't the army's fault. Our battalion did six days in the trenches last trip without a casualty and two days this trip, so far. Here's hoping the luck will last. Many of our casualties have been the result of not obeying orders. We are all prone to take chances; Fritz is a pretty sleepy sentry; and, usually, a pretty rotten shot; but not always, and that's where the risk comes in. We can take chances, but once in a while somebody gets hit. But we would not be much use as soldiers, you know, if we never took risks, and it's all in the game. Fritz, however, doesn't take as many chances as we do, and, personally, I, too, am beginning to get more sense.

By the way, Billy H. wants some tobacco—which you might keep in mind. You are keeping Stew., Wes., and me supplied with it now. My issues go to the Imperials. They don't get too much.

I'm not thinking of coming home till after we've been to Berlin. It seems quite a way off at present, but then, you never can tell.

FEBRUARY 23RD, 1916.

YOUR letter gave me a good laugh to-day. I can sympathize with you when you only get short notes from me, and you sure did call my attention to my delinquency. But how the dickens *can* I write you long letters when I could put every bit of news I have, or am allowed, to tell in a few lines. While you are complaining about my letters being too *short*, the censor is kicking about them being too long and, in fact, the last one did not get through at all. While it is unsatisfactory to you to get short letters at times, it is a hang sight more unsatisfactory to endure the monotony that newsless letters indicate. Try and imagine the circumstances under which my letters are written and I'll bet you won't wonder at their being short sometimes.

G. writes me that he has enlisted. You should have seen his letter. He is so *proud* of having taken the right step. He'll get over that—not of being proud, but of *showing* it. Poor kid, I hope you will praise him a bit for he surely has had a hard struggle.

I like to get your long newsy letters for you tell me just the things I want to know—the home news. Thanks to them I know more about Canadian affairs than I do about the war and they are more interesting

too as there will be no important war news till we advance.

It seems strange to us, the importance the Canadian papers seem to attach to what the Russians are doing, to what is going on in the Balkans, in Mesopotamia, etc. I wonder how long it will take for the fact to soak in that England is going to win this war in Flanders, no matter what H. G. Wells has to say.

Do you know we have been in the line for five months and I have not yet *seen* a German, but when events start to come off I'll see plenty of them. In the meantime why should I want to be killing perfect strangers anyway?

There, I positively have to go to dinner under penalty of being hung, drawn, and quartered, so you see now how your letters get cut off short in their infancy.

MARCH 2ND, 1916.

I'LL bet you folks have been reading the papers this last week with the Big German drive going on in the South. Wasn't it fine the way the French hung on? Of the fighting on the British front, the reports we hear are that every objective was successfully occupied and held. We, ourselves, have not been in action, but our artillery has been pounding Fritz for several days, and I know what a concentrated bombardment means now. It makes an awful row.

The spring campaign has started splendidly for us, hasn't it? It almost seems as if we might finish the war this summer.

I am glad if Uncle Fred used extracts from my letters for recruiting purposes as that's making them useful. I wouldn't object to some of the letters I wrote to — being published as I think they helped

him make up his mind, and while applicable to him no longer, might help some other fellow to decide as he did.

We were back in brigade reserve only three days this time—thank goodness. I am on a working party again, I'm glad to say, for it is awfully tedious doing nothing all day in the trenches and work makes the time fly.

It's a year ago to-day since I enlisted—seems a long time, doesn't it?

MARCH 3RD, 1916.

I HELD yesterday's letter over to answer one I got from you last night on that sporty khaki paper.

Do you know that the fellows are saying that the Germans are afraid to attack the Canadians, and that our commanders are not letting us attack Fritz for fear they couldn't stop us if we got started, but you don't *have* to believe this you know.

Each of the caps you sent is keeping a soldier's head warm and you can bet your flag was welcome. It is torn now but still holds a place of honour.

Didn't you get my letter acknowledging the pictures? They were very good of you and Dad and my baby niece too, and are travelling around with me in my pocket.

I got the cake from Aunt Rose and promptly, too, was it devoured.

Rain no longer bothers us. Wet clothes do not matter while we live outdoors and the weather has got mild again.

The papers in Canada will feature any news of our being in action and I can't mention what other troops are doing, not even the French, and we know so little, anyway, of what is going on, though now the

official reports of Britain, France, and Russia, are posted in the trenches.

MARCH 3RD, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

I WAS very glad to get your letter, which was like a breath of fresh air in a high school class room. I get too absorbed in the war and in myself and isolation begets egotism.

Thank you for the reference to "vital things." Is shovelling Belgian mud one of the vital things I wonder, or even killing the breadwinner of some German family whose only sins are ignorance and trust in unworthy leaders? But the thing that threatens England must be destroyed, therefore, Germans must be killed.

I plead "not guilty" and never need Toronto support *my* "wives and families." But, truly, we are very proud of you over there and the way you have kept faith, and eagerly wait the opportunity to make you proud of *us*.

"Keep the Home Fires Burning" was our marching song in England. Poor little Tim, our first man killed, introduced it to us, and you'll understand why we don't sing it often now. Here's the latest trench song:

"We are the boys from the mountains and the plains,
We are Canucks, you see.
We come from the East and we come from the West
To fight for the Land of the Free.
And now that we're here like the rest of Britain's sons
We don't care a — for the Kaiser and his Huns.
C-A-N-A-D-I-A-N-S.
We are—we are—we are Canadians."

"Oh, gol blimey, wot do you think of that?" It's got a great swing. There are others that are not quite so fit for publication.

Really, there is more laughter than gloom over here for we always see the comic side, as in the story of the chap who took down his periscope because Fritz had spotted it and then looked over the top to see if he could "get the blighter."

*Please* do *not* refer to plum jam. Part of our daily litany over here is "From plum jam and bully beef, Good Lord deliver us." But, truly, I have got fat and so have the rest and the secret is—no worries.

I saw a glorious bombardment the other day all along the line. The biggest shells we used were 9.25 but what a crash they made! Fritzie's front line just disappeared. It looked as if it was all on fire. The intensive bombardment drove some of the Germans out and our fellows got them with rifles as they ran. We hadn't a casualty though it literally *rained* fragments—"comebacks" from our shells. Our bombardment was only a "demonstration" but we could have had their trench for the going over, but—oh well, they can do the re-building and we'll go over and take it when we want it. Our happiness was increased when the O.C. posted in the trenches a dispatch announcing a British advance farther up the line.

MARCH 18TH, 1916.

I'VE just been inoculated again and, officially, I'm supposed to be sick.

We do have great weather over here, but oh! I miss the asphalt, the buildings, and baby carriages, and you pushing Peggy down College Street.

C. tells me in her letter we've been in action, but we have not heard of it yet ourselves. Rumour is busy but she's been that way for many moons.

MARCH 20TH, 1916.

I QUIT writing to go out and get a decent meal which I was too sick to eat, and yesterday I was too miserable to finish this letter, but to-day I'm feeling fine. We were a funny looking bunch of cripples hanging round yesterday for you know how sore the inoculation makes your shoulder, but that's over for another year and by then, perhaps, the war will be over.

APRIL 1ST, 1916.

I'M sorry to hear of my Cousin Ed. being wounded and hope it's not very serious. He and Cousin F. would likely meet quite often.

I have not written any letters for a week. We've been too busy dodging shells as you will probably have read in the papers. Our battalion had it's usual good luck.

I have seen some Germans at last, and gave one of them my breakfast, which, judging from appearances, he needed. He was only a poor, tired, wet *boy*, not eighteen by many months I should think. We were close enough to the fighting to see it and got pretty heavily shelled ourselves, and, as the communication trenches were getting it the worst, our line was used for the wounded and some of the prisoners to come out. I was in charge of my gun and at 3.30 we stood to and a few minutes later the mines were set off. I can't describe how it looked exactly, but there was a broad column of dull red and then a pillar of black

against the faint brightness of the dawn. The ground shook and then—well, when we stood to it was a cold, quiet night with just the hint of dawn and you would never have dreamed that there was a war going on—but after the mine was exploded, every battery around opened fire (and there are a great many batteries) and the whole hill was lit up with shells and pretty soon our trenches were too. I was inside on my gun with the loophole open, waiting in case of a counter attack on us, and there were three whizzbangs hit the emplacement but didn't faze it. You will hardly be able to imagine quite what a real bombardment sounds like, but inside where I was it was like being under a bridge when a train is going over, only more so.

Nothing particular happened down our way but up the line the British went over, took what they wanted, and in the cold, standing waist deep in water in the captured trenches, under the very heaviest shelling, those fellows, who had been lying out all night in the frosty grass waiting for the mine and the attack, hung on, with nothing hot to eat or drink, and no parapets but what each built for himself. Three times Fritz counter-attacked in the afternoon without success, and all the next night till nearly daybreak, before the relief could get in, those fellows stuck it. They've well earned their nickname of the "Fighting Fifth." They've never lost a trench nor failed to take one that they started for, and this was the second time in six weeks that they'd been across. If you could have seen the poor fellows drifting down past us that day and night you would have been heartsick. Frank and I sat up while three of them used our bed. They

were all in, and, believe me, it was no wonder, for how anyone lived on the hill that day was a miracle.

At the start of the proceedings a shell came under the bridge in our bay, exploded in the wall of the company cookhouse, killing one man and wounding another out of the five that were there. About seven the prisoners and wounded began to come down and we fed, or at least gave a cup of tea, to dozens of them.

The Britishers looked happy in spite of their wounds and the prisoners, most of whom spoke English, seemed quite happy, too.

This is *some* letter isn't it, but remember this was my first "battle" even although we were not sent across. We were only a few hundred yards from where the men did go over. I was on duty steadily for twenty-five hours in the emplacement. I couldn't have slept anyway and the other fellows needed the rest so they took turns on the parapet guard while I sat beside the gun.

Two days later the battalion was relieved but my gun was left and we were strafing over the parapet all night. Fritz tried to range on our flash with whizz-bangs and 4.25, but fortunately missed, though he hit the parapet of the bay we were firing from four times and had me so scared that I felt like running.

We were relieved next day for which I was thankful as I had not had more than two or three hours' sleep in the four days.

The British battalion had only twenty-two men hit in the *charge*—their heavy casualties were during the next twelve hours. Our battalion had only a dozen

or so hit. The fight, or at least the bombardment was really exhilarating and the experience wonderful.

April 14th, 1916.

Out again. We've been hoping for action all winter and now we are getting it. None of our section were killed last trip in but I guess it was about the only section in the brigade of which that could be said. We had six men wounded, though.

Neither Stew., Wes., nor I had any casualties among our crews.

For ten days the Germans have been shelling our trench heavily and the trench shows it. However, the casualties have not been so terrible. The English papers report that "The Canadians have lost some trenches and craters that were taken by the —." (English regiments.) That's true as far as it goes, but *taking* trenches at a comparatively small cost and *holding* them at ten times that cost per day are two entirely different things. No living men could stay out there this last week, and if there be any glory or medals going they belong to the 4th and the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigades.

None of the fellows you know have been hit.

April 24th, 1916.

We had another shelling to-day but, fortunately, it was concentrated on a piece of empty trench to our left. For nearly two hours they came over and the racket was deafening, but beyond showering me with mud, for I was outside reading a book I wanted to finish, they did no harm, though they sure made the sandbags fly.

I have on my team now a mule skinner that was on the G. T. P. about the same time I was, and it is *good* to hear him talk. He is like a breath of home for he is a typical Westerner and the way he bullies me is scandalous.

I believe I shot my first German this morning. He was leaning over their parapet exposed from the waist up at about three hundred yards and he disappeared, pronto, when I fired. Of course, that proves nothing, but he was such a good target I *ought* to have got him at that distance.

It has been a perfect day. For the last ten days we have had rain except yesterday which was a lovely day also, fine and warm, and it has been a treat to loaf outdoors.

IN BILLETS, APRIL 29TH, 1916.

THIS letter, unlike my last, is written in peace and quietness. I am quarantined for measles, which is some joke. Stew. is the cause of it all and he is back at the base, in the isolation hospital, and all the fellows are envying him. Personally, I haven't got the measles at all, as you'll remember I had them about sixteen months ago, but I have got *something*, and although a dozen times worse than the hives, is of no consequence.

To tell the truth, I never expected I'd be writing this letter.

Some day, after the war, some great writer will explain the terror of a night shelling and the exaltation that follows the first few minutes' panic. We had a rough time in again—four bombardments in

four days—and again our section suffered. S. was wounded, though it's only a shrapnel splinter, but good for Blighty.

As I told you before, the British next to us a few weeks ago sprang some mines and occupied the craters with half a mile of the German first and second lines and got a footing in the third. They held it two days and Fritz made no organized counter effort at all. Then it was turned over to our division (we being celebrated as trench diggers, I suppose) to "consolidate the position." Fritz made a determined counter attack after what the official report I believe describes as "The heaviest bombardment concentrated on any trenches in this war," and our fellows were literally blasted back with very heavy casualties and now we occupy only one of the craters and the old German front line.

The second night two guns were called for, and C. and A. went in with them and were caught in a bombardment, but got to the front line with their guns. A. was wounded and the officer they reported to called for volunteers to man C.'s gun. A sergeant who had never seen a Lewis gun, who was already wounded in the leg, volunteered to go and a scout offered to carry the ammunition. C. went into a post and held it for forty-eight hours, the sergeant having been killed. We all hope he'll get the D.C.M. for we think he certainly earned it.

Two of the boys who were "slightly wounded" have died, and we're all feeling pretty badly about it, for they were two of our "old" men, both popular, with plenty of nerve and grit, and one of them was married.

APRIL 30TH, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

YOUR letters are like a sunny, breezy Saturday on the Bay after one has been cooped up all week in a stuffy lecture room.

Yes, as you say, it is great to be alive and young and a soldier on such a day as this—and Belgium is a wonderfully lovely country—a country of long rolling hills, and fields of all shapes and sizes, not at all on the checker-board system of America—separated by wide hedges, or narrow roads lined by a double row of tall elms, and everything always melting into the distance in a purply haze. And there's the enchantment of those rambling, red-roofed farmhouses, so crowded and yet each so isolated in its little hollow.

Just now the fields are green or gold or white or gray, as they contain grain, or buttercups, or daisies, or just the ploughed earth. Just behind and between the trenches they are uniformly yellow with the crop that has stood unreaped these two years.

Trench fighting is no longer monotonous. You see, the German guns have, most inconsiderately, destroyed our trenches, though in doing so have provided ready-made rifle pits, so we are fighting almost in the open. Parapets, dugouts, trench mats, all the "comforts of life" are, in many places, no more. Barbed wire is still among our labours, but labour lost truly for no entanglement lasts longer than a day or two and—we're paying the price. Just as it was a year ago, so it is to-day—the Canadian Corps is holding the place of honour and of danger.

It is funny though to read sometimes of what we have been doing, all unknowing. Yesterday I read

that "The Canadians have again repulsed a German attack at —," of which the German version was "Our fire reduced to nothing a strong bombing attack at —," which in neither case was, strictly speaking, correct. The facts are that we were being relieved when a flare went up and Fritz saw a wiring party of ours out in front. He is holding a crater which he stole from us, literally, as the occupants were all buried by shells and the barrage was so heavy no others could get into it, and, naturally, his infantry (all German infantry is that way) was specially nervous, and as soon as they saw the wiring party they started to heave overboard all the bombs they had in the crater. It was an impressive sight, but nobody was hurt. Then up went his flares for artillery support and it began to get warm. As our artillery did not know whether or not all this was a prelude to another attack they cut loose, and for an hour and a half we could almost read by the light of bursting shells. Fritz got quite all he bargained for and then some. Three times his guns quit but ours kept right on and so, of course, he had to reply, but his shooting was spoiled by nerves and we suffered very slightly.

I wonder what you people at home are thinking to-day about the fall of Kut? Of course, it isn't a surprise altogether but still a great disappointment.

MAY 6TH, 1916.

WE'RE out of quarantine and I expect Stew. will be back in a day or two, in fact he was not put to bed at all; so if he had the measles, it was a mighty slight attack.

We're in billets in a semi-ruined town, of which town by the way I have watched the destruction by stages. Wes. and S. and I are bunking together in a coachhouse and it's a pretty comfortable "dugout" except that the roof leaks.

I got the birthday cake from C. to-night and Sim and Wes. and S. and I have just demolished it. The first thing to turn up was the wishbone which Sim very nearly swallowed. Then I discovered the thimble. S. found the button; and then we crumbled up the cake. Wes. got the ring but I captured the heart, and so we're all happy. But seven pounds of fruit cake inside four men is going to cause some queer dreams to-night I'll bet.

You can settle down to rest now, Mumsie, for the activity in this neighbourhood has petered out. We did have a hot time for a while, but now I suppose there's another four months of building trenches for us. Honestly, I prefer the shelling. I'm more scared of a shovel than a shell anyway.

MAY 17TH, 1916.

IT is a long time since I wrote you, I am afraid, as the days slip by so quickly in the front line. Each half of our crew does twenty-four hours with the gun and twenty-four in reserve so you see we're working one day and sleeping the next.

But, that isn't much of a reason for not writing, is it? And the truth of the matter is that some of my letters to you have not gone out because, I guess, I "talked too much." I am only supposed to tell you of my *personal* experiences. Last night I added

one more to these and that was being bombed. At least we heard several bombs explode, doing no harm and quite a distance from camp.

We drew for leave to-day and I drew tenth so that my turn would come about the middle of August. "Old Soldier," however, drew twenty-first and as his people are in England, I offered to trade turns with him, for what does six days in London mean to me as compared to what it means to him, for he is doubtless as anxious to see *his* people as I would be to see *mine*.

I had an anxious time the other day. You know how fond I am of Stew., and I had to stand and watch Fritz throwing "rum jars" (sixty pound bombs), "sausages" (four inch trench mortar bombs), "pineapples" and big shells into a crater—and he was in the crater. He wasn't hurt, but I never expected to see him come out of there alive. We got a few ourselves that day but our emplacement is shellproof.

War, Mother, isn't just a "horror," nor is it all bad. Don't you think that a game that strips men of everything but manhood, which places them naked before their fellows, is good for the race? You know, too many of us were succumbing to the beastly creeds of "the almighty dollar" and "me for myself," and perhaps we needed a war to make men of us again. Bluff does not go under fire, and when chances are one out of five of surviving another hour, we know then which of the uniforms cover *men*, and of all the old crew that left Toronto together there isn't one that hasn't stood the test. It wasn't wholly loss when Scott gave up his life in the Antarctic. I guess you know what I mean.

MAY 23RD, 1916.

WE are having ideal weather though rather on the warm side and, incidentally, we have a class at seven a.m. which means early rising these days.

John, Wes., Stew., and I, had a great walk on Sunday and had our picture taken which I'll send you next week.

I never saw crops grow like they do here. Belgium beats England for beauty and fertility.

I'm glad you got those few souvenirs and I'll try to send you others. We've got so used to shell noses, shell cases, etc., that we hardly think of them as souvenirs. We've lost the perspective.

If you'll give me an idea of the sort of lace things you'd like I'll send them over. The Belgians make quantities of this stuff and it is quite an art. They teach it in the schools and they say in peace times a girl might earn as much as a franc in a day making lace.

The incessant hunt for grub and amusement gets me into many Belgian homes and yes! I have a girl in every town—just one that I can jolly a bit.

I see by the papers that we've "covered ourselves with glory" again. I've been covered with mud a few times but being shelled a bit isn't necessarily being covered with glory. However, the fighting has died down to normal and "all is quiet."

I saw Roy Curtis yesterday but it's too hot to walk three miles to see Charlie.

The other night I had a real treat. Stew. and I went over to see John and there were a couple of other School fellows there, and we had a game of auction with John and I winners at the finish.

ARMINE
"STEW."

"WES."
"JOHN MAC."

JUNE 1ST, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

THERE, talk about "answering by return"—I received your letter at midnight, read it in the trench by aid of a pocket flash (some job, believe me, keeping the light down so as not to attract a sausage) and am answering this morning while again on guard.

Am sorry you sometimes get in the "dumps," though you're not the only one. I never got so sick of anything as I do at times of the monotony of this job. There is this in it, though—that we never know what is going to happen next and there is the prospect of a hospital or a grave any time.

To tell the honest truth, Belgium is a gloriously beautiful country. A soldier's life is, in the main, a lazy, carefree one and there is everything to make me happy, except of course the distance from home, so you see I have not much excuse for grousing, and I really don't often do it.

I can quite understand that a cog in the machine gets weary of the eternal grind and would like to be the engineer, but the engineer thinks he's in a rut too, and, after all, in a rut is the smoothest travelling.

Your viewpoint in regard to temperance is very clean and very fine. I scarcely think that the politicians are as anxious about the welfare of the boys at the front as you are. Perhaps the M.P.'s, looking on us in the mass, are making the mistake of thinking that the Canadian soldier is of the type his English brother once was, but, having had the best of opportunities of observing him, both in the trenches and in the estaminets, I can say that he is not by any

means. The Canadian private, or at any rate the majority, by no means considers the Members of Parliament his betters. Because it is a matter of vital importance that Germany should be beaten, because he knows that every available man is needed, he, for a time, has given up his rights and placed himself under other men's orders, sometimes men in no way his superior—and no man knows better than a soldier the value of discipline. But there is an afterwards, as many men whose heads have been turned by a little brief authority have discovered, and a Member of Parliament or politician, who speaks patronizingly of the soldiers, would do well not to forget that he is referring to the *people*, his masters. Making liberal discount for my prejudices, the fact remains that our "patriotic" politicians have not risen to their responsibilities and opportunities—the greatest, public men ever had. Just now the winning of the war is what *we* must attend to and after that is done we can deal with traitors, grafters, and slackers. This is enough "politics" for one letter.

I am glad you approve of me as a descriptive letter writer. I only wish I *could* describe the front as it is, but I'm not big enough to feel and see it all at once and reconcile it into a living picture. Just now, picture a sandbag wall, six feet or so high. The bags are in ribbons but the dirt stands. It is noon and bright sunlight. The bottom of the trench is a narrow path of ladder-like boards—the firestep, two or three feet high, is just a plank on trestles against the parapet, and on the firestep is a box of bombs. A rifle with fixed bayonet is leaning against it, and Wes. is sitting with his feet against the bomb-box and his back against

the traverse, which comes out to where I sit. He is wearing a "tin helmet" and reading one of Nelson's sixpenny novels which has a bullet hole through it. Can you see him? Up above, the sky is flicked with tiny white clouds where Fritz is trying to hit some of our planes. You can here the "pop" of the shells like the cork coming out of a champagne bottle, and the air is full of whirring from the falling shrapnel and the aero's engines—a high pitched whine like the sound in a telegraph pole.

Did you ever see a "brule" in New Ontario—the stark naked poles that once were trees, the raw earth that once was clad with green? Imagine then this earth pitted with cup shaped holes encroaching one into the other so that the original ground level has disappeared and it is all holes and ridges of dirt. This is the foreground.

Then again the brule—not a branch on any tree and every tree broken off twenty feet or so from the ground and standing black and shattered. This is looking back from our trench, for this ground has changed hands oftener than any part of the front. This bush has been shelled a hundred times and still there persist some shrubs all green, hedgerows and clumps, and the birds sing and flies buzz just as they do in Muskoka in June. Imagine a ridge against the sky crowned with another brule and, half way up, the ruined walls of a white stone chateau (there are many such on all the front from Alsace to the sea). This is further back. In front again—a jumble of ridges of dirt, long lines of sandbag walls, shell torn, and remnants of barbed wire entanglements and

thousands and thousands of shell holes. This is looking through a periscope.

Just a mile or two back all is changed—green fields and greener clumps of trees, hedges, and avenues, and red tiled roofs hiding amongst the foliage. A rolling land of ridges and hollows—a fertile land, more so than any I have ever seen, and every inch is covered with growing things just now. Belgium is a lovely land and it is heart-breaking to see the towns all wrecked and ruined. That is the crime of war, for nothing that is now destroyed can be the same again, and places with the memories of ages clinging to the stones are sacred—more sacred even than human lives.

Belgian girls are pretty, fair haired, blue eyed, rosy cheeked, with ample figures. But the children look like angels straight from paradise. I never saw such lovely, plump, laughing, beautiful children, and there are scores of them everywhere.

Is this enough "description" for you? The third part of my letter should be news, but there is—no news. Everything is quiet, and I am waxing fat and lazy.

We had a joke on Wes. the other day. He fell and hurt his back and was put in the ambulance to go down to convalescent camp for a rest. On the way he dropped off and came back. He was reported wounded and when the ambulance got to camp and they couldn't find him, the orderly room was requested to furnish any information they could get as to the disposal of his "body."

So now we won't give poor Wes. any cake, for "dead" men don't eat cake. Cheer up, it's a good old world to live in and very well worth dying for.

JUNE 7TH, 1916.

IF I had been "invalided" I'd have had no "thrilling escapes" to tell you about and my crew had more narrow escapes last trip in, than any bunch in the lot and only one was hurt and his wound is slight. To begin with, one night I was setting the gun—we had only an open platform for the night—a whizzbang exploded in front and ruined the tripod but no one was hurt. The afternoon of the day I last wrote you, Fritz started shelling around the emplacement with heavies. He started at 5.45 and I was supposed to relieve the men on duty at six, but—well, it didn't look healthy. At 6.15 I got impatient and started down. In one place the parapet was down and I had to go around the parados. The line is earthworks, not trenches you know, and the parados was cover as perhaps you can understand. I was "scouting" my way, as they were coming about once a minute, and I'd drop and then move on again. I got to the gun and found T. all alone lying up against the parapet on the trench mats. He had an inch of sand all over him but he was cool enough. The bay next to the emplacement was crushed in—filled right up. I asked T. where M. was. "Round there," he said, pointing to the wreck. Gee, my heart stopped beating. "Under that," I said. "No, round the traverse," but I wasn't quite easy in mind till I saw M. It seems the first hit against the parapet only bulged it and some impulse warned them to move just before the next one crushed the bay in. The shelling lasted about half an hour after I got to the gun and you bet—T. and I crouched pretty close to the parapet. A shell lit in front—short; the next lit behind. T.

said "There, the next one gets the parapet—three times they have done that, one in front, one behind, and the next in here." Imagine how long the few seconds seemed when we could hear the roar of the coming shell, but it went yards behind.

The day following, Fritz started to throw "rum jars" at us. A rum jar is many pounds of very high explosive in a thin sheet steel shell and is fired from a trench howitzer. You can see it easily as it comes very slowly.

I was on guard at the gun with W. and you *bet* I was watching them come, though none got very close to me. Roy, L., M., and T., were asleep in our dugout which was a hundred yards from the gun and around a corner. A rum jar woke them and they *moved*. T. and L. didn't hesitate but beat it to the left where the trench was much better. M. saw one coming and yelled "Come on, here's another," but Roy was slow and he'd only got about ten yards along when the thing went off. He was picked up and thrown about twenty feet, alighting on his hands and knees, but entirely unhurt. Then he came down to the gun.

You know what a "traverse" is, don't you? A block about eight feet square cutting off a trench parapet so that the trench is zigzag and can't be enfiladed.

Roy and I stood one at each corner of a traverse so we could duck to the left or to the right if one lit on the right or *vice versa*. You'd hear Roy—"Here's another—right for us," and he and I would squat on our haunches like a pair of jumping jacks and gaze into each other's eyes with a strained expression till the crash. Then the strained expression

would change to a kind of lurking smile—then a real smile—then a laugh—and we'd get up and look for the next. It would have made a splendid skit for Shea's.

A corporal of — Company was blown over the parapet by a rum jar, climbed back again p.d.q. and looked up to see where the thing had exploded when a falling fragment busted him on the nose. Isn't that *some* yarn?—but it's absolutely true nevertheless.

That afternoon was the first time in a week when both our dugouts happened to be empty and they were both wrecked. You never saw such a mess. My crew sure has been lucky all through. It's to be hoped we'll stay that way.

JUNE 8TH, 1916.

My letter written yesterday has not yet been posted so I'll add this to it as I just got a letter from you to-day and find it a discourse on strength of character. I'm too busy being a machine gunner these days to worry about much else and I'm quite content with my job at present. I'm to go down to the school to take a six days' course and it will be a pleasant holiday. The school is on the seashore, and just imagine me going swimming again.

If I forget to acknowledge a parcel do you really wonder? If you constantly expected to be killed within a few hours, or at least were quite aware of the likelihood of it happening, do you think you could carry much extraneous matter in your noodle? I expect I got both parcels at my birthday and both at Christmas but, honestly, I forget.

The all absorbing topic of the day is those little animals of which most of us had heard but were not acquainted with. You can imagine how *interesting* they are.

I'm glad Mrs. L. got my message. She may be sure it was not because the boys did not appreciate her thoughtfulness that the parcel was not acknowledged. It's the "engrossing distractions" of the war that makes them forgetful of conventions.

JUNE 14TH, 1916.

*Dear Dad:*

THIS is from the front line. Your letter arrived to-day—a few minutes ago in fact—and it seemed funny for you to be talking of summer while I'm nearly friz. We really did have some splendid weather the beginning of the month but it has been blowing from the north and raining the past week.

I can assure you that the casualty lists are likely to grow. We are the only brigade in the three divisions who have been left out of the recent hand to hand fighting. On our left and right there has been hot work. Charlie, I guess, has seen German bayonets. Our corps is holding all the ground it had when the scrap started and some of the German line besides. We've just had the normal shelling, and in my last letter to Mother I told of some of the escapes my crew had last time in, but so far there has been nothing near us this week.

I sure wish the rain would quit for I've had cold wet clothes on for three nights now. While talking of this I just want to tell you how much the kindness of Mother, C., and the other knitters, has been

appreciated. Night before last we went back to reserve for a twenty-four hours sleep. There were six of us and not one of the bunch had a change of socks except me and all of us had had wet feet for at least thirty hours. I had a surplus of eight pairs in my kit and you can bet they were a godsend to the bunch. I wish I had some for them to-night.

The tobacco, too, is greatly appreciated, and there are so many of the fellows to smoke it.

I see in Canada they are fighting over the merits of the different rifles. It seems to me that the best way would be to let every fellow use the rifle in which he placed the greatest trust, as they all shoot the same ammunition and are all good weapons. There are Canadians who prefer the Lee-Enfield and there are Imperials who like the Ross, and the man who doesn't *love* his rifle will never fight as well with it. You've got to be careful and proud of your rifle and I keep mine as clean and take as much care of it as Lois does of that wonderful niece of mine. I only wish we had Canadian *boots*.

Well, is the war going to last over another winter, and if not, why? Don't build too much on what the Russians are doing, for, in the long run, it is British troops that are going to beat Fritz.

JUNE 24TH, 1916.

I AM at the machine gun school and in sight of the white cliffs of Blighty. We had some trip coming down of which I will spare you the details, except to say that we went to sleep on the train depending on the guard to wake us, which he did *not* do, and when we did wake up we'd got nearly to Paris, which

was a long way in the wrong direction, and we finally landed here twenty-four hours behind time, though it didn't make much difference.

I have been in the ocean three times, the first and second day and this afternoon. There was a dandy surf to-day and it was great. I was deaf, dumb, and blind at times and three parts drowned but it was a glorious swim.

I'll finish this letter when I get back to the front line again.

IN THE FRONT LINE, JUNE 28TH, 1916.

YESTERDAY afternoon Howard Stewart was struck by a piece of shrapnel which entered his heart. His mother lives just north of the city. I am enclosing her address and I wish you would go to see her. You know what friends he and I have been—more like brothers than anything else, and, God knows, I'd have willingly taken his place.

He was such a fine chap, a perfect gentleman. I don't know any higher praise that could be spoken than what Sim said this morning, "No man ever said a word against him." He's the only man I ever knew that couldn't make an enemy and yet he never *tried* to make friends; but just because he was so absolutely honest—just, fearless and strong—everyone leaned on him and he was everyone's confidant. I can't seem to realize that he is dead. I never dreamed of his being killed. It doesn't seem true yet. Why! I came up, when I had permission to stay at the transport last night, just because I hadn't seen Stew. for seven days and was lonesome for him, and then

"CHARLIE"

CAPTAIN CHARLES K. HOAG, D.C.M.

Jack met me and told me he was killed. I shall miss him terribly.

I have taken all his personal belongings—there aren't many of course—to H.Q. They'll send them to his "next of kin," which is what the army calls a widowed mother. Please go and see her. I'm writing her and so is Jack. We were Stew.'s closest friends. I can't tell you in this where he is buried but I'll try and let his Mother know as soon as possible.

Am sure you have had anxious days lately, but, cheer up, and don't worry. I may be one of the lucky ones.

JULY 6TH, 1916.

OUT at last. For a few days, at any rate, we are relieved of the constant strain of holding a critical point, and it feels good to know that a shell won't get any of the gang for awhile. I am feeling Stew.'s loss very keenly.

Frank and I came down yesterday as advance guard and had supper at Rachel's on the way. I forgot to speak to her about lace, and she's the only Belgian girl I know who might write English, unless the girls up at the photographers can. Anyway Dad can read French I suppose.

What do you think about "Lieutenant" Charlie? My, I'm glad. There isn't anyone I'd rather see with stars than Charlie and best of all he earned them by bravery in action.

Have you read the great news from the South? We're taking hats off to the German machine gunners who held up British advances, for, as machine gunners ourselves, we're proud of even German gunners who

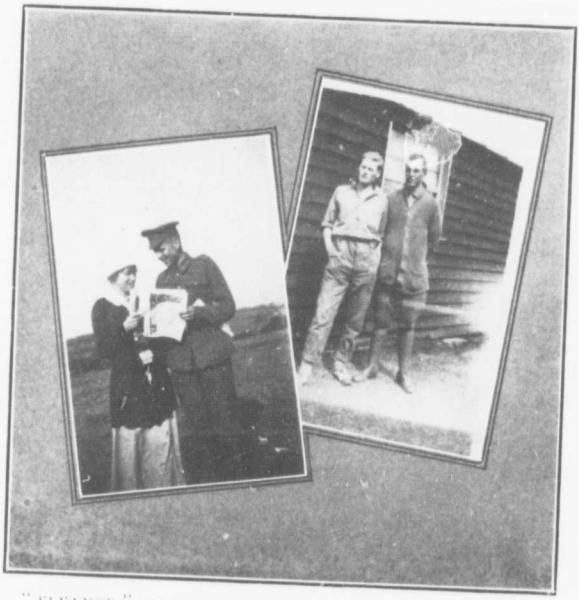
fought their guns after their infantry surrendered or ran. It isn't a nice job, ours, but even Germans seem to imbibe courage from their guns; and the Canadians on June 2nd, the few that survived the bombardment, fought their guns till their ammunition ran out.

Yes, as you say, the casualties in the last three months have been heavy, but, after all, what did the Canadian people bargain for? In Canada, I believe they say "the Canadians are the finest troops in the Empire." And yet when we're given one of the hot spots and hold it, our Government seems to whimper about the loss. Perhaps some day the folks at home will understand (as we do) why we *had* to hold that line. Meanwhile, Mother, it's enough that it was orders.

I suppose you saw that Capt. Morkill had been wounded again, but only slightly. We're hoping he gets his majority, as we all think he deserves it.

I'm glad you got the pictures and, if you think I look like that—all right. They are splendid of Stew., though, and so, now, invaluable. He is buried with another of our originals, MacK. of the A.M.C., and they have fixed up the grave splendidly. It is a double grave and in the centre a cross is laid of white tiles and, under the cross, the battalion number in coloured fragments of brick—the letters white on red. There are two wooden crosses with their names, numbers, dates, etc. All these cemeteries and the names are registered. I'll see if a photograph can not be sent to his Mother.

I'll not be in England again, probably, until the war is over and—my heart is not damaged a bit. I think, Mother, the end is in sight. Of course, only



"ELEANOR" AND ARMINE— "STEW." AND "WES."
AT BOULOGNE

the C.I.C. knows, but if it isn't the beginning of the end, it looks like it, with Russians, Italians, French, and ourselves, all on the offensive, and the German General Staff must be thinking strange thoughts. In case big developments happen in France it is quite possible that letters will be stopped, so if you get only cards from me don't get worried, for it won't necessarily mean that we are in anything.

JULY 11TH, 1916.

I AM at the school again, this time on a Vickers. I'll be some machine gunner before I get through, won't I? It is kind of confusing at first dropping one gun and learning another with all the new names for such similar parts though, of course, the knowing one gun helps in understanding the mechanism of another. I think I'll try to make a combination of the three, *apres la guerre*.

The day I came down, I was taken ill and got off the train while B. went without me, which was immaterial as there was another that got me to the school in time. I was glad afterwards that I got left as I discovered the — Canadian Hospital was near and I went out and saw Eleanor. She was glad to see me, and I was tickled to death to see her—the first Canadian girl I'd spoken to or seen for many months. It was heavenly to hear a girl talking in my own language again, and to hear her laugh. I spent four hours at the hospital which has a beautiful location, away up high on the hills above the city, which, by the way is *some* city. I'd love a week in that town to see it and I think I'd rather spend my leave in France than in England.

JULY 16TH, 1916.

BACK again with the bunch and I never got a swim at all as it blew a cold gale every day I was at the coast. Coming up yesterday we had to wait five hours between trains at — "Somewhere in France," and I bought this lace there for you. I picked the edging because it was the "finest" I saw. The madame said it was *tres chic* and also that you had *un fils desirable*, which means, in English, "a pretty nice son." The lace is made by refugees from Ypres. The cards I enclose I thought were cute, don't you? Most of the cards made in France are "acute."

I'm in charge of a Colt again. Wes. is giving my crew some instructions on its mechanism and I'm impressed by what he knows and how well he can tell it, but then, like myself, he loves a Colt for its "charm." It's a case of "With all thy faults I love thee still," and the gun repays that kind of interest for it appreciates petting as much as a kitten.

The vari-coloured effect you see in this letter is caused by the leak in the roof and the indelible pencil I'm using. I'm getting anxious to see my adorable baby niece. Perhaps I will before Christmas.

JULY 17TH, 1916.

I'VE been wondering if it isn't possible for me to acquire some of the knowledge I would have gathered if this war had not intervened. I know so little about business and the things I would be learning if I were home instead of here. Think it over, Dad, and see if there isn't something can be done along that line, for it is going to be an awful handicap to us to lose the

years, say from twenty-one or two to twenty-four or five, from our lives and, if I could some way make up for that, it would help a lot when I came home.

What I want is not the knowledge I can get from books but the knowledge of men and business that every man markets to earn his living. I've hours and hours in which to think and I'd like to make those hours and that thinking useful.

JULY 22ND, 1916.

YOUR letter with the snapshots of you and Lois and the baby came last night. Send me snaps of yourself more frequently. I like to hear of the MacGachens too, and especially of Uncle Fred's kiddies and oh, you can't imagine how interested I am in all *my* people when I'm so far away.

For the past week I have been very busy instructing new men on the gun and it's no cinch I can assure you, when you're fond of your subject. If anyone shows an interest in my gun, I drown him in information and I've been talking, thinking, dreaming Colt gun all this week. The Colt is my first love and favourite.

We've been staying at our old billets at the farm, and Wes. and I have been sleeping in a waggon with a canvas cover like a prairie schooner, and as the waggon has been moving at five a.m. we have been rising early, but with this weather that is a pleasure.

It was strange down at the ranges this afternoon to watch the other fellows practising and to teach them, when it's so recently that I was just a greenhorn myself. Now I'm a veteran and an "expert" and order around some of my old friends. I can

see now some of the problems that Mr. Morkill has to work out, and thank the Lord they are *his* and not mine. I expect he'll be the next to get the D.S.O. or M.C., for he is a most efficient as well as one of our bravest officers.

We go "in" to-morrow and to a fairly quiet trench I expect. Fritz is too busy in the South to be very vicious here. I wonder how the Kaiser feels these days? Not that we've done so much yet, but for the first time in eighteen months the news is of Allied offensives everywhere. Can you read what that means? Just think, for two years we've talked of how our ultimate strength must eventually turn the balance in our favour and now that is just what's happening, and slowly but steadily the Germans are going back and oh! it seems very good to us. Just imagine what those fellows in that battalion must have felt when they opened ranks to let our *cavalry* through. Wouldn't I have liked to have been there, but it seems possible that we'll be there yet. Do you realize that I have been ten months in the front line and never been over the parapet. You see I'm not a soldier yet, am I?

JULY 27TH, 1916.

LAST night I was "over the parapet" with a patrol. I thought it would be "thrilling" but it wasn't a bit and it was hard to keep awake. We went with some scouts and bombers and we never saw a thing. "No Man's Land" is just like a hayfield and full of daisies and other flowers—also nettles, and I grabbed a handful once by mistake.

A strange part of it was the feeling of security I had all the time. I wasn't dodging bullets out there

like I would have been back half a mile in the open, as what little firing there was was overhead.

My second impression was as to how quickly we got lost. Of course, the scouts, by some weird instinct, went right where they wanted to, but, personally, from the time we left our parapet till we got back to it, I never knew where the lines were, for seemingly flares went up from all around us.

So far our tour has been uneventful—the usual shelling, a daily ration of rum jars, and quite a little rifle fire, which indicates "quiet," as there's never much sniping when there's artillery activity.

JULY 28TH, 1916.

So you have heard of Howard's death! It still seems to me too unreal—too fantastic—to be true, but all my life is unreal, you know, these days. I feel like a spectator at a play—not as if I were living—and Stew.'s death just seems part of the mad jumble. He died so suddenly and I never saw him. Did not see his grave even for weeks after; and though I *know*, I don't *feel*. Strange, isn't it? Yet, you know, it's lonesome. Wes. and I are closer friends now because we both miss Stew. so. It's a merciful thing about war that it forgets its dead. We haven't time to *think*—we have *work* to do—and men are dying every day.

JULY 28TH, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

How would you like to be writing a letter an hour before sunrise? But it's an answer to yours written at sunset, and sunrise is really ever so much prettier, but the mosquitoes (and *les autres*) are awful

pests and you must imagine this letter punctuated by slaps and bad language.

Regarding the French-Canadians. Individually, I like the habitants and always did, and it has been a disappointment and wonder to me that they have not better answered the call, for a Frenchman loves a fight as much as a Scotchman or Irishman. I should think the slowness of recruiting in Quebec is owing to the isolation of the habitant from the rest of Canada, and the world at large—an isolation due to his very ignorance of the English language. But the English-speaking native-born Canadian has not yet enlisted much faster than his French-speaking compatriot and then he had, for a large part, to be an "officer" or else he wouldn't play, so that while there seems to be lots of officers, the ranks are not filling up very fast.

*Is* Canada at war? I read in a *Star* lately that there had been fourteen thousand at a ball game, and on the same day forty-nine recruits were signed up in Toronto. Doesn't that make you feel ashamed?

To return to your letter. I surely did mean it when I said that there were worse things than the loss of lives—not the "destruction of property"—I was thinking more of the "desecration of the beautiful." Truly, it is a crime against all mankind, this destruction of the wonderful buildings and *homes*. It was the latter I was mostly referring to, for the destruction of architecture, as such, does not stir my soul to wrath so much as the wanton destruction of the homes of the people. When I wrote we were billeted in what had been a lovely old country place—it had been a splendid white brick and stone building—not a monstrosity such as you see in America—but a picture

of comfort. A crescent driveway led through a grove of magnificent pines round in front of the house and back to the road again. Enclosed by this driveway was the lawn, and the moat made an island on the left of it. Behind the house was a park—a square of grass surrounded by big trees, like beech trees they look—and the whole thing was just a dream of home and comfort and enjoyment.

*Now* the lawn is a hayfield, the moat a sewer, the house a ruin, and the park a graveyard—my chum is buried there. That's the sort of thing I said was worse than men's death—the old world comfort it took centuries to achieve, and of which we in America do not seem capable. More millions of men are being born but these places cannot be restored, and in their destruction are the millions yet unborn being robbed.

. . . . . .

There are advantages in a winter campaign after all. The smells were not so virulent nor the vermin so omnipresent and omnivorous.

Shells are a joke compared with living in one's clothes these days. The mosquitoes—you've met mosquitoes—but these are the size of humming birds; and the water! In the winter we had too much of it, but we could drink (contrary to orders) from the ditches and every shell hole was a wash basin. But now, the ditch and shell hole water is covered with slime and smells to heaven.

Remember that " Your King and Country need you " to write letters to me and don't worry about the "cheerfulness " part for you are really the most irrepressibly optimistic and innately joyous person I know.

AUGUST 4TH, 1916.

WE were inspected by the new Corps Commander this morning and it was *some* inspection.

Did you know I was a wild Western cowboy now, with a forty-five six shooter which I'm half eager and half scared to death to try? We've got to practise with them this week and I'll tell you they're a lot better than rifles to carry. I've written Dad to send me an automatic as I know I can shoot straight with one of them, and if I've *got* to shoot at a Fritz, I want to hit him and I expect it will be healthier to hit him first try.

We've been pushed pretty hard this last two days getting ready for inspection, and for the first time since we got to the front we shined all our brass, which was an awful job. However, done it was and *well* done, so it's over with.

Roy is in hospital but will be back in a day or two and you might tell his Mother we opened two of her parcels to him which, of course, is an understanding among the fellows. I was given a little can that was in one of them, that the fellows thought was maple syrup and everybody was waiting his turn at it, but it was *not* maple syrup. Mrs. L. will know what the joke was.

AUGUST 9TH, 1916.

I GOT a letter from Charlie and one from Eleanor yesterday. Charlie's letter was the best line of "kidding" that I've read for some time, so I guess he is as well as a fellow with eighteen holes in him can be expected to be. Eleanor says he will likely be invalided to England and probably granted sick

leave home. As a lung wound is very slow in healing, the war will be finished, I hope, before he can get back; and he's done *his* share. His D.C.M. was granted the day he came back with his "stars," and he was wounded two or three days later with shrapnel when returning from a patrol.

We're in support of our old home trenches and our old friend, "Alexander," is still on the job. I wonder that they haven't worn the barrel out of the brute by this time.

I pretty nearly didn't come up with the bunch yesterday as I had some temperature, and the doctor said I'd have to stay back with the transport, but I was normal by the time the crowd moved so I put my kit on the limber and made the trip, though I was pretty well fagged. I chucked the medicine in the ditch and have been wondering if I'd have died if I had taken it. Two of the other fellows are pretty groggy with trench fever also. The worst of it in my case is that I look so blooming healthy, I can't get any sympathy.

This is Mother's Day in England, and over there they are thanking the Mothers of England for the soldiers that they have given so freely. It is really only soldiers that *know* how much thanks are due, for we know that British soldiers are only the spirit of their mothers. I'm not much good at this sort of thing, but I want to thank you for the Mother you have been to me and if all Canadian Mothers were like mine, there would not be any shortage of men for reinforcements.

Now, Mother, I want you not to immediately consider me dead and buried in case you hear that I am

wounded, for it's quite probable that I will get hit, as my luck can't be expected to carry me through without a scratch, but you know there are often mistakes made and information isn't always to hand, so if you hear I'm "seriously wounded" just try to think that it only means a trip to Blighty and that is considered good luck, and I can say that very few die in the hospitals so I don't want you to worry.

I *hope* that our battalion will get a chance this summer. We've been over here so long, worked so hard, lost so many, and we've never been across "No Man's Land" yet, and I know, Mother, that you're no more a halfway sport than I am. We'll play to win and, if we lose—well, there's a better life after this and we've only paid the price that so many have paid for England's victory.

I had dinner with John MacDonald yesterday and then Wes. and I went to look at an artillery barrage that our guns were staging. We did some crawling in the grass and got pretty close to the German lines for such a bright day as it was. I *think* Wes. expected to be shot—I *know* I did, but I've given Fritz so many better chances that I guess we were playing pretty safe, only neither of us had been out in the open much, and in spite of all knowledge and reasoning, you hate to have only grass and air for covering. We never got closer than seven hundred yards and up to four hundred is considered pretty safe.

AUGUST 28TH, 1916.

I TOLD you, didn't I, that we were going back for awhile? Well, we arrived. It's miles beyond the sound of guns, except in vivid imagination, such as

the correspondents have, and oh! it feels good to be civilized again.

All the fuss and bustle of life up front is lost, and for a few days at least we'll sleep in peace. No "stand-to's," no "crumps," or "rum jars," or "whizz-bangs," or "woolly bears"—no mud, and not even "eggs and chips." We're in France and we're restricted to signs and a few phrases.

You know Canadians have been in the salient so long that really Belgium is Americanized. Here it is not—and Belgium, well, they do grow crops, but they make their living selling things to soldiers. Here they are really farming, and I never saw better crops or such a country. Mother, you must see France *apres la guerre*. It's so clean, unlike Belgium in that it's so well kept; even the narrow grass strips by the roadside are cut for hay. They sharpen their scythes with a hammer, pound out the edges on a flat steel. They bind their sheaves with straw by hand, and they use the weirdest of long handled two-tined forks for pitching. I'd get all tangled up with a fourteen foot long fork. Of course, there are only women now and a few unfits and "blessees." Believe me, there are a number wounded and almost as many widows in France. Their horses are marvellously trained—one horse—one rein, and controlled wholly by words. The waggons came out of the ark with Noah, but they can surely build great loads on them.

We spent five days coming down. Half a day's march, then a day's rest. The first day twelve miles, third, sixteen or seventeen, to-day eleven or twelve, and in between, a full day's rest. Result—fairly

fresh, very few sore feet, I couldn't really walk a blister on to my feet with clean socks each morning, and those shoe-packs you sent me are wonderfully comfortable.

My shoulders gave me a few twinges in the last few minutes of each hour and my knees crooked up. Still I've spent every minute of my own time revelling in this land of plenty, so I guess I didn't suffer much. Yesterday I spent reading in a "stook." The stooks are just like ours, only better built. They waste time on them, you see.

Someone—Napoleon, wasn't it?—said an army travelled on its stomach—not our infantry, however. The number of men who fall out on the march is directly in proportion to the pairs of clean socks in their packs, and you and kind friends have kept me so well supplied, that of my crew, at least, none need march two days in the same pair of socks. That's why, Mother mine, our men don't fall out, and since the section was organized never a man has fallen out on the march. Isn't that worth noting? The whole battalion did marvellously well on this march, and we're proud of ourselves.

Tell Dad not to send any more money to me by way of England. Canadian money is current here and we get more for it.

Now that the postal authorities require the return of all undelivered parcels, please mark parcels to me: "To be opened by the sergeant if addressee a casualty," for why send my parcels to me in Blighty if I'm so lucky as to get there? And then again, I might not need them, and the boys would always welcome them—and they're all good boys—the pick of the battalion.

SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1916.

TO-NIGHT it seems as though we may go back into the line without the couple of days rest I was figuring on, so it's hardly wise to put off writing to you any longer.

We've been marching and drilling, not exceptionally hard work, but enough to take us to bed with a distinct desire to sleep.

I got the tobacco and gave it to the boys and because the effort of acknowledging gifts is such I have told the fellows never to mind. You know, however, just what *good* tobacco means to a pipe smoker and how glad the boys were to get it. Wes. is going to thank you for the cigars which fell to him.

That cake also was delicious and came at an opportune time when we were on short rations and everybody flat broke.

I have a lot to tell you about the France I've seen, and the poverty of the people whose men folk have been swallowed up in the long drawn out war. Thank God, France is not suffering as is Germany, but neither England or Canada *dreams* of what war has meant to her. Mother, the inhabitants of the slums of our cities live in luxury compared to these peasant women. And, because we can't understand them or they us, they seem inhospitable, when they are only poor, and I guess we symbolize war to them, and they have cause enough to hate war and all its manifestations.

The language problem has a funny side too. Imagine a hungry battalion descending on a poverty stricken village of about two hundred peasants—we have money to pay for what we want but they are too poor

to have much to sell. The other day we went "foraging" looking for eggs and we took D. with us because he's the best "grunter," but to imitate a surprised bear when you only want eggs *is* funny. I saw on a farm a sign, *Ici on parle Francais* yesterday—truly, they do, but *we* don't and it isn't always a joke when we're hungry.

Oh, did I tell you I got the picture Dad said he was sending me of "The Four Girls?" It's very good of Grandma, Lois and Baby, but especially good of you.

SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

I GATHER that in my last I appeared to you as rather sarcastic regarding the English-speaking Canadians who stay at home and criticize the French-Canadians for doing likewise. Oh, sure, I was born in Canada—so were Dad and Mother, and their mothers, and I think I'm about as much native as most in our young country, but there does seem something different in the blood of men born in America which renders them less anxious to come over here than those born in other parts of the Empire.

The finest *looking* soldiers I've seen are the Indians and next to them the Anzacs. The Anzacs are big fine fellows and their swagger is irresistible and, don't they just fancy themselves? Don't get the idea that the Canadians are not fine troops too. You've seen us yourself, and some of our Western brigades put even the Anzacs in the shade for physique. But the English "Tommies" beat us all for sheer happy-go-lucky, don't-give-a-hang, happiness of disposition, and nine-tenths of the work and the fighting is done by

the same Tommies. They're the business-like bunch, and the colonials have got perhaps more than their share of the front pages.

SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1916.

I WONDER if you are feeling any older to-day. Anyway, here's wishing you many happy returns. I slept last night in sound of the guns again, and in the open, in our ranks, "bivouacing" they call it.

I'm continuing this to-night in billets and for a change we're in a house with three storeys, a fireplace in every room, and with a watertight roof. Gee, but it's a long time since we slept in a house even on the floor. Usually we billet in barns. It's a standing joke in the army that horses must be treated better than men because they're harder to replace. At any rate we travel in box cars labelled *Hommes*—40; *Chevaux* 8. As you see that isn't over roomy quarters. However, there's lots of room in our billets usually and in a barn we generally have the luxury of straw to sleep on.

We had a church parade this morning just as we used to do at Sandling with massed brigade and massed bands, and after it, communion service, which I remained for as I hadn't been at communion since February.

There is no news beyond what we read in the Toronto papers and that is usually wrong. Where do you suppose the papers get the stuff they print?

We've had quite a holiday and seen quite a lot of new people and places and the roads have changed from cobble to macadam and I can tell you it was a welcome change to our feet.

Roy has got a job at the base on the strength—or I should say weakness—of his injured ankle.

SEPTEMBER 22ND, 1916.

AT *last* we've been "in" and have had the desire of our hearts.

You know, of course, that we were on the Somme, as that was announced in Canada the week we left the salient and our division, the other day, was given its chance in the big push. My brigade was one of those to go over, with my battalion in the centre, London battalion on the right, Kingston on the left, and our sister battalion from Toronto to consolidate our first objective, and we had three strong lines and an intermediate trench to take.

Only the first crews (six men) of each gun went in and the reserve crews stayed in the billets. Poor old Wes. was crying, and I can tell you there were other heartbroken fellows among the ones left behind. Number 1 gun and my own were to go right through to the final objective and number two and four guns were to stop at the support we were to dig. We were told three days ahead just what was coming off and we practised running one thousand yards with the gun and equipment, which, by the way, is hard to do with a tripod to carry, even with two minutes rest every one hundred yards, unless it's down hill. We started about ten o'clock at night and the fellows gave us a great send off. As we went down, singing, an Imperial officer who heard us remarked that it was a queer hour to move troops out to rest and when Wes. told him we were not going out to rest but

were going down to get into to-morrow's show he said, "Well, if anyone gets through, those boys will."

We had about a mile to go through the communication trench up to our front lines and we started for there about two o'clock. Capt. Morkill went in with me and helped me carry the tripod. The communication trench was packed and progress very slow. Twice we were buried by shells and I thought the first one had ruptured my left ear drum and the captain thought his was gone too. Our progress became slower and finally word came that there were some wounded men blocking the trench. Capt. Morkill left me then (about five o'clock) to go and see if he could clear them away. It was getting light and we were still moving very slowly. About six o'clock an artillery officer came running up the trench getting a wire through. He was some excited and he sure made men clear a road in double time. A few minutes after we moved up (it was daylight then) I came on his body with two wounded men lying just in front of him and a couple of men dressing them. The parapet had been blown down just where the trench turned at right angles and a German machine gun was enfilading it. I had to crawl on my stomach to get by and just round the corner I found *our* captain, one of the bravest men I knew, lying on his face, and you can imagine how I felt. The trench was blocked again and I lay beside his body till our barrage started. A barrage of shrapnel is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen or heard. The constant swish of the shells prevents you hearing them explode and it takes all fear clean away. One of the last orders Capt. Morkill had given me was that if we didn't get into

our first line, to go over from the communication trench, so as soon as the shrapnel started I stood up and saw our men jumping out of our trenches everywhere. I swung the tripod up and yelled to the other fellows and over we went. When you climb the parapet everybody's crazy with excitement so I can't say I remember very much till we slid into Heinie's front line. I have a vague idea that I jumped over our line and that T. was ahead of me crossing it, as I couldn't jump very well with the tripod, but the chief things I noticed were the overwhelming rush of shrapnel overhead and that there was no crackle of rifles or a single bullet fired at us. I dropped into a wide trench beside an officer. He was laughing and saying to his men, "Well, boys, this is what we consolidate." I said to him, "Is this the German front line?" "I'm d— if I know," he said, and of course I didn't know either, and as everyone else was going ahead and as it was their *fourth line* I wanted we climbed out, and as I stepped over a dead German I knew then that we were over his first line. By this time I was pretty well up to the first wave instead of in the third where I belonged and all at once found no one in front of me, and as one of our whizzbangs popped behind me I flopped into a shell hole. I remembered then about our barrage which I'd clean forgotten until I walked into the edge of it. I lay there until I saw the line of dust (which meant our shrapnel bursts) about two hundred yards away. T. and L. were right beside me and Art B. came up from behind carrying the spare barrel and the box of ammunition that he started with and two other boxes. I asked him where he got the extra ammunition and

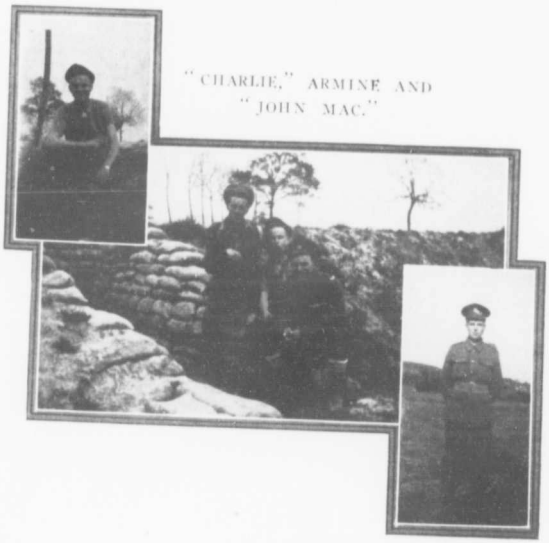
he told me that the man who had been carrying it had got hit, and I tried to stop one of the men passing to carry it but no one would stop, so Art had to struggle along overloaded. I saw "Old Soldier" on my left and Dan and A. on my right. I waved to "Old Soldier" and went over to Dan and told him what had happened to our captain.

Just then we saw the sugar mill, a much dreaded strong point, on our left through the smoke. We were getting sane again and when everyone in front dropped, we did likewise.

The barrage lasted some minutes and we filled our pipes, and I managed to get a man to carry the extra ammunition. The mill was ringed with men and our heavies were still crashing into it. A shell fragment as large as my forearm tinged on my helmet, ticked my Canada badge and buried itself a foot in the mud. I guess we were then ten minutes ahead of time for I know that the shrapnel hadn't passed the mill when our first wave reached it. The officers were now getting the men cooled off, and a half mile run with equipment on does tend to cool one's mind even if it brings out the perspiration. While we were halted I got the chance to see what an attack looks like. I could see our front for over a division in each direction. Our attack was delivered over perfectly flat ground (except for shell holes every few feet), and when we reached the mill we were over the enemy's third line. The waves with nicely spaced intervals which we had practised so assiduously, had become a mob of men just like the crowd that swarms on to Varsity Stadium after a football game. There were no longer any lines but just scattered men, and it is

wonderful how the German heavies dropped harmlessly among them. Fritz never fired a rifle or machine gun and so our casualties were comparatively slight. From my shellhole I could see the trench which was our objective quite clear along the sky line. Our shells were plumping into it and there wasn't a German in sight. Our front line started on and we followed and I was soon standing on the edge of the German trench sizing it up for an emplacement. It was exactly seven minutes between the time I slid into the trench and when the tripod was set up in a good open emplacement and the gun ready for action, and let me tell you that that's digging some. It was now half-past seven and about nine the trench was cleaned up and we were consolidated and I was hungry so we had breakfast, Clark's pork and beans, hardtack, and what was in our water bottles. In front of our objective was a sunken road supposed to be strongly held and from which we expected an immediate counter-attack which, however, did not come, and we were on our parapet and parados in hundreds looking over our capture. About eleven o'clock the bombers went over and took the sunken road, a process which merely involved inviting Mr. Heine to come out of his hole and he was—oh, so glad—to come. We got about fifty prisoners in the sunken road and, by the way, we got the machine gun which had enfiladed the communication trench and killed our captain, and I have the gunner's saw bayonet and a Mauser automatic and his belt with "Gott mit Uns" on the buckle. I tried the gun and as there were twelve loaded belts for it I mounted it for action in my bay. We were in for forty-eight hours without any attack coming. About

"GRIN"



"CHARLIE," ARMINE AND "JOHN MAC."

IN FRANCE

six o'clock that night the French-Canadians went over our heads and down to the left about another thousand yards and on our right our men consolidated a heap of ruins which had been a village. Our division and Charlie's did splendidly and our battalion contributed 1,400 yards to the "big push." From the sunken road the infantry can now look down into a valley miles wide and to a ridge perhaps ten miles away. We're over the summit and through Fritz's last strong ridge line for miles.

I am not going to say anything about the hours we hung on under the shelling the Germans gave us, which was simply hell, but we've had our turn "over the bags" which was great sport. We are now out and resting and I'm feeling fine.

GRIN.

(Written at the Somme.)

When you're feeling sort o' grumpy
And the world looks kind o' blue,
Just Grin;

Remember there are others
That have troubles to go through
And Grin;

It's not so bloomin' awful
If you figure it out right,
And grab your courage round the neck.
And hold it mighty tight.
You can stick it, and you ought to,
And, furthermore, you've *got* to,
So twist your face
And show your teeth
And Grin.

SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1916.

IN this letter I'll try to describe to you a bombing raid, the form of infantry attack that occurs the most frequently, and takes place usually at night and some nights almost hourly. You must imagine it dark and moonless, the starlight just enough to make it blacker in contrast with the blue sky overhead, or perhaps windy with sudden spats of rain. The "front line" is a recent conquest held by the men who took it from the Germans a couple of days before. It is represented by that dark line that you see at the edge of the shading in your daily paper's war map, and is in reality a series of shell holes more or less linked together by narrow trenches dug in the feverish half hour after the charge when "consolidating," and every here and there one of these shell holes hides a machine rifle and its crew.

The garrison in the front line is waiting relief, praying for it as souls in purgatory. About forty-eight hours ago, they started for the German trenches, cheering, laughing, singing, eager and alert still, after the night of waiting in the assembly trench under shell fire; and in the full daylight they made the advance and gained their objective. Then they consolidated, dug like beavers till a shallow trench was formed; and yesterday morning was a picnic with never an enemy shot or shell near them, and the men wandering freely in the open exploring their capture. At noon Fritz got the range and now a lot of those fellows are casualties and the rest have endured for many hours the rain of six and eight-inch shells that have crashed every minute among them. All have been buried by debris—stretcher bearers are worn

out—the garrison is too weak already to send more men out with the injured and the agony of the waiting is increased by the presence in the trenches of wounded men. All this second sleepless night they have watched and waited for the German "come back" and fatigue is overwhelming. With nerves long strung to highest tension, reaction at last brings apathy and wakefulness is hardly longer possible; but the shells now aid to keep awake men of whom duty demands sleeplessness. Suddenly there's a rattle like we used to make on the 24th of May when we set off a bunch of firecrackers at once; flares spring up and turn night into day; a Lewis whines; scattered shots ring out; and the flares die away—silence for a moment; and then the steady "crump" again of the big fellows and the attack is over.

It took sixty-three seconds and to-morrow's paper will say "some enemy bombing parties were easily dispersed," and a half dozen more Huns are on their way to the prison camp and perhaps a score, less fortunate, are lying in front of our line.

You know, Dad, that the reason the German "raids" seldom get into our trench, the reason his counter attacks are failures from the start, the reason Fritz runs to meet us with his hands up when we "go over," is that the German private soldier *knows* he's beaten.

The German army in the West front is trying to do what the British did for the first year, and Fritz *doesn't* like it. Every day our shell fire gets a little stronger and his a little weaker, and his infantry cannot hold us back. For a year the British troops fought against his big guns with rifles and outnumbered

three to one—without adequate artillery support—they stuck to their ruined trenches and the German infantry could not turn them out. Now it's our day and no rifle fire greets us; not that it would stop us, but our artillery is so predominating that our advances cost us often no more than ten per cent. in casualties. It's rain and mud that's helping Fritz at present.

Will the offensive continue during the rains? If so, you would have to see to understand just what that means to the men; but, somehow, someway, Fritz is going to be *strafed*. He's short of guns, of shells, and of men, and if he figures that we're going to stay quiet while he accumulates a supply as we accumulated ours during our first winter, I think he is reckoning without his host.

OCTOBER 3RD, 1916.

WE'VE lost a lot of our "Originals" but on the whole we've been very lucky, and as for myself, I feel, to put it in plain English, that God has been very good to me. I do not expect to be in as dangerous a spot again for a while, but, Mother, if my turn comes, we won't grudge it, will we? For so many have died, and so many must yet die. At any rate I've lived to know that the worst is over and that victory is certain. England is winning now and the triumph is going to be complete. Of course I've always known we'd win, but it's a great thing to have been spared to see at least the beginning of the end.

I haven't, I think, told you about the captain's will. He left all his kit and personal things to the men in the section. He wished to have inscribed on his

cross, "I believe that I am but one of countless thousands who died happy that England might live." For a man holding that faith it wouldn't be hard to die, would it? All of us are willing to die for England, but in acute danger when shells fall close one is sometimes apt to forget. It is really pride of race that keeps men steady. It is traditional that British soldiers do not run and do not surrender, though we have to do both at times. Fritz, however, runs like a rabbit, when he might win if he fought, and he is quite eager to surrender when a safe chance offers. I am referring to the ordinary German infantry men we meet. The men of some of the crack regiments will not do either and are just as steady as our men, but (for which we should be thankful) there are not many of these, and, poor devils, what they have to face is awful. We'd have lost this war if our infantry of 1914 had been as poor-spirited as the German infantry, generally speaking, of 1916, but our fellows faced the music and "hung on."

We're feeling rather proud of ourselves for you know our division had never been in a real advance before and we gained a lot of ground. Of course, those were our orders and the other fellows would have done just as well had they been in our place and had our chance. Nevertheless, the division did splendidly, and it hasn't all of it been as easy as the stunt of which I told you. What did the Canadian papers say about us? I'd love to see one. I've seen English papers dated as late as the 30th, and from them (just fancy!) I found we have been in support for a brigade of another division in the advance on —, oh, well, "Somewhere in France," and I never

knew what their objective was until I saw the map in the paper. You folks at home, I bet, don't appreciate the papers like we do.

I've lost another old friend, one I knew at Sandling, D. P., a very fine fellow, who was blown to pieces the other day along with two gunners. It's hard when your friends are killed. S., my substitute on the gun in charge of the reserve crew, got a Blighty the other day.

SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1916.

You are my only correspondent to-day, Dad, so you will get *some* letter this time. I wish your letters *always* contained snapshots for they tell more somehow than letters.

Yes, I got the photograph of the four "girls." It's the only picture that went "over the bags" with me—I carried it in my haversack. Do you know, Dad, we had a pretty rough time of it the night and day following our advance. I never expected to come out alive at all, and that's the first time I ever seriously considered the likelihood of being hit. I was buried twice in the communication trench with the captain before we went over and I had to climb over his body. It's the sight of the dead and, in less degree, the wounded, that gets your goat. I'd never seen very many dead before, but now I've seen dozens. The trench on both sides of my gun was destroyed and the gun itself buried twice the day after the attack. To move the gun I had to carry it over several bodies, and I'd only got it in to the new bay when it was hit and we had nearly half an hour's hard digging to get it out again. About an hour later I was going to

look over the parados and had my foot in the old fire-step, when "whang" and my tin helmet went straight up about two feet in the air. I sat down with emphasis. Gee, it was a surprise as I never heard the shell coming at all. Then after dark I was lying in a niche in the traverse when a shell hit it. It knocked my wind out and, for a moment, I was paralyzed and speechless. I knew I was unhurt but the roof was falling in chunks on me and the moonlight outside had gone pitch black (with the smoke, of course) and when I called A. and he groaned, I was sure he was done for. The reaction after the excitement was such that I slept peacefully all night. If I hadn't slept I hardly know how long I could have stood it. Of course they shelled us all night but nothing hit close to me again. Coming out again back along the "Road to Glory" Fritz started breaking "woolies" over it but Wes. and I caught an empty limber on the fly and got out quick. In billets the first night, I couldn't sleep—the *silence* was awful—funny, isn't it?

I do my turns as usual but, whereas before I enjoyed thinking of the risk, like we used to enjoy shooting rapids, now it's different, but I'll get over it as some millions of others have done. They have now gone beyond where we were and yesterday I walked over the lines we captured and it was a queer experience.

I'd like to go over the top again, Dad, even knowing the hell that follows, for it's the crowning experience of a lifetime. It's madness, of course, but it's glorious. Have you had enough of raving?

I expect now after our little experience we will be getting a rest. Dad, I wonder if you can understand when I tell you that it's heartbreaking to see the

battalions of our division. You've seen the casualty lists and know something of what we have suffered, but I have seen the *fellows* and know more. But, again, we have been lucky—the luckiest battalion in the luckiest brigade and, truly, the old score must have been raised under a lucky star.

OCTOBER 9TH, 1916.

I GUESS it's natural that the sight of moonlight on the water should make me want to write to you to-night.

I've just been out of the tent. There's a full moon shining; and, looking down on the white line that is the sea's edge, I just had to write and tell you about it.

I wouldn't mind the dirt and the discomforts when we are "in" if I could spend the time when we were "out" down here, for its wonderful. Wednesday morning I was in a barn, a filthy ruined one at that, the mud outside ankle deep and the roads rivers of semi-liquid black. *To-night* I'm in a nice new tent and outside there's sweet clean grass and about two hundred feet right below me is the sea and I feel like writing a book—"A Trip to Heaven and Back to Hell in Seven Days," by a "Cave-Dweller."

You're wondering where I am—well, I'm where the roar of the surf replaces the roar of the guns and we can forget what is going on some miles away, for this is *France*—the beautiful, clean, spotless, normal France—and we're at the Army Rest Camp. The 20th century Briton knows and appreciates the human elements that go to make up the "thin red line" we've read of so often in history, and someone who, yet a

soldier, must have been something of a poet, *dreamed* this camp and, behold! it materialized. Just think of it—seven days on the seashore straight from the battle-front, for men who've had a year or more in the trench and to whom leave cannot be granted to go to England. Seven days without *any* soldiering! Seven days of clean streets and green grass! Seven nights of *peace* and *sleep!* Can you imagine what that means to us "old soldiers?" And I was lucky enough to be among the first bunch of Canadians to come here. It's rather cold for swimming though I have been in and enjoyed it. It was quite a job getting through the surf but glorious fun.

We were "insulted" yesterday by being paid twenty francs; fancy *all* that much to spend in our holiday. Well, we had to *spend* it anyway and we wandered along the beach to another place about nine or ten kilos away and we sure had some meals that gave us the worth of our money.

Just set your mind, Mother, on meeting me in England, say next September, (*apres la guerre*, of course) and then we'll see together the places I have told you of but could not name, and I'll show you some of our battlefields.

OCTOBER 17TH, 1916.

WHETHER I've got the right date on this letter or not I do not know but anyway, it is Wednesday night and I'm back in the trenches again, by the way, with a stripe, that I haven't sewed on yet. The three of us that went over on the fifteenth were promoted by Captain M. before he was killed.

You might ask Dad how he figured I was going to *carry* that automatic he sent me and let him study it out before you tell him that I'm going to use the leather in my boot legs and get a Frenchman to make me a holster, for every holster in France has already got its "gat" in it, and I could as easily acquire a gun on the Somme as a holster or spare clips. Nevertheless, I'm *very, very* glad to get it and though, as yet, I've no ammunition for it, I brought it in with me, because, apart from its usefulness, I just *love* a good gun, and the Colt is the most powerful and perfect one-hand weapon ever devised.

Tell Dad I spent two hours stripping and assembling it and then found he had sent in the box full directions that would have enabled me to do it in ten minutes. I don't think now that there is any make of firearm I can't strip and assemble for I've stripped a German Mauser and a Maxim that were both strangers to me. Remember, I've dreamt guns, lived and breathed guns, handled, cared for, and instructed on guns for many months.

You've read about the terrible potency of our heavies and the awful execution of our field artillery, but it is no secret that the barrage which covers an infantry advance owes its effectiveness in no small measure to the machine gun bullets that help compose it, and that's one thing we've beat Fritz on at last—machine guns. Do you know that almost as many machine guns as field pieces are used, and many hundreds of times as many bullets as shrapnel shells go to make up a barrage and nothing can be exposed to our barrage for even a minute and live.

Temporarily, at least, we've moved to quiet quarters and we positively hope we'll be left here in the trenches for the winter. No anxiety about a relief from this, for, for the first time since I came to France, I can stand in the line and hear absolutely nothing, neither shells, bullets, or machine guns, and my dugout is twenty-seven feet underground in solid chalk. Just fancy, there are twenty-seven steps from the floor of the trench to the floor of the dugout and the trench is eight feet deep, so I guess the roof is waterproof which it needs to be as the rains have begun and it has rained every night this week. Wes. has charge of another gun and has also a subterranean dwelling.

By the way, several of our section are among the last to receive M.M.'s. Pretty much all the battalion N.C.O.'s got medals and S. at least ought to have had a D.C.M. A lot of our officers are wearing M.C.'s, and I think ours captured more honours than any battalion in the division. "Old Soldier" and R. got theirs away back on the salient in April. T. now in charge of my reserve team was wakened last night at midnight and sent on ten days special leave to Blighty. I'm very glad as it's his first leave and there is a little son over there that he has never seen. That, of course, is why they sent him.

It is rumoured that regular leave is to recommence and also the issue of green envelopes. Really, the envelopes are the most important to me though I'm nearly due for leave if it begins again.

Don't look for me by Christmas as I hope to spend it right here in this dugout. I told you I wanted to see the finish and I'm still of the same mind. There'll be war going on next spring and, please God, I'll be

in it. Not fourteen hundred yards but six hundred miles next time I hope, and wouldn't it be glorious if I could go through to the end unhit? Some will and why not I? Here's hoping anyway.

I think you can set your mind at rest for the next few weeks as I don't think there'll be many Canadian casualties for awhile.

OCTOBER 22ND, 1916.

I'M afraid you're exalting me in your thought to a regular crusader and are in for some disappointment when I get back, for we're not sprouting *wings* but *horns*. This is a service where profanity is no longer an art but a habit and, praises be, you can't hear me talking sometimes. As to booze, as a general thing I prefer coffee which is a good thing these frosty mornings.

Somehow I think some of the older fellows are getting less and less certain of their atheism. It is a fact, unadmitted by many, even to themselves, but a fact nevertheless, that it's only from the instinct given us by our mothers that there is a Supreme Power intelligently controlling our destinies that we can endure long hours of shelling and stay sane, and I find that so long as one retains the idea of the importance of what happens to *him*, so long as he relies on his own nerve, the chances are the nerve will break, not from sudden fear but from long tension and high imagination, and it's only when one can remember how unimportant he is in this universe and can bring himself to "Into Thy Hands," that his nerves relax, and, frankly, Mother, on the sixteenth we needed something to help us.

Talking of the help we get from ideas—do you remember the letter you wrote me the week you heard of Stew.'s death? That letter has been read over and over again and I am keeping it, for it was a wonderful letter. Poor old Stew., since he went it has never been the same. He had the magic gift of friendship and everyone of us leaned on him and through him were held together. Down at the Somme the fellows showed how much they thought of each other. That morning we came out is a memory worth having. Every man of our reserves was waiting on us. Why even our cooks, whom all men quarrel with, were going out of their way to be nice to us. It was more like a bunch of boys waiting on their sweethearts than the usual blasé and grouchy crowd. Those were four grand days, the fourteenth to the seventeenth, and I know now that whatever surface friction there may at times appear to be, this outfit is one grand bunch of fellows, and it's a fine thing to know, and that the British race still breeds *men*.

We think it too bad that the Canadian papers do not stick a little closer to the facts and not attempt to glorify us so much. We did well enough but you know men are mortal and *can't* charge "through volleys of machine gun and rifle fire," because if a machine gun is in action at our range, it's down we go. It isn't a question of bravery, for the bravest man can't stop bullets without going down. We don't want press agents, and we're neither better nor worse than the "Tommies," yet in every advance that Colonials are lucky enough to get a chance, our papers, and the English papers too, seem to give us all the credit, whereas as a matter of fact there are ten Imperials to every Colonial and, of course, the

Imperials do the most of the work. The prominence given to what the Colonials are doing makes the fellows over here tired for we're all British anyway.

OCTOBER 24TH, 1916.

So you would like *your* son to be an officer, too, just to prove that he's as wonderful as you think him. Well, I'll promise you one thing, I'll try to do my share in whatever rank I may be. Remember the epitaph that our captain asked for. I'll have some stories to tell you when I get back about many fellows who have "gone west" without a medal.

I'm glad Charlie is home—keep him there—he's done his share. Poor John is wounded and in Blighty too, so two out of us three at least should pull through.

You needn't marvel at my being able to write steen pages or so about my first trip over the bags. I was bursting to tell someone about it, and when I came out that morning I talked poor Wes. nearly to death.

If you want to hear about "heroes" I'd have to tell you of those fellows that rode in the "tanks." I was talking to some of them and when they coolly told me that they proposed to stay out there in those things while we consolidated, well, I thought of what I used to read in Henty's books about "forlorn hopes." And what do you think of the scouts that walked in front of them to pick out the road—in front of those fire-drawing magnets? That, positively, is the bravest thing I've heard of in my life, not even excepting that little destroyer, which, in the Jutland fight, ran into the middle of a fleet of four battleships and opened fire on them, "it being too late to withdraw," as the log put it. If you'd ever seen a destroyer

you'd know better what it meant for they're just about the size of a tug and they carry what even we infantry would call "popguns." But those tanks!—the marvellous insolence of them is to me far above their, as yet, proved, effectiveness. It was great to see them crawl, so much like snakes it made one's flesh creep. They didn't seem either human or mechanical—in fact, as one had painted on her side, they were "*Somme* Bus."

OCTOBER 25TH, 1916.

*My Dear Cousin:*

I'M glad you enjoyed my "Somme" letter. It was a great experience that scrap—and for the first time in my life I really knew what "battle madness" meant. My letter was, I think, nearer to the truth than most of the newspaper accounts because I wrote absolutely just as I *saw* it.

I do not know why they called the tanks "funny." You've read about what they did—did *you* think it funny? I do not think it possible to explain the psychology of such a polyglot thing as the British army, but it isn't that there is anything "humorous" about the tanks themselves that we laugh at them, but it's perhaps because of the wonderful, *impossible* things they *do*. They're power, personified, and most repulsive looking monsters and they made a hit—but, believe me, when we looked them over on the fourteenth and realized what they *proposed to do*, we didn't laugh.

I'll not attempt to analyze the state of mind of the men at Camp Borden, but remember that the same sort of fellows are there as those of whom you were

so proud at St. Julien, Festubert, and the Somme. The fault isn't always the soldier's—the world in general, and the service in particular, isn't run like Utopia, and you know it is a soldier's privilege to grouse. These are the same kind of men who, with eyes wide open, entered hell to die for people and a country that had never done anything very special for them.

Yesterday the general inspected us—pinned on the decorations and told us how proud Canada and he were of us—but it strikes me, looking at the new "smartness" in the men, that the all important thing is—how proud *we* are of *ourselves*. We went down there, after a year in France and Belgium, an unproved and somewhat "fed up" battalion. Now, we've got two or three things—a record, traditions, some recognized heroes and some dead chums, and oh! we're proud of the battalion and the division—*our* division and *our* corps. In fact, the *esprit de corps* that can't be forced, was born in one night. It's an elusive thing, but you can see it in the *little* things—cleaner clothes, polished brass, punctilious recognition of rank. We're a "famous" regiment now and we have to live up to it. As a final proof of this, very close friends will go so far as to admit to each other that "the battalion didn't do so badly."

How I run on. I'm afraid you'll get too much about this "monstrous thing," which, by the way, is good—I mean the phrase, because war is unutterably *evil*. I think none of our literary defenders of war can have seen or felt it at first hand. True, it brings out men's finest qualities, but it seems as though the finest men are the first to die.

JOHN HOWARD STEWART

It's one of my duties to-night to post the "gas-guard" for it's among the German refinements of this war that we can never lie down within a mile of the line save under protection of a guard lest we be gassed in our sleep.

NOVEMBER 1ST, 1916.

I am enclosing a poor attempt at a "Memoriam" of Stew. Mother, I haven't Stew.'s strength of character and am afraid never will have, but for his memory's sake there are some things I won't be guilty of. Stew. was fair and so I'll try to be unjust to no man nor see injustice done without a protest. I'm not going to write nice things about myself even to console you, but I'm trying my best to do what I think right; and if I haven't won a medal or a commission why you know *everybody* can't do that and what I came over here for is to whip Fritz.

I got your parcel with the cookies in and the maple leaves and I don't know which of the things the fellows were the more eager to get, for it's funny how sentimental we are after all and those were *maple* leaves from our *own country*.

IN MEMORIAM.

JOHN HOWARD STEWART.

A Student in the Faculty of Science, University of Toronto,
Killed in Action, June 17th, 1916.

As he had lived, so did he die,
Quietly doing his duty.
No honours had he won,
No medals worn.

He, the best amongst us,
Died unknown.
But, say not he accomplished less
Than those of famous name;
For could there be a higher praise than this,
That every man he ever met
Did wish him well!
Not by subjection of his manhood;
Not by weak truckling to the public will;
But quietly strong, chose he his course,
And did to all that which was right.
Oh, Stewart, in the hearts of us who knew you
There is left an ache, a void, time cannot fill—
That you should be the first of us to die!

A thrill of pride it gave to us
To call him friend.
The strength of manhood that was his
Could stoop or bend
To naught unworthy, small or mean.
He was fair to all men,
Gentle to the weak,
Sympathetic to the troubled,
Generous to his comrades,
Obedient to his duty,
Brave to a fault;
Not reckless in that showy way
Which forces recognition;
But wherever work unpleasant lay,
There he was. His guard was always
Just when the "strafe" began—and
Till it stopped. And so he died.
In all these months of war
I never heard his voice in anger,
Nor ever yet heard words unfriendly
Spoken of him.
This is the medal that he wears.

If he had chosen,
All the world was his;
For God had gifted him above most men.
Will he had and understanding,
Purpose mated to pity, strength to sympathy.
In his body, youth possessed,
Mind of a man,
Heart of a woman,
Soul of a child.
Finest of all created things,
A Gentleman!

If he had chosen,
No path to him was closed,
No goal that he could not attain.
But "England expects" . . . .
And so he chose,
And so he died.
He lies amongst the best of all his race.
His life was freely given,
Nor lived he to obtain the measure of award
He should have had;
He died
But ere he died
Erected in the hearts of all his comrades
A monument of fine memories,
Not sullied once.
Stewart, who came to us
And lived with us and was not,
God makes of *your* kind
One in a generation
That men may see what men should be.

God gave to me a friend,
And let me know and love him,
And took him to Himself again.
God, let me grow to such a man
As he was, and I would gladly die.

SOMETIME IN NOVEMBER, ABOUT THE 8TH, 1916.

I WONDER how you are going to like my letters growing shorter and shorter? You remember last winter and spring when there was nothing to write about—well, it's the same again only more so. I told you awhile ago that I dreaded this winter; well, you may forget it, for as long as we stay here we are going to be very comfortable, and winter *is* here. These are the most comfortable billets we've been in since we left England, and I hope we stay for the rainy season. After that, scared as I am of what I know we are going to get into, the sooner the action comes the better, and the sooner it will be over, and we'll be away from the monotony of camp life.

Commend me to certain soldiers for carelessness. I'm writing this from a shell-proof concrete emplacement—a very elaborate one—and the roof is leaking like a sieve for want of a few sheets of metal that they ought to have put on, and it's uncomfortable even though you dodge the drops.

You'll think this letter is developing into a grouch, but I've been listening to a lot of grouching lately, perhaps pardonable, but all the same useless and dispiriting. I think if the mail came in more regularly the boys' spirits would rise above the petty things. There is just the merest dribbling of mail coming through, and Lord help the mailman when the flood arrives. It's hard to be cheery when we don't get any letters and it's always raining.

Thanks to Captain M. we have nothing to complain of on the score of grub for he arranged, before he was killed, for a plentiful supply of oatmeal and rice.

I'm hoping we'll be in this present billet for Christmas Day as Wes. and T. and I have fixed up our cellar as comfortable as many civilian homes are and we expect to have a great spread.

The last papers I saw contained good news and if only this infernal rainy weather wouldn't interfere I might be planning for a canoe trip down the Severn or somewhere for next summer. Perhaps I will yet—who knows?

Now, this letter is long enough for the sort it is. Cheero—I'll likely be getting some mail to-morrow which will banish the blue devils. Meanwhile, I'm dry, warm, well fed, and fit, so nothing to worry about.

NOVEMBER 15TH, 1916.

I WROTE you yesterday but now some parcels have arrived and I have more to write you about. One of the parcels contained the Balaclava cap for Wes., and I'm charged with his grateful thanks. The white socks that you put in for Captain "Thingumy" I appropriated, for truly, the men *need* socks and the officers only *want* them, and I gave these to M. P., who needed a change. My, they were such awfully nice ones I hated to part with them, but I had quite a supply on hand. The ones I got from Bird I gave to Wes. All your socks are lovely anyway, but I find on washing them they shrink a little so a little extra size in the feet might be advisable. That *white* Balaclava is just a little, say, conspicuous, and I'm wearing a toque to keep my head warm. The other will be handy to wear on night guard—but why *white?*

Talking about cold, it's frigid to-night but these trenches are like heaven after the salient this time

last year. We're dry and able to keep fairly warm and there's no water in the trenches at all.

I wonder what made you think of sending Campbell's soup. Did Dad tell you I fed him on that the time we batched together? Both the soup and coffee were appreciated and we had a full course dinner as follows:

Soup—Tomato, au canteen
Fish—Imaginaire
Entree—Pork and Beans, a la Clark
Roast—Maconochie's, au naturel
Dessert—Strawberry Jam; Coffee, au lait

Truly all things are possible to cave dwellers, for that meal—all piping hot—was cooked over a wood fire in one of my empty tobacco tins—some range, but guaranteed—*nearly*—smokeless.

Yesterday I consumed the pickle and crabapple jelly; they were scrumptious. If only the jars had been *larger*. *Entre nous*—I like the pickles best; we get such heaps of jam.

Wes. and I are wearing our stripes. We get $1.15 a day now instead of $1.10—so we'll soon be *rich*.

Do you ever go back and read the papers of a year ago? If not, do so, and turn up my letters too, and then you'll be a real optimist. Gee, things have changed since Hannah died. Poor, tame old Fritz. I never thought to hear our fellows strafing day in and out and never a blooming murmur from over the wire. It seems unreal to me after we carried the short end so long. I'd never be able to explain to you the difference on paper, but listen—if you were here we could go up on the parapet and sit—at night anyway; we didn't do that last year, you can bet.

The date of this letter is misleading—it's two days old now and it may be a week before it's posted.

NOVEMBER 19TH, 1916.

THIS is the same old letter continued. I'm out of the trenches for a few days—same old routine. I'm third on the list for leave now. I'm into my fifteenth month in the trenches. Did we ever dream I'd last this long without a scratch? By the way, now that I hear that mothers, wives and sweethearts, are allowed to wear their soldiers' gold stripes I suppose it's up to me to try and "stop something." There are dozens and dozens of draft men in the battalion who have been wounded. I don't know as I'm overly eager for that honour or for a Blighty but it's popular to pretend you are. I'm still interested in the outfit and don't want to leave the bunch.

Now I'm pretty well run down and will close up. The reason this paper is soiled is because it's three sheets that that husband of yours put in one of his letters to me as a sort of hint, I suppose, and I carried it round in my pocket till the envelope wore off—it's not answered yet. Tell Dad I'm an erratic genius and only write on inspiration.

NOVEMBER 25TH, 1916.

I JUST want to go on record as stating that of all the mothers I've met or read about you are the very best. What has drawn this outburst is your answer to the totally uncalled for letter I wrote from the Somme. It must be bad enough for you to be worrying about the risks I run, as it is, without my making it worse by telling you I was afraid for my miserable

life and, Mumsie, I don't want you to imagine that that letter was written in my normal state of mind. It was just the let-up; the slackening of my nerves after the concert pitch they had been keyed up to; and already that feeling is a thing of the past and I'm sane and confident and careless again. I think the tendency is, after you have risked disaster for a long time, to welcome it as a relief.

However, we have been taken from the hottest spot in France to the very quietest and the result, naturally, is that our nervous tension has relaxed and we're quite ready for more any time. I think I can go into action again quite as confidently as I did the first time and I've entirely lost the feeling that every shell is going to drop on me.

By the time you read this I may be in London.

Christmas is coming round and I hope I'll have had my leave and be back again to spend it with the fellows here. I hope—oh, surely we *will*—spend next Christmas together, you and I.

NOVEMBER 25TH, 1916.

*Dear Dad:*

JUST one month to the third and *last* war Christmas. I'm sure it's the last, *but* I was sure 1915 was the last also.

I'm going to take your advice, for awhile at least, and to the best of my power, and quit thinking about "after the war." The premises may be entirely different a year from now and who *knows* how or when the war will end.

The other matter that chiefly bulks in your letters is my own confusion as to the effect the Somme had

on our nerves—and, again, you were perfectly right. You must understand though that when I wrote you, I was up against something I never dreamed of or believed in, and that in itself was the greater part of the trouble. A man can face death for an hour, with a laugh; for a day, with quiet self control; but when again, again and again he comes within a hair's breadth of disaster and escapes, and when he just has to *sit* and *wait* for whatever luck brings, every fibre in his being cries for an end—*any* end—to the strain; and the reaction—well, you know what that ***must*** be.

But now, that's mostly forgotten, though none of us will ever entirely forget; but the power of ignoring possibilities has returned and with the growth of confidence again comes back the longing for another test, another whirl into grips and confusion and action. I think the battle lust is really the old inborn gambling instinct, for when all's said and done, from a soldier's viewpoint, a battle is the most exciting game of chance there is.

You seem confident that the country owes us much and will repay after the war, but the better part of the country including our mothers, fathers, wives, sisters, and all who are doing their bit at home, is *ourselves* and how can we repay ourselves. It is only those who could and did not, that owe a debt to us and the way they have failed is sufficient to show how much gratitude we can expect from the slackers, the politicians, and the profiteers. Truly, it seems as if there will be no love lost between them and the overseas soldiers and there are some very interesting possibilities in what is going to happen after the war.

I'm looking forward to the snap-shots you promised in your last letter. Parcels come through all right, but

of course not as regularly as first class mail matter. The handling of our mail must be a tremendous problem and the men are very appreciative of the way it is being done. Both the handling of the mail and of the rations are wonderful and also it's wonderful how all these thousands of men are looked after. Fancy, free hot coffee or soup to men coming out of the trenches, or, in these quiet trenches, served every midnight right in the front line.

It's not all kicking here you know—there's considerable admiration and appreciation too.

LONDON, DECEMBER 6TH, 1916.

THIS is my third day in London and being about dinner—AS YOU WERE—I mean *luncheon* time, and so rather a loose end I'm taking the chance to try and write you a letter. Of course, I can't write much of a letter from *London*, and if I could I couldn't do it in the morning after the night before. You needn't get alarmed—there wasn't any wine or that sort of thing—just laughter. Grace and I went last night to the funniest show I ever saw—funnier than "Charlie's Aunt." The posters say "Two and a half hours of continuous laughter," and it was no dream. I thought I'd forgotten how to laugh but honestly, I laughed till it hurt.

I arrived here in my old uniform I got back in June and I had, to make myself presentable, to buy a new outfit from the skin out and with that and other things I've just got seventeen pounds ten shillings left, so I'm settling down you bet, as I've seven whole days here yet to finance. I do like to look clean and feel clean and eat in nice places and sit in good

seats at the shows. Fortunately, the taxis are as scarce as hen's teeth owing to the gas laws but, gee, I'm glad the food laws don't come in till the day I'm due to reach my unit. My lunch cost me ten shillings yesterday and it was jolly well worth it, but under the new law I'd have to go to four restaurants to spend ten shillings on grub.

I hope Dad gets that letter with my shoulder badge I wrote at the "Cri." It was some joke about that letter. I had had but a cup of coffee for breakfast and I got down to Piccadilly about 11.30 and thinks I, "I'll just drop in to the grill and get stuffed a bit so I'll have a long afternoon." Well, there wasn't a soul downstairs—not even a waiter—so I went across to the Army and Navy Stores and bought a couple of clips for my automatic. Then on my return, I discovered a very apologetic head waiter who "hoped I wasn't in a hurry—the waiters would soon arrive." "No, I wasn't in a hurry but I want a cigarette and a sheet of paper to send a letter while I'm waiting." Say, I had to see everyone from the manager down but finally did get what I wanted (up in the lounge, I could not persuade them to bring them down) and then the pen wasn't fit to write with. However, I made shift and went out and registered the letter and when I came back I discovered that my waiter had arrived. He was an ex-private of the Buffs—rheumatism from the salient last winter. I had been in the day before with an Australian, a 'varsity man from Melbourne, a "common private," so the waiter knew me and we got our lunch *tres bon*.

I'll write you a better letter on my return to the trenches.

DECEMBER 16TH, 1916.

THERE were letters from you waiting for me when I got back yesterday—indeed there were fourteen letters from you and other people.

I had a splendid time in London and went to five different theatres and plays—the last night to the Alhambra where one is allowed to smoke. I never had a more comfortable seat in a theatre in my life—the show was good and I nearly laughed myself sick.

Of course I went broke which was to be expected after fifteen months in the trenches, but I got my money's worth, you bet. I had a glorious time in fact, with six meals a day, starting at ten a.m. and finishing at midnight.

I haven't got my parcels yet but they'll probably be up to-night. Sure, I get the papers and magazines and they're the mainstay of the section. I got the gauntlets, too, but I've lost them. However, I don't need them so much this year as I don't do any shovelling, and I bought a pair of fur-lined ones in London.

DECEMBER 17TH, 1916.

I LEFT this unfinished yesterday but I must get it off to wish you and all a Happy New Year, the Peace Year, we'll hope.

I got the shoepacks which are fine for on guard in the cold weather. I got three parcels also containing—let's see—coffee (we had some at "stand to" this a.m.); you're extravagant with your loaf sugar—it can't be got in England; the clips for my Colt (that's four spare now, a complete set); also two cakes (we've eaten the long flat one and the boys say it was fine cake); and the apples which were in perfect condition

(funny how much better Canadian apples taste than English or French); cigarettes, tobacco; socks; and handkerchiefs; a book and a lot of things, very welcome indeed. I had also parcels from Eleanor, Mrs. Heaton, St. Anne's Church, and the Jaffrays, and a big bunch of magazines and papers, and it took two trips for Wes. and Tom to carry them all up.

I hope you have a merry Christmas, you and "the Browns"—the Newly Weds and the Baby—and I do hope you'll all have a happy, bright and prosperous New Year, though it's queer how unimportant the "prosperous" seems these days.

DECEMBER 25TH, 1916, 12.01 A.M.

*My Dear Cousin:*

NOTE the date line. Your letter arrived this—no—yesterday morning so it did get to me for Christmas after all, you see. Most of the other *Christmas* letters were two weeks *early*.

Occasionally you surprise me by showing that you know so much. Some presumption this from an undergrad. to a Mistress of Arts—but who told you that Christmas in the trenches wasn't so terribly unhappy after all? Of course it isn't, and the fact is that it is only by the calendar that we know it is Christmas, for in its duties it is the same as any other day. I am spending my Christmas in a wine cellar, and we can go up a flight of stairs to an ex-estaminet and look through the windows towards Fritz's line and admire his marksmanship on the door—it would be unhealthy to go to the upper storey.

The cellar is small with six beds around the walls and a table in the middle. Our stove is in the doorway and the pipe just ends in the stairway so the

smoke sort of diffuses before showing to Fritz. There's another door under the stairs that leads into a long tunnel out to the emplacement over a hundred feet away. The ceiling of the tunnel is low and of course it is dark and if it were not for our steel "lids" we'd fracture our skulls frequently.

You are not the only one that thought the war would be over by this Christmas. Last year I was *sure* I'd be home for Christmas, 1916, but now I'm not sure about 1917, but I'm—oh, I'm *hoping* I will be.

I agree with you that the maps are not a reliable indication of the enemy's success, though they are depressing to look at to-day. The casualty tables are more encouraging and indicate that we won't play out first, as our losses are, proportionately, fifty per cent. less than theirs. Every battalion of the B. E. F. has now met Fritz hand to hand and in every case beaten him, which means a lot to us—and to Fritz.

Why, oh why, do not our eminent politicians realize that we're losing *real* men's lives every hour that they waste squabbling about forms and formulæ? There are two men in England to-day who are talking *sense*—Bottomley says, "Get on with the war," and Father Bernard Vaughan says, "Kill Germans," and Tommy—millions of him—English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, Australian, African, Indian, Canadian—says, "Why don't they let us *go?*" The orders to go don't take us far enough to get Fritz's big guns—the ones that get us. The ambition of all our fellows is to get into the German garrison artillery with the bayonet. The field artillery takes about the same chances as we do but the "heavies"—they're away back four

or five miles in *comfort* and *safety*—pounding in our trenches, and I tell you there's no love mingled with the admiration Tommy has for Fritz's heavies, and one of these days we'll get the desire of our hearts and go right through and from Switzerland to the sea—but, as you say, it is slow waiting.

The mud is an awful handicap, and when men have to carry up the shells because horses can't pull the limbers, it's hard, *hard* work—so don't be too impatient.

Yes, we can learn of our own achievements at first hand but the wonderful imagination that characterizes the stories in the papers makes us eager to see them. Of course, they tell the truth but what makes the yarns so beautiful to us is that they don't stop at the truth—not even at possibilities.

I read with much amusement the thoughts, and the motives that inspired your friend in the —, and I, at least, have never met anybody with such views. Every man has his own reasons for enlisting, but his were new ones to me and I bet he'll change his ideas before he is through with the game. If you wish to know *my* sentiments, here they are: I enlisted because I hadn't the nerve to stay at home. You didn't know that before did you? I'm rather fond of my Mother, and my people and I didn't want them loving a coward. That's mostly why I joined. Oh, yes, Canada is worth dying for, but that didn't occur to me until after I had attested. Before—I was thinking mostly of my own desires and ambitions and of Mother and Dad and all my friends, for, naturally, a fellow is apt to think of himself and his folks when he's about to go and let people shoot at him.

Still, it never occurred to me that Britain should not have been in this war and, of course, Canada is a part of the Empire and I'm just as much interested in Britain's honour as anyone who was born in England. Of course you see that. It seemed to me when Germany invaded France that if England stood by and let France be beaten again, I, personally, would be disgraced forever. Therefore, logically, I belong right where I am.

Your friend may have studied history but he missed this—that no ideal ever grew in this world unless it was watered by the blood of men who gladly gave their lives for it. Believe me, neither the United States or Canada can keep alive an ideal by talk.

The Bible itself teaches "As a man *does*" not "As a man *says*." When a million men die for an ideal that's what makes it grow. As to our not being *wanted* over here—that's absolute nonsense. They just idolize "Colonials" in England and especially Canadians, as your friend will find. They think we're wonderful to come so far to fight for the Empire and they do everything in the world to show their feelings.

Canada's contribution *was* unsought—God forbid that Britain need ever *ask* her sons for help. To the extent that she would certainly have won the war without us, our "sacrifice" may have been "unnecessary"—but isn't it worth while? Just to be able to keep our pride in our land and in our race, isn't it worth *any* sacrifice? And it certainly is not "useless." That anybody can read and call it useless I can't understand, but *some* people said it was sentimental foolishness to hold Ypres. Well, it *wasn't* and no Canadian *soldier* thinks for a moment that it was, for we know.

CHRISTMAS NIGHT, 1916.

THREE letters from you to-night and one from Dad. It was perfectly all right for you to publish my letter about the battle of Courcelette if you thought it sufficiently interesting or, indeed, any of my letters so long as there is nothing in their publication that transgresses the regulations. Do you know that the letter was copied by several country papers and in each it was said that I was a resident of the place where the paper was published. We had quite a laugh about it and the fellows wanted clippings to send to their friends. Some of the boys said I had made it sound too easy, but it was as *I* saw it. Some were in front of machine guns, others had bayonet work to do, but I wrote only what I saw myself and know to be true. If I had known that you would have liked a German helmet you would have had it, but next time we go "over" I'll get one for you.

One thing I have learned out here is, how little anything that we used to think of such importance really matters. This saves a lot of heart burning and here, continually face to face with death, I've come to *know* it's true. Like you, Mother dear, I think I'm coming back to you but just now everything else in the world seems to have ceased to exist. Life, as I used to live it, is a thing of the past and just one thing has remained unchanged in this wreck of a world gone insane, and that thing—the only thing that matters, the only thing that makes living possible—is LOVE. Out of my old world there appears to be left but you, Dad, and me. Everything else seems incidental, but we are one and live in and for each other.

Do you know, Mother, we are getting spoiled over here? Everybody makes so much fuss over us—our people, the papers, the girls—can you wonder that we're apt to get "puffy?" Of course, we see the funny side of it too and we laugh about it, but I guess it's human nature to *enjoy* it, and a little of it sort of stays with us. To get right to the point, both you and Dad are trying to spoil me by being too good to me.

I used to think that I wasn't selfish but I'm afraid I've got that way. One by one the virtues you inculcated drop away, Mumsie, and I guess I'm just a *mutt*. You make a great mistake if you think that our being here implies that we're "noble," "brave" and all the rest of it. All the world mostly is fighting; every man of the belligerent nations of military age (*Canadians* alone excepted) is in the firing line, and we're just the same thoughtless, selfish fellows that we were in August, 1914. Honestly, I think I'd done "nobler" things before than I did when I enlisted so, Mother, come back and treat me as a good for nothing should be treated. I've never seen a man acting the coward here yet, though there are millions in the lines, and it's no credit, is it, to be just as good that way as the poorest specimen of your sex about you? So endeth this "sermon"—I'm pretty sleepy—Christmas day, 1916, is over—it's almost midnight. I've slept part of the day; I've read Service's "Rhymes of a Red Cross Man," which are pretty good, and I've read your letters. I got a parcel from you this morning too, the one with the box of candy in it from L. If I don't acknowledge all your parcels, it isn't ingratitude, it's absentmindedness. Anyway,

Mother mine, I love you, and that's why I think you love me too much and are too good to me.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE, JANUARY 20TH, 1917.

I THINK of all the money you ever sent that from Auntie came at the most opportune time. The rations went astray yesterday, and we'd almost given up hope when your letter arrived, the result of which was that I went to church in a much better frame of mind. I can't say I enjoyed the sermon, and you'd think our chaplain should know us better than to preach as he did. We're proud of our dead but don't want their deaths spoken of to us as "glorious sacrifice." We die because it's in the game and because it's a struggle now for existence between our Empire and their's; and our race has never dodged an issue and it isn't doing it to-day. Our chaplain, all the same, has the hearts of his "congregation" pinned to him with a little bit of blue and white ribbon. He is one of the officers that got less than he deserved—an M.C. —when all the men in the brigade believed he earned a V.C. I'll tell you what he did:

In a certain sunken road, known to all our division to its cost, there were a great many dead, both ours and their's. They had been lying for, perhaps, two weeks, and it took a brave man to touch them. Well, our and another chaplain spent two days *bareheaded* on that road burying them. We used to avoid the place as much as possible and never went down the road except at a double, and it was constantly shelled by the Germans. You see why, then, that the fellows all regard our chaplain with a kind of awe, as a man

braver than the bravest of us; for there isn't any other man I know who would willingly have gone down that road bareheaded.

I'm going to have my picture taken to-morrow if I can get time—then you'll be able to see for yourself whether or not I'm a real live boy still. Certainly I feel very much alive after eight miles of a route march this afternoon.

Please God, by next New Year's you'll see me in the flesh, for I believe that the next few months will bring the climax and the end of the war. The fact is that now every time we bombard, Fritzie climbs into his hole, takes off his equipment, and gets ready to become a prisoner when we go over. How much of an advantage to us that is, our casualty lists will show. It's come now pretty much to a case of keeping cool-headed and being safe. Our barrage is easily visible, and behind it we can advance in security, and all we have to watch out for is not to go too fast and walk into it in the excitement. Truly, taking trenches is the easiest and safest thing our fellows do now-a-days.

Last night I got your parcel with the Red Cross puzzles for Wes. and me, the socks from Pearl, and the stuffed figs, and preserved ginger. That wasn't all, of course, but you will know which parcel it was. Wes. had got one of the puzzles last week, and we had so much fun trying to solve it that I just did up both the new ones and sent them to Eleanor for her boys at the hospital. Thank Pearl very much for remembering me and for all the thoughtful labour put in these socks. Honestly, Mother, I'm ashamed to wear the socks you send—there's so much work

for you all in them, and I don't think I deserve it. You know I really think there's quite too much sympathy wasted on us soldiers. If I didn't want to be here more than anything else on earth, I wouldn't be here; and if you don't realize that, why just look at all the thousands of Canadians that *aren't* here. I guess there's blood from too many generations of soldiers in me for anything to have kept me out of this. I'm just as big a coward as any of the slackers, but I *wanted* to be a soldier all my life, and now I *am* one and glad I was born in time to be in this big scrap. Why, if there hadn't been the war, I'd have probably lived out all my life in the monotony of earning a living. Mother, don't you know that just to go "over the top" once is worth anything else life has to offer! That's *living!* And when we all come back home and you hear us talk, you'll realize that the most "horrible horror" of the war is its deadly monotony—just as it is in life generally. I saw a piece of poetry in the *Star*—"We're Going Over the Bags To-night"—that just expresses how we feel.

Mother, if there were only some way to make you cease worrying about me I'd feel perfectly happy. I know if you were in my place you'd never have a breath of worry about the outcome. Can't you feel that back of all this seeming fury there is a cool Intelligence planning, using us to the best that's in us; and, when we are done, there are millions of our kind to take up the unfinished tasks. We're only atoms in a vast consciousness. Why should *we* trouble ourselves about what the Master does with us? God guard you all and comfort and keep you.

FEBRUARY 27TH, 1917.

REGARDING the subject nearest your heart and mine just now. Matters are at a standstill owing to the continued absence of the O.C. I've done everything I can now and I couldn't have done so much if it hadn't been for "Doc" who is such a *man*. For the first time since I've been in the Army I've signed my full name (to those papers) "Armine Frank *Gibson*" —Norris.

MARCH 2ND, 1917.

THE *raison d'etre* of this letter is to tell you I have reason to believe that I'll be a blooming "Loot" as you read this, or, if not, in a fair way to become one. I'll cable you of course as soon as I hear definitely and if you get this before the cable you'll know I haven't got my papers *yet*.

MARCH 24TH, 1917.

No! I'm not chasing the Huns. Isn't the news glorious? You ought to see us mob a paper boy when that rare outpost of civilization arrives near a camp. The wonderful British Army through the trench canteens and the radio keeps us informed, even when we're in the trenches, of the latest news, and for the past ten days each day has brought news so utterly, incredibly, marvellously good we refuse to believe anything we don't read for ourselves because there's such a crop of humourists. But, I'll tell you a joke. The Monday that brought news of the German retreat I went over to the trench "Y" and brought back a copy of the "official." Well, next day S. and W. and I went over and they hadn't the bulletin so, to save

disappointing the rest, we invented one. It included an advance of eight miles, cavalry actions, aeroplane strafing of the retiring enemy, and naval actions in the North Sea, and the point of the joke is—on the Wednesday we got a paper and it was all *true*. Of course, the details we supplied were inaccurate but the main features were right. After that I *quit*. I thought we'd gone beyond the bounds of possibility, but, honestly, all we can do these days is to marvel. Let Fritz console himself with his "voluntary withdrawal" stuff, but every foot he goes back is a foot of France redeemed and *finally* redeemed for we'll hold all we gain. Think of writing you from "Somewhere in Germany." You know down in our souls is echoing the chant:

"We've got him where we want him now;
We can see the shells a-popping on his bow; (read *stern.*)
No matter what it's cost,
It's worth all the loss;
It's worth all the fighting just to be the boss;
We've got him in the *open* now.
He's going to his German frau."

Mumsie, are you enough of a Tommy to understand what it means—those magic words "in the open?"

For thirty months we've been underground and gaining only inches. Now the lucky ones are in the open, marching towards Berlin in *column*. Oh, open fighting is Tommy's game—Fritz loves the devious ways of long range murder with everything on a scale map, but—in the open—that's *our* business. The German papers say it's a voluntary retirement to an impregnable line. Ah Crie! and the "Contemptible little army" too! There "ain't no such thing" as an impregnable

line—not in our dictionary. The best asset in warfare is a living line of men who love to fight for fighting's own sake, men who won't and can't be beaten—and our business is winning. It's not form to be jubilant in the Army, but I'm positively past the point where I can suppress my effervescent optimism. I'm betting when, if ever, Fritz gets into his impregnable line, he'll find it easier to *start* a retreat than *stop* it, but we'll see. Wouldn't I like to be *home* just for five minutes. Oh, not to miss the summer here but just to bubble over a bit.

I've no personal news whatever. You'll know as soon as I when (if) I'm gazetted. I believe it's going through and I'm told it should come within the next two or three weeks, but, what's the difference anyway?

Your letters from the 12th to the end of February are missing. I've received parcels, also a lot of papers and magazines but not the Orillia *Packet*.

The little cards of Helen's and Fee's are awfully dear. Wish I were going to be with you for Easter.

MARCH 31ST, 1917.

OI, yoi! it's cold. From which you can gather I'm otherwise O.K. But we're having the most utterly damnable weather and we're living in tents and—for reasons sufficient—I had to throw away my underwear yesterday. Isn't life one thing after another?

We're in tents because we're out of shell fire doing physical torture *et al* for the good of our condition. It's raining, therefore, I hope I'm not neglecting anything of importance by staying in my tent and writing this letter. Fritzie is the cause of my lack of underwear in this wise. He shelled the baths the day we were to bathe and you can fancy fellows running

through the village *au naturel*. Unfortunately there were several casualties in the area during the day. He began at dinner time throwing "express trains" upon the hills above our camp. There was a brand new bunch from Canada camped next us and you should have heard them cheer the duds—the first half dozen were duds. We didn't cheer. You get over that in time—but we prepared to depart from there *at once*. A shell lit some sixty yards from our hut and right among the bivouac, killing several men and horses of the new bunch. There were no further cheers—only the call for stretcher bearers, and horses and men running. I stayed away from that camp till supper time and I was very glad we moved next morning. Therefore, I missed a much needed bath—I'll get that Heinie yet.

We had a "funeral" yesterday—poor old 1738. We turned it in. I borrowed a stretcher and Wes. and I carried it reverently to the limber—our first, and last, Colt gun. You might add, our best—Sgt. Hill, No. 1; Adamson, No. 2; Norris, No. 3; Wesley, No. 4—when we left Toronto. Some *gun*, some *crew*.

Your newspapers are hysterical "prevaricators." I've told you that you'd hear from me before the papers got any news if we were in a place hot enough to excuse the papers printing anything lurid. The yarn about Charlie's division was invented. A raid isn't an action you know. We're all, always, "in action" but not often in "fierce fighting." In fact, up to date, I've never seen bared bayonets at work or a German armed and alive.

Don't you believe that I'll laugh at your socks. I feel very much more like crying when I think of the hours and hours of work you've put in on them.

Dad's letter telling me of Uncle Frank's (F. S. Spence) death came with yours telling me of his illness. Poor Bessie and poor Aunt Sarah! I'm enclosing with this a letter to Bessie. Dad feels pretty badly I gather. It's hard to feel away out here.

Take care of yourself and Dad while I'm so far away.

I'm glad those souvenirs weren't lost after all.

APRIL 10TH, 1917.

JUST look at the date of this letter, Friday, April 10th. Well, I'm jake. Wes. and I were left out this trip. Why, I know not, but Capt. A. (*alias* "Doc") is my company O.C. and perhaps that's why. He and Capt. B. and Mr. N., who is my immediate O.C., and is in charge of the bunch left out here, have been at pains to impress on us that our commissions were coming through very soon. I don't know as I feel very grateful for being kept out of it to-day, and yet—the mud and the rain and snow—it's been terrible weather. Paddy O'Reilly went up and came back with another man and three times he lost him in the trenches to find him stuck in the mud. You'll hardly credit it but one platoon had five men missing—all lost in the mud—going in. If this is "sunny" France, give me Ontario. We've had snow flurries all day. It's snowing as I write and this is April. In between the clouds we've bright sunshine.

I wonder if you enjoy reading the newspapers these days? Are you satisfied at last with the U.S.A., Dad? Maybe there won't be some rivalry between the Canadians and Americans if ever we go over side by side. Talk about "sister colonies!"

I like Americans—some Americans at least. I've been instructing a Texan on the gun and it's like a breath of home—his accent, for you know *we* talk English now, rather than American. That's a thing I noticed when I saw Eleanor. The girls have *kept their* accent.

What's happened to the camera? There's an awful dearth of snapshots lately and it's getting spring and picture time. I want a good one of you and another of Mother in a leather case, breast pocket size.

I hope you get these things from Vickery's and I hope you won't give away the souvenirs.

APRIL 11TH, 1917.

ONE more of our old fellows is gone, Arthur Adamson, the second of No. 3 crew to be killed. Art was No. 2 on the crew when we left Toronto and when we came to France. Out of that group picture you have of the section, there's only left Dan, Charlie M., Wes., and me.

You may congratulate Uncle Howard and Uncle Archie on now being able to admit their American citizenship without blushing. Three cheers for Uncle Sam!—and Cuba, and Panama, China, Chili, and Argentine. The water's fine and every ship counts.

APRIL 18TH, 1917.

"*Dear Norris:*

AFTER much waiting on your part, I see that your move order has at last come through. Please allow me to congratulate you, Armine, old cock. You have been through the mill and I am awfully glad it has at last come. Good luck to you, Old Man. Remember me to your people when you write. 'Doc.'"

The enclosed is self-explanatory and I'm beginning this letter at the rail-head as I've an hour to kill before the train leaves. My address which you'll have in my cable is, *"Lieut.* A. F. Norris," etc. — M.G. Battery. For a while I'll be well away from the falling shells as I'm reporting to the Base.

I was left out again and acting as Q.M. for the "details" and was down getting the mail when a runner came up and handed me a letter marked "Urgent—Rush." Now, there was some mix-up with the Lewis guns of the company due either to my butting in or something else. I don't know which. I thought "Here's some of my sins coming back to roost," but when I read the letter!—Well, you've just read it! I'd just had supper when another message arrived, "You will report to Paymaster immediately." I did— you just bet your life I did, and he said, "Oh, Norris, your commission came. You're not posted to the 20th; you're posted to the — M.G. Battery." *What!* Well, it was true. Just "fawncey," no more trenches, no more mud, no more pack, no more lice, no more hiking. Such joyful news has come my way at very infrequent intervals.

"I'm so happy, oh, so happy, don't you envy me,
Right on my mother's knee, she thinks the world of me."
(Do you? You do.)

APRIL 20TH, 1917.

I DID it. Mumsie, whatever else they say of your son—he is pretty well used to doing what he wants when he wants it.

I had no order to report by a given time at the Base so really there was no reason why I shouldn't

see Eleanor, and there was every reason why I should, so when we got to the station (it was after nine at night) I debated whether it would be too great an imposition to load myself on her hospitality at that hour. However, I couldn't go *without* seeing her so. I dropped off, and I've been a patient in a hospital at last and slept in one of the wards.

There was so much to say we almost made a night of it but I got forty winks all right and better still a bath. I had to stop over twenty-four hours, then came straight through.

Mother mine, can you imagine the torture of walking in to the mess to-night in my old faded lance-corporal uniform? I funked it at tea time but at dinner I invaded it, and some Christian gentleman took pity on my conspicuousness and was most kind to me, so my ordeal was more dreadful in anticipation than in reality. To-morrow I go to Ordnance for part, at least, of a kit I hope, and everyone here seems to think that within a week I'll be given kit leave—to Blighty!

So you can understand that I'm so happy that I couldn't be more so. And—I'm twenty-four years old to-day—many happy returns—thank you!

APRIL 27TH, 1917.

I MUST write you to-night though I haven't much to tell you. I'm still at the Base and my future is a mystery, but I'm having a pretty good time. I've got all the outward signs of rank at least. True, they don't fit—I mean the clothes—but they'll do until I get to England or if I go to the firing line. I've had six days wandering around mostly buying a few things and practising acknowledging salutes. One of the

fellows asked me the other day, "Why do you wear your stars on your cuff?" I said, "Well, you see, every time I meet a Tommy I look around for the officer he is saluting and then I see my own cuff and remember."

I had my first duty to-day—censoring umpteen hundred letters. They're funny but rather painfully similar. Lord only knows what was in the last bunch —I *read* them but I was *thinking* of my lunch.

SUNDAY, APRIL 29TH, 1917.

I FILLED out a cheque the other day "1916." Fancy forgetting the *year*. How many of my letters have been dated wrongly?

I have to "conduct a route march" to-morrow, and will not be censoring letters. You'd be astonished at some of these letters. They've been from hospitals and it makes you proud, the way the fellows write the news home. One poor chap had lost a leg, and he never mentioned it till the postcript. It was all "don't worry"—"not serious"—"coming to England soon."

Mother, I'm glad you've got interested in the hospitals and the poor beggars that have got back all smashed up. It hurts me to think that none of the girls I knew in peace time have become nurses.

I think *you* are going to be one of us who know war for just what it is, for dropping the glamour of romance and the horror pacifists cover it with—the real thing is just life set to fortissimo.

MAY 18TH, 1917.

AT last I've got a letter from you, dated April 11th and re-addressed three times, and believe me it was welcome.

Wes. went through the last show unhurt. I wasn't in it but was close enough to see the works moving and perhaps I'll be in the next and bigger one.

I had three Harvard men to dinner the other night. Dr. A. is going home and you'll see him within a few weeks. He's a jolly, fine fellow. Wish I were going with him but my turn's coming.

MAY 24TH, 1917.

IF I'd thought how hard it might be for you to open that cable I'd have sent it to Dad, but I only thought how tickled you would be when you did open it and, judging from your letter, you were.

I've got a parcel at last. Do you recognize the paper? Please tell Dad he couldn't have sent me anything else half so useful. Thank Bessie for her book. I've been trying to capture a copy of it for months.

Those snaps of you were fine. I don't think they do you half justice but they're you all the same and for that reason I love them.

It's dear of Lois to want me to come and "loaf away the strain" *apres*, but I've done all and more loafing than is good for me these two years past. What I'm going to need after the war is real hard work and lots of it, and when I come back I'm going to spend a few weeks with my parents, so look forward to making me get up in the morning and stay in in the evenings.

I'd love to see the kiddies—all of them—"Miss Brown"—Helen, Fee, and my goddaughter.

You know I'm learning—no—I've learnt that there is nothing in all the world like Canadian girls. All

the sisters who wear our stars are worthy representatives of Canada, abroad. They're proud of what our soldiers have done and we, of what our nurses *are*, and what they haven't done, and, incidentally, they have the prettiest and neatest uniform—especially the absurd stars and leather belt.

I'm hoping Hal. won't need to come across, but, Mother, I'm really afraid he will and I wish he'd take an O. T. C. course just to be ready for next summer if next summer comes.

Mumsie, I knew weeks and weeks in advance of that scrap but you see I couldn't say "the battalion is going to take part in the biggest scrap of the war up to date and I'm staying out," but I did say "you needn't worry about me; I'm not going to be in any special danger as far as I can see."

I've sure gone some these past two weeks. I've met so many of the sisters and I've had a very good time. It's so comfortable having someone to loaf with.

JUNE 10TH, 1917.

I'M writing sitting with my back against a tree in a grove of pines and supposed to be watching the road, for I have an engagement to have tea with one of the fellows from the mess and he is to pick me up on the way past—provided I see him.

You won't be sorry to know that there is little likelihood of my being sent up the line for some time yet; so I'm looking forward to several weeks of contented idleness. This is the lotus land—a land of dreams where always the sun shines, and the birds sing, and a little breeze steals off the Channel. A land of sand dunes and hidden pockets of pines, where it's shady,

cool, and carpeted with needles. A land of little tea rooms—beside the sea—in the woods—beside a lake—oh! a land of beauty that I haven't seen equalled anywhere. On one side it's an hour's walk to a little old port whence a tram runs—always through pines—to a modern seaside town—*plage* (beach) they call them in France. On the other side it's an hour's walk over the hills to another *plage*—the loveliest spot of all. There's an old farm like we see in pictures, with an orchard and a lake—and it's a "rustic inn" now where you lunch with the branches trailing in your wine. And from there, trams run into a big port where there is a Canadian paymaster—praises be—and indeed it is the most interesting town I've been in yet. Eleanor will have described it fully. She was there many months, and Charlie, too, was in hospital there.

I haven't yet had tea in our mess—there are so many tea places near. In the mess is a bunch of bridge fanatics. Between you and me they don't play as good a game as we do at home and their bidding and mine clash, so I've paid for my education. Wouldn't I like to have one of you for a partner for a week while we acquired all the loose change in that mess.

And now I guess I'd better close. That fellow will be here any minute.

JUNE 19TH, 1917.

THERE is among the Canadians here a Toronto boy and he's attached himself to me because he says I need to be taken "out of my shell." Sunday he gave

a picnic to five sisters from the Harvard unit, three of the doctors, and me. We walked two miles and a half over the hills and the heat was awful, but we didn't actually dissolve owing to a providential thunderstorm without rain. The others came out and met us about six and then we gorged ourselves and romped and then lay under the trees, watched the sunset, and wondered why we shouldn't be perfectly contented with active service. And so, back in the gathering dusk with the painted sky at the end of the road. Under the sky was England, whence steamers run home. To me I don't believe Canada is home any longer. It's my country, but over here, every single living thing is my friend, an understanding fellow worker. It's a good thing you live there, you and Dad and the others, or I wouldn't want to come back.

Let me inform you that I don't ride a horse. I'll need a sword when I come home for full dress parades. Where is Grandpa's?

I was very sorry to hear of poor Doc's death. Not for him, because he died quickly and painlessly and because he had no reason to fear death. He was always a gentleman and a very fine officer, who came up to the real test. His company did truly worship him. Everyone in the battalion, officers and men, liked and respected him. I never knew another draft officer to win such a place in the battalion. All the men looked on him as a natural leader and a good friend. So even if I hadn't known him personally, and if I hadn't owed him so much, I'd have been sorry to hear of his going. I feel terribly sorry for his people. I can't write them but I wish you would and tell them these things for me.

"DOC."

CAPTAIN ARTHUR HOLFORD ARDAGH

*Dear Dad:*

I see the Government has introduced a conscription bill. I suppose it will pass. It's almost two years late but better late than never, and the war may last another year. It's kind of heartbreaking, considering that we have it won; but we'll just go on to the end and pray there won't be any sentimental peace. Peace be d—d. It's war we want and we're getting it at last, glory be.

JUNE 30TH, 1917.

IT's ages since I wrote you but you know I'm safe and that I've been very very busy—enjoying myself. Wasn't it funny I never knew I'd been gazetted until to-day when Eleanor sent me a copy of *Canada* in which my name appeared and it was dated April 9th, so, presumably, you knew before I did.

I told you, didn't I, that the Harvard Hospital is close to the camp and there's a pretty girl there from Worcester, Mass., with red hair. Monday she and another girl had afternoon off, so M. and I arranged a picnic *a quatre* and his orderly brought the lunch out to us. Lunch! Oh just two chickens, salad, and about half a crate of strawberries. When we went over for the girls we hadn't mentioned picnic—it *was* to be a surprise, but they had rugs all rolled up—and a comb—and hairpins. Now, tell me was that picnic a "surprise" or not?

To-morrow being Dominion Day, there's a big picnic of about forty and most of the organization fell to M. and me since we suggested it. It's raining to-day —here's hoping it isn't to-morrow.

I spent only about a hundred francs in two weeks so I'm beginning to live inside my allowance.

July 5th, 1917.

Still at the Base and having a good time and no sign of going either to England or to the line.

Our Dominion Day picnic was a dinner dance instead. It was a rotten day, cold and cloudy and windy, so of course that killed the picnic. We had to find some place big enough for us all. Fortunately, we discovered a little hotel about two miles from camp on the beach with a long dining room—just built for us in fact. We had thirty-two to start with and we all went down to the beach and had tea. Then while some danced, some rode a providential donkey, and still others a sand yacht, Marie, Kim, M. and I went back to meet the orderlies bringing the dinner. We had a dandy time and romped on the sand dunes and generally behaved like children, much to the amusement of some of the hotel folk. Oh, well! it's only the first of July once a year and isn't a twenty-five foot sand dune a temptation to play "King of the Castle?"

Then we had dinner, a few more dances just for digestion, and away home. You know the sisters have to be in by ten.

Did I tell you Andy T. arrived Wednesday? So we had three Orillia boys—Dane, Andy, and me.

Yesterday being the Fourth, there was a big celebration and every building was covered with flags, especially Old Glory. The place was crowded with Americans mostly from the hospital staffs here.

By the way, this is summertime and there aren't so many Canadians in France so, naturally, we stick together. This is lest you might think I was rather

informal calling the girls by their first names—they're Canadians and ladies, you know.

JULY 9TH, 1917.

I'M going to try and write a real letter, but the fact is, Mother mine, that I've too much leisure, too much money, too many distractions and attractions, and after being a soldier for so long and starved for the sound of girls' voices, I've gone to the other extreme I guess. I think, being my wise Mother, you'll understand and be happy because I am.

The corps had an athletic meet this afternoon and the mess entertained their lady friends to tea, so I asked M. to come and see what a classy tea the Emma Gees can put up. It was very nice too.

I can't say I approve of your bridge, but the fact is, in bidding you must use sense—not rules—and must figure that your partner does likewise.

Now, its just about bed-time and I've a lot of work in the morning—censoring on Sundays and Mondays is no joke. For the next month or two you'll be free from worry knowing I'm at the Base.

JULY 16TH, 1917.

Now, I want to talk "politics." Listen! While folks at home are wrangling about the fairness of the conscription measure proposed by the Government, our casualties are going on just the same. We want men, more men, and still more men, and our hearts are going to be broken if we have to reduce our field force. I'm not interested in the petty party squabbles. All I know is that we need men and the Government

has at last decided to give them to us. If there's an election, every loyal Canadian should vote for conscription. You just have to trust the Government to be as fair as it can be. And, anyway, it isn't a question of fairness or unfairness. It isn't politics at all. Our honour is pledged to win this war. Laurier said "To our last man, to our last dollar." Well, we want both and we're going to need them. So, Dad, for my sake and Stew.'s and Doc's and Charlie's forget politics and vote for *us*.

AUGUST 2ND, 1917.

It's been raining for four days and is still at it. I tried to write you yesterday but it's too easy to feel blue on a wet day under canvas hence the letter was not a success so it was burned. Doesn't the weather fight against us? It almost seems as if "me" had some influence in the partnership of "Me and Gott." But, I'm not fighting and what the rain did to me was to interfere with a picnic we had planned for the girls and, considering that they only get one afternoon off in a week, and the prospect's for a heavy influx of cases, I thought the rain ill-timed. However, we did go over to my old friend's, Madame, the schoolmistress, or rather, the master's wife, and had the usual dinner—chicken and all the fixings. So it wasn't such an unsatisfactory day after all and when you've got rain coats, rain doesn't matter much, does it? K. and I have been at Madame's so often she's getting to call us both by name now. I've told you before that she can *cook*, haven't I? She knows how to make the nicest omelette you ever ate.

AUGUST 12TH, 1917, SEAFORD.

DON'T faint when you see this date line, because I'm "over 'ome" for the next few months and there's even a faint hope dawning on the farthest horizon that I'll see you before Christmas. That's not to be built on, however, but having been two years in France I am, under present regulations, in line for Canada leave. You can just bet if there is any chance I'm coming to see you before I go back to paths of glory.

I was going out on Tuesday afternoon as usual and as I went into our mess to get my lid, S. called to me, "Did you know we're going to Blighty in the morning?" There were five of us to go. Well that *was* a night. K. and Miss S., an English Emma Gee and your hopeful son, went over to Madame's for dinner and you should have been there. But it's just as well you weren't, for it just kept drumming in my head, "Your last night in France," and maybe we didn't have some hilarious time. I made Madame and Monsieur le Maire and all the little ones come in and drink to Canada in bubbly stuff. It was a fine large night. We arrived "home" at eleven, just an hour after the girls were supposed to be in, and I sent K. to waken M. and T. and a couple of others I knew pretty well and we held a farewell revue. We were to have left at 6.25 a.m., but as a matter of fact it was after lunch so I went down to 24 and said good-bye and paraded again at 22's operating room. We got to London about midnight but couldn't find a hotel for some time and finally had to be content with rooms at the St. James.

I went out next day and stayed the night at Cousin P.'s and in the morning enjoyed myself ordering one swagger outfit and left at 3.20 to come down here.

"Old Soldier" is in command of the company to which we're posted and Andy T. and umpteen Orillia products are here as is also Alex. B.

This may be my ruin, but I'll enjoy life while it lasts.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1917.

I HAVE been back from leave for a whole week, and to-day is Sunday. Time flies when you have something to do.

Tuesday we were interviewed by the Company O.C., and Wednesday put into a class preparatory to an exam. in what we know of the theory and practice of machine gunnery. That means we parade at nine and 1.45 for a debating society meeting. Theoretically, they are *lectures*, but as everybody has his ideas to express (always barring "yours truly" of course) there's not much lecture to it. That takes the days except Saturday and Sunday, and Saturday there's a route march. Yesterday it poured and I got soaked.

I was detailed for church parade this morning—my first in nearly six months—and my very first as an officer. The chaplain preached about as good a sermon as I've heard. They have a church with organ, pulpit, chancel, altar rail—oh, all the regular fittings—that seats, I should estimate, well over a thousand men. I was admiring the stained glass windows and asking where they came from and found they were paper pasted on glass, but they *look* real.

I have been fortunate enough to get into a room and have a perfectly good spring bed and a mattress, thanks to the kindness of Mr. S. who came over with the original 19th. We've had a heavy gale and all the tents went down. There were over thirty officers

in them and when I saw the ruins I was glad I wasn't in one.

SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1917.

WELL, we're getting nearer to each other, aren't we? It only takes a bit over two weeks for your letters to come now. Last week wasn't strenuous. Incidentally, I've had a few games of golf, but I'm not like Dad, I get worse instead of better.

I am interested in your soldiers, and am going to assign some money to you for them as I'd like to help.

I'm fed up with London. I'm not exactly penurious, but—do you remember that song, "Jack's a Cinch, But Every Inch a Sailor?" Well, believe me, Colonials are a cinch for the experienced sluggers in the Big Town. Oh! it's worth while, I think, to go the pace once, and pretend you're a millionaire, but afterwards I'd rather live inside the money I hope to have, and you can't—not in a uniform, in London; at least *I* can't. But don't picture me unhappy or worrying.

I was sorry to leave France. There is something in the spirit of things over there. Everyone is your friend, or rather, your comrade—and that's like being a relative—there are no strangers in France and the French people are good to us. Somehow, a Frenchman can sort of make you feel as if you were an honoured and very welcome guest, and every person you meet is so friendly. That's where the charm is of France. A French girl told me last winter that the French liked the Canadians because we were so much like themselves. Courtesy and good fellowship seem ingrained in both and we can understand each other because, in spite of our different languages, we think along parallel lines.

Two more of my old friends have been wounded. In fact, there are more 5-7's and 5-8's in the list this week than in any list since the Somme.

Eleanor is going home to Canada early in January. Isn't she lucky? But she surely deserves it. She's been overseas about as long as I.

I've got to lecture to a company of men to-morrow. Why I ever undertook the job I don't know, but if I survive I'll write you again.

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 1917.

WHILE I was in France I hadn't time to write, and now I'm here I've nothing to write about—so there you are!

Honestly, your letter made me smile. You'd think I was as popular with the girls as Charlie, but I'm *not*. The girls at the Base are just as lonely as we are, perhaps more so, as Canadian girls are used to having a good time and they don't get too much of that on active service; but I sure did my best to give them one.

I see you and Lois will have a vote under the new Franchise Law. You'll vote, of course, as I want you to, since it is by virtue of me that you can vote. I guess you know how I'll vote and I bet that Dad votes that way too. The war's being fought by soldiers and our leaders should have what they require to fight with. I belong to the "Win the War" party, and as long as we get the men, I'm afraid I don't care a hoot *how* we get them, and whether we are fair in not conscripting wealth also. There's no shortage of money—when there is, why we'll have to take that too. No man's life, property, feelings, or anything matters when the King needs it.

SEPTEMBER 18TH, 1917.

WE need at once a hundred thousand men—General Currie says so—and it's no more unfair to conscript some and exempt others than it was to allow us to volunteer while so many remained at home. We need them *now*, and I'm going to vote for the Union Government—so are you. It's no use kicking about what the Government doesn't do and at the same time prevent it doing things. The Premier is neither traitor or fool and he possesses a lot of information that we haven't. Back him up and give him the assurance that we're *all* with him.

By the way, Dad, lest you think I'm deserting the old party—there is no longer a Conservative and a Liberal party. There's a soldiers' party and a slackers' party. I enlisted in the first which just naturally brings you in, because if you'd been lucky enough to be my age you'd have enlisted too. It's not our fault we can't follow our old leader. Yes, I've fought alongside French-Canadians and finer fighters there are none, save the Irish—and that excuses neither Bourassa or Sinn Fein, does it?

SEPTEMBER 23RD, 1917.

My day was officially disarranged this morning when I was detailed for a "reconnaisance on horseback." Heigh ho! three solid hours of it, and it's six years since I was on a horse before. I never learned to ride either, for out West I got on as best I could, stayed on ditto, and prodded my gee-gee into a nice canter. Now, in the army you *ride*—get that! and usually at a gentle trot which, to my inexperience, is about as gentle as if someone went over me with a club. Ooh!

to-morrow I eat off the mantelpiece; and to-morrow I take over the training of No. — Company. S. is going on leave, so it's up to me, and I am looking forward rather dubiously to having to handle a whole company on the two daily dress parades. I'm getting kind of interested in the work and am going to try to hold down the job.

Did you know the Huns bombed K.'s hospital and the camps alongside on three successive days? One of the doctors was killed. D—n those brutes! If there is one place that should be sacred it's a hospital camp. Of course, for two years they've bombed our advance C.C.S.'s but they are really in the fighting area and there are only a few nurses at them, but a hospital is different.

I'm glad your soldier man came out so well. I guess it's going to be a case of helping hands all round among the overseas folks—the men and their people—for after all, there are two distinct peoples in Canada now—those who have given everything they could and those who have given nothing and stolen much.

SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1917.

THIS is Friday night and I hope to go on leave to-morrow. Wednesday night I was playing bridge in the mess when one of the fellows came in and told me there was a "man" outside to see me, so I excused myself and went out, and there was Wes. I was in rather a quandary as I couldn't take him to the mess in his N.C.O. uniform. However, my old tunic fitted him, and my slacks and boots—even my shirt and collar. S. was away so there was a vacant bed, but after breakfast we were stuck again because alas!

I hadn't a spare Sam Browne and an officer *must* wear a belt. So we had to "reduce" him again and I went out and paraded my company, left Wes. with "Old Soldier" and Joe C., who is now one of my corporal instructors, but was one of the old section, wounded when Stew. was killed. I had to rustle but I got things straightened out, turned the company over to my second and then Wes. and Harry and I went and looked up some of the old bunch, got them off their classes long enough to have a bit of a talk and then I took Wes. down to the Golf Club for lunch, and afterwards saw him off for Scotland.

Same day I got a letter from Cousin Nita saying her holiday was to commence on the first instead of the eighth and, of course, that squelched the idea of going to Brighton, as you couldn't get even room to sleep on the sand there this week, so I wrote Nita I'd meet her in London.

It's been a busy week with lots of blunders and worry but I've got it done, and S. comes back Monday to take charge again and I'll take a rest. Alex. has been a brick—he's acting C.I., and if he was satisfied I am. Of course, I've barely found my feet, being so inexperienced.

Your letter of 3rd August has just come back to me from France. It mentions Dane and Alan H. Of course, by now their mother will have got word, but while I'm in England if any of our friends are in such anxiety as Mrs. H. was, have them cable me and I'll make inquiries at the Canadian Red Cross.

OCTOBER 8TH, 1917.

TRULY, I'm homesick for France again—for the familiar discomforts and the careless good humour of

the crowd; for the old grousing and the unselfishness of others that you get to take so much for granted and scarcely notice; for the awful language and awful longings and the clean clear grit of the boys who are ashamed only to admit that they aren't quite as bad as they pretend. Oh, Mother, war is awful because of the people at home, but for us, war is wonderful. I want to go back. You think I've had a good time only since I got my commission, but I wouldn't forget a single moment of my life in the trenches. Just imagine having lived for nearly two years among men who never showed anything but courage, sheer, naked bravery and laughing indomitableness! Men who always *said* they were afraid but never *showed* a sign of fear. Mother, they're wonderful men, our men, such perfect men out there, and who shall judge them for what they may do while on leave. What shall happen to the souls of men who defied all the commandments, defiled their bodies, and yet laughed in the very face of horrible death? There are stories of how the First Contingent behaved in England but amongst all the things they did there wasn't a *cowardly* crime. They defied morals and discipline as they defied despair and death, and when they sinned it was frankly and openly and they did not the sort of things the Germans did in Belgium. When the gas came and only wet handkerchiefs could enable them to hang on at Langemarck they wet them in the only way they could, with urine, and tied them round their noses and mouths. Just imagine men doing *that*—not to save their lives—but to save their trenches. C. told me this. He was one of them. War is horrible for those who can't fight—it's glorious for those who can.

My worst night's fatigue was carrying trench mats up to the line from R— one awful rainy night, but I don't remember how wet and cold I was, but how all our fellows worked to get it done—to do their *share*. How H. sat up till two a.m. to have hot coffee for us—H. that never failed us when meal time happened, even at St. Eloi and at the Somme—and S. who sat up with H. to issue to us a double rum ration.

Why should I want to forget France?

NOVEMBER 4TH, 1917.

I WONDERED where that *Star* you've been sending me came from.

You don't think I'm interested in musty party politics, do you, Dad? What difference does it make who's called? The point is, and perhaps this last fiasco in the South will kind of make folks at home see it—we're in this war, and it's men on the firing line that count. The papers and the complacent politicians make me tired. Some folks seem to figure that we couldn't lose if we wanted to—that it's only a question of time when God, or luck, or something else will hand us everything we want—and even after three years of it, they are still asking, "When will the war end?" It won't *end*—it's got to be ended. I pick up a paper and it wonders "When the Kaiser will realize that he's beaten?" Dad, he's *not* beaten—and can prove it. You've seen Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro, Roumania, Russia, and now, possibly, Italy, get knockout blows and in the House the other day the First Lord gave some interesting figures showing how the U. boats had bitten into our shipping.

Mind!—we're going to win the war yet. It's inconceivable that it should be otherwise, but it's men fighting on the Western Front who'll win it.

NOVEMBER 19TH, 1917.

IT is a question that doesn't admit of debate at all Dad, we *must* have men. If we don't get them, do you imagine Germany will hesitate to treat Canada as she has treated Poland and Alsace-Lorraine? Sure, the United States won't let her (?) but if there are people foolish enough to believe that the U.S. alone can stop her, supposing we are foolish enough to let her beat us here, they should get their heads examined.

Suppose we admit that Canada can allow her Army Corps to dwindle down to the division it was originally and yet that we'll win the war. Still, is there no pride left? Is there no sense of honour left? What about the pledge "To the last man, to the last dollar?"

Over here we're praying that conscription will enable us to put another division, at least, in the field. I think the *Star* inconsistent when it attacks the Government on account of the War Time Franchise Bill. Did you know that the English press proclaim it as a patriotic measure?

Do you honestly think enemy aliens should vote? Do you think women who've clutched at their men, who've robbed us of soldiers, should vote? I don't. I think pretty much as you do of the Government, only they are giving us conscription and we'll need every fit man eventually.

DECEMBER 7TH, 1917.

IT's a long time since I've written you, isn't it? I mean a proper letter, so here goes, though I'll have to borrow a stamp to post it.

Hully Gee! fancy buying Christmas presents and financing six days' leave at the same time all on a month's pay. So far I think I'm almost even but it's a long time to the 28th. However, we should worry. I was ahead of the game in November in spite of being in hospital and at Brighton and, by George, I'm going to have a few shillings in the bank in January or know the reason why. It's been some squeeze since I came over from France because I have had so much leave, but you see, Mumsie, I didn't get much leave before when we were training at Sandling, and I expect long before summer I'll be "helping Doug. punish old Hindenburg" again so I want every penny of fun there is in every pound I get. Every successive leave has cost less than the last and yet the last is always the best.

I went up to London on the 28th, arrived about three p.m. I missed D. C. and went to bed early and slept late. I met Nita next day but she had to be in early, so I got Christmas presents for you and Dad and visited three photographers, all of whom were too busy to take an order to be finished before Christmas. Next day I went down to see Tim's mother. She was very very good to me, and didn't I get stuffed.

Sunday afternoon I was taken down into a coal mine. It was very tiring but I wanted to see a mine and I sure did. I got back to London Monday at eleven p.m. and tried three hotels before I got a room. It had a fireplace, bath, and clothes closet, and first thing I did in the morning was to ask what I was paying for it. I was too darned tired to care the night before. It was only 10s. 6d. which wasn't too bad.

Nita and I went to see "Ailette" which was very good but nothing startling. It is one of the trinity

of "Maid of the Mountains," "Carmenette," and "Ailette," all of which I've now seen.

Next day I intended leaving town but ran into a little R.F.C. loot and stayed over and went to "The Yellow Ticket" on the strength of Gladys Cooper being in it, and it was punk. Gladys Cooper is a first class comedy actress but "The Yellow Ticket" is a "dra-u-ma" and a poor one, and she wasn't even pretty in it so it's too bad I didn't come down Wednesday instead of Thursday.

Tuesday when I was at the Regent I met a whole bunch of Orillia fellows and a School man just back from six weeks in Canada, and Major A., of the 20th. In fact, while I was in London I saw a familiar face every little while from which you can gather that city is crowded with officers on leave. You know you are in the capital if you stand a few minutes in a big hotel where you see officers of every corps and regiment of ours and officers of every allied army. The Flying Corps seems predominant but then most of the fellows I met that I knew were R.F.C. men. It's the service for a young nervy cuss, you know.

I've four long letters of yours and note what you say about my going back to France, and that's a matter in which I have no choice at all. The Depot hasn't very many officers trained and ready and I'm one of them and when my turn comes I must go back. I'm available for any branch of the M.G.C., and surely you've seen how heavily our officers have suffered lately. It's just this way, Mumsie, I'm twenty-five, nearly, sound in body, with fairly good nerve, trained in any kind of Emmas, and have never been scratched —so when my turn comes I couldn't shirk it if I would nor would I if I could.

JANUARY 4TH, 1918.

Two "books" received from you to-day. Gosh, Dad, I wish I could write letters as long as yours so I'd be able to satisfy my correspondents. You express my feelings ever so much better than I did so now we can forget the "politics." You just carry on writing letters though because I like to get them.

Now, with all my heart I apologize for having ever feared you'd fall for the sort of stuff the supporters of Laurier were handing out, but you must remember most of my letters were written about conditions two months old and there wasn't any Union Government, and I wanted to make sure you'd vote for the Government, any old Government, pledged to conscription. Once things swung round with Liberals in the administration I knew you'd be with them. I knew too that you'd support the Government in any case.

I'm sorry I accused you of extravagance. I didn't mean now, in war time. Your extravagance, like some of mine, is a virtuous vice in that it's mostly for other people.

Now, as regards France. I've explained that when my turn comes I'll go because I'll have to anyway and I'm not quite sufficiently scared to try to dodge—and I know my turn is not far off now. As to being useful here, that's bosh. The best instructors are usually men who haven't been over at all. That may sound foolish but it isn't. You don't try to teach the men what actual trench warfare is like. You couldn't until they have seen it and then they learn almost overnight. But we do teach the mechanism of the guns—their stoppages that are easily overcome, and their stoppages

which aren't—and then, besides, the men must be disciplined and trained in infantry drill; and all that is more interesting to the man who hasn't yet felt the fascination of the real game. That's why I say instructors who have not been over are often the best.

On the other hand, because the men question such instructor's nerve, thereby destroying the atmosphere necessary for discipline, and also because it's only fair, these instructors have been replaced by men who have been over, older men, married men, etc. But I haven't the temperament to settle down contentedly to teaching men stuff I hate to be bored with myself. I like the discomforts, the turmoil and fascination of being in the real thing. I like to see history made, and so I can't feel contented here. Nevertheless, I've no great ambition to die before my time and it isn't fair to ask Mother to endure any more anxiety until I must, so I'm contented to hang around until they want me and then go contentedly back to the mud. That's all. I'm afraid my nerve is too unreliable for flying. You don't live to lose it twice in the air. And I guess as long as the responsibility is on me I can keep my head—on the ground. I'd give my entire possessions to be a flying loot. Perhaps I'll feel like suicide some day and join the R.F.C. At present you can just settle back and wait for a cable saying I'm going to France and don't imagine I'm hurrying it along.

I'm going to turn over a new leaf and see how little, instead of how much money I can waste. I've discovered that three-fourths of my expenditure to date has been on meals and taxis and theatres and all the London distractions. I sure seem to have been burning money which is why I was usually broke. It costs three pounds to take a girl out for an evening.

I mean a special girl. Nita and I usually now do just as well on half that, so you see I'm improving.

Don't have apoplexy over those figures. Just remember that an officers' mess is a darn poor school in which to learn economy. Don't imagine I begrudge the money—a lot of it went in giving the Sisters a good time, and that's as worthy a cause as it could go in. I won't have another four months to devote to it so I'm going to save some money this year, and my confession ought to furnish you with material for a letter that will stiffen my Spartan resolution.

Now, as to how the war is going. It doesn't give much grounds for rejoicing does it? Yet by the Lord, three peoples anyway are in this to a finish, and there isn't any question as to what sort of a finish—is there?

JANUARY 4TH, 1918.

YOUR parcel arrived New Year's Day. Since then three letters, so the sun is shining again. That cake was really appreciated and it disappeared very rapidly. When I get married pass along that recipe to my wife. The salted almonds I devoured mainly myself and the candy was appropriated by my roommates. You do remember my tastes, don't you? Fancy your sending me those scissors. I've been intending to buy a pair and kept forgetting. And the gloves—how did you know I'd lost a couple of pairs recently?

Funny that Lois and I should have had our tonsils removed about the same time. I didn't suffer anything to speak of. I was eating again in three days.

I won't have any more of that talk about my "suffering" in France. Where on earth did you get

that idea? I'd rather be in France than England simply because I have a better time—more interesting and more contented in every way. I get so horribly bored here with nothing to do. The danger in France is incidental. After all, I'm used to it and I haven't been yet hurt. And if I do get killed?—I'll be dead fifty years from now anyway, and probably have more sins on my conscience. If it comes over there, it's a quick end—a *man's* death in every way. And we'll probably meet "Across the line" you know. You should only live in the present in war time and not worry about the future or the past. One's dead—the other hasn't arrived—why worry? I'll cable before I cross and if you get a letter with an A.P.O. stamp don't faint till you open it—I might take a draft over.

Poor Mumsie—what a trouble I am to you, and how out of date you are!

You win your wish too. There was a nice nurse to pet me while I was sick. All the nurses are nice. They are far too good to mere men.

I had a letter from K. yesterday. She had the ward all festooned with evergreens and a Christmas tree in the middle, and Christmas Eve they hung stockings for all the patients—and filled them too. Thirty-two Evac. and eighteen Convoy on Christmas. Do you get that? Thirty-two to England and eighteen from the line. The boys said they thought they'd arrived in fairyland. The doctors helped cook and serve the patients' dinner just for a lark. So I guess Christmas wasn't so bad in France.

I do love the joke of *you* electioneering but go to it, Mother, it's sure the women's turn to run things and they all voted for the Government and conscription. It's too bad your tender heart won't let you

look at things through humorous glasses. To you the draftee looks pitiful; to me—funny; and it's time big husky duffers were in training. There are thousands of girls in khaki going through it now—all of it—the cold, the loneliness, the dirt, and discomforts and inoculations, and the loss of individuality, and when girls do it and thrive on it and enjoy it, why pity a man of twenty. Look at *my* hospital. Miss C. has been mentioned for bravery and devotion under fire in the salient at a C.C.S. Think of doing dressings in a tent in zero weather. Think of the nights when it rains and freezes as it falls—the patients are comfortable enough in bed, but the Sisters have to stick it. There is usually coal for the wards but not always for the girls' rooms. It isn't only men who are heroes these days. To read K.'s letter you'd think it was *summer*—only you see I *know* what they're going through.

The papers seem to think Fritz will try a drive on the West this spring and, naturally, the fellows will be praying that he does. It's so much easier killing him when he comes over and less costly in every way, so I wouldn't worry about the map if I were you. Of course, it was too bad that Russia broke down and saved Fritz this year. But, thank God, it's France, England and United States now and what do we care. These three are good to last and win, so provided some silly blighters don't go making peace, I guess we'll see the turn of the tide definitely before long. I should say that now conscription has come there may be a chance of my getting home this year for a visit. Oh well, we'll just hope and carry on.

JANUARY 13TH, 1918.

I HAVE been very busy this week with my barrage course. Heavens! there are a bunch of notes. I haven't had a spare minute for reading and haven't written a letter. Of course, I could get all the stuff in my head without bothering with notes at all, in fact most of my notes are written from memory, but I have to hand in a note-book to be marked just like in old High School days. It's been very interesting getting back to mathematics, even simple ones. Even had lectures on the slide rule and sextant.

It does seem funny for you to go in for politics but wasn't it fine the way the election turned out. There must be a lot of people in Canada besides the slackers and their friends. After the war it looks as if the soldiers were going to control things, which might be a calamity I'm afraid. Let's hope the women will hold the balance of power.

Wasn't that nice for your sailor to turn up? I'd like to have seen the meeting. And *haven't* you a large family?

The Corps has asked for A. to take command of the — Company and if he can get away it should mean his Majority and a D.S.O. He sure can handle men and he's popular with everyone. I sure hope he gets the job.

Eleanor will be home I expect before you get this. She is wildly excited, of course, and she has earned a good holiday, hasn't she?

JANUARY 20TH, 1918.

ANOTHER uneventful week and no letter of yours to answer, but here's a news item. "Old Soldier"

is the father of a baby boy and he's sure some conceited.

I've had a letter from Wes. and he's going to get his commission at last and will likely be out of the coming summer's fighting as I was out of the last. I'll likely be in France again before he arrives here. I hope I'll get over before the fireworks start and get a chance to settle in harness before I have to handle strange men in a show. You see why I'd rather get away early. It's very trying to arrive at the Front in the middle of a show.

My barrage course is finished practically—anyway the exams. are over and I came out third in the class. Nothing to boast of, as, with my mathematics, I'd ought to have topped the bunch. I got 112 out of 118 marks. Knowing trigonometry and logs. helped a lot.

I saw Roy C. the other night and he sent his regards to you and Dad. He's in the R. N. A. Service and he looks nice in his blue and gold uniform, and he's a fine, husky fellow. He came to the camp to see some of his old friends of the Nineteenth who are in our mess.

FEBRUARY 3RD, 1918.

By the time you read this I'll have been out of action for a whole year and it's certainly been the shortest of the years since I enlisted. It's just about three years ago when I went down to Exhibition Camp to see Capt. Morkill, though, officially, I didn't join up till 3rd March.

It's just about a year ago that I started after my commission and now I'm going back to France, and going soon, you bet. Wes. is expecting his papers to come through soon so I guess we'll trade places, he

to England and I to France, and I think he'll be just as anxious to get back to France within a year as he is now to come to England.

When I'm warned for France I'll cable as I said, because I want you to have my new address and avoid delays in my getting letters.

FEBRUARY 17TH, 1918.

I STARTED a letter to you from London but it was not posted so this will be a budget. Two weeks ago to-morrow I paraded my class in the morning as usual but about nine o'clock the Company O.C. came around and warned two men for France. One wasn't physically fit so I got his place and then my scurry began. I managed to get away by noon Tuesday for London. As soon as I got there I phoned D. C., and we had dinner together and then went to see "Chu Chin Chow."

Wednesday about noon I was loafing in the rotunda of the Regent wondering what old acquaintances I'd meet this trip when a fellow with M.G. badges and the colours of the 16th Company walked up to me and said, "Aren't you Norris of 1T7 School?" It was McL., our year Rep. on the Students' Council. Do you remember our scrap and the row there was? Oh, Charlie will tell you all about McL. He was lunching with a couple of Toronto fellows, R.F.C. men from France, and I joined them and we had tea together and I met Cousin Nita afterwards.

Thursday I met the R.F.C. fellows again and had lunch with them and spent the afternoon and evening with Nita. You know her fiancé is interned in Holland and very anxious, of course, to get home.

Next day I practically made up my mind to get back to Seaford Saturday after spending a day at Cousin P.'s and I'd paid my bill when whom should I bump into but Eleanor. It was a lucky accident and we went and had lunch together and killed time till her train went out and then I went out to Cousin P.'s and stayed there Saturday and rested. An old friend of the Doctor's came in in the evening with two pretty girls, his daughter and niece, who gave us a concert. Sunday morning I went down town and lunched at the Overseas Officers (Royal Automobile) Club with a whole bunch of R.F.C. men from Canada and got down to camp after midnight where I found a big bunch of mail including a letter from K. saying to be sure and get across for a dance on St. Valentine's Day.

I got orders to report at the port of embarkation by ten Tuesday morning so I *hustled* some and caught the 12.10 for London by the skin of my teeth, and got to the bank two minutes after closing time, but they were kind to me and cashed my order. I had tea with D. and dinner with N. and next morning travelled in a Pullman and had breakfast on the train and had three hours to spare before the boat left.

We had, as usual, a smooth crossing and when we got over there was a truck waiting to take us to the old depot and I met many old acquaintances on the depot staff. After dinner I went down and met K. as we had so much to talk over and I had been told I might go up to the line next day which, however, I didn't.

Wednesday K. and I piked over to Madame's. I'm skipping the welcome I got from Madame and at the hospital but you can imagine it.

Thursday was Valentine's Day and we went to the Manor for dinner where again I knew and was known, and at six-thirty Friday morning up to the line and the best of luck.

The depot is changed a lot. The hospitals are huts now in place of the old canvas and the camp is as dark as London, whereas, before the Huns started bombing hospitals, it was a blaze of light. Up the line, through all the familiar smells, and we arrived at the C.C.S.C. about lunch time and stayed there last night. Next morning we walked over here, a couple of miles.

This is also well-known country to me and I'm billeted in the same old sort of a house, with a *belle madame* and *beaucoup des* pickaninnies, moderately clean ones, and last night, over the fire, Monsieur and I discussed weighty questions of fuel economy and fine wines. I'm part of the family now.

Incidentally, I'm orderly officer to-day. I'm to be examined to-morrow and when I go up to a company is a question of luck and Fritz. Perhaps next week or next month. And, oh, Mother, it's *great* to be *home,* because this is home far more than England. I'm glad indeed to get back—France or Canada for me. Don't worry—I'm lucky, you know.

FEBRUARY 22ND, 1918.

I'M glad you got and liked the dressing gown which Nita and I chose because you said you'd like something from the wonderful shops in London.

I had so much to tell you in my last letter and so little in this. How much longer I'll be here I don't know. I should soon get posted somewhere and it

will be good to get up the line and back to work, just as it was good to get back to France. Maybe when I get up to the mud I'll begin to repent but just now I'm feeling almost contented with life for the first time in many months. I know France, especially this part, so well that it's just like getting back home and I think I'll feel the same up the line in the old familiar trenches.

Now, Mother, you're not to go fretting yourself about me this time. Nothing is going to happen to me we'll hope, and anyway what does it matter—just a few years less, that's all. I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to be and I'm not kicking about any turn in the game. All the world's in this, every man of English tongue and I can't see where I'd be of any particular value to the world in general anywhere else than here. And if I should go over like Stew., and Tiny, Tim, Doc and Art., and so many others, why I've only gone with the best of our race. Let the mothers of conscripts mourn; you have the right to be glad.

My billet here is very comfortable, Madame is a gem. She floods me with *cafe au lait* from daylight to bedtime. We've a good mess and the commandant is a very fine officer indeed. He's been a soldier practically all his life, and all over the world, and naturally his stories are most interesting.

It was too bad I couldn't get home from England but no earthly reason why I should. You'll have to wait till I stop something, Mumsie. I'm glad I'm not going to miss this summer here. The war grows interesting. I only hope I can stay to see it through. It would be rotten luck to get smashed up now before next fall.

MARCH 2ND, 1918.

I'M settled at last and my address is 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Company, B.E.F., France. That's *all* of it—never mind the division. You'll know the division. It's the one I'd have chosen next after my old one. And it's a darn good crowd and several of them are old acquaintances. Thursday morning I was sent up here with a draft and, by the way, it was a matter of twenty kilometres. It was 2.20 when I got here and I sure was not looking forward with pleasure to the hike back. Just as I got my receipt and was leaving, the O.C. said, "By the way, do you know a fellow called Norris?" I sort of admitted that I did and then discovered I was posted to his company and maybe I wasn't glad. I stayed and the skipper sent a limber after my kit and S.'s. So you see at last I'm almost a real officer. I will be one when we come out.

It's no use to tell you not to worry about what's liable to turn up in the way of a scrap. No doubt I'll get mixed up in something before the summer's over but that's what makes life worth living. This will be a month old when you read it and you'll know if anything's happened to me in the meantime. And what's the use of worrying over it?

Here's hoping I'll last a few months to pay for my grub and passage since last April, and we'll hope, too, that I'll come home with the usual complement of limbs, etc. I'm sure glad to get to work at last.

MARCH 7TH, 1918.

WE'VE been "in" several days and I've been pretty busy on the whole. So many officers of the company

are away sick, duty and leave that I had to come in in command of a section. Under ordinary circumstances I'd have been sub-section officer.

All my guns are named after drinks—quite immoral for Canadians, what? My sergeant and section runner are both old timers and in this outfit I'm a mere recruit. My guns are pretty well dug in. I'm living, myself, in an old German rabbit warren and have a gun crew here. By gosh, Fritzie could *dig*, but at that we beat him these days. My dugout is a vault. It's new, therefore, cold with the damp of the fresh cut chalk. But it's a palatial sort of place and I don't know where I'd get to if I followed the tunnels leading off my hallway. There's a matter of two long flights of stairs leading down to it and the odd shell doesn't even put out the candles. I call it fairly safe. Fritzie is pretty tame—the usual exchange of thumps going across—but he only means it in a friendly way, you know.

One of my duties is to visit the various infantry company and battalion H.Q. in the neighbourhood—liason, it's called, but really it's sort of collecting the odd snort, or snack, as the case may be. My nearest company was under a fellow who, considering his grave dignity—a D.S.O., etc., is a darn good scout, and he's from Toronto.

I suppose back home you read the papers these days and think it's an awful war. Of course it is—the *Daily Mail* has headlines every day but, honest injun, right here you couldn't guess it. Personally, I dislike shells—just a fad of mine—so I'm glad Fritz so far has given his attention to more interesting localities than ours. It's just the same as it was last winter only we're in Fritzie's dugouts, which are better than

the ones we used to have. In fact, I've "nothing to report" and I think I'm going to like it here unless fair weather brings a recurrence of the hostile spirit.

MARCH 12TH, 1918.

REGARDING the war, first let me say I'm giving my own opinions only. I don't know anything officially, but I think this widely advertised attack of Fritzie's is a bluff. Everywhere the Germans have succeeded it's been because of propaganda and foolish socialism resulting in wholesale desertion and chaos in the ranks, and it's always been against uneducated soldiers. In Russia only one soldier in five or six could even read and they knew little and cared less about the causes of the war, so when the restraining iron discipline was broken they simply went home. Similarly the Italians believed that the Austrians would quit if *they did*—and they tried it. But don't imagine for a holy minute that there's a single Poilu in France or that there's any Tommy in our ranks who doesn't know what they are up against and as for the Yanks—well, they're the only bunch of enthusiasts left. On the face of it, it's absurd to suppose that the Germans can accomplish anything except by the regular formula of overpowering artillery and overwhelming superiority of men, and they haven't got them.

We've got more men—individually better men, better equipped; more guns, better served; better planes, better fought, and if Fritz feels like starting anything, let him start—we'll finish it.

I'm just wondering if you think the boys over here want the war to finish as at present. Do you suppose any man, playing any sort of a game, wants to quit

before he wins? Sure, we're sick of the war, but we don't want peace yet. I'm sure that a plebiscite among the men doing the fighting would show nine to one in favour of dropping all discussion about peace until our armies had crossed the Rhine. That's only reasonable, for the big majority of men over here now are veterans of several big shows—and we've been so close to the "break through" so often, and we've never been beaten for three years. So it isn't surprising that the average man out here thinks—no, knows—that we can win this war decisively in the field if they let us fight it out.

I note what you say about the States. Well—I believe in America and Americans whichever side of the border they live on. The Yanks say they'll be well pleased if they do as well as we have done. The Canadians feel as if the Yankees were sort of younger brothers. Oh, to all intents and purposes every division that crosses the Atlantic is one of *our* divisions whether they fight under the Stars and Stripes or the Union Jack. We sure believe right now that they're just as good as we are, only, of course, they need to get cut up to make soldiers out of them. So the oftener Fritzie slams them and the harder he does it, why so much the worse for Fritz. The "First" at Langemarck, the "Second" at St. Eloi, the "Third" at Zillebeke; we've all been through the proper sort of training. You bet we're putting our money on the Yanks to show Heinie that *all* Americans can scrap. Of course, we take a sort of brotherly delight in hearing of their mistakes or misfortunes but we know the material that is there because they're blood brothers of ours. I've got a lot of confidence in the brains at Washington, too. Cheer up, Dad, the war was won

for absolute certainty when Uncle Sam started to take off his coat. Oh, we'd have won anyway but it would have been a tougher job.

MARCH 13TH, 1918.

I'VE just been "upstairs" sunning myself. We're having glorious weather and Fritz has been very tame all day. It's hazy and there's nothing doing in the sky so altogether it's a day for loafing.

The tour is nearly finished and I haven't had a casualty so far, though there has been a little gas. That's a big change from what it was last year. Gas has become one of the commonplaces of everyday routine, but it's fairly harmless and at the worst, a Blighty. It's pretty hard to think up things to write about.

I'll tell you something just between ourselves—I'm no hero. I just instinctively dodge any danger I can avoid, but, personally, I don't want the war to end till we win so decisively that we can dictate peace in Berlin and collect indemnities and to help that on I'm quite willing to pay my life along with the rest. Just so we win that's all that matters.

There's some camouflage about lofty ideals and all that—but I'm no idealist. I want to win when I play cards, I want Varsity to win all the intercollegiate championships, I want Canada to have the finest war record of any country, and I want our side to win. We didn't start this war. The Kaiser reckoned he could thrash Russia and France without our consent and that's where I figure I come in. I'm British, and Britain, ever since the days of the Black Prince, when any other people butted in has thrashed them. That's

what my ancestors did and if they were alive again they'd be in this. They're dead, but I'm not, so it's up to me, and that's all there is to it. What Fritz said about "The contemptible little army" pinched *my* toes and I'm willing to peg out doing my share to convince those square-headed, sausage and sauer-kraut-eating supermen that they'll never see the day that they, personally, or as a nation, can lick an Englishman or England. I can't play hockey or foot-ball or any of those games—I never learned—but I can fill a job in the army as well as the next guy and you bet I intend to do it till I peg out, get knocked out, or we win; and the shades of our honourable dead will condemn the Government that makes peace this side of the Rhine.

And because I feel that way I know you do too, so on with the war and if I'm killed, some other, I hope better, man will take my place and see the game through. There isn't time these days to worry about or mourn for individuals. I'd like to live to see the victory; I'd like to win a lot of decorations and promotions and all that; but they aren't the main thing. I was a useful soldier before I got my commission, and I'll never be ashamed to meet any of the old mob, and I'll do my darndest so that the fellows I'm with now won't think I'm shirking my share.

I know both you and Dad are aching to be here but you were born too soon. Would you really mourn if your son paid the customary price? Mother, it's not done in *our* family. You might have something to mourn about if I *wasn't* here, but as it is you can be glad and proud that your son was young enough, and husky enough, to go with the other men into this game,

and I—why, God bless you, Mother, for bringing me up to be a soldier for from you and Dad I inherited what made me want to come over here.

March 17th, 1918.

We've been "out" for a few days. The fine spring weather holds and it's been *bon* lately. The day after we came out I rode over to see Wes. I had a deuce of a job finding the battalion, but I did find it and saw a lot of the old crowd—there are so many of them still there. Wes. is fine but no sign of his commission yet and he's still instructing. Dan, too, the same, smart little bald head; and "Heinie" is cooking for the sergeants' mess. Art. B. is still with the transport; Harry C., Alex. S., and Charlie M., are all Lewis gun sergeants and Joe B. is a sergeant, too. Harry C. was with Doc Ardagh when he was killed. Oh, I knew dozens of the men and all the N.C.O.'s and most of the officers, so naturally I was pretty busy travelling round. Yesterday I rode down to an ordnance depot with Shaugh. and B. and I feel as though I'd had 'steen direct hits with H.E. all over myself. Otherwise, I'm *fond* of riding.

Outside of that there isn't much news. I've been permanently posted to a section now, which means sub-section officer, of course, and my section officer is detached for duty, meaning I've the section to look after. And that reminds me, I've got to get down to the mess and censor mail. To-morrow is my busy day. Aside from usual parades, which last till 12.45, I've a lecture to give on gas (and I know nothing about either lecturing or about gas) and I'm orderly

officer, and I have to take the pay parade. Outside of that I'm free to loaf. However, it all means very little only I don't like the "public speaker" stuff.

We never had a casualty last time "in." Wasn't it lucky? I was glad, it being my first trip on this job; and to-day is exactly my 731st day in France, one of the years being a leap year.

Oh, I've a glorious deep feather bed and a room all to myself. It pays to be an "ossifer."

I must try and find George McEwen one of these days. I think it's the 34th Battery he's with and I may hit it sometime, though, of course, it's not in our division.

MARCH 24TH, 1918.

WE'RE having the most glorious weather. This afternoon I was out riding and just got back to be included in a group photo of the crowd. When we get the pictures, if we ever do get them, I'll send them to you.

I'm answering your letter of February 8th, the last to reach me, and the Varsity Service Roll arrived also to-day, and they've got my unit wrong—I've never been with the motors at all and I belong to my own corps—the C.M.G.C., which, however, is a detail.

George's battery isn't in my division but chances are we'll run across each other. I heard that Roy might be coming out very soon.

There isn't much to write about—news, there's none—we're just "resting" till our turn comes. There are rumours of a scrap going on but we've only had papers several days old.

MARCH 31ST, 1918.

IT does seem strange that when we start a drive it *always* rains but when Fritz starts his he gets splendid weather and, by the way, hasn't he done well? I'd love to see the Canadian papers. So far we're merely onlookers but we sure devour the papers when they come in. I suppose, at home, as usual, there's lots of arm chair critics and a certain amount of pessimism. It's extraordinary, the sort of contented satisfaction that pervades our boys. We know, you see, the divisions engaged, and if Fritz smothered them with numbers he played our game. Killing Huns is what we're here for and I guess everyone is duly grateful that the Huns should at last come above ground and be killed. He can't win. So why worry?

I see I'm entitled to wear four service chevrons but I'll not put them up if I can avoid it for it's a farce asking overseas men to wear distinctions for their "active" service in *England*. I'm really entitled to three for I've been more than two years in France.

They've issued "service" books for officers to carry and it seems I filled mine in wrong 'cause I marked my service in England under "*Home* Service." Truly, some things aren't comprehensible to a mere civilian in khaki.

APRIL 12TH, 1918.

I SPENT the anniversary of Vimy Ridge in the trenches. It's nearly two p.m., and I've just finished "breakfast." Yesterday began at seven a.m., and I was busy clean through to four this morning. I had a lovely job last night, to move a gun and all its stores nearly a mile and then dig it in and camouflage

it before daylight. I've got to hand it to the men. They sure worked like Trojans.

Do you remember how, my first winter out here, I used to write about the "old stone road." Well, there's always a road, for France is pretty well grid-ironed with good roads, and last night I did hate bringing a big party down it. It saved a lot of valuable time but when you have a lot of lives at stake it's a whole lot more strain on the nerve than if it were only your own.

It was a lovely night, starlit and cool, and that helped some, and our guns were pounding away over us all night. In these days of rumours it's encouraging to hear our guns, and we are *Canadians*. I think we'll live up to our self-esteem when the test comes, though it's three years, all but ten days, since Canadians have been in a scrap where Fritz had the initiative. Still, you never heard men more supremely sure of themselves and their unit than our boys.

Morale is everything in a scrap especially on the defensive, and we've certainly got that.

Take the matter of raids—Fritz has never got away with one with one of our battalions yet. In one case where he got into our lines an infantry officer cleaned the trench single-handed, killed twelve with revolver and bombs. In another case twenty Huns tried to jump a machine gun and sixteen bodies lay in one swath to mark the cone of fire. Four got into the trench, three were killed with bombs, and one of the crew shot the other man with his revolver. In another case, a large party had penetrated the line in daylight under cover of a bombardment and taken a few prisoners. Going back, an officer and four men held them up, released their prisoners, captured ten of them

and killed the balance. These are only illustrations taken at random.

The idea I'm trying to convey is the personal conviction that we have that Fritz can't beat us. It's dangerous to underestimate your enemy but—well, look how often we've beaten him, and you'll understand why our men are universally convinced that Fritz is beaten and knows it—even while we hear of retirements on other parts of the front. You may perhaps understand what I mean but the correspondents' stuff in the papers about our "Happy Tommies" is not sufficiently illuminating.

The facts are that our men are tickled to death to think that at last Fritz has come down to cases and is meeting us in the open and man to man. That's all the British soldier ever asked of any enemy—a hand to hand fight, with the odds, preferably, in favour of the other fellow.

It's too bad Cousin P. was so prompt in breaking the news that I had come back to France. I didn't cable because what was the use of giving you an extra month of worry.

There are advantages in the food line in France. I had porridge, bacon, mashed potatoes, and cocoa for breakfast. My orderly calls his stew "soup," so for dinner last night I had a soup plate full of stewed grouse, with onions, spuds, and tomatoes, a steak, mashed potatoes, and grean peas; and the same, except that we had to substitute chicken for the pheasant in the "soup," at noon to-day. Of course, we only have four meals a day and only two of them are dinner—but that's enough. I'd like you to realize that "comfort" in England isn't in it with comfort in France and honestly, I'd rather be in France than in England

and rather be in the line than out. That's altogether outside of the question of risk, of course, for after all when a few thousand shells have fallen almost on top of you you get used to the sensation.

If you'd seen Alex. and me last evening roaming round on the hill about our wire trying to stalk a pheasant you would never have dreamed that we were within twelve hundred yards of the Hun. No, we didn't get the pheasant—we will to-night. Don't imagine we're taking foolish chances. Believe me, I've lived under fire too long to do anything that isn't reasonably safe. Fritzie's M. G. fire is practically zero and what shelling there is, is at the trenches, not in the open, of course.

It's a queer mixture, war, and like everything else, you get used to it and learn the danger points. And when you have to go through a bad spot, why you have to, that's all. If he doesn't get you—all right. If he does, it may be a Blighty. It's *toujours bon chance ou la fortune de la guerre.*

I wish I could post myself to you with this letter, but—this is the last year of the war.

APRIL 20TH, 1918.

I'D forgotten that to-day was my birthday. Only when I sat down to write you and was wondering about the date, it dawned on me. So I'm twenty-five to-day and I've had my commission a year—and some people say time doesn't fly.

With all the racket the Boche has been raising I know you'll be anxious but I haven't been in the shows at all. By the same token it's time we were. We need something to take down the swelling of our heads.

The rank and file almost figure their "devoted officers" are supermen. I wish the Hun would hit us and hit us hard because I figure we'd smash him, and the only way to prove it is to have him try. This *Soyez tranquille* stuff, when other poor blighters are getting it in the neck, gets my goat.

APRIL 28TH, 1918.

LAST night I sent you a cable via England and will perhaps cable you occasionally now since letters are so slow and I know you must imagine all sorts of things these days, and the facts are probably the last thing you'd think. I'm not in the line just now. I went up with my battery but there was a bunch of details left out and I was sent out to look after them so I'm having it easy.

With all the heavy fighting going on there's many miles of the line as quiet as ever and somewhere in those miles is my little dugout home. Why your curiosity as to our whereabouts? You never used to know, but no doubt the official communiques will tell you before you read this. Surely, you know my division? Ask Charlie, he'll know.

I'm so glad you saw Eleanor. I had a letter from her and am watching for her next one from France. Of course, you couldn't help loving her. She's just absolutely perfect. I wish you knew all my friends. I'll have to send you some of their letters just to introduce you, for by their letters shall you know them.

Your birthday parcel arrived and the cake of yours is the very best I've ever tasted and I guess I've tasted over a thousand home-made ones in France.

APRIL 28TH, 1918.

I'VE saved this sheet of paper for you, Dad, to thank you for the pipe and for the tobacco, and the magazines that are coming regularly.

Naturally, it's been heartbreaking to read about the real fighting going on and stand aside. Yet, I guess the C.I.C. knows where he wants us and when.

Yesterday I got the first letters from home written since the show started. I guess it would look black to you in Canada, but what a price the Boche has paid! And the masses he has used are staggering. Just think! the troops on his old Eastern front are now available against us. You've been used to thinking that we had more men than Fritz. We had—a year ago—but we haven't now by a long way. That our units engaged succeeded in emerging as units at all when attacked as they were, is a tribute to the fighting powers of the private soldiers. Outnumbered in everything, still the same units are in the line to-day. There never was a case where we attacked, where his infantry had courage enough to fight after our barrage had passed, that any of his front units succeeded in withdrawing even a remnant.

Now, look at these late shows again! In no case did our infantry fail to put up a very strong resistance when bayonets came into play. In no case were our units destroyed or their formation broken. Smothered by numbers, pushed back by weight, they're still going strong and for every man we've lost he's lost four. That pays—*us*. When we've attacked his infantry has surrendered in droves. All the prisoners he's taken are either wounded, or men so exhausted that they could march no more but fell into shell-holes and woke

up to find themselves in his lines. The Boche has staked his all in a final desperate throw to wipe out and eliminate the British army. He's failed at frightful cost. He's wearing himself out against an unbreakable line—it's had to be a mobile one to save casualties at times—but when again we hold the balance of power, when we, in turn, outnumber him then he'll get his and he knows that, hence the dying kick. So cheer up, Dad, the *last* victory wins a war.

May 8th, 1918.

I've just had a letter from Cousin Nita saying my cable to you was duly sent so I'm not so conscience stricken over my lapse in letter writing. I've been busy but haven't much to tell you.

It's summer here and the country is simply lovely in soft tints of green. Our camp is right in a wood and the ground is specked with flowers of all kinds. Oh! summer has fairly come and I'd like to be where picnics were possibilities. I almost was too. I was walking up a road with W., behind two of our men when Fritz landed a shell fairly and why only *one* was hit, I can't imagine. However, it was only a Blighty for one of the men. Don't worry—like a bad penny I always turn up.

May 12th, 1918.

Mother, honest injun, you sometimes make me laugh when in your letters you wonder how I'm enduring all sorts of imaginary things. I've spent just sixteen days in the line since I crossed this time and those were in *bon* dugouts.

But I *am* suffering. Firstly, we've had such warm weather that I had to put on summer undies. Secondly, I've been devoting the last two days to indoor baseball, played outdoors, and I'm so stiff I can hardly wabble. And thirdly, I've just got up from dinner, and we had boiled lamb with caper sauce, mashed potatoes and creamed cauliflower, and I'm suffering from the stooping necessary to write this letter. Oh, if I hadn't finished with stewed rhubarb and custard! Aren't you sorry for me? The Boche!—pooh, the Boche is miles away. In other words, it's a *bon guerre*.

You've been trying to minimize the German push to encourage me and I've been doing ditto to encourage you. Remember that however dark things might look to you, the Army doesn't worry. We don't care as long as we get a good smash at Fritz and we *know* we're going to win while you only *hope* so. Do you suppose that the men of First, Second and Third Ypres, St. Eloi, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Passchendaele, don't know pretty much all there is to know about fighting? So long as we get an even chance or even two to one in their favour, we can wallop him easily and, bless you, haven't we done it often enough to know his number pretty accurately.

My dear, the Army is perfectly happy. In the winter we loaf and get fed up with humdrum, but in the summer there's war along the front and the army feels just like a much-stuffed and petted kitten.

*C'est bien;* we've this advantage over civilians, we don't feel the cost. We meet so many who become our friends and pass on West, or to Blighty, and we're used to it, and we've no anxieties. While you poor mothers of the Army have nothing but the worry and

the cost. Truly, Mumsie, you'll never realize how light and easy my share is compared to yours.

So you've had the "flu?" Everyone here did but me. So far I've escaped. Isn't it appalling the things I do escape? One of these days I'll have to pay my shot I guess.

MAY 26TH, 1918.

I'VE just come from "church." The Senior Chaplain, Canon (Colonel) Scott, held a service just outside the (R.C.) church here, on the grass, and there was quite a turnout. The chaplains over here, by their bravery, have done much for the Church and Canon S. is the idol of this division, which reminds me of a joke.

Some time ago we were in the line in a "fluid" front. That is, the line had been withdrawn and there were places in the new line which might be penetrated, anyway you never know. Well, this "colonel" came along with his offhand, breezy way, wearing a chaplain's cap badge. We were particularly on the watch for spies and I'd never before seen a chaplain who was a *colonel*, and he wanted to know so much about where the line was and who was in it, that I darn near pinched him. Wouldn't I have been laughed out of the Service if I had? However, I didn't, praises be!

Do you realize that our chaplains are our bravest men? That is true, so when a man shows he's absolutely indifferent to death, naturally other men are willing to hear him talk about the faith that has made him so. I could tell you of many instances I've seen where the "padre" has done something that made

everyone take off his hat to him. Wonderful men, our padres!

We're billeted in a lovely, quaint, picturesque, smelly little French village. I wish you could see these old villages. You'd fall right in love with France as I did ages ago. I think if I were not Canadian I'd want to be French. They have the country best worth dying for, and if you could only see the cities I've seen after the Boche guns had ruined them. Wonderful old buildings—just heaps of brick; wonderful wide boulevards, tree-lined and originally, oh, far finer than University Avenue—trees all shattered, roadways grass-grown. No wonder the French hate the Boche. It breaks your heart to see them.

And the people! One time I remember I was in a village that the Huns were shelling. We were grouped around the window of a "club"—*Madame*, and *Grandmere*, and *Ma'mselle*, and three or four of us. Across the street was a vacant lot, at the far end of it a brick wall; just over the wall apparently, the crumps were landing and they were *big* ones I'll tell you. Three or four had come at about two minute intervals, when down the street came two kiddies—a little girl of eight or nine and a baby of four or five. The little girl was holding the baby's hand—and do you think French kiddies would *run* for shells? I've never seen civilians run for them yet. They just carry on, scared, but too darn proud to show it.

Our friend, the Boche, has bombed some more of our hospitals. Do you know that's *the* thing, the only thing yet, that makes me see red. There's no curse deep enough for the cowardly brute that bombs a hospital.

You must understand, Lois, that the only road to Canada is via a hospital. As long as I remain fit, I'm here to stay. That I'd just give anything for a few weeks at home doesn't alter things at all, so if you see my name among the "wounded" then you can expect to see me. Otherwise—well the war will be finished in two or three years. It's just three years since I landed in England and it's twenty-six months in France now. Scarcely seems possible but it's so. Nothing like being lucky. I can wear four blue chevrons but never a gold one yet.

Don't let my niece grow too big before I get home.

MAY 26TH, 1918.

"OH, it's a lovely war." Here I am sitting in front of the open window of my billet, the erstwhile parlour of a French home, and outside—well, it's just like Canada in June sometimes—lazy heat and dusty roads, deep sunk between hedges of fresh sweet green. Like England, you know, France has hedges of hawthorn and hazel—not our sombre evergreen—and the orchards are masses of colour, cream and pink and pearly white on the trees, and a golden carpet of buttercups underneath.

In France the farmhouses are grouped into villages so that every house in the village is really a farmhouse and set in its own hedges and orchards and pastures and courtyard. The courtyards are brick pavé and drained to the middle so that all the drainage of the stables runs into a lake. Gods of sanitation, what a smell on hot days!

Most of the older houses are practically one big room, tiled floor, plastered walls with an enormous

fireplace and hearth at one end where they cook, and occasionally you run on a room that would make your heart rejoice. They're all spotlessly clean and imagine a vast, cool, stone place with big open French windows and a massive mantelpiece at one end and tier on tier of shining copper cooking utensils hanging on the walls. I'd love to show you some of the farmsteads I've been in.

This place is almost France as she used to be, a big sprawling village, all stone or red brick and tile. And the roads of France, that stretch like broad ribbons everywhere, straight, wide, big, tall trees grown along them on either side and paved with cobble stones.

Perhaps you've discovered that I love France. Really it is a sort of country that feels homey and motherly. It's so lazy and so old and grey and so fresh and green and smiling, so productive, such a land of homes and plenty. It knocks the spots off any country I've seen—except ours. We miss the water so. I'd give three times the war-time price of whiskey for the same quantity of water fresh from your tap at home. It's three years since I've had a really satisfying drink of water. That's why, I guess, we use substitutes—but there's nothing can take the place of water when you're hot and thirsty.

That's all this time. Your soldier son is fat and blooming, miles from danger.

JUNE 4TH, 1918.

WE'RE still "neutral" and the weather is glorious and I've been having a splendid time. There is a C.C.S. only about fifteen miles from my billet where

I heard there were twenty-two girls, so, naturally, I had to explore and I found T. who was one of the crowd on a memorable occasion—my last evening at "Madame's" last summer; also C. one of the old bunch.

You should have seen T.'s face when she saw me. On Sunday I went over again. C. had just left for Canada a few minutes before I got there but T. and I had a picnic tea. So you see it's a lovely war. Only d—n the Boches. This isn't profanity, so don't be shocked. You've read of the raids so you'll understand a little of how I feel, but you don't know the girls and I do, dozens of them. And you don't know what being bombed feels like; and you don't know the feeling of being swept over with machine guns; and I do. It's the most horribly awful thing those brutes have done yet. Of course, you'll think of the patients, but I'm thinking of the girls. Talk about your V.C. heroes, there isn't a man living ever pulled off a stunt that took more bravery than when the sisters stuck to the tents—and d—n the brutes that murdered them.

T. and C. surely had some experiences this summer. Their C.C.S. was naturally swamped by the influx of cases after March 21st. They had something like three patients for every bed when they started to evacuate. They only had twelve hours' notice and got every man away before the Boche entered the town. Then again, they were caught in the second drive (on the north) and had to move suddenly. Their third site was brought under shell fire, and now life is monotonous for them. Oh, it's a lovely war!

But for me all is peace and smiling skies. There's

a deuce of a racket going on as I write but it's not dangerous—only a football match.

I'm so glad Eleanor isn't in France now. Hers was one of the units that suffered.

JUNE 11TH, 1918.

STILL doing nothing and enjoying it. I suppose I ought to pat Hal on the back for volunteering, but now that the U.S. is in they can raise more than enough men to ensure the final result without straining nearly so hard as Canada has already been strained without calling on our married men, and I almost feel as though I'm representative enough for our family. If the U.S. had rail communication with the front I believe England and France could withdraw their troops and that the Americans could finish it alone, but the trouble is that they can't swim or fly or jump across the Atlantic. I don't doubt that there are already more men available than ships to carry them and the problem is for England and France to hold the beast until the U.S. has time to bring her numbers into play. So, since certainly the U.S. can better spare the men and there are millions freer to go than Hal, I don't see why he really needed to enlist. It's immaterial whether the men are fighting under the Stars and Stripes or the Maple Leaf just so there are enough of them. Nevertheless it's anybody's scrap and all comers are welcome, and if Hal feels financially free to come, there's no reason he shouldn't humour himself and have a crack at the Boche, provided he doesn't break his neck doing grandstand stunts in training.

JUNE 18TH, 1918.

I'VE been going some, mostly to amuse myself I admit, still I'm pretty well beat to-night. I walked about twelve miles this morning and yesterday rode over fifty—not on a horse, thank fortune. I'm getting to be some traveller. It isn't everyone who has travelled a matter of fifty miles just to have afternoon tea with a girl, is it? What started me though was our Divisional Sports. We had a glorious day and the grounds were elaborately laid out and about a hundred nurses were fetched up in cars to give a touch of colour to the proceedings. However, I got bored about noon and, finding another guy feeling the same way, we decided to travel. A car picked us up and whisked us into — well, our "intermediate objective," and after we had had a scrumptious meal at a club we decided we'd chance going further. So we did—went over and had tea with T. and so, home. It was a happy day. The real fascination is the road—the Hoboes' Open Road—just to start out for anywhere and speculate on what sort of luck chance may send. For instance, our first ride was in a regular car "on our staff;" the next in an awful slow lorry—took thirty-five minutes for eight miles; the next on an ambulance; then another lorry that we transferred from to a fast Red Cross car; then another lorry and we caught our own to home.

You'll gather from this that I'm still neutral. It's really a *bon guerre* this, you know.

Oh, and the mail is opened up and I'm smoking *real* tobacco. Tell Hal he's a dear to think of the cigars, none the less appreciated (this *entre nous*)

that I *never* smoke anything but a pipe. And the cake! Well, I always appreciated grub, didn't I?

JUNE 26TH, 1918.

WE had a funny picnic the other day—Capt. M., F., myself and three of the girls. Unfortunately, the girl F. was to escort had to stay on duty till eight and we other four went on to the woods. The orderlies were bringing the grub at a quarter of seven and F. was to send them on down. As luck would have it, it started to rain, a regular Scotch mist which is the usual kind of rain in France. In the woods it wasn't noticeable as it wasn't wet enough to drip through the trees. However, the grub didn't show up and about ten minutes to eight we gave it up and started for home. Just round the first bend of the road we found the grub and orderlies sitting in the rain. It seemed a shame to let good grub spoil so we squatted down in a hedge and pulled a chicken apart with our fingers and cracked a bottle of fizz which we drank out of big enamel cups. It was the most hilarious and unique picnic I've been at. Your cake and cookies and other salvage from the day's mail helped out wonderfully as dessert.

We started off again and just as we reached the village met F. and the other girl. They were famished, so we had to have another feed. We turned into an orchard and under the trees devoured the remaining chicken and all that was left of the snack. I'll bet the French M'amselles thought we were dippy, but we enjoyed ourselves, *neanmoins*.

Yesterday I had to visit the dentist, and I made a loop round most of France while I was at it. I figure

I went sixty-three kilometres on stray lorries. I got my teeth fixed, had lunch, and travelled nearly thirty kilometres to have tea with T., and home for dinner.

You can tell Hal I hope he won't have anything on me, for I applied to-day for a transfer to the R.A.F. I'm all for speed after my recent lorry hopping and, incidentally, I'd like to get a crack at those things that bombed our hospitals. Anyway, I've wanted to be in the Air Force for so long and I'm still fit and if my nerves aren't good enough now they never will be, so if I can pass the tests, me for it. It's the finest job in the army, always interesting, never drudgery, and they don't get them all. Their percentage casualties are less than ours though being all officers they take up a lot of space. You know everybody goes into it sooner or later unless the Boche spoils them on land. Right now I know more Air men than Emma Gees. Besides, look at their nifty new uniforms.

JULY 10TH, 1918.

I SUPPOSE that, motherlike, you'll imagine all sorts of things, because I haven't written, except the real reason which is that I'm just out of things to write about and being out of the line there are so many things to do besides letter writing that I just naturally have a reasonable excuse every day for putting it off till to-morrow.

We've got a baseball league going between the four batteries of the company and as we have a company mess I'll tell you excitement runs high. Oh, we're regular gamblers. I win so much that I spend so much that I'm usually broke. *C'est la guerre.*

I had a letter from Eleanor the other day. You should have seen the nice things she said about you and she tells me Charlie is in England again.

I suppose Hal is half a bird man by now. It's going to be nice for you to have Lois and the kiddie with you.

The war still passes by and leaves us on the side-lines. Really, though, the baseball is lots more exciting.

I had a letter from Auntie the other day. I'll surprise people some of these days by answering a few letters but, *pas ce soir*, Josephine!

JULY 15TH, 1918.

Do you remember the reams I used to write in the long still hours in my dugout last year? That's what I'm going to do to-night. Rations are up; I've visited my guns; and there's nothing to do but sleep. You see the beauty of a deep dugout is that it's dark all of the twenty-four hours. Dark and cool and quiet. That's the secret of how the army can turn night into day and *vice versa* and sleep any old time. I'm going to sleep to-morrow.

You'll gather that I'm in the trenches but only a quiet sector. Honestly, not a hundred shells a day fall in our area and there isn't a fresh shell hole within a hundred yards of our dugout.

Though we are more poorly paid than officers of the British and American armies, nevertheless for those of us who aren't supporting wives our pay is just pocket money. A married lieut. is up against just the same proposition that you would be if Dad's salary were only $111.60 a month. As to myself,

certainly I could save up $200 in three months. Perhaps I will as I'm expecting leave about that time. My last two days in London cost a lot of money. Thrown away, I'll admit, but that was the last two such days for six or eight months. Reduced to writing it sounds awful but money is worth so little in London. As to lacking things! Why should anyone lack things when the only thing he has to do with $3.60 a day is spend it? You need not worry about my lacking anything. If I prefer spending money to amuse a girl I like, then I have so much less to buy things I want. But there's nothing in life to a soldier except the infrequent leaves. Leave provides the staple topic of conversation between leaves. We just live by virtue of those crimson days we get once in six months.

Don't believe all that the "holy brethren" may say of our dissolute lives. Gambling with death as a duty, and gambling with figures on coloured paper for dissipation—it doesn't hurt to lose. The fortunate help the unfortunate, and our gambling is no more vicious than playing bridge for a prize. We all know that a very great number of us will not know any other life but this, in this world. Oh! it's hard to get the atmosphere unless you happen to be one of the crowd. There are so many girls here that get so little out of life, isn't it worth while to give them a good time?—when they're young; when it means a good time for you too? I could get introductions to "nice" people, patriotic people with means, who do their bit by entertaining impecunious subs, but the joy of life is in giving, not in getting—in paying your own way. It's just as much, maybe more, fun to feel like a millionaire than to be one. I wish you were in England for me

to trot around, for you know, Mumsie, it would be lots more pleasure to spend money on you than on girls I don't love.

Seriously, would you make the trip? If you'll come over for Christmas I'll pay all expenses and you'll have the time of your life. It would be worth saving for that. Go and see the shipping people and see whether you can get a passport and let me know and that's all there is to it. I wonder why I didn't think of that before? If I can't come to you, there's no reason you shouldn't come to me, is there? You needn't worry about my leave. I could manage that; nor money, I can manage that. You've wanted to see Europe, now's your chance. Please, Mumsie, see if the Government will allow you to cross. I'd prefer you to come by the Mediterranean to Marseilles and I could meet you in the Sunny South and you could go home if you liked by London and Liverpool. The expense would be mostly travelling. Well bred people don't waste money on clothes these days. I'd love to show you the France I love.

JULY 23RD, 1918.

HERE I've been in the line for ten days and only written you once. There really is so little to write of. Fritz shells us periodically but so far unsuccessfully. Let's hope he keeps putting them where we "ain't."

A couple of times he's strafed my trail before my footsteps were cold, and my runner says most profanely, and disrespectfully, that I "travel too d—n fast." You see I've kind of got the habit of expecting a shell to land at the precise spot I'm at when I'm at it, for I only deal in instants at spots in the

open. I know that I'm as apt to walk into it as away from it, but remember I've been back to the recruit stage and forgotten my philosophy. Still, I guess I'm getting used to it again—all the old familiar stuff with the new experiences. The difference between being an officer in charge of four guns and an N.C.O. in charge of one is quite some difference. My job is to see that my N.C.O.'s and men are on *their* job, keep my distance and dignity and growl and snap. I'm afraid I'm a poor snapper. You see my inclination is to sit down and make friends like I used to do, and let someone else worry about "discipline" and "smartness." Only you see, there isn't anyone else—it's *my* job.

I'm a much better N.C.O. than loot. You know some guys just naturally love to walk on people, and I like to treat other people's feelings with respect, which doesn't make for efficiency. Training in the ranks isn't necessarily the best way to make an officer. Maybe it'll help when it comes to fighting, but it raises difficulties when you know just how your men think.

My duties aren't onerous. I have to visit my guns sometime every night and during daylight, when possible. With two of my guns it isn't possible so I visit them at night. It's a trip of about one hundred and fifty yards across the open. You wouldn't think an old soldier like me would mind a little thing like that, would you? But that's just where my runner has to *run*. I *can* walk *fast* when I hurry, and I hurry then because I'm not betting that he won't drop the odd whizzbang or a few messages from Emma Gee while I'm where there's nowhere to duck. Anyhow I like to get finished when I begin that walk. You

see I find difficulties in that rolé of insouciance for which an officer is cast.

The night time is day time in the trenches. We all wake up then and start our work. The Emmas and the artillery, the Talk Emmas and the ordinary mud-dweller, we all know, on both sides, that the darkness is cloaking movements of men and transport so that it's generally at dark that the daily strafe begins and after dawn things quiet down and sleep gets its turn. So, usually, I breakfast just before noon, dine at about five, and eat around midnight.

The parcels and papers are coming quite regularly. Those cakes you sent were delicious.

I've had two letters from Charlie and he seems quite chirpy. He had heard of Margery's improvement. Poor boy! he's had his share of worries, hasn't he?

I'm glad you and the Baby are going to be together because you're the greatest baby worshipper I ever saw and she'll keep you cheerful.

Oh! I'm coming home some day. It's a long time coming, that trip, but it's worth waiting for, isn't it?

AUGUST 11TH, 1918.

THIS is on paper "captured from the enemy." The newspapers will tell you more than I can about the show, for we haven't seen a paper yet or even an official communique. The boys say we've been chasing our balloons, because they always seem to move as we move and always ahead, and as for catching Fritz —it can't be done, but oh! I'm glad I've lasted to see open warfare. This *is* war—not sewer construction. Picture riding into action with the guns on limbers instead of plugging along through shellholes with our

junk all on the men's backs. There is practically no shellhole country, it's open fields of waving grain, woods in full leaf and villages with the barns full of straw and the roofs on the houses. We've even dragged our field kitchens along and keep the rations regularly up. And cavalry in myriads, and tanks, every road full of moving transport; artillery galloping from one battery position to the next. *This* is war.

We came out of the line and I, unfortunately, lost several men, gassed the night of the relief, including a sergeant. Then we moved to back of the point we kicked off from, losing a lot of sleep on the way, believe me. We didn't know where we were going, or why, till next day. Yesterday afternoon we had to march over eleven miles to our assembly areas. I was up all night and tried to get a look at the barrage, but we were too far back. However, in an hour we knew the show was going to be a success, in two, the cages were filling up, and we moved about four hours after the kick off. Everything was moving forward. You never saw such an impressive sight. We bivouaced on the old F. L., and moved again early in the morning to back of where his field guns were. Used a 5.9 battery position for bivvy, but moved very soon again forward to a wood where two of his naval 5.9's were. They'd never fired a shot, were built in May this year, and are complete in every way. Even then our line was away beyond their range. At dark we moved again and used one of his rest camps for a bivvy. Oh, well! this is just move after move, isn't it? That's all the war we've done.

Marching up after we'd passed his front system it was impossible to imagine we were crossing a battlefield. There are no dead, at least very, very few, so

few we scarcely ever saw one. Most of his casualties, of course, are in our cages and we captured five to ten times as many prisoners as we had casualties. Some show!

AUGUST 27TH, 1918.

I'M sending the enclosed letters to you. One of my crews buried the body they were taken from and I thought he might be one of the — people, of Orillia. In any case you'll see that they get to the lad's mother.

I haven't time to write much of a letter to-day but I'm fit and fine and going strong. It's a fine war this one, the best I was ever at, as the boys say. Maybe I'll be home this winter yet.

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 16TH, 1918.

THIS is written from "Parkside" so you'll understand the reason for the gap between my letters. I cabled you though, so you'd know I'd come out of the last show unscratched. I was in the thick of it too, and I was in command of a whole blooming battery, for the skipper got a nice Blighty and that left me to take the battery over. I had an officer in command of one section and the S.M. took the other.

We had the second objective—Don MacIntosh's battery, with the battalion they were supporting, kicked off and made easy sailing to their objective clean through the famous "switch." We assembled roughly about a mile more or less behind them, followed up and went through. I've never been through such shelling since Courcelette. He certainly wasn't making any "voluntary withdrawal according to plan" that morning.

On the contrary, he was massing men, as we know, for a counter-attack—I must admit a pretty one—on paper—but which had the drawback that advancing as we were, trench by trench, we were taking oodles of prisoners every day and, naturally, knew all about his show—all but the zero, of course.

Well, as it turned out zero day for him and for us was the same date but his zero hour was half an hour later than ours, which was fatal for him. In that half hour his troops had made splendid progress, *some* were almost to our cages. Fancy the haul from his packed trenches!

The two battalions that had the honour on our side found no less than ten Boche divisions represented in the mass in his line. Some odds, wasn't it? Two Canadian divisions beat eighteen German ones, drove them out of the last of the vaunted Hindenburg line, took thousands of prisoners, more indeed than we had infantry in the actual contact.

Well, as I said, the trip for the first phase was just naturally a procession, casualties were only nominal and, honestly, I never thought so many Huns were in France as we met going up (to the cages) many of them, most of them in fact, fine husky young men—picked troops they were, of course.

Our phase though was tough—hammer and tongs fighting all day—right from breakfast till dusk we were at it, but we finally were on our objective and we had a Boche machine gun for every man we had hit, even slightly. These infantry men of ours are certainly marvels at achieving the impossible.

The Boche artillery put up a splendid fight, fought their whizzbangs over open sights till rifle butts

finished mopping them up. Some scrap, Mumsie mine.

I had two guns in action against one battery at sixteen hundred yards and we stopped him firing on three occasions. In fact neutralized that bunch fairly well. I had the satisfaction of starting on them myself and seeing some gunners fall when I got the range. We got two guns down a bare road for over two hundred yards from cover to cover under direct fire from the battery and the road was swept, it seemed, almost all the time, by machine gun fire in straight enfilade—and *not one* man hit. Say, I'm the lucky person!

And when we came out I found my leave warrant waiting for me. I got away and "lorry-hopped" down to Camieres, or rather Widehem, and stayed with my old friend, Madame. She gave me a lovely room, feather mattress above and below and she was delighted to have me I know. She wouldn't let me pay her, and K. and I had two dinners that I'm positive couldn't be matched anywhere else in this war-weary world.

I'm going to go back before my leave is up to spend another couple of days—provided it's not too rainy, as it is now.

I've been in London a week and only been to one theatre. I'm going up to see Mrs. Heaton and don't expect many letters these next two weeks.

OTTAWA, OCTOBER 3RD, 1918.

DEEPLY regret inform you Lieut. Armine Frank Norris, Machine Gun Corps, officially reported killed in action, Sept. 28th.

DIRECTOR RECORDS.

From *Canada*, January 18th, 1919.

## GALLANTRY IN THE VICTORY DRIVE.

### Deeds Which Won Recognition in Closing Phases of the Great War.

*London Gazette*, Supplement, January 11th.

### Military Cross.

LT. ARMINE F. NORRIS, 1ST BATT., C.M.G.C.

When his battery commander was severely wounded, he took command, pushing his guns forward to the exposed left flank of the infantry which he was supporting.

He made skilful dispositions under both machine gun and direct artillery fire, and, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, assured complete protection of the exposed flank.

His efforts to assist the infantry were untiring.

### Extracts From Letters From Major Murdie, Major Denholm, and Colonel Watson.

Major Murdie:

"It was with deepest regret that we learned that your son, Lieut. A. F. Norris, was killed on September 28th.

"He was with the foremost guns of his section leading them forward and directing their fire with wonderful results.

"The N.C.O.'s and men all spoke very highly of his leadership during the action and his coolness and courage are worthy of the highest praise.

"He was universally respected and very much loved by his men—an officer in whom we all placed the highest confidence.

"All ranks join in sympathy for you in the loss of a son whom we honoured.

"We, too, grieve, but we are indeed proud of him for he set a most inspiring example."

MAJOR DENHOLM:

"I have not had time until this moment to express to you my deepest sympathy in the loss of your gallant son.

"I have just learned to-night that he has been awarded the Military Cross. Had he lived, he would assuredly have gained other honours.

"His bravery, self sacrifice, and devotion to duty were beyond all praise. The gallant act which cost him his life will always be remembered.

"'Norrie' was a great favourite in the mess and his dry humour and remarks will never be forgotten."

COLONEL WATSON:

"It is with deep regret and great pain that I have to advise you of the death of your gallant son who was killed in action on September 28th during the attack on Haynecourt, N.W. of Cambrai. He was in command of No. 2 Section, 'F' Battery of my battalion.

"He brought his guns into action east of Haynecourt and silenced a battery of field guns and inflicted many casualties on the retreating enemy. The machine gun and rifle fire were intense and he found it impossible to push his guns further forward without suffering

heavy casualties. He thereupon made a personal reconnaisance to find a safe approach for his men, when he was shot through the heart by a machine gun bullet, death being instantaneous.

"He was carried out to the Crucifix Cemetery, east of Sains les Marquion, and buried by the padre of the 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion.

"He was of a very cheerful disposition, well liked by his men, and a great favourite with all the officers. His splendid bravery and devotion to duty were only equalled by his steadfast endeavour to maintain the highest standard of efficiency and soldierly qualities in his section.

"I feel I have lost one of my very finest officers and a deep personal friend.

"I trust it may be some consolation to know that your son behaved so magnificently and was always a soldier and a man."

FROM ELEANOR'S LETTER.

"FRIDAY night, September 20th, I was called to the telephone to be surprised at hearing Armine's voice, as I did not know he was on leave.

"That night we talked till midnight. He told me all about the summer's fighting with that amazing enthusiasm that he had from the very first and never seemed to lose. The machine gun people had been wonderful. Of course Armine's men *would* be the only men in his eyes. He told me how he and two or three of his men had run the gauntlet of a deadly machine gun fire down a sunken road to silence a nest of Hun machine guns. It seems they couldn't locate them the first time and they had to come back

still under that fire. Then they went out a second time, located, and put the Hun battery out of business.

"Afterwards it fell to Armine's lot to pick out his men for decorations. When I asked him what he himself was to get, he laughed and said, 'Why—nothing—of course. You see I went with the men because I had to, but I didn't do any of the work.'

"All the new fighting was so different from the old; one could take some interest in fighting up on top of the ground, face to face, as it were, with the enemy. France and the firing line were the only places to be now that we were advancing. Fritz would surely be out of France by the end of the year.

"Saturday evening we had dinner together, I wearing my mess uniform at his express wish—for Armine was always crazy about the Canadian Sister's uniform. How glad I am now that I put it on if so he was the least bit pleased.

"Afterwards we went to the Folkestone Theatre and talked during the whole show. Shows could be seen any time but there wasn't time to tell all there was to say. Some more about the war. This time about the tragedy of the cavalry's beautiful horses being killed before Cambrai. Was he very fond of horses? Because he was particularly hurt about them being killed.

"Then I must tell him about my being home. 'Your enviable luck, Eleanor, in being able to see my wonderful Mother,'—always 'My Mother—no one has one like her, Eleanor'—and the war.

"Sunday afternoon he called up to say good-bye. He was to be with his unit Tuesday the 24th, and intended going to Camieres Monday to see Kim. He

was looking, I think, better than I'd ever seen him—very brown, very fit, and not the least bit tired after the strenuous summer and—more than being physically fit—he was the same clean-hearted, clean-minded boy you brought up, and that I have always known. Older, oh yes, with older ideas and different ideas, but with a mind clean and straight like a real Canadian should have.

"How much I wish you and his father could have seen him—his wonderful Mother, and the Dad that he once told me, naively, 'Was,' he thought, 'rather proud of him than otherwise.'

"Proud of him—yes, we all are! So proud to remember that his death—the kind he himself would have chosen—for Armine has said more times than I remember, that to be killed in the trenches was the most fitting death for a man in war time, and not at all to be dreaded—was for the country and the people he never forgot and never failed to love."